

How can funders encourage more effective research uptake?

Summary Report on an Exploratory Workshop

Held on 16 December 2014

Wellcome Trust, London



Background

Over the past decade there has been growing recognition of the importance of research uptake as an integral part of the research process. For most funders working in the international development sector it is no longer seen as enough to fund good research, and hope for the best. Many different approaches have been tried to improve research communication and engagement with users, and theories of change have moved beyond simplistic linear models to a more nuanced understanding of how change happens and how research may or may not contribute to it. There is now a substantial literature on the topic and an array of tools and approaches on offer. But while progress has undoubtedly been made, it has been patchy and there is a great deal more to be done.

Research funders have a critical role to play in incentivising and supporting this increased focus on research uptake. How can they do it better? And how do they know their efforts are working?

The idea of this workshop emerged in conversations in the Netherlands where NWO/WOTRO, the development arm of the Dutch Science Council, is in the process of launching a new generation of multi-consortia research programmes around priority themes, following a reconfiguration of how knowledge and research for development is supported. This opens up new opportunities for enhancing research uptake. They are keen to compare notes with UK counterparts on how they are addressing these challenges, so they can learn from others and incorporate emerging good practice in the design and implementation of their programmes. Subsequent contacts with a number of UK-based research funders showed that these are active questions for them, too, and that they were also interested in exploring these challenges together.

The workshop was hosted by UKCDS at the Wellcome Trust in London, UK on the 16th of December 2014. It brought together 22 participants from 14 organisations (see Annex A), a mix of research funders and research uptake 'practitioners', organisations with hands-on experience of deploying different research uptake approaches.

The objectives of the event were to:

- 1) Share experiences on how research funders can encourage more effective research uptake,
- 2) Explore the appetite and scope for further collaboration in developing this agenda.

This report, drafted by Josephine Tsui from the ODI/RAPID team, presents a summary of the key ideas and discussions from the workshop.

Setting the context

Louise Shaxson (ODI/RAPID) started the day by sketching out the development of research uptake by recounting her own career journey starting in 1990. There has been a major evolution in thinking and practice over this time – which she likened to the transition from the invention of the wheel to the modern motor car; the point being that we are actually improving on the wheel, not just reinventing it. Some of the milestones have included the rise of the participation movement and farmer field schools, DFID’s first communication strategy (2000), the introduction of the rule that 10% of DFID research funding should be used for communications (FAO had much earlier recommended 15%), the establishment of a new generation of knowledge brokers, the development of the RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA), and the establishment of sophisticated system-wide initiatives such as the Australian-funded Knowledge Sector Initiative in Indonesia (which is dedicating Aus\$300 million over 15 years to improving the use of evidence in policy).

A lot has changed in this time. Many tools have been developed and workshops delivered. Areas that remain weak are in connecting to the demand side and measuring impact – topics we would return to during the day.

The Funder’s Perspective:

Five funders then shared their experiences and emerging thinking on the most effective ways to promoting research uptake.¹ They were:

- NWO/WOTRO, the development arm of the Dutch Science Council,
- UK’s Department for International Development (DFID),
- The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC),
- The Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN),
- The science arm of the Wellcome Trust.

Each funder discussed how research uptake is embedded in their institutional structure. The organisations vary in institutional make-up, so research uptake is treated in different ways. DFID has two full-time equivalent posts dedicated to research uptake, whereas with other organisations research uptake is embedded in the research management role. However, in many respects, the strategies and approaches used are rather similar (e.g. stressing engagement with stakeholders and users in all stages in the project, using impact pathways or theories of change to show how connections are made, involving knowledge intermediaries to spread the word - either on an ad hoc or permanent basis).

Questions were asked on what is the funders’ role in research uptake? This is constrained as funders are rarely advocates on particular issues. Whose research should the funder promote to get into policy? With the array of researchers, funders cannot be in the business of sending all their researchers to be knocking on every policymaker’s door. Is the objective of the research simply to increase the body of evidence? Not all research is designed to influence policy: there is a spectrum from very policy-focused studies to global public good research intended to increase the body of evidence. What has most impact on policy is not always primary research; instead it may be secondary research (or consultancy work), which is not the focus of research funders.

¹ See Annex B for snapshot summaries from each organisation outlining their approach and lessons learned.

There are a few successful practices funders use to support research uptake, some of which are now routinely included in the tendering process. These include requiring applicants to spell out expectations relating to research uptake, asking for stakeholder engagement early on in the process, demanding that clear impact pathways are constructed from the outset (which may also include a theory of change and/or logframe), and underlining the need to develop a communication strategy and carry out rigorous monitoring.

Some funders require bidders to build transdisciplinary teams, whereas CDKN expects applicants to provide background on the policy context and evidence of existing relationships with key policy players, plus evidence of demand for the research. ESRC encourages researchers to spend a minimum of 10% of their overall budget on research uptake. Other organisations do not specify the percentage but expect clear budget lines for research uptake.

Other activities include supporting cross-project support activities such as information sheets on stakeholder engagement, providing introduction to M&E frameworks across projects, organising kick-off meetings to build capacity in community building, defining crosscutting activities or M&E. NWO also engages specifically with intermediaries (such as The Broker) to organise international debates, seminars or workshops.

While the strategies mentioned may increase the probability of research uptake there are still challenges. “We have in our mind what is research uptake but the researchers come up with real-life problems for the requests that we have. The researchers feel like this is something we demand of them instead of something that is also good for them.”

For funders it is hard to understand the ecosystem of research uptake from a distance. Demanding that research is user led may sound sensible but these relationships require time and opportunity to develop, and are hard to fund as outcomes are not at all clear in advance. Further, as grant cycles are short, it is difficult to support uptake activities beyond the lifetime of the funding.

An important question funders struggle with is how do they define impact? Ministers love success stories but if research management teams are diverted too far in this direction is there a danger of them losing objectivity and becoming more like public relations units?

The practitioner’s perspective

To compare perspectives, seven ‘practitioner’ organisations then shared their experience and strategies to enhance research uptake:²

- DFID ESRC Growth Research Programme (DEGRP) Evidence and Policy Group (EPG),
- The Broker,
- Food & Business Knowledge Platform,
- Hivos (via Skype link),
- International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED),
- Institute of Development Studies (IDS),
- The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM).

² See Annex B for snapshot summaries from each organisation outlining their approach and lessons learned.

Each of these organisations have slightly different models for research uptake. IIED, IDS and LSHTM have dedicated communications and impact teams that focus on the research uptake for their respective organisations. Other organisations such as the DEGRP/EPG, The Broker, and the Food & Business Knowledge Platform aim to add value to current research and knowledge. Hivos has an applied methodology called knowledge integration. It integrates various forms of knowledge so new insights can be created and new strategies formed to contribute to policy.

Practitioners commented on what strategies enhance the probability of research uptake. There were some common themes:

- Involving multiple stakeholders in the process of research uptake allows for the **co-creation of knowledge**. Several practitioners mention how important it is to have the right stakeholders involved from the beginning. Hivos also introduced the idea of research users “curating” their own research findings, selecting what is most relevant to them and their specific audiences.
- **Analysing the political economy of knowledge**. Understanding the politics of knowledge, to whom does it benefit and who are the key players in the field is vital in understanding who is served by research. Stakeholder mapping exercises were mentioned frequently throughout the day.
- Understand **what brokering role one plays** with the dissemination of knowledge. The K* spectrum is useful to determine what function an organisation plays in research uptake, whether they play an informing function, a relational function, or a systems function.³
- **A communication strategy with the researchers** is also necessary to maximise uptake. Many organisations such as IIED and LSHTM now have communications and impact teams that focus on uptake of their research. This is to ensure communication research is not just at the end of the project cycle but an ongoing process from the beginning.

Practitioners at this event made suggestions to funders on how they can help support research uptake. These include, being flexible rather than enforcing budget quotas, organise trainings and sharing resources (such as learning events) between programmes, and finally inspiring programmes by leading by example. Some funding approaches, like the DFID Accountable Grant mechanism, have been useful in helping organisations clarify their theory of change.

A number of organisations felt they were weak in monitoring and evaluating their communications and policy influence and are seeking assistance. By investing in strong M&E systems, organisations can be better at convincing researchers that research uptake is a worthwhile activity and can add value to the project they are working on. M&E needs to be more than just downloads, and include qualitative work and cross project analysis. Further, it was noted that many academics continue to be disinterested and resistant to the idea of research uptake, making it difficult to monitor their effect on policy or practice.

