EVIDENCE FOR POLICY DESIGN
Center for International Development
at Harvard University

Smart Policy Design
Approaching Policy Formulation and Implementation
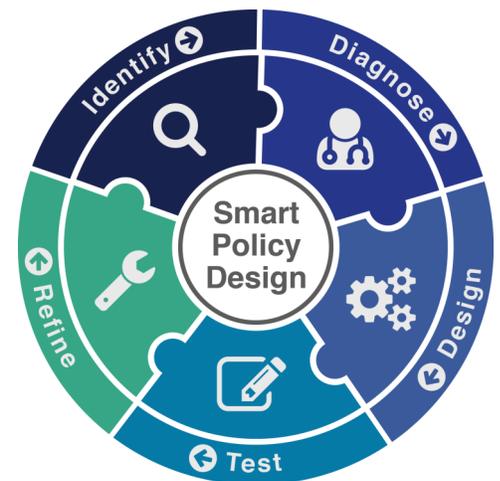as a Design Challenge

Development is a tricky business. With each success comes a new wave of challenges. Great strides have been made toward getting all children enrolled in primary school, but the next problem to tackle—getting them to actually learn—is much more complex. Many countries have introduced enlightened regulatory policies to protect health while improving environmental sustainability—but aligning incentives to achieve compliance is difficult. ***Designing policies to meet the next wave of development aims will require a smart approach, but what will that entail?***

Consider product engineering. From cars to computers, the design process has advanced to integrate systems that collect data about a machine's own performance that can then be used to self-regulate and self-correct. What if we could build such systems, affordably, into public policy?

EPoD's Approach: Smart Policy Design

Evidence for Policy Design is a network of researchers and in-country partners working at Harvard and across the world to optimize public policy and improve the lives of poor. We practice—and work to promote—a ***problem-driven, collaborative*** approach, where policymakers and researchers come together, employing their collective expertise to design, test and refine solutions. In each of our policy-research engagements, we follow the five steps of ***Smart Policy Design:***

◊ **Identify** pressing policy problems
◊ **Diagnose** underlying causes
◊ **Design** high-potential and feasible policy solutions
◊ **Test** solutions through implementation and rigorous evaluation
◊ **Refine** those solutions based on continuous monitoring and feedback

Each of these stages incorporates both economic theory and rigorous evidence. In all our work, we strive to make evidence accessible to policymakers—through dialogue, training, support for innovation, and interactive tools employing data visualization.

Recent innovations—like the spread of cheap mobile technology across poor populations and the advent of big data—are creating a base of real-time evidence that is unprecedented in size and scope. Possibilities for empowerment through new knowledge abound. But knowledge, even when it is relevant to policy, is not enough. At EPoD, we not only produce research, we also build mechanisms that enable policymakers to refine and implement smart policy.

In **India**, the Smart Policy Design approach has produced a suite of reforms to environmental regulation that can lower factory emissions by adjusting the incentives of the auditors who check them.

In **Indonesia** it has shown that the targeting of public welfare programs can be improved by allowing villagers to identify worthy recipients, and by creating opportunities for the deserving to credibly self-select.

In **Pakistan** it has demonstrated how designing financial and educational support services for small, backyard private schools—often employing women teachers—can deliver quality yet affordable education to the poor.

And in **Uganda**, Smart Policy Design is generating new evidence on market-based mechanisms to fight the proliferation of counterfeit drugs and seeds that threaten health and livelihoods.