INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE CONTROL COMMISSION
C I C A D

Secretariat for Multidimensional Security

IMPORTANCE AND ROLE OF RESEARCH, INFORMATION AND EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS TO DEVELOP, MONITOR, AND EVALUATE EVIDENCE-BASED DRUG POLICY
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Importance and Role of Research, Information and Early Warning Systems to Develop, Monitor, and Evaluate Evidence-based drug policy

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What is drug abuse research?

- Research can raise awareness, change perceptions of problems and solutions
- It provides systematic methods to collect qualitative data about drug use and quantitative data on patterns and consequences of drug use or abuse
- Be also mindful of the political and tactical uses of research

What is the added value to policy of research?

- It constructs new knowledge
- Research focuses on understanding the nature, extent, consequences, and etiology of the problem across individuals, families, age groups, gender, communities, and population groups.
- Builds capacity and good practice
- Operationally it provide services and practical outcomes
- Informs policy

Are current policies and programs based on evidence?

- Yes. – when research identifies 'what works' and policy-makers applies the evidence in the context of no longer being bound by ideology and thus free to act on the basis of the best available evidence.
- However, some current developments linking research to policy and practice pay insufficient attention to the complexity of relationships between policy-makers, researchers and practitioners and the extent to which they pursue different agendas.
- There has been significant improvement in the development of national drug policies that are evidence-based/ and for the most part, our treatment programs are evidence-based and depend on new knowledge transfer. This however is nowhere near where we should be.

Do we know which programs work and which ones do not work?

- For the most part our social programs have been linked to recurrent budgetary allocations so very little effort is expended evaluating them.

- The decisions to evaluate are based on factors external to the program value – the defining question is whether the purposes for the evaluation are oriented to better decision making and whether there is commitment to applying results.

The value of what we have done

- The vast majority of our epidemiology research had been quantitative in nature

- Not much of the information collected have be consistently disseminated in-country and region-wide

- Most of our present knowledge comes from generic research conducted outside the region

How can we use research to monitor and evaluate programs and policies?

Evaluation research should devote much of its energies to:

- Tracing the life course of programs:
  - The structures set up for its implementation
  - The motivation and attitudes of its staff
  - The recruitment of its participants
  - The delivery of its services, and the ways in which services and schedules and expectations change over time
  - The responses of participants and their views of the meaning of the program in their lives
- The research must be a systematic, long-term programmatic effort

From research to policy to practice

- Research (gathering the evidence)

- Policy (applied guiding principles and strategies)

- Practice (activities/programs)

☞Our key question –
"Of what value is research in making this link?"

From research to policy to practice

- Effective strategies to deal with the problems of drug abuse must be "as complex as the problem itself

- Success will be found only when public safety and public health professionals use science and not ideology as the foundation of those strategies

- Policies should be based on the best available knowledge and analysis and should be judged by the results they produce rather than by the intentions they embody

Does evaluation form an integral part of policy?

- In theory, evaluation for policy making should assess merit and worth of programs/policy – making judgment about policy or program alternatives, by assessing the consequences and costs of alternative solutions to recognized social problems.

- Or …to document the existence, prevalence and importance of social problems in ways that may justify and legitimize government intervention.

- New knowledge is constructed about new ideas, identify new theories about social problems, their causes, their consequences, and solutions – put this new knowledge to use.

- In practice, a culture of evaluation needs to be developed among our policy makers and stakeholders.

Do Member States have the necessary human resources to generate scientific evidence?

- Speaking for the Caribbean region a vast amount of human capital exists within our universities and tertiary institutions; not much within our implementation stakeholders.

- A significant amount of effort in now taking place and must continue in order to harness collaborative efforts to engage in research, construct new knowledge and provide sound scientific evidence.

Is the drug problem a priority area for research in Member States?

- Recent developments within the University community among Member States in the Caribbean Region as well as the continued knowledge development efforts within our drugs observatories would suggest that it is being given some priority.

- On the other hand, the proliferation of social problems related to drug use and abuse within our communities demands that this be given priority status

Do mechanisms exist that help us to understand and respond quickly to challenges in Member States?

- One good example in the Caribbean region is the continuous development over the years of our national drug information network systems to function as early warning systems with respect to emerging drug problems – whether new substances, new methods, new routes (trafficking), etc.