The politics of knowledge was a key challenge. Some organisations felt there was a hierarchy in the value placed on knowledge depending where it comes from. For example, Hivos discussed how research uptake is not a neutral affair, that it can be used to maintain the status quo.

³ For more on K* see: <http://inweh.unu.edu/archive/River/KnowledgeManagement/KstarConceptPaper.htm>

Comparing different approaches to improving research uptake

In the second half of the day participants broke up into four parallel groups to look at different approaches to improving research uptake. These were to:

- a) Build research uptake into individual projects/programmes,
- b) Support independent (external) knowledge brokers/intermediaries,
- c) Build knowledge hubs for specific programmes,
- d) Focus on building users' capacity to use evidence.

Each group was asked to answer the following five questions;

1. What are the strengths/what situations does it work best?
2. Challenges and limitations?
3. How well can it connect with demand?
4. How to balance excellence & impact?
5. What should funders do differently to support this?

Highlights were reported back in the plenary, and are summarised below.

Table 1: Comparing four approaches for supporting research uptake

	Build into individual projects/ programmes	Support external Knowledge Brokers	Establish Knowledge Hubs for specific programmes	Build capacity to use evidence
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can embed in context. • Possibility to change mindset of research institutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can create critical mass of content and perspectives, and not just the 'usual suspects'. • Can concentrate specialist skills. • Has a form of transparency. • Deals with the legacy problem when research projects end. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows bundling of expertise. • Separate from the donor: helps legitimacy, autonomy. • Allows space to construct knowledge around the theme. • Creates centralised networking area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bringing together partners. • Sustainable/long-term approach. • Can bring in other types of evidence (not just research).
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uptake becomes a junior communication role. • Can be seen as a UK agenda. • Difficult to get into long term funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited reach as most components are online. • Must invest in offline components. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects around the world. • Lack of focus. • High expectations. • Risk duplication. • Expensive. • Sustainability? • Saturation of hubs. • Does it externalise the role from projects? • It doesn't shape research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users may not use YOUR evidence or balance of evidence. • Need to think of evidence strategically and use operationally. • Value for money of capacity building? • How to measure impact?

	Build into individual projects/ programmes	Support external Knowledge Brokers	Establish Knowledge Hubs for specific programmes	Build capacity to use evidence
Connect with demand?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual projects can connect well with demand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can help with opening up demand over time. Must establish credibility in the sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purpose of hub is to understand demand. Opportunities to shape demand landscape. Can be very flexible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is the demand? Demand can be muddy. Somebody must own it.
Balance excellence & impact?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should you only be dealing with the research based on your own model? Not really relevant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must balance who is involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is academic excellence? Some hubs can shape what excellence is. Who is hub for - users or beneficiaries? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>no feedback on this particular issue</i>
What should funders do differently?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforce importance and skills that go with the role. Up-skill research organisations so they can all compete for funding. Creating the space for post-grant critical reflection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a long-term perspective on funding so knowledge brokers can build their user base and maintain continuity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure there is live feedback and learning within hubs. Include hubs in design. Require multidisciplinary teams. Look at the need of the consortia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain what is it they want to know? Develop a theory of change (& use it). Be flexible for what counts as impact (be realistic with what you can achieve).
Key quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "An African researcher once said 'I don't need a project website, I go to church with half the cabinet'" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "You can audit supply but you can't audit demand". Capacity building may be insulting. Call it "skills and knowledge".

All four approaches clearly have strengths and weaknesses. Reflecting on the exercise it was pointed out that there are institutional implications with each model. For example, knowledge hubs can help in sharing learning across organisations, and pooling capacity. This is harder for individual projects, which can struggle to develop a critical mass of skills and capacity given tighter budget constraints. Within organisations there are also risks of communication capacities becoming siloed within individual projects, and not helping the organisation as a whole.

Everyone agreed on the difficulty in monitoring the effectiveness of different approaches and ensuring meaningful accountability. This is partly about time frames: it is rare for a research paper to have a direct and immediate impact, and it may take 5-10 years for impacts to be felt. However there are useful measures along the way to determine whether the research is making a difference. It may be

possible to create a plausible narrative to connect research with impact, but it may not be a direct one as there are too many other players and variables in the field.

It was also noted that there is a lot of research on monitoring and evaluation on of individual research, and the work of knowledge brokers, but very little experience on how to measure the impact of knowledge hubs or capacity building initiatives.

Conclusions and next steps:

In the final session, participants reflected on how well the objectives of the workshop had been met and what, if anything, should happen as a next step. The headline messages were that:

1. Participants considered the workshop to be useful. There was general agreement that at present there is no community of practice or space where funders can talk with each other about strategies for research uptake.
2. The workshop was timely and provided a safe environment where organisations were able to be frank about the challenges involved. They welcomed the practical focus, as the literature on research uptake can be quite abstract. There is a strong appetite to investigate how to bridge theory and practice.
3. There was discussion about the merits of establishing a new community of practice, but participants were wary about time commitments.
4. Participants wanted to know if it would be feasible to expand this discussion to other communities, reaching out to institutions from the Global South, or including organisations such as IDRC, the Gates Foundation, the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development⁴, or the European Initiative for Agricultural Research Development⁵.
5. There was agreement that it would be useful to develop the comparison of different research uptake approaches further, and document this. We only had time to scratch the surface.
6. It was suggested that developing joint activities or collaborative programmes in the field of research uptake would be a good way to exchange ideas and learn from each other.

The Workshop organisers will be following up with a series of conversations in early 2015 to test the appetite for further collaboration on this topic, and see who might be willing to take the lead.

⁴ <http://www.donorplatform.org/agriculturalresearchfordevelopment/oncommonground>

⁵ <http://www.ardeurope.org/index.php?id=372>

Annex A: List of Participants

First name	Last name	Organisation
Geoff	Barnard (Facilitator)	Geoff Barnard Consulting
Nathanael	Bevan	DFID
Caroline	Cassidy	ODI/RAPID
Phil	Davies	3ie
Tarah	Friend	DFID
James	Georgalakis	IDS
Rosalind	Goodrich	IIED
Alex	Gwyther	UKCDS
Annie	Holmes	LSHTM
Amy	Kirbyshire	CDKN
Corinne	Lamain	NWO/WOTRO
Nina	Marshall	ESRC
Vanessa	Nigten	The Broker
Evert-Jan	Quak	The Broker
Louise	Shaxson	ODI/RAPID
Val	Snewin	Wellcome Trust
Josine	Stremmelaar	HIVOS
Helen	Streep	3ie
Ian	Thornton	UKCDS
Josephine	Tsui	ODI/RAPID
Han	van Dijk	NWO/WOTRO
Paul	Woodgate	Wellcome Trust

Annex B: Snapshot summaries from individual participants

Part 1: Funders

2.1 NWO/WOTRO

2.2 UK Department for International Development (DFID)

2.3 Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

2.4 Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN)

1.1 NWO-WOTRO

Corinne Lamain and Han van Dijk



NWO-WOTRO Science for Global Development is the division of the Dutch research council responsible for the funding of research for inclusive development.

What does research uptake mean to you?

Presently we use the DFID definition (as well as their interpretation of the concept): “Research uptake includes all activities that facilitate and contribute to the use of research evidence by policy-makers, practitioners and other development actors”... with the ultimate goal to provide impact: the desired contribution to positive socio-economic change (to the benefit of the poor).

We see research uptake as a specific set of activities (but often part of a broader range of activities under the strands:

1. Capacity development (referred to as "the capacity to innovate");
2. Stakeholder engagement (ultimate target audiences ("the poor") and individuals/organisations who may use research for change (policy makers / practitioners / development actors, whether or not via intermediaries);
3. Communication (here especially communication with targeted audiences: stakeholders that are the best positioned (to enhance the) use of research / research evidence by the above mentioned actors and
4. M&E to learn and to apply lessons learned to improve the strategies for effective research uptake.

How is your organisation involved in research uptake?

As a funding organisation (NWO-WOTRO Science for Global Development) we are not directly involved in research uptake. We try to enhance the chance for effective research uptake. We do so by:

- Call set-ups that seek the involvement of consortia applying transdisciplinary co-creation approaches, build upon public-private as well as international and intercultural partnerships (if possible including the funding of input of non-researchers) and paying attention to multi-stakeholder engagement and capacity development;
- Defining criteria, e.g. relevance as an important or the most important criterion;
- Specifying requirements that are more or less directly related to research uptake (stakeholder identification and engagement strategies, communication strategy, M&E strategies (ToC/Impact pathways/log frames), defining specific capacity development activities;
- Enhancing the chance of effective execution of the above mentioned strategies: by prescribing early engagement with stakeholders, e.g. proposal development grants and by defining budgetary requirements (e.g. fixed % or amounts for knowledge sharing/communication/capacity development/inter-project collaboration), rigorous monitoring (e.g. mid-term reviews with external experts);
- Support activities (info sheets on stakeholder engagement, rapid introductions to M&E frames or research uptake);
- Organise kick-off meetings (community building/creating synergy/defining cross-cutting activities/training modules);
- Engaging intermediaries to translate/organise specific uptake activities (international debate through (e.g. The Broker), seminars/workshops);

- Funding specific add-on projects that support projects/create synergy between projects or translate research results to the benefit of effective use.

What do you consider to be the best or most successful practices in supporting research uptake?

- Budgetary requirements+monitoring indeed help to draw up realistic (but also rather conservative) strategies for research uptake;
- Applicants enthusiastically report back on the grants provided for proposal development processes, as well as the opportunities offered to fund non-academic input/activities;
- Kick-off events often provide the basis for community building, initiating inter-project exchange and collaboration and willingness to contribute to the higher goals of a (thematic) programme;
- High expectations (but no proof yet...) of involving expert projects on M&E and or research uptake that support individual research project, help defining joint strategies, create synergy;
- High expectations (but in an on-set stage) of engaging with the Knowledge Platforms (kind of knowledge hubs) (helping) to engage with networks, enabling scaling-up, providing the means for specific support to projects and programmes.

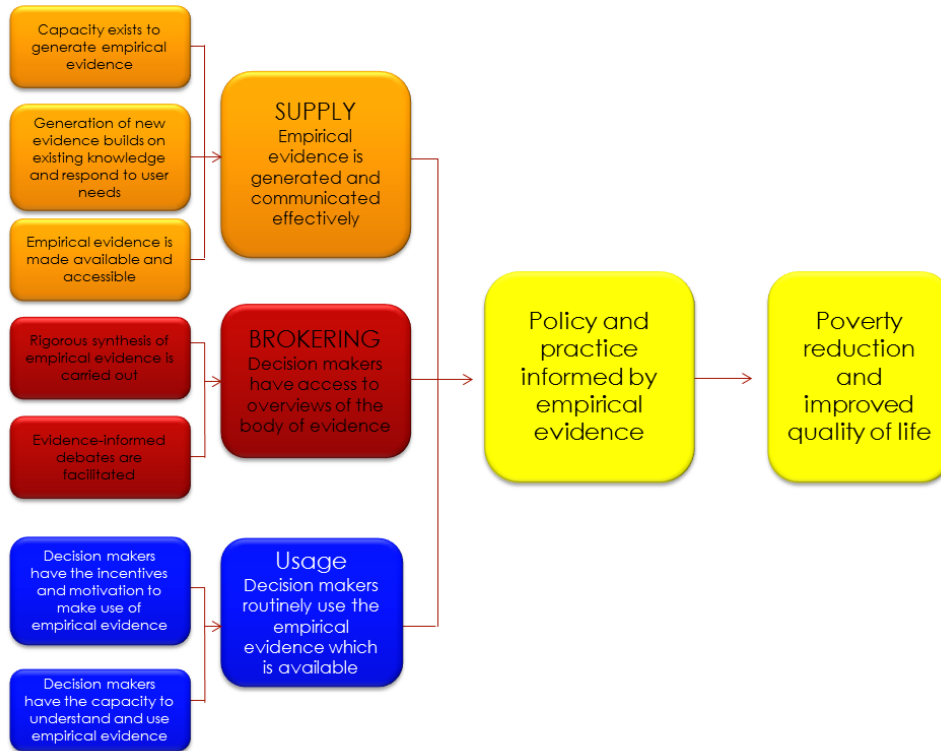
What are the most significant bottlenecks or challenges you have encountered? Especially those that are yet to be solved...

- Proposal writing is an enormous burden, certainly in WOTRO's case with so many requirements. Once the proposal has been awarded, attempts to interfere (to benefit of the project set-up we think...) in the course of projects is not felt as helpful but an extra burden;
- To find appropriate balances in sufficient attention for scientific rigour (and production) on the one hand, and answering to the needs of stakeholders (often short-notice, easily understandable information) is not easy. Consortia led by non-academics have difficulties in attaining academic standards, consortia led by academics overrule/pay insufficient attention to the needs or ways of reaching out to target audiences of their non-academic partners. It takes much time to build trust and good relationships and acknowledging/appreciating complementarities (> 4-5 yrs);
- Researchers are primarily researchers. They often haven't the time, the incentives (academic culture), the skills but also not the real interest to engage in research uptake.
- If there is an interest, tools provided are sometimes regarded as too general and too abstract.
- Our main question is, however: how to incentivise researchers to put more energy into research uptake.

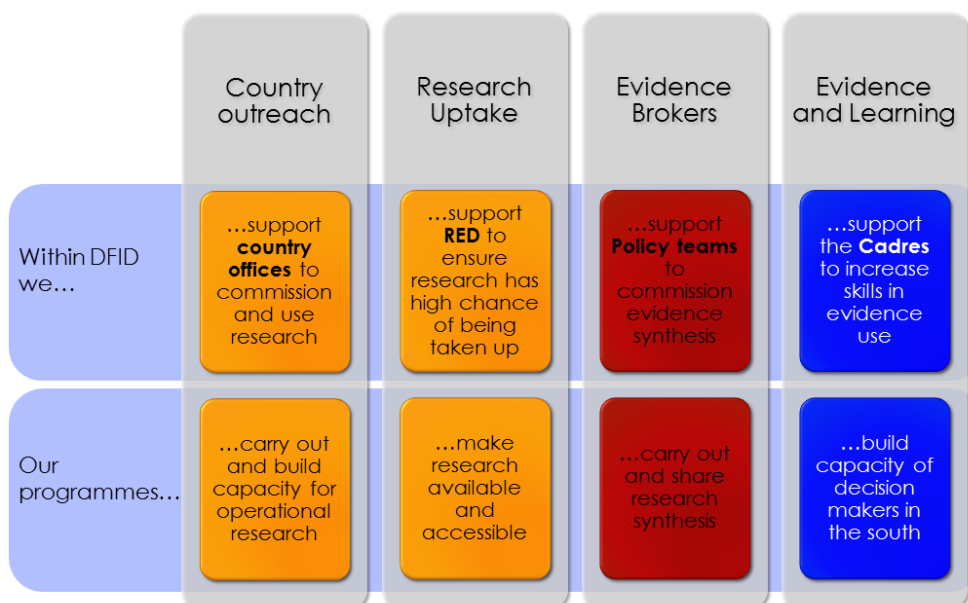
1.2 DFID Evidence into Action team

Tarah Friend

The aim of the Evidence into Action team is to increase the use of evidence by decision-makers within DFID and in the wider world. We support staff across DFID to commission, communicate and use evidence, and manage programmes which support evidence-informed decision-making. Below is a very simple theory of change for our team's work.



Our team is split into clusters which address different areas of the theory of change, as the colours demonstrate.



Our products

The team produces a number of products that help to support the use of evidence:

- **Evidence Papers** – internally produced papers which collate a wide range of evidence on a given topic (also [published online](#))
- **Systematic Reviews** – commissioned externally to bring together a wide range of peer reviewed evidence on a given topic (also [published online](#))
- **Stories of Change** – two page case studies demonstrating where research programmes have had a positive impact on policy (also [published online](#))
- **Online training on the use of research evidence** - interactive modules that allows participants to determine why it is important to use evidence how to do this effectively. (also available to Other UK Government Departments)

Our taste of our programmes⁶

Making research available and accessible	
Development Research Uptake in sub-Saharan Africa (DRUSSA)	Strengthens research uptake management capacity in 22 universities
Global Open Knowledge Hub (GOKH)	A digital data hub to make research more available, accessible and re-usable online.
Strengthening Research and Knowledge Systems in developing countries (SRKS)	Work includes: building capacity of library consortia to negotiate for low-cost journal access; strengthening capacity of Southern researchers to communicate their work.
SciDev.net (Science and Development Network)	Enhances provision of reliable and authoritative news and information about science and technology for the South through a website and building science communication capacity building.
African University Research Approaches (Aura)	Strengthens university departments to improve the quality of the research they produce, strengthen how they communicate research and enhance the teaching of research to students.
Research synthesis	
Evidence and Lessons from Latin America (ELLA)	Synthesises lessons from Latin American experience in response to demands from Africa, and enables exchange and learning through Learning Alliances.
Use of research	
Projects under the Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence programme:	Working with key policymakers and practitioners in Ghana, South Africa and Zimbabwe to build their capacity to use research findings effectively.
	Strengthening the use of evidence by health policy makers in Kenya and Malawi through a series of initiatives targeting policy makers at different levels and strengthen organisational systems
	Working with a consortium of Malawian and South African delivery partners to build the capacity of up to 700 individuals to develop evidence-informed decision-making.
	Improving the ability of government officials NGOs and research organisations in India and Pakistan to use research findings when designing policies and programmes
	Working intensively with Cabinet Secretaries in Sierra Leone, Liberia and South Sudan to improve their processes, systems and staff capability to use evidence effectively.

⁶ For further details and to find out about other programmes that the EIA team funds, [see here](#)

1.3 ESRC International Development Research Team⁷



Nina Marshall

1. What does research uptake mean to you?

If research is to have an impact⁸ it needs to be ‘taken up’ or ‘used’ by people. For the programmes run by our team, research uptake includes all the activities that facilitate and contribute to the use of research evidence by policy makers, practitioners and other development actors. Research uptake activities aim to:

- Support the supply of research by ensuring research questions are relevant through engaging with potential users, communicating research effectively, synthesising and repackaging research for different audiences, etc. Activities in this area typically start with a focus on a particular research project or body of research and consider how it can be communicated.
- Support the demand for research by building the capacity and commitment of research users to access, evaluate, synthesise and use research evidence. Activities in this area typically start with a focus on a particular decision or decision-making process and consider how it can be informed by a range of research evidence.

Research uptake activities are carried out by:

- Researchers from the full range of academic disciplines, whether funded by ESRC or otherwise
- Intermediaries, including those individuals and organisations who aim to synthesise, repackage and disseminate research information and to support research uptake in other ways (e.g. by promoting research generally or through capacity building activities)
- Research users, including policy makers (and those who support them), development practitioners (e.g. public implementing bodies and non-governmental organisations) and the general public

2. How is your organisation involved in research uptake?

Our work in support of research uptake operates at two levels. At the level of *individual grants*, all applications to ESRC calls, including ESRC-DFID calls, must include a ‘Pathways to Impact’ plan to address who will benefit from the research, how, and how they will be provided with the opportunity to do so. Researchers are strongly encouraged to be innovative in their engagement, communications and research uptake activities, and the IDR team calls encourage researchers to spend a minimum of 10% of their overall budget on these. For all of our ESRC-DFID calls, we also ask grantholders to hold a stakeholder workshop in the early stages of their grants, in order to ensure research uptake and impact-related planning includes these perspectives from the outset. All award holders’ contracts also require them to cooperate with any additional outreach activities which the funders may sponsor, which may include capacity-building and best-practice sharing elements: a recent example of such work was a grantholders workshop on impact for the Joint Scheme on Poverty Alleviation held in

⁷ Please note, this response is restricted to activities undertaken by the ESRC International Development Research Team and the programmes they are responsible for: further information on broader ESRC activity relevant to research uptake can be found at www.esrc.ac.uk

⁸ Based on HM Treasury’s definition, which operates across UK government, we define impact as ‘the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy’. For more on our understanding of research uptake and impact see RCUK’s [Pathways to Impact](#) and ESRC’s [Impact Toolkit](#), as well as the [ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research Guiding Principles on uptake, impact and communication of research](#)

September 2014.⁹ Grantholders are also expected to provide us with annual reports, which includes information on research uptake and impact activities being undertaken, to update information on the ESRC's research outputs portal and DFID's Research Portal (R4D), and to comply with the funders' commitment to open access publishing.

At the level of **research programmes**, policy perspectives are built into consultation on programme development, as well as in the assessment of applications, including through the involvement of peer reviewers and/or commissioning panel members who are from the relevant research user community. Several of our programmes also have advisory committees of international experts from academic and policy environments who input into the general direction of the programmes. The IDR team has also sought to secure external expertise and input on research uptake and associated activities at a programme level, which has taken a number of forms over the years and across different programmes. The current configuration sees an Evidence and Policy Group (EPG) based at ODI deliver this input for the DFID-ESRC Growth Research Programme, and we are in the process of recruiting an Evidence and Policy Directorate (EPD) to deliver this function for the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research and the Raising Learning Outcomes research programme.¹⁰ These activities reflect our appreciation of the opportunity to add value to the ongoing and successful impact-promoting activities undertaken at individual grant level, and in some cases across different programmes. We also report annually to DFID on research uptake activities in respect to each co-funded programme.

3. What do you consider to be the best or most successful practices in supporting research uptake?

In terms of specific practices, we would direct to the [ESRC Impact Toolkit](#), which captures the existing support and encouragement provided to grantholders by ESRC. This builds on the organisation's broad and long-standing experience and expertise in understanding and supporting social science impact and pathways to it.¹¹ We also see clear value-added potential in engaging in, supporting and facilitating research uptake activities at a programme/ partnership level. This is particularly the case in a context in which we have a growing, and diverse, portfolio of research being funded and conducted across a number of programmes, contexts, themes and timeframes.

We consider adoption of a strategic approach to supporting research uptake as critical, at both grant and programme levels. Strategic planning for research uptake and impact requires determining who may be using the research, and identifying and developing strategies to respond to the range of needs and contexts of potential users. Such work requires a range of expertise, some of which may necessitate capacity building support and knowledge exchange, as well as a responsive or flexible approach that enables research and researchers to connect to – and ultimately impact on – agendas, questions and issues in the worlds of policy and practice.

4. What are the most significant bottlenecks or challenges you have encountered?

Some of the challenges which we know exist in research uptake are:

- Capacity to access, assess and use research findings within policy/practice contexts
- Understanding of policy/practice contexts and timescales within research communities and v.v.
- Limited opportunities to develop co-produced research with policy/practice stakeholders, intermediaries and knowledge brokers, including developing and sustaining long-term relationships and networks
- Provision of support for uptake activities beyond the lifetime of individual grants

⁹ See <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/international-funding/esrc-dfid/joint-fund-granholder-conference-2014.aspx>

¹⁰ The EPD specification is available at <http://ted.europa.eu/TED/search/search.do> by searching for 'PS140272'

¹¹ See for example <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/research/evaluation-impact/impact-evaluation/index.aspx>

1.4 Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN)

Amy Kirbyshire



What research uptake means to CDKN

For CDKN research uptake means the use of research evidence by an intended audience. What research uptake looks like differs between research primarily aiming to achieve policy impact and research aiming to move forward global understanding of climate compatible development (CCD); we see this as a spectrum, and while all CDKN research aims to achieve both types of research uptake some CDKN research projects are more policy and practice oriented and others more academic.

CDKN's approach to research uptake and our take on best practice

CDKN is a funder programme managed by an alliance of partners in London, Quito, Cape Town and Islamabad. We commission research, technical assistance and knowledge management to support decision makers in developing countries to design and deliver CCD, and work with partners in the public, private and non-governmental sectors. Since our inception in March 2010 CDKN has established programmes of work in 13 priority countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, and narrowed our thematic focus. We fund projects on themes including climate finance, climate-related disaster risk management, low carbon development, and national and subnational level (especially urban) climate compatible policy and practice, among other topics.

Research uptake is a core objective of CDKN's research programme. Our approach to research uptake, especially on the policy impact side, has been shaped by the fact that our research programme operates alongside and in collaboration with CDKN's technical assistance work. CDKN's Regional offices hold direct relationships with our government and non-government partners, and take a hands-on approach to identifying demand (mostly for technical assistance) and promoting uptake. In contrast, the CDKN research programme draws on the global research community for demand-driven research proposals, mostly through a research call process. However, the topics of our research calls are shaped by priority issues in our focus countries, and we draw on the knowledge and experience of colleagues in our Regional offices during the review process to help ensure that the research we fund asks policy-relevant questions, engages the right stakeholders, and has an appropriate and effective impact pathway for the country context.

Other ways in which CDKN aims to maximise the uptake of research include:

- Multi-disciplinary research consortiums including partners from universities and research institutions, NGOs, the private sector and government.
- Evaluation criteria designed to ensure that we fund demand-led research with significant impact potential, such as:
 - Letters of demand from a relevant government partner
 - Evidence of an established working relationship with government
 - Evidence of real understanding of the policy context, stakeholders and entry points
 - Involvement and engagement with key stakeholders throughout a project, possibly as formal project partners
- Emphasis on stakeholder engagement, dissemination plans and uptake/ impact pathways alongside scientific excellence and research quality as core evaluation criteria.
- Kick-off calls to establish and agree expectations and ways of working.
- Processes to support and maintain a focus on uptake and impact, including setting of objectives, baselines and indicators at the start of a project, and quarterly update reports and end of project reports including information regarding uptake and impact, project impact reviews 6 months or a year after the closure of a project.

- Connecting research partners with other relevant partners in our network, including other project partners or government partners.
- Hosting learning workshops on a thematic or regional basis.
- Directly supporting dissemination of key outputs and recommendations, for example by sharing outputs within our network, known knowledge platforms and forums, and our government partners where appropriate, or supporting partners to produce CDKN publications highlighting research findings and recommendations.

Research uptake challenges

We have encountered a number of challenges in achieving the uptake we would like to see from the research projects we fund. Some of this results from the fact that many of the practices outlined above have been adopted and refined over the course of CDKN's lifespan, and therefore were not established when our earlier research projects were commissioned. For others, we have yet to find a solution.

One significant challenge with which we feel we have made significant progress is identifying the projects with real potential for research uptake and policy impact from the pool of proposals submitted to our research calls. Over the course of CDKN's 5 years we have been increasingly strategic and specific with research call themes, and more closely interrogated impact pathways (for example by drawing on the knowledge of Regional office colleagues as outlined above). This has helped to ensure that we are funding thought-leading research of real significance to the global CCD agenda, and policy-relevant research with high potential to achieve policy impact.

Since the inception of CDKN, we would have preferred for more of our research portfolio to respond directly to research demand in our priority countries. However, especially in the first few years (the years when the majority of our research projects were commissioned), this has proved to be challenging – our in-country engagements primarily yielded technical assistance requests. This is partly due to capacity of our government partners, and partly a result of CDKN's structure and distribution of research expertise (centred in London). As CDKN's country programmes and cross-CDKN patterns of working have become more established, this situation has improved significantly; recent commissioning has seen a third of our research budget successfully spent on high quality research projects which respond to CDKN country programme demand. However, we would like to further develop this area of research commissioning.

A challenge we have not yet overcome is that of monitoring and evaluating research uptake and impact. We have found that impact is relatively swift and visible where a research team has worked with a government partner at national or especially city level, to provide research, practical recommendations and technical support on a specific issue – the policy impact end of the research uptake spectrum. Monitoring uptake and impact of research which aims to move forward global understanding of CCD has been much more challenging. The intended audience is significantly larger and more diverse, the timeframe for uptake and change is longer, and the degree to which change can be attributed to any one intervention much reduced. For this latter type of research, we rely on download statistics, citations and feedback from users, among other indicators, but this can feel thin. Monitoring uptake and impact for this latter type of research is made harder by challenges in maintaining contact with research partners after the length of a research grant to monitor uptake longer term, which many researchers consider an unnecessary burden.

Part 2: Practitioners

2.1 Research and Policy in Development (RAPID), ODI

2.2 The Broker

2.3 Food & Business Knowledge Platform

2.4 Hivos

2.5 International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

2.6 Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

2.7 The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)

2.1 Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) Programme, ODI

Louise Shaxson & Caroline Cassidy



What does research uptake mean to RAPID?

We refer to research-based evidence as evidence that has been sourced according to robust methods. This incorporates statistical data, research, evidence from citizens and stakeholders and evidence from monitoring and evaluation: we find the term ‘research’ is viewed by many to solely mean academic research and can miss the very valuable contributions that the other types of evidence can make. We also tend to refer to ‘policy engagement and influence’ rather than simply research uptake, to ensure that people do not get stuck in a linear mode of thinking—engagement and influence imply multi-directional, multi-stakeholder relationships.

Having said that, we see ‘research uptake’ as part of a broad ‘ecosystem’ of actors and activities that need to be considered together to make more effective use of research-based evidence in policy and practice. These are:

- The supply of research-based evidence
- The demand for and use of evidence from policy-makers and practitioners
- The intermediary organisations that operate inside, outside and in between the supply sides and the demand sides (knowledge brokers)
- The enabling environment: the incentives, values, social and political contexts that shape the way research-based evidence is scoped, sought and used

We recognise that there is no hard and fast distinction between the four groups outlined above: a single organisation will both supply and demand at different times or for different purposes; an intermediary may sit anywhere in the ecosystem, and many organisations have some ability to shape the enabling environment within which they operate. So we also recognize that it can be more useful to talk about an ecosystem of *functions* than of organisations.

How is your organisation involved in research uptake?

For over twelve years, RAPID has advised teams within ODI, and external organisations, on how to think about the issues around research uptake. This includes how to make research and evaluation more useful for policy-makers and practitioners, and helping donors and organisations to design and embed research uptake within their programmes.

We currently work directly with researchers under the DFID-ESRC Growth Research Programme (DEGRP), supporting them to improve their pathways to impact (to be described in more detail during the workshop). Just working with researchers is one thing, but we also look to improve programme-level impact by using our networks to convene events to debate research-based evidence in the context of current policy and practice challenges.

We also are increasingly working on the demand side, understanding what factors condition the uptake and use of evidence by policy-makers and practitioners. While a good deal of work has already been done on this topic within donor organisations, very little has been done inside developing country governments. RAPID leads the demand-side component of the Indonesia Knowledge Sector Initiative (KSI), a multi-million, multi-year DFAT-funded programme of support to the Government of Indonesia. We are also funded by DFID’s BCURE programme to support the South African Department of Environmental Affairs to help them take a more systematic and strategic approach to their use of evidence.

What type of strategies, methods or mechanisms for a) enhancement, b) realisation, c) building capacity or d) monitoring of research uptake do you practise?

Our work is based around the Rapid Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA), which sets out three main steps that can be taken to improve your policy engagement and influencing: diagnosing the problem, developing a change strategy and monitoring and evaluating the impacts you are having. ROMA is a scalable approach, so depending on needs (and budgets!) we can take you through a light-touch approach through to a full-blown context analysis and in-depth monitoring and evaluation strategy.

What do you consider to be the best or most successful practices in supporting research uptake?

1. A good context analysis is important to bring a realistic understanding of how you are likely to influence change. ROMA helps you diagnose complexity, which helps you to work out where to focus your engagement and influencing strategies. Likewise a good stakeholder map helps you decide on whom to focus your energies and how you can build networks or coalitions to support what you want to achieve;
2. Understanding that communications begins at the beginning of a project and is a core focus of the work and your resources throughout: it's an old observation but one that still needs hammering home;
3. Developing a theory of change around uptake, using outcome mapping-based indicators (expect to see, like to see, love to see) rather than traditional output-outcome logframe-type indicators. We find this helps bring a degree of realism to ideas about uptake and impact;
4. Developing a monitoring and learning strategy from the outset (see the point above about communications!)
5. Recognising the role of knowledge brokering and that there are several different functions involved: we use the K* framework (to be presented at the workshop) to differentiate between a linear approach to the uptake of research-based information and an approach based on social learning.
6. Recognising that the researcher may not be the best messenger for his/her message: that they are part of an ecosystem and others may be better placed to transmit the message into policy.

What are the most significant bottlenecks or challenges you have encountered? Especially those that are yet to be solved...

How to demonstrate the impact of research uptake activities to funders hasn't yet been resolved. We still find funders wanting numbers of policies influenced, which gets into all sorts of tangled questions about what a policy is and isn't. In ODI, we are working with the idea of a 'cable of evidence': each strand of evidence about impact may not individually carry much weight but taken together, and wrapped up in a reflective story of change (that is peer reviewed for accuracy), they show how we have made a plausible and distinct contribution to change.

Useful websites

odi.org.uk/rapid

[ROMA Guide: roma.odi.org](http://roma.odi.org)

[DEGRP website: degrp.sqsp.com](http://degrp.sqsp.com)

2.2 The Broker

Evert-Jan Quak



What is The Broker:

The Broker has eight years of experience in connecting the academic knowledge agenda (long term) with the special demands from policy-makers and practitioners (short term).

- The Broker is a knowledge hub, a thinknet, on globalization and development.
- The Broker connects different knowledge domains for a better understanding of the context and interrelated causes of current and future events for policy-makers and practitioners.
- The Broker brings together knowledge from different knowledge-makers, from universities, research institutes, NGOs, private sector and public sector actors.

Why is this important:

Global knowledge provides a solid foundation for broad-based foreign policy and social engagement aimed at achieving just, equal, peaceful and sustainable global development. The growing complexity and interdependence of local, national, international and transnational processes call for an interdisciplinary approach. That is why brokering knowledge and bridging gaps between economic and social sectors and scientific disciplines has great added value. *The Broker* believes in context-relevant and needs-based approaches. As a thinknet we wish to foster an active dialogue between the academic, policy-making and practitioner communities and grow *The Broker* into a vibrant knowledge hub of integrated perspectives on current global policy issues.

How do we work:

The Broker aims to achieve a broader and more comprehensive understanding and thus better informed policies. We wish to provide a knowledge hub to help policy-makers, activists and NGOs determine their strategies. We do this by:

- Contributing to an effective performance by practitioners, to relevant research and evidence-based policy-making
- Co-creating knowledge by actively facilitating cross-disciplinary dialogue
- Supporting agenda-setting processes by introducing new topics and new ways of looking at them

We synthesize knowledge from different disciplines and perspectives by combining, comparing and debating with the aim to create genuine added value.

Living analysis:

In 2015 The Broker will work with living analysis, which are articles that will be updated through co-creation. Based on our experience this method could better reflect on the multiple realities that contribute to a context. Our ambition is to have a multiple perspective view that enables us to contextualize what is happening on the ground. There are two key elements in this approach, one is the overview and synthesis of perspectives and second is knowledge generation together with many experts including local voices. The Broker's analysts are constantly investing in these sources. Online debates, expert meetings, bottom-up approaches by using local media partners will feed the analysis.

www.thebrokeronline.eu

2.3 Food and Business Knowledge Platform

Vanessa Nigten



Dutch Knowledge Platforms for Development Cooperation

Recently the Department for Development Cooperation of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has set up five Knowledge Platforms for its main policy themes. Within the Platforms policymakers, the private sector, academics and civil society from the Netherlands, developing and other countries combine their forces. They work together on ground breaking research to support development policy, map existing knowledge more effectively and jointly compile a more coherent knowledge and research agenda to address development challenges. Knowledge Hub The Broker has developed and coordinates the umbrella website for the five Knowledge Platforms (knowledgeplatforms.nl) and is participates in the Secretariats of three of those Knowledge Platforms (on Security and Rule of Law, Food security, and Inclusive Development Policies). In these Secretariats The Broker has an extra opportunity in practising and further developing its "knowledge - policy brokering" activities.

Experiences in the Food & Business Knowledge Platform

"Making knowledge work" is the credo of the Knowledge Platform for food security. Adapting existing and future knowledge to food & nutrition security practices in low- and middle income countries is the main business of the Platform. Three examples illustrate experiences in knowledge brokering since the start of the F&BKP in 2013:

- **Various professionals choose knowledge creation instead of dissemination**

The Office of the Platform manages a Knowledge Management Facility Fund for networks (of academic, NGO, government and/or business actors) in the field of food & nutrition security that want to contribute to the Dutch knowledge agenda. Possible activities that the Platform Office can support are (international) conferences, policy briefs, synthesis documents, workshops, leaflets, documentaries, overview studies etc. In practice the Fund is mainly used for the development of new knowledge (explorative/ overview/ mapping) studies instead of the dissemination of existing knowledge (leaflets, conferences etc.).

- **Embedding knowledge uptake strategies by academic research teams is not obvious**

Besides the Knowledge Management Facility, the F&BKP operates in coordination with two research funds for academic project teams managed by NWO-WOTRO (The division Science for Global Development of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research). Not only the F&BKP has a role in setting the agenda for these research programmes, also an important task of the F&BKP is to support research teams in facilitating the uptake (& impact) of their research throughout the duration of the projects (and after). Despite the willingness to adapt their work to the needs of deliberately chosen stakeholders and targeted communicate with them for building capacity, this all seems quite new and non-obvious for the research teams.

- **Active involvement in policy influencing, with average impact**

This summer, at the request of the Dutch Ministries of Foreign and Economic Affairs, the F&BKP Office facilitated a public online consultation for professionals related to the Dutch international food security policy. In 2 months' time 154 contributions in total were delivered from business (11%) academia (13%) knowledge institutes (8%) civil society (61%) consultants (5%) and the public sector (2%). Based on those inputs the F&BKP Office composed a Synthesis report. The Ministries had asked the Office for this report in view of the policy brief they were composing for the Dutch parliament on their vision of Dutch food security policy for the coming years. Although the final brief underlines the outlines of the report, politically it did not seem feasible to adopt the expert advices elaborately.

Lessons from the Food & Business Knowledge Platform

First experiences since the F&BKPs' start show that investing in research uptake is not evident for professionals in the field of food & nutrition security. Much focus lies on developing knowledge instead of disseminating it. Besides time and awareness of relevance of professionals, in particular knowhow on bridging different perspectives of researchers and practitioners from businesses and governments seems essential. For this The Broker keeps on improving its methods to continuously put itself in the place of stakeholders and adapt them to knowledge processes. More than being a thematic expert or having the power yourself, this building links requires social knowledge brokering skills and time investment.

www.knowledge4food.net

2.4 HIVOS



Josine Stremmelaar

What does research uptake mean to you?

Research uptake is about research findings informing audiences, and thereby triggering new ideas, new research, adapted policies, changed strategies but also counterfactual argumentation. I use a broad definition of research findings; these are not just end products, but can also be a mapping at the start of a research programme or sharing the research methodology while “testing” it. Research uptake can be an explicit but also an implicit process and the uptake can be intended but also unintended. I also have to note that particularly in the development sector knowledge is power. This means that research uptake is not a neutral affair.

The politics of knowledge

The politics of knowledge – how thinking is translated into action of various kinds and which ideas are considered legitimate – is vital to processes of social transformation. Certainly, knowledge building results in increased political, economic and social capital. At the same time, knowledge can be used as a countervailing force or employed to solve problems. We also see it used to legitimize and serve political goals. In other words, knowledge can contribute to change or it can be used to maintain the status quo. One thing is sure: knowledge is never neutral.

How is your organisation involved in research uptake?

My organisation is an international development agency that has developed a think tank facility (the Knowledge Programme) that facilitates research to enhance the effectiveness of development interventions. We facilitate research process engaging researchers, practitioners and policy makers through a methodology called knowledge integration. Research uptake is an important element of the knowledge integration strategy.

What type of strategies, methods or mechanisms for a) enhancement, b) realisation, c) building capacity or d) monitoring of research uptake do you practise?

Hivos has applied a methodology called knowledge integration. By integrating various forms of (new) knowledge - academic, practitioner, educational and cultural expressions of knowledge - new insights can be created and strategies formulated that contribute to the development of new policies and practices for the development sector. This process of knowledge production stems from a series of ad hoc but integrated interactions. Four stages can be elaborated from this process, namely: knowledge development, transforming new and existing knowledge into appropriate and effective strategies, knowledge dissemination, and advancing the application of these knowledge-based strategies.

Knowledge dissemination is an important element of our programme. This is done through activities such as network seminars and regional workshops. We provide platforms for regular dialogue and opportunities for all involved to share their experiences, and we are building a knowledge network via outreach media such as our website, policy briefs, e-newsletters and other publications. Beyond sharing, we aim to advance the application of these knowledge-based strategies (and to improve these strategies based on experiences). For instance, in order to apply one of our key insights, namely, to adopt a more fluid and inclusive approach to development – encompassing all elements of society – real change was required. By employing knowledge integration in this way, Hivos believes that knowledge can and does trigger change.

Example: The women’s movement and the struggle for their rights in Nicaragua, 1998 – 2008

From 2008-2010, Hivos and ISS facilitated a research programme to analyze Nicaragua’s women’s movement and the strategies developed during the last decade to defend and extend women’s rights, in particular in its struggle against the prohibition of therapeutic abortion. This tier of the

Knowledge Programme involved academics, practitioners and activists. The study accommodated the broad participation of the movement's leaders through diverse knowledge exchange activities and reflections at the national and local level. The methodology and outcomes of this project have been captured in a video that is used frequently by the women's movement in their workshops, forums and other gatherings in both Nicaragua and abroad.

Capacity development is an important element of the Knowledge Programme. For many, knowledge integration is a new methodology and so we facilitate the enhancement of their capabilities in this area. We also capacitate individuals and partners that don't have a lot of research experience yet. We also support young (PhD) students, professionals and activists to play a role in the programme.

Example: Pluralism Knowledge Programme

The Pluralism Knowledge Programme provides civil society actors concerned about the rise of fundamentalism with input for new strategies. It addresses Hindu fundamentalism in India, radical political Islam in Indonesia and ethnic tensions in Uganda. The programme is undertaken in cooperation with the Kosmopolis Institute (University for Humanistics), the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society and the Patna Collective (India), the Centre for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies (Indonesia) and the Cross-Cultural Foundation Uganda. The knowledge is generated by mixed teams of academics and practitioners in the three countries. The Programme generates and disseminates knowledge on a significant scale through papers, workshops, summer schools and dedicated websites (<http://pluralism.in/> and <http://crcs.ugm.ac.id/pluralism>).

We monitor research uptake annually. We also have done evaluations of some parts of our programme. Recently we have started to publish testimonials of research uptake on our website.

Uptake by Karim Emile Bitar: At these times of polarization, Hivos KP is a source of thoughtful objective analysis.....I remember stumbling upon the thoughtful policy paper entitled Regional Perspectives on the 'Dignity Revolutions: How Middle Eastern Activists Perceive Popular Protests. It was an interesting and important text because it analyzed the multidimensional nature of the revolutions, and looked simultaneously at politics, history, economic development problems and at the new media revolution. They.... were objective and pertinent, free of the usual academic jargon, and they drew from multiple disciplines to make useful recommendations to policy makers.... In addition to the above-mentioned paper by Kawa Hassan, during the past two semesters, I have assigned 3 Hivos publications to the masters' students of my International Relations classes at IRIS, and to students of my permanent education evening classes.

What do you consider to be the best or most successful practices in supporting research uptake?

To ensure research uptake, it's key that the research process is designed well preferably in consultation with the intended audience. Hence it's important to support, facilitate or sometimes even press for quality research design.

The way research is shared is important to make sure it travels and may lead to uptakes. Support the development of research "products" with the receiver in mind rather than findings alone and support multiple formats.

Position your findings clearly but carefully. How are your findings contributing to the debate in your area? This may also inform the way you present the findings.

Example Digital Natives with a Cause community?

Digital Natives with a Cause? is a research inquiry that reveals the ways in which young people ('digital natives') in emerging ICT contexts make strategic use of technologies to bring about change in their immediate environments. Ranging from personal stories of transformation to efforts at collective change, it identified knowledge gaps in scholarship, practice and popular discourse relating to the increasing usage, adoption and integration of digital technologies in processes of social and political change. It worked with multiple vocabularies and frameworks and produces dialogues and conversations between digital natives, scholars, practitioners, development agencies and corporate structures in order to examine the nature and practice of digital natives in emerging contexts in the Global South. The digital native community was born out of a process including three workshops, which brought together around 80 people from Asia, Africa and Latin America, to explore key questions that could provide new insights into Digital Natives research, policy and practice. The workshops were accompanied by a 'Thinkathon' – a multi-stakeholder summit that initiated conversations and shared learning. The conversations, research inquiries, reflections, discussions, interviews, and art practices are consolidated in a four-part book as a main product. See <http://digitalnatives.in>

What are the most significant bottlenecks or challenges you have encountered? Especially those that are yet to be solved...

Capturing the richness of research processes in research products is a major challenge. We often are engaged in research processes that are inspiring, have interesting findings and bring together a wealth of experiences. However to "translate" these findings to audiences that have not been part of that process is a challenge. There are various ways in which we try to tackle this challenge, such as in the way we organize workshops (we have introduced writeshops for instance, capturing on the spot) and the use of other formats such as videos.

The capacity to facilitate research uptake is limited. We have tried to build our own team's capacity to facilitate uptake and that of our partners. We also support research outlets, as there is also a lack of knowledge brokers. However it is a specific competency that we would need more of if we want to take research uptake to the next level.

How to invite more effectively engaged research users in "curating" research findings? It would be great if research users would be able to create "their own" products based on research findings. This will ensure that the outputs are better catered for specific audiences and it enables a larger reach. We have tried a pilot with users being able to "make their own book" based on key words that are related to areas of our research findings. Unfortunately technical difficulties made us abandon it.

Getting support from (within your) institution to design different processes and produce different research outputs than is usual. We have experiences with this challenge ourselves being a think tank within a grant making organisation. We have found that it takes a lot of time, inspiration, results and guts to convince others to do things differently.

2.5 International Institute for Environment and Development



Rosalind Goodrich

Research uptake — communicating for impact

What does research uptake mean to you?

IIED believes that research evidence is a global public good and as such we should do all that we can to raise its profile in a timely and relevant way, making it accessible to anyone who needs it. We hope that the research we produce with partners will influence policy decisions and practical approaches at local, national and international level. Whether it does depends on a number of things, among them the way that the research findings are communicated.

IIED researchers build individual relationships with policymakers and practitioners across the world, talking to them about their research, gathering their responses and feeding these into ongoing work. The communications team supports this personal approach within our institutional communications and engagement strategy, as well as in project specific strategies. We place strong emphasis on encouraging researchers to focus on the audiences they want to reach, being clear about why they want to reach them and then working out the best outputs and channels for the purpose. In this way we aim to maximise the opportunities and likelihood of their work having profile and in turn, being influential.

How is IIED involved in research uptake?

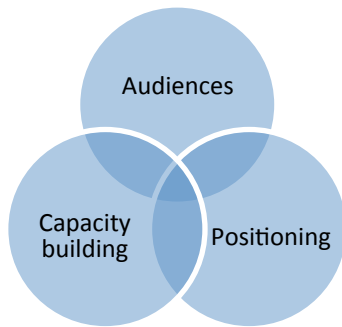
Ten years ago at IIED communications research was seen as an ‘end of pipe’ necessity, with four people in the communications team. Today 13 staff cover all communication areas and work across the organisation to improve the communications and influencing element of research proposals and ongoing projects.

How did we get to where we are now? Five years was spent building the team to include the basic skills to run an effective operation. The next five years have included:

- **A brand refresh**
 - Rationalised 150 different outputs down to around 35
 - Created a product portfolio encouraging researchers to think who for, why and what message, with a clear editorial process to ensure quality.
 - Created set of tools to support uptake such as our ‘Writing clear text’ booklet
 - Created processes to safeguard quality (editing and production protocols)
- **Appointing an audience development manager (from January 2013)**
 - Stakeholder and influencing mapping, audience persona work with groups and projects
 - Much stronger focus on audience development
 - ‘Collaborative impact framework’ for as many projects as possible, setting out how researchers and comms will work together to achieve impact through communications, engagement and marketing.
- **Appointing a web content manager (from September 2012)**
 - Digital portfolio
 - Online coherence
 - ‘Booster’ communications: blogs, vlogs, online interviews, social media etc

- **Research communication manager (from June 2014)**
- Programme of internal and partner capacity building re comms
- Evaluating the success of our communication work
- Responsible for sharing what we have learnt internally and externally.

These new staff have enabled the communications team to lead on encouraging different ways of working across the organisation. The emphasis on audience is combined with greater focus on positioning IIED and partner voices in key debates at all levels, and building the capacity of staff and some partners to communicate their research clearly and effectively.



We have become more systematic at getting in early on project conversations to suggest a more strategic communications approach to support research uptake: a case of 'less can be much more' rather than the usual trend for high numbers of outputs.

We encourage researchers to be creative with their communications and engagement; to include money in budget to support this and we have decentralised some

comms operations into groups, with training provided.

We have experimented with different models for the communication input into projects ranging from a dedicated comms person to being a central support hub to 'satellite' communications people around the world. And our role in some comms-related programmes such as Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) now brings in funding for researchers rather than the other way round.

We spend more time on monitoring and evaluating our 'campaigns' and have seen downloads and social media networks grow, but would like to develop this area of work much more.

Overall, we feel able to say that the past ten years has seen greatly improved research and communications integration and growing mutual respect for skills.

But it isn't all rosy ...

We query whether the standard of outputs is uniform across the organisation and whether we are managing to pass on new learning centrally to people in groups. We are planning to review whether brand values are consistently displayed across the organisation's content. For example, in language used, editing standards, how partners are represented, and so on.

And with events, are they organised in the best and most effective way? Are the research presentations well thought out and is every opportunity for building relationships noted and seized?

There are still too many situations of 'if only we'd known about that we could have done ...'

There is a residual resistance to increasing the size of the central comms team and yet (in our view), not enough commitment in research groups to build comms capacity to the extent that it is needed.

The challenges and the support we'd like to see from funders

The DFID Accountable Grant has pushed us hard on being much clearer on our theory of change for each project, what the purpose of each communications output is and why we are doing it. This has been welcomed but outputs have still proliferated, adding to workload, and countering the 'less is more' approach. We have gone from producing 35 to around 80 briefings in three years. We don't want more outputs; we want to do more with the same output, repackaged for different audiences. Evaluating the success of every output or initiative takes significant time. We are under capacity in this

area and would like to be better at comms M&E but currently rely on projects to allow for this in the budget.

In fact we are at the stage where we need to gather evidence of impact, as a result of comms and engagement work, in much more depth. Downloads (for example) are only the beginning; we need to do qualitative work and cross project analysis, which takes time. With strong evidence of what comms work translates into impact, we will be better at convincing researchers that it is a worthwhile activity and can add value to the project they are working on.

We'd like to see support for communications for influence as a project in its own right. We are currently working with the Ford Foundation on a project relating to large and artisanal-scale mining that has a specific communications focus, with the project designed to build networks and encourage dialogue between the two mining groups, governments and all those along the mining supply chain. It would be great to be able to be funded to experiment with more of this kind of approach.

2.6 Institute of Development Studies

James Georgalakis



Engaged Excellence: 5 steps to effective research uptake and impact

At IDS we believe that effective research uptake and knowledge mobilisation strategies rely on the production of rigorous, methodologically sound evidence of the highest quality that links to and involves those who are at the heart of the change we wish to see. This is about going beyond traditional metrics of academic excellence and linear concepts of research dissemination. We call this concept 'Engaged Excellence' and have broken it down here into five steps that will help programmes become more relevant, more likely to influence real change, and to have a more lasting and scalable impact.

Step 1: Rigorous research that produces scalable solutions

We co-construct practical knowledge and create scalable solutions to poverty and inequality by working collaboratively with others in ways which engage multiple perspectives in defining problems and questions and in generating evidence. We approach problems with practical solutions and have been successful at adapting methods to suit the partners with whom we are working. A good example of this was our use of participatory video as a tool to empower youth and share knowledge in relation to climate change and disaster risk reduction in Africa and South Asia. Another is our work bringing local communities' knowledge together with that of vets, doctors, environmental modellers and policymakers in practical, integrated approaches to address zoonotic disease in Africa including the Ebola crisis. Co-design of research carries through co-production to co-communication.

Step 2: Understanding policy, power and knowledge contexts

For effective research uptake we need learning partnerships that enable us to better understand the environment in which development happens and map out desired changes, key stakeholders and policy processes. Influencing change, we have found, means not just producing knowledge and evidence and disseminating it, but engaging with the politics of knowledge. By understanding the power relations, political economy and interests which favour some perspectives over others, influencing strategies can be identified to empower and support alternatives – including the views of marginalised people. A nuanced understanding of how change happens in local, national and regional contexts provides additional reach and the potential for impact on policy and practice. Working with our collaborators, we help to challenge the status quo, set agendas, and if needs be create new policy discourses.

An example of this approach is [The Future Agricultures Consortium](#) (FAC) which aims to encourage dialogue and the sharing of good practice in Africa on the role of agriculture in broad based growth, engaging with the politics of policy processes. However, a key challenge was a lack of policy spaces at a regional level to achieve this. So, we created African regional hubs in Kenya, Ghana and South Africa which analysed the policy and knowledge context they were operating in. This enabled them to convene a platform for policy dialogue within and across countries and set up meetings between FAC researchers and partners and policy-makers to promote networking, research dissemination and new alliances for change.

Step 3: Mutual Capacity Building

Mutual capacity development is at the heart of our approach to engaged excellence and research uptake. We work with partners and communities at each stage of a programme – developing awareness, capabilities and networks. We not only strengthen skills, we also embed the behaviours, such as information literacy, and strengthen the relationships that will enable ongoing communication

and impact. Throughout this work, we at IDS are also learning, and benefit enormously from the knowledge and insights of our partners and their stakeholders.

For example in the POSHAN nutrition programme in India, we work with district level policy and programme representatives to support their use of evidence, promote joint reflection and planning and increase the connections between them. We do this in partnership with State-level organisations, who are embedded in the local context and can support on-going change. In turn this partnership is informing our broader understanding of policy processes and decision-making, and the factors that influence them. (www.poshan.ifpri.info/about-poshan)

Step 4: Strengthening civil society movements and evidence based advocacy

Some learning partnerships and research uptake work enable us to mobilise locally and globally generated knowledge and work to influence the behaviour and practice of actors working in national and international contexts. We aim to contribute to, and in some cases drive forward, policy discourses that lead to positive action. The [Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index](#) (HANCI) is a strong example of how IDS and its partners have worked to leverage awareness around levels of political commitment to reduce undernutrition amongst local and national government and international policy makers and encourage them to take action. This is a transparency tool that has been used to kick start policy and media debate and motivate governments and donors to evaluate their own efforts and to prioritise actions in the fight against hunger and undernutrition (www.hancindex.org).

Step 5: Mobilising knowledge with technology

Our approach to effective research uptake and knowledge mobilisation is underpinned by digital innovation and our commitment to the delivery of free and open content. In breaking down technological barriers we aim to increase the availability of research evidence and present diverse perspectives on development issues. This is about more than just creating websites that pump out programme outputs. Projects such as Interactions.eldis.org provide good examples of how we can increase availability and accessibility of evidence-based information and enable effective co-construction of knowledge by representing the work and voices of partners directly, and enabling timely online dialogues.

IDS is a digital innovator using data visualisations, film and other multimedia outputs and social media from Facebook to Buzzfeed and Twitter to build bridges between academic discourse and live policy and media debate. We are constantly trying to engage our partners and the evidence and learning they produce with us in the broader public debates around development.

For further info go to www.ids.ac.uk or find us on twitter @IDS_UK

2.7 London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, STRIVE research programme consortium



Annie Holmes

What does research uptake mean to you?

Research uptake means a strategic approach to ensuring that public health research makes a difference to public health in action.

RU seems to differ from or extend “communications” and “dissemination” because:

- RU begins at the very start of a study
- RU involves questioning and listening to end-users as much or more than addressing them
- RU requires strategic thinking

How is your organisation involved in research uptake?

As a DFID-funded consortium, research uptake is a key element of our contract. The research directors who wrote the original proposal were committed to the principle and experienced in the practice of research uptake (although they didn't call it that) and so the structure, staffing and budget were designed to prioritise research uptake alongside the research itself and capacity building.

Our consortium investigates the structural factors that shape HIV vulnerability – how these social and economic forces operate and interact, and how to address them. Our studies range enormously in focus, methodology and level of impact (from local to international). The RU strategy for each partner, working group and study therefore varies too. What they have in common is the need for strategic thinking. They are, however, based on the same set of questions.

What types of strategies, methods or mechanisms do you practise for enhancement, realisation, building capacity, monitoring of research uptake?

From the outset, we anticipated a need for ‘internal advocacy’ – ie within partner organisations, with researches – on the meaning and benefits of RU. Our RU team (Knowledge into Action or KiA) comprises a hands-on lead plus a senior decision-maker from each partner to ensure real support for the RU agenda and tasks. For the same reason, the RU team are fully involved in the Annual Meeting. We offer free open webinars once a month to build capacity in and beyond our RPC to work on structural factors; these include webinars on research uptake approaches.

To take advantage of the opportunity to meet in person for the Annual Meeting (AM), the RU team gather for one or more days beforehand for specific RU capacity building. Each KiA team member has specific knowledge and experiences, so each one makes a presentation and shares her/his skills.

The KiA team member plays a central role in overall monitoring activities, including a critical reflection process within each partner team as well as putting together a matrix of publications, events, meetings and so on.

What do you consider to be the best or most successful practices in supporting research uptake?

The first RU activity in each partner organisation was to conduct a “landscape analysis”, investigating the relevant context for their RU goal. Rather than involving a consultant or doing a desk study, our Tanzanian partner involved the relevant ministry in the capital in a series of interviews with potential end-users. The result is far more useful than a report would have been on its own, as she built a network of contacts and support, and her work led to visibility and an enhanced role for her organisation in national decision-making.

What we might call internal engagement has proved another useful practice. Every partner has rich resources of RU experience often held by a few individuals – we have found it valuable to surface and share these networks and thinking.

What are the most significant bottlenecks or challenges you have encountered? Especially those that are yet to be solved.

Some academics continue disinterested and even resistant to the idea of RU.

<http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk>