Knowledge on the move: research for development in a globalising world

The Hague, February 26-29, 2008

Background Paper on Research Communication
(Preliminary draft – not for quotation)

Note: This is a preliminary draft bringing together three contributions around the central conference themes of international research partnerships, embedding research in societies and capacity development. A revised version integrating these components and contextualising the wider discussion will be produced after the conference.

Introduction[1]

Why focus on research communication?

Over the last decade there has been growing recognition of the importance of research communication[2]. There is quite a range of factors driving this, and from different directions:

- Many of the agencies that fund development research are under pressure to demonstrate what difference their research is making and are starting to pass on this challenge to the organisations they support, for example by expecting detailed communication plans to be included in research proposals[3].
- Government ministries, development organisations and others are asking how they can make their policy and practice more evidence based, and as part of this are looking for better ways of tapping into research knowledge.
- Many research institutes are operating in an environment where competition for influence and funding are intense, so are wondering how they can raise their profile and widen the impact they are having.
- Some researchers are experimenting with new and innovative ways of interacting with stakeholders as they conduct their research, to deepen and enrich the research process and to create new pathways to change[4].
- The media and civil society organisations are becoming more engaged with research, often in an active and critical way rather than as passive recipients.
- The development and spread of the internet is opening up entirely new possibilities for storing and sharing information, which in turn is creating new expectations regarding people's right to have access to publicly-funded research information, and their ability to comment on research and engage in debates.

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[1] This introduction has been written by Nick Ismael Perkins and Geoff Barnard, of the Institute of Development Studies, at the University of Sussex.

[2] We use the term 'research communication' in a broad sense in this paper to include all kinds of communication and dialogue occurring at different stages of the research process, not just the 'dissemination' of final results.

[3] A survey of current donor practices was conducted for a joint DFID/IDS/IDRC workshop in 2006 on "Maximising the Impact of Development Research". See Barnard, Carlile and Basu Ray (2007).

[4] See for example the work of the Development Research Centres on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (www.drc-citizenship.org), and Pathways of women's empowerment (www. pathwaysofempowerment.org).

All these drivers are bringing the need for more and better communication into the centre of the development research arena. The days of researchers communicating in academic language and sharing their finding with only a small circle of specialists may not have disappeared entirely. But they are gradually coming to an end. At the same time, the trend toward development research being conducted through international partnerships and consortia is adding an extra dimension to this, broadening the canvas and opening up new opportunities and audiences – but also fresh challenges.

While this new focus on research communication can be welcomed as an overdue breath of fresh air, it is important that research communication is not taken for granted or treated uncritically. Communication processes are complex, and by their nature are politically and socially embedded. Communication can obscure and distort as well as illuminate. As one lifts the lid off research communication processes one finds a whole extra layer of complexity where issues of power and voice abound. These are only beginning to be analysed and discussed in mainstream development research circles but they are surely important if development research is to fulfil its desired transformative potential. So in the same way that wider research processes are being scrutinised in this Conference, it is fitting that research communication should also come under the spotlight.

Theoretical framing

If the development project is about bringing knowledge to those who lack it, then no communication function appears more crucial than research communication. However, just as the modernising mission of development has been challenged over the last fifty years, so too research communication has been forced to examine assumptions about knowledge, relevance and the mechanisms of social change itself.

At the heart of the modernisation ideas that drove development politics after the Second World War was the notion that certain communities were not advancing because of the strictures of their culture and their deprived worldview. If achieving development outcomes is concerned then with an information deficit, the role of communication – and indeed research – is clear. It is not surprising then that diffusion theory emerged as the galvanising and enduring paradigm for research communication. The challenge was essentially to understand the most effective way to reach as many people as possible and convince them to change their behaviour.

The agriculture sector was fertile ground for the development of research communication approaches. Much of this stems from the 1960s when increasing agriculture was a priority among donor agencies. Of course, agrarian livelihoods remains an important pillar of development practice, but it is no longer at the centre of gravity in policy terms in the way it was, with governance perhaps taking its place at the turn of the century.

Just as development assistance funding priorities have shifted, thinking in the development community has also precipitated shifting expectations of communications. The awareness that information alone was not going to provide chronically poor farmers with global equity, led this crisis in development.

The counterpoint to modernisation is a body of theory – known as dependency theory - which suggest development is not about a problematic culture but due to structural issues including political, economic and social relations, many of them transnational but other highly localised. This would suggest that people's understanding of and ability to act on information is dependant on where they are located. Dependency-inspired approaches suggest that change needs to be conceived in a broad social context, not just through the individual. The implication for research communication is that it isn't just the content of the information that mattered but also the means by which this content was arrived at and the way in which stakeholders engage with the content that affects the relative success of any initiative.

However critics of these alternative (often participatory) approaches associated with dependency theory say they don't fundamentally change the object of development; instead it presents new modalities. Indeed many projects are beginning to experiment with innovative processes that aim to take account of the dynamics of social change and attempt to integrate these in the management structures necessary for sector-wide programmes and mass dissemination. The importance of being able to work to scale should not be underestimated because some communities cannot be effectively reached with narrowcasting, such as universities. Trends in aid architecture (such as the Paris Declaration) also mean it is an unavoidable consequence of the current research arena.

There are three challenges facing research communication now:

- To continue to build an evidence base for what works so that practice is no longer constrained by dominant theoretical frameworks.
- To continue to interrogate the sector's work and draw upon emerging thinking in related sectors which might have relevance for our own framing of what we do.
- To create awareness of the programmatic opportunities facing research communication in the wider development community – including among research donors - so that our own interrogation, evidence and learning might influence the framing and implementation of development.

Structure of the paper

The three central themes of the Conference - research partnerships, embedding research in societies and research capacity development - provide useful entry points to explore these challenges. In this paper we bring together three contrasting perspectives focusing around these broad themes, but drawing on different experience.

Part 1: Research partnerships: fit for purpose?

The first contribution from the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) asks if current approaches to research partnerships are delivering their intended benefits in terms of shared knowledge generation and capacity building, and the more challenging goal of influencing change. It asks some tough questions around who is driving the agenda, what kind of support is being provided, and how clear (and shared) partnership objectives really are in practice. It points out how donor requirements often place unrealistic and conflicting demands on partnerships, and how these and other constraints can get in the way of good practice. The challenge of encouraging more effective research communication is an important part of this bigger picture, and raises issues of its own which need to be addressed. This frank analysis concludes that most current partnership models are far from perfect and points to some of the areas where improvements are needed.

Part 2: Embedding research in society: understanding the role of the media

The second contribution focuses on the important but often misunderstood role of the media in bringing research debates to a broader public audience in developing countries. Drawing on the experience of the Panos RELAY Programme, it argues that researchers wishing to engage more actively with the media need to understand the media better and treat them as actors in their own right, with a valuable role to play in a pluralistic society, rather than as uncritical service providers waiting to disseminate their research messages. Using case studies as an illustration, it describes the changing media context in developing countries, some of the constraints affecting both researchers and journalists, and the challenges of establishing productive relationships between them. It finishes by offering a checklist for developing a media strategy and drawing conclusions on what are the key ingredients in making these relationships work.

Part 3: Research capacities: Capacity building for relevant research

The final contribution from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) provides an overview of trends and emerging issues of research and research into use capacity development and current practice among agencies involved in supporting development research. It summarises the key concepts and context of research capacity development and offers a practical insight into work carried out by ODI's RAPID programme (Research and Policy in Development) to strengthen links between research and policy. The specific modes of RAPID's capacity development support are illustrated by two case studies from the Canadian International Development Agency and the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) in Tanzania. It concludes that capacity development in this area requires a lot more than just training and institutional support. Effective communication is part of this, but it needs to go beyond simply the provision of appropriate communication outputs to include an active practical engagement and interaction with key stakeholders. It is a change process which, if taken seriously, has fundamental and far-reaching implications, for not only the skills and behaviours of researchers, but also power dynamics within and between institutions.

Part 1: Research partnerships: fit for purpose? [5]

A number of key challenges face research partnerships charged with some of the most urgent tasks of our time — helping to reduce world poverty, reach the Millennium Development Goals and make sustainable development a reality. But are these partnerships fit for purpose? Three issues can compromise their effectiveness:

- **Whose agenda they follow:** what are the real drivers behind research partnerships – donors, researchers or the tensions between local and global priorities?
- **What kind of support they get:** is it flexible, long-term and tailored to their needs?
- **How clear their purpose is:** do they have a strong intention to influence that gives impetus to their communication strategies?

Without good communications, research partnerships cannot hope to be fit for purpose. And if such partnerships don't fully understand what communications entails in terms of orientation, structure and resources, this is less their failure than a failure of those supporting them.

Introduction

Research partnerships cover a huge range. They can be informal collaborations between a few individuals, formal contractual collaborations between international research consortia, or large groups of global experts working together, as in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Those who fund research partnerships may define them slightly differently, but most recognise a duel objective of generating knowledge and helping to build capacity. The Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE), for instance, provides a useful context: 'Research partnerships of various types and intensities, involving research institutions in industrialised and developing or transition countries, are important means for contributing to knowledge generation and capacity building' (Maselli et al, 2006).

This definition can be stretched to include multi-stakeholder partnerships — individuals, institutions or organisations — which may not be primarily involved in research but do contribute important knowledge.

Most agree that knowledge arising from development research should be seen as a global public good that is accessible to all. Researchers gathering or organising knowledge for policy options and ideas for future directions should have access to many knowledge sources and not just those traditional to academia. Research partnerships should involve all the key stakeholders with access to knowledge that will increase the relevance of each research agenda.

But are research partnerships 'fit for purpose' – are they really delivering? If generating knowledge and building research capacity are the only criteria, many pass the test. Having a demonstrable impact on policy is a tougher task, prompting questions of how research is used and what difference it makes. These can be loaded questions, as there is frequently a disconnect between the design and potential of most research partnerships and what they are expected to achieve in terms of accountability and impact by both donors and end users.

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[5] This section has been written by Liz Carlile, Director of Communications at the International Institute of Environment and Development, with the help of IIED intern Rosheen Kabraji and other colleagues (see www.iied.org).

The evolution of research partnerships

Research partnerships have evolved for different reasons. Some primarily strengthen capacity of one or more of the partners involved. A good first stab at describing some of these has been made by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) (Jones and Young, 2007). Some bring together key actors with different expertise on the same issue. Some are scattered alliances gathering data from different areas to build a bigger picture. All are potentially more than the sum of their parts. They offer the chance to share and learn from different research arenas and/or countries, and are a response to the growing complexity of research needs, particularly for non-evidence based, societal demands for knowledge.

For instance, in 2002 IIED and 'the Ring' — a network of 13 renowned policy research organisations spanning five continents[6] — looked at the state of sustainable development research. The Ring argued that the challenges of sustainable development demand research focused not only on technological innovation but, more importantly, on issues such as governance structures and rights to sustainable livelihoods. They highlighted four key research needs (Bass, 2003):

- leadership, innovation, investment and learning
- encouragement for effective research partnerships such as the Climate Change Convention's work with the IPCC
- agreement on the part of global research partnerships on the right questions to ask, what works how to link researchers with concerned stakeholders
- locally driven research that uses local capacity, knowledge and needs.

The Ring proposed a major campaign to support research partnerships in sustainable development in least developed countries, countries in transition and countries recovering after conflict. Over the last five years many of these recommendations have been adopted. But many of their concerns still resonate today.

Meeting research needs can be a tough call. International environment policy researcher Adil Najam notes there is tremendous pressure on research partnerships to produce fast, relevant research across a wide range of sectors if: 'If all policy is about putting theory into practice, then research has to be the lifeblood of good public policy' (Najam, 2004).

But policymakers and policy shapers looking to research to provide answers to pressing problems on the political agenda are not necessarily focusing on the same issues as researchers are and may have very different priorities. For example, a recent survey of forestry policymakers and scientists asked the policymakers what they thought were the most relevant topics for them in forest science. The scientists were asked which topics they thought most relevant for policymakers. Some glaring mismatches emerged. The scientists believed that policymakers would find research on carbon sequestration most relevant, but policymakers ranked this as one of the least relevant topics. The policymakers ranked cross-sectoral impacts, options for policy and the values and goals of stakeholders as of high importance – but the scientists did not think they would (Forest Policy and Economics, 2008).

[6] IIED is a member of the Ring, a network of research organisations spread over Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin American and North America. Further information from www.ring.org

The changing shape of support

These days there are research partnerships working on development issues across all sectors. Over the last five years there has been a move to ensure that partnerships bring together multi-stakeholder interests and strong South-North alliances. But concerns about impact remain. This has less to do with whether Southern research is growing in capacity and more about whether the research generated by these partnerships is really making a difference and changing policy. Donors, too, are under pressure to demonstrate real impacts. But do research partnerships have the time, resources and expertise to fill the gap?

There has been much research done on the links between research outcomes and policy change; and while these may remain complex and diffuse, we now know much more about what makes for successful impact.[7] One key problem, however, lies with who sets the agenda.

Great expectations: whose agenda is it anyway?

What are the real drivers of research partnerships? Does everyone involved have the same expectations? Is there a comfortable alignment between the two goals of knowledge generation for policy change and strengthening capacity, or are they at odds?

The 2007 strategy consultation carried by the Central Research Department of the UK government's DFID identified a shared concern from research stakeholders – that research agendas were principally driven by the 'interests and priorities of funding agencies' (DFID, 2007). Despite rhetoric about the need to include end users and stakeholders in the refining of research agendas, it was clear from the consultation responses quoted below that this is not yet happening as well as it might.

> *'In all sectors, research is largely driven by interests and priorities of the funding agencies and the researchers.'* Uganda
>
> '*Donor-driven research agendas dominate the current research direction in Nigeria, not local needs or priorities. Respondents expressed concern at the dominant influence of donor agencies on national research direction, processes, methodologies, completion and usage*.' Nigeria
>
> '*Some researchers felt that donors sometimes do not address the national research priorities. They tend to impose their own agenda. They also sometimes attempt to copy experiences of other countries and replicate in Ethiopia.'* Ethiopia
>
> '*Choices about research areas and approaches need to be informed by demand and shared interests*.' China

The philosophy behind these partnerships indicates they are there to address in-country needs by ensuring the relevance of the research agenda.[8] The evidence above, however, suggests that research agendas are driven not by the needs of the countries, but by the donors and research partners engaged in the project. The focus is skewed away from end users' needs in the following ways.

[7] See ODI Rapid Programme http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID
[8] See Consultation on DFID's Research Strategy http://research4development.info/features.asp?FeatureID=58

Donors' constraints

Donors face a number of conflicting demands:

- To **demonstrate impact** and accountability to public accounting bodies, and ultimately the taxpayer, donors have to show value for money and sound management. Yet as early as the concept stage, partnerships can be tied into detailed targets thought up well before the partnerships have had time to develop their ideas, let alone engage meaningfully with stakeholders and end users.
- **Rigorous financial accountability** also demands that donors ensure the lead management role is taken by an institutionally robust organisation. This takes the managerial burden off consortium members with less capacity. But even when the managing partner is endeavouring to maintain transparency and create a healthy partnership relationship, perceptions of unequal partnerships can easily emerge.
- In an environment where there is pressure on donors to **reduce staff numbers and increase efficiency**, donors may rely on those they support to provide the intellectual input when they need to respond to new needs and challenges arising in their own constituencies. This can pull the researchers into juggling different priorities away from their partnership agendas.
- Pressures on donors to **react to changing agendas** impact directly on researchers and their partnerships. Climate change is a case in point. Researchers are adept at refocusing their research proposals so they can take advantage of new funding trends (indeed they need to be to sustain their funding), but following funding 'fashions' can impede progress at the national level and distract effort from their central research focus.

Researchers' constraints

Effective communication and take-up of research findings are boosted by closer engagement between researchers, those affected by the outcomes of it, and policy makers (Hovland, 2003). But even the most passionately committed researcher may encounter many constraints that impede their efforts to keep the agenda driven by end users:

- Researchers are continually responding to **shifting donor agendas** and rarely have the time they need to develop research themes with policymakers, end users and stakeholders before putting together a proposal. Thus donors, not end users, become the clients.
- **A lack of understanding of 'policy hotspots'** can hamper research. Understanding the triggers and opportunities for delivering a message is key to effective research communication. Keeping pace with developments in knowledge, finding access to the latest research, and understanding who is engaged in which policy area and their current deadlines and constraints is a challenge for Northern researchers, and a much bigger one for most in the South.
- **A conflict between breadth and depth** may arise because of the way researchers need to work. Researchers and research partnerships often have to respond to the short-term needs of a client. They may or may not be able to support further work to build on that. A 'portfolio approach' to funding helps keep such relationships going by ensuring there are always a number of different research proposals for funding, even if they do not all neatly segue one into the other.
- **Pressure to gain academic credibility** – particularly from supporting academic institutions — may be an issue for less experienced researchers. They can cause them to shift their focus to publishing in journals, rather than engaging with policy audiences.
- Many researchers **lack expertise in a range of communications skills**. Nor do many have access to communications expertise to help 'translate' complex research outputs into relevant and timely policy messages. Researchers who do have these skills rarely

have the time to monitor those moments when their work will have most impact. Communications professionals can be brought in, but are most effective if involved from the start.

- **Engagement with end users** should be a constant focus during research, partly because it encourages takeup; but it is not always a researcher's natural domain. Training in participatory methodologies is rare, and in many cases researchers do not have confidence or trust in the validity of different kinds of knowledge. Even if they do themselves, they will encounter many in both national and international research and decision-making fora who will challenge the credibility of some sources of information. It needs a respected and confident researcher to push these boundaries.

Local or global?

Feedback from the DFID consultation in Ethiopia reveals that the consultees felt the in-country research agenda is addressing international rather than national priorities because it is donor-driven, and the donors' agenda tends to focus on global problems. Research partnerships in general seem to experience an strong tension between national and international agendas, and the latter tend to become an irresistible magnet for many researchers, donors and partners.

Despite the desire to integrate Northern and Southern researchers, some experienced researchers belong to an 'international elite' who are not from the countries in which they work and who may be poor at dealing with local stakeholders and values. This exacerbates the pull towards an international agenda and the perceived divide between global and local. Another issue is that many donors have reduced in-country capacity or no in-country offices to help maintain a strong national identity for research. Where they do have a presence, they are not always connected to or responsible for monitoring the research. This again weakens the engagement between research and policy (Bass, 2003).

Brain drain can add to the problem. Many researchers are understandably lured away from their own country in pursuit of an academic career. Incentives to return are often few until these people have seniority and the chance to influence real change.

Good researchers in the South can be overwhelmed with requests to carry out quick 'action research' projects for a range of international clients. While this contributes a valuable Southern voice to a range of international perspectives, it can pull the research capacity away from local agendas.

When the agenda is split between national and international, research communications can also be pulled in different directions. Making an impact requires targeted, consistent and appropriate communication and also long-term relationship building. This is a time-consuming, highly focused process. Serious change can be achieved by building relationships with key people in the right place, but their needs have to be fully understood and interactions with them timed to their agenda. Ample research and experiential evidence support this, but the implications for how a research partnership is resourced are rarely recognised.

To speak to international audiences, researchers need to invest in websites, academic journal articles and so on. Local policy audiences need one-to-one engagement, policy briefs, local media support and translations of key materials. If a research partnership is increasingly pulled into international decision-making and writing for international academic journals, it simply cannot deliver at the local level without extra staff and greater flexibility.

There are many positives to being part of an international consortium, too, beyond the funding and status it brings. International players in a research partnership can help to create the space for discussion and development of ideas that cannot be initiated by those too close to home. Sharing examples from another country or from an international perspective can boost engagement at a higher policy level — and do so without negative implications for national agendas. But it is important to recognise the inherent tensions that partnerships bring.

Flexible support: why partnerships take time

Support is vital to research, but needs to be flexible to adapt to the inevitable changes partnerships go through over time. And partnerships take time. This is strikingly obvious in KFPE's suggested 11 key principles for research partnerships (Maselli et al, 2006):

- Decide on the objectives together.
- Build up mutual trust.
- Share information and develop networks.
- Share responsibility.
- Create transparency.
- Monitor and evaluate the collaboration.
- Disseminate the results.
- Apply the results.
- Share profits equitably.
- Increase research capacity.
- Build on achievements.

Yet time and timing can be problematic elements for research partnerships. Many are set up quickly in response to a call for research on a particular theme on the international or donor agenda. Donor support is usually given for relatively short periods of time, dictated by donors' own changing agendas. But it is unrealistic to expect a meaningful partnership to synchronise and deliver ambitious targets on short funding cycles of under five to ten years. Targets for first results can be unrealistic and there is not enough time put aside for relationship building with key stakeholders outside of the research partnership itself and for developing communication strategies that are more than just an exercise on paper.

IIED has tried to buck this trend. As an independent research institute, it has developed numerous partnerships over its 37-year history, and throughout has tried to find ways of staying engaged with them over the long term. Like many others in this sector, it has adopted the portfolio approach, engaging with different partners at different times depending on research needs and donor demands. Ensuring that a good number of research projects are on the go at any one time makes it easier to ensure that certain vital research threads, rooted in participation, continue to run through the institute's work. IIED has also continued to engage with and support networks like the Ring to mobilise when both the institute and Ring partners can align on an issue at short notice.

Partnerships, formal and informal, large and small, need proper support to be flexible enough to develop and respond to partnerships as they evolve. The constraints faced by many donors to demonstrate rigorous accountability imposes funding structures and processes that deny many partnerships this flexibility — along with the capability of developing effective relationships with stakeholders.

For example, the recent move by DFID to place part of its research funding into the hands of the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as a way of reducing its own staff numbers has inadvertently made it harder for Southern partners in a research partnership to engage in the tender process. Electronic registration and the requirement for detailed predetermined goals and outcomes have penalised those with less capacity to respond quickly to such demands. Some interesting and valid research partnerships have become sidelined from key sources of funding in this way. Partnerships will develop in increasingly varied ways, and funding will need to respond to this if we really want to achieve good uptake of research recommendations.

From a research communications perspective, flexible long-term support is essential because building strong relationships with key stakeholders also takes time. Flexible support means partnerships stay responsive to needs, and can repackage research findings as new opportunities to engage arise. In Uganda stakeholders to the DFID consultation noted that 'the institutional arrangements and incentives for maintenance of partnerships seem to be the major constraints' (DFID, 2007).

Aiming high: making intentions clear

Most research partnerships have an implicit intention to influence change. But is this enough? If projects are to go beyond just generating knowledge and helping develop capacity this intention has be made clear.

Research partnerships aiming to influence change need to be organised in a different way from those who are just about originating new knowledge or capacity building. For example, IIED places a lot of importance on advocacy as well as research. This advocacy role – which requires being in the right place at the right time to effect change – is sometimes seen as a distraction from research, that can compromise quality and depth. In fact, this aspect of the institute's work constantly enriches the relevance of its research agenda. This approach gives high priority to working with partners, regularly communicating research findings, and networking and responding to donor challenges. IIED's recent work on water ecosystems services and poverty reduction under climate change surveyed many who reinforced the importance of new ways of working together to successfully integrate aspects of research and policy influence (IIED, 2007).

Talking cure: the role of communications

The role of communications is key here. DFID's recent consultation revealed strong criticism from groups in China and Uganda who suggested that there is a lack of communication with end users, and that communication and learning are often an afterthought in the research process. Finding the mechanisms to deal with this dilemma in a meaningful way presents a significant challenge. Do we resource the research partnerships themselves to deal with this, or do we work on building networks of communications expertise to bring other examples and skills from different sectors? How much can we burden the researcher to achieve this?

Partnerships must have a solid communication strategy developed in tandem with the research agenda. In the current Research Programme Consortia (RPC) funded by DFID there is a requirement for 10 per cent of the funds to be spent on communications and for there to be a thorough communication strategy. The challenge remains that for this to be more than a paper exercise; stakeholders must be involved from the outset to ensure it evolves with a clear sense of shared purpose. This kind of strategy gives equal weight to building relationships with key individuals and to developing the necessary communications outputs and activities. And from the start, the process must be informed by a clearly stated intention to influence.

A strong understanding of the history and politics of a situation and a desire to support those making the change are also essential. Good perspectives from other situations and countries provide a platform for shared learning. Word of mouth is one of the fastest and cheapest methods of scaling up interest and engagement, as long as the audience sees tangible benefits, desires the same change, sees themselves as involved, and is listening. And a receptive audience will pass the message on to the most relevant stakeholders almost as an automatic reflex (Barnard, Carlile and Basu Ray, 2007).

But building this up requires painstaking work focused on the interests and needs of different audiences and how those translate into opportunities for buy-in. The top three audiences in the context of influencing policy are the media, policymakers themselves and end users. All are demanding in their communications needs and whether it is headlines, options or new lives, these demands can represent considerable pressure for researchers. Many researchers do not, understandably, see this as their prime function.

Nevertheless, research partnerships are expected to provide solutions to problems. Thus they often see themselves as telling people what to do rather than listening and learning from people. Listening is a vital part of an intention to influence but it can play havoc with a tidy hypothesis. One of the things research partnerships need to be able to do is to demonstrate they are listening and find a way to do so that does not undermine the confidence of their researchers.

Conclusions

In looking at the impact and agenda of research partnerships, partners and stakeholders have made clear recommendations for what is needed:

- recognising the importance of the national agenda
- engaging with stakeholders and end users
- investing in communications expertise and focusing on targeting national audiences for lasting change.

> *'If it is recognised that the knowledge needed for learning accumulates slowly, largely through practice, and that the time and resources invested in learning determine how quickly development occurs, the question arises: Do we need more research…or do we just need to put more existing research into practice? The answer is almost certainly that we need both – and we need them together.' (IIED, 2007)*

A recent IIED study suggests the importance of thinking how research partnerships may need to explore different models like 'learning groups' to bring different stakeholders together around particular research themes. Further research into the strengths and weaknesses of such models could provide a basis for funding that can support partnership and flexibility and still allow for rigorous accountability.

Communication is a prime agent of accountability. Engaging the media and end users nationally and internationally builds real connections with an audience while putting the research 'on the line'. Regular feedback between partnerships and donors builds trust and transparency. The role of networks, 'intermediaries' and 'infomediaries' could, however, be more explicitly integrated into research communications work (Fisher and Kunaratnam, 2007). More support for mentoring and coaching in research communications also needs to be integral to the research partnership, as does more opportunity for working with those who have a different communications experience of scaling up the results of research in other sectors. Building networks of research communications expertise in-country and across different sectors would provide support and confidence by sharing learning and expertise.

The need for increasingly effective and vibrant partnerships for gathering knowledge is undoubted, given the gap between global social and environmental aims and the reality on the ground. Three things would help mobilise such partnerships:

- clarity of purpose and a shared agenda
- flexibility to develop relevant creative ideas with different stakeholders
- the ability to communicate with and engage national and international audiences.

As communicators of research, it is our role to push for an understanding of what can make a difference and work with research partnerships and donors to develop more effective models and greater coherence, so research partnerships can become more successful vehicles for change and more truly ‘fit for purpose’.

Part 2: Embedding research in society: understanding the role of the media

Introduction

This paper presents knowledge and experience gathered through the Panos RELAY programme[9]. RELAY was initiated by the Panos Institute to bring local media and researchers together to find common ground and maximize the production of effective and high quality communication about research topics. Panos London is part of an independent network of NGOs working with the media to stimulate debate on global development issues.

How and why research is communicated depends on the context in which it is being conducted, its purpose and the methodology used. Within the development sector some research is conducted to generate a greater understanding of a topic within research communities themselves, while other research is undertaken to bring findings to specific audiences, such as policymakers. Communication strategies may aim to bring about behavioural change or raise awareness of a particular issue or risk among the general population. Research might be conducted to bring a global issue to the attention of Northern publics, while some is conducted for and/or about a particular community in a developing country.

The media context

In the last two decades the media environment in most developing countries has changed radically. There are increasing opportunities for wider audiences to participate in debate around the issues raised by research. Government monopoly and control has ended or been reduced, and there is a greater variety of media houses and outlets – online, print and broadcast. Advances in communications technology have made centralised control of communication more difficult and free communication easier and cheaper.

Media as actors in their own right

The RELAY project reflects the Panos view that media are important development actors in their own right, with a role to play in widening out debate, rather than just churning out information. As RELAY project manager Jo Carpenter notes *"I think we can acknowledge that media may have an agenda of its own; this doesn't mean that researchers cannot work with the media to get their research out to wider audiences – they do, its the only way,"* - but it does mean that more attention needs to be give to media as stakeholders themselves rather than as purely a distribution channel without their own characteristics, needs and challenges, viewpoints and potentials. Very often researchers and NGOs do not have a sufficiently nuanced perception of media as strategic partners, who are more than service providers, and are in fact strategic actors in the knowledge chain.

For media to use and valorise research findings they need to first of all want the information and value it; if it is not seen as useful then it will not be taken-up and communicated further. Secondly media need to know how to adapt it and reproduce it in compelling ways; and thirdly media need to reach audiences who find the information relevant and who are able to respond. In targeting which media to work with researchers therefore need to be clear about these three steps – and ask the questions: *Is this media outlet interested or is there a better one? Can this media outlet really understand and convey the information accurately? Does it reach any of my target audiences?*

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[9] This section was prepared by Jackie Davies, jackie.davies@c4d.org. For more information about 'Panos RELAY programme: Communicating research through the media' contact: Panos London, 9 White Lion Street, London N1 9PD, United Kingdom Email: RELAY@panos.org.uk, Website: www.panos.org.uk/RELAY

The media's role in strengthening the knowledge chain is to be an effective link between the supply-side and the demand-side of research communication. There is also a role for the media in investigating what research is being conducted in their countries, especially where research will be fed into national government policy or the policy of large international NGOs providing development initiatives and services.

Media challenges & needs

Media potentially has the capacity and capability 'to generate and provide the information that marginalised groups want and need and to provide a channel for marginalised groups to discuss and voice their perspectives on the issues that most concern them' (Deane, 2006), however:

- ***There is an ownership challenge:*** The increasing commercialisation of the media and the pressure of competition mean that journalists sometimes sensationalise research results or cover disputed research uncritically. Many media outlets have commercial goals that constrain the quality and quantity of public interest content they carry. Media organisations operate in highly competitive environments where they struggle to find resources and build markets.
- ***There is an information need:*** Very often the media in developing countries are starved of local information, or are reliant on external information; for example southern media outlets frequently rely on Northern news and content providers such as the BBC, Reuters or CNN.
- ***There is a relationship need:*** There is a need for media to know researchers and vice versa. Many media do not have contacts with research institutions and do not know what and how to access research information.
- ***There is a resource and capacity need:*** Under-resourced and overworked journalists and broadcasters have a limited capacity to engage with national and local issues. As a result, journalists have difficulty reaching local communities, engaging with them and responding to their information and communication needs.

The researcher context

Researchers involved in development issues play a pivotal role in the process of knowledge generation and transfer, however in the realm of communicating their research they are often constrained by capacity, resources and contacts. Their role in strengthening the knowlege chain is to produce accessible research information which is relevant and wanted in their country context. Their challenge is then to distribute this knowledge and effectively reach beneficiaries who are able to understand and use the research information.

Researchers challenges & needs

For researchers wishing to do more to communicate their research, there can be a number of challenges that constrain them. These include:

- ***There is an ownership challenge:*** Research conducted locally is commissioned on a freelance basis by international bodies such as the World Bank, the UN or international NGOs. Research is often commissioned from individuals rather than institutions, so researchers take time off from their salaried positions to carry it out. As well as undermining local research capacity, freelance researchers may have no ownership of the research they are conducting and therefore no remit to communicate it locally.
- ***There is a relationship need:*** For researchers there is important to establish links with journalists to ensure that research findings are communicated and to get to know each

other. Also on a macro level a research organisation wanting to engage with the media needs to understand the media context they will be working in. This varies from country to country.

- ***There is a resource and capacity need:*** Research organisations in developing countries are often under-resourced, and lack dedicated communications staff. Although there are exceptions, where communication staff do exist they are mainly engaged in record-keeping and filing. A recent Panos survey shows that very few research organisations had communications staff with the time or experience to communicate their findings proactively.

The relationship context – media and researchers

Researchers often want to reach wider audiences and the media want news, analysis and relevant information to give their audiences. The benefits of a good relationship between researchers and the media is clear. Media is often the most viable option for research communication strategies that seek to reach wide audiences and engage with people in developing countries; and success in communicating research information is closely dependent on the effectiveness of the media in translating, reinterpreting and popularising the information.

Researchers recognise the importance of credibility in increasing their influence on policy. By using the media as a platform for debate, people are informed and issues are on the table. It is also important for researchers to engage with critics or those who might misrepresent the research in the media.

Issues in the relationship

However there are some challenges and issues in the relationship between the media and the researcher community centre around trust and credibility, as well as on problems of elitism, misunderstanding and lack of effectiveness.

- ***Awareness of critical roles:*** There is an issue of both parties needing to understand the importance of being critical partners; neither destructively obstructionist nor uncritical advocates only providing a public relations function for research organisations. *"The two groups should not be in each others pockets",* notes RELAY project manager Jo Carpenter*, "and it is good that they are not. We want to foster debate in pluralistic societies so differences of opinion are a good thing."* Some media are clear about their critical role in relation to researchers, seeing their role as undercutting *'(I will)…cut you with my pen,'* as one RELAY journalist noted. This is a useful example of the need to retain journalistic independence, and be able to hold researchers to account – i.e. playing their public interest role, rather than just churning out what researchers say.
- ***Trust:*** There is often an issue of mistrust and lack of openness between the media and researchers. For example, at a RELAY workshop in June 2006, a Professor from the University of Swaziland explained that *he was wary about publicising his research into HIV and AIDS because he feared the findings would feed into the Swazi media's inclination to downplay the scale of the epidemic*.
- ***Lack of sensitivity or awareness:*** The media can potentially do more harm than good in cases where research covers taboo issues or where recommendations threaten entrenched power structures.
- ***Elitism:*** Both journalists and researchers suffer from elitism, which makes relationship building a challenge. Researchers and RELAY participants have identified elitism and professional arrogance on the part of media as a frequent impediment to developing a good relationship with researchers. On the other hand the same accusations are sometimes directed at researchers. For example one media participant on a RELAY

training noted that she felt a researcher she was consulting '....*was deliberately trying to confuse and undermine her and that this was motivated by his domineering personality and a need to protect his higher status as an academic.'*

The RELAY project

The RELAY programme advocates for a greater role for the media in research communication, based on three premises:

- the media has the potential to promote more inclusive participation in debates around research and policy, providing a platform for a broader range of participants to join in
- broad engagement of researchers with publics has the potential to promote pro-poor policy change and ultimately more open, inclusive and democratic societies
- by engaging with the media, researchers are promoting the development of a public interest media sector that will improve the communication and influence of their research programmes in the long term.

RELAY has been working to build networks of researchers and journalists in three regions – Northeast India, Southern Africa and Eastern Africa. Participating researchers and journalists are involved in discussion forums, training sessions, study tours and the production of print and radio features. RELAY produces media briefings to support journalists to engage with key research themes relevant to their regions. These range from land management, post-conflict reintegration and food security, to sexual and reproductive health. The RELAY programme provided travel grants to East African journalists, enabling them to leave their capital cities and talk to people living in rural and remote areas. In Africa, many radio stations suffer from a lack of equipment. RELAY has provided mini-disk players to enable broadcast journalists in Southern Africa to record local voices for their features and news items. In addition, RELAY's policy of paying highly competitive commission fees allowed extremely low-salaried journalists to work on in-depth features over a period of weeks, freeing them from worries about daily living costs.

Project strategies to address challenges and needs

It is a RELAY approach to not encourage specialisation; based on a belief that it would be more appropriate to improve investigative reporting skills and instil a culture of using research as a source of stories, encouraging local journalists to seek out researchers. This was felt to be a more sustainable approach – one that respected the profession of journalism but also took into account the limitations around the quality of training that many journalists in Eastern and Southern Africa receive. In Uganda, RELAY is working with journalism schools to include modules on using academic research and interviewing researchers in the curriculum.

RELAY has been working to address issues of lack of trust and openness, as well as concerns about media coverage doing more harm than good. Through supporting the establishment of peer networks over time, individual researchers and journalists participating in the Panos RELAY programme have begun to overcome their prejudices and are learning to trust and respect each other. Where journalists have found that they need to do more background work and reading and travel out of town to produce good in-depth features about the issues raised by research, researchers have found that to reap the many benefits of working with the media they need to relinquish control of their research messages.

Through commissioning research-based features and awarding journalistic fellowships, the Panos RELAY programme has seen journalists move away from covering research events and conferences as news items to looking for the story behind the research and gathering voices to create human interest features. Journalists have received positive feedback from their colleagues and audiences about this change in direction.

> ***Case Study:*** *Makokwa Kozi, from the community radio station Mazabuka FM, in Zambia, said: 'Before… I didn't see how the media could work with researchers. I thought maybe if the researcher comes up with this thing, you just do their story. But from what I learned in Malawi we can actually work together with the researchers and we can come up with very good programmes… to tell people what the results are, to tell the people what the researchers are working on.'*

Researchers developing a media strategy

The RELAY project aids journalists and researchers in understanding that effective research communication is a process; a process based on building relationships, and on understanding the linkages between the research process, the communication aims, the identification of possible media roles, risks and challenges, and understanding realistic mechanisms for media engagement. The research process includes clear stages, and these are: (1) Identifying the research subject; (2) launch of the research; (3) the active research period; (4) preliminary findings; (5) disseminating the findings, and (6) the post-dissemination stage. The RELAY project has developed a useful matrix (see Table 1) for researchers about identifying the key factors to consider in developing a media strategy. These include:

(1) Identification of the research subject
During the early stages there may be limited public and media interest in the proposed research. Some researchers may fear that initial attention will be building public expectation too early, or attention may result in people's active participation changing the research as competing priorities may become an issue. *Communication aims:* For the research community this may include the aim of gathering input from civil society; building links for future collaboration in research; to increase legitimacy, build ownership and to check the level of interest amongst policymakers, media and others in the subject of the research. *Possible media roles:* from the perspective of researchers media is crucially a source of information. Media is potential also a forum for debate of the subject and a way to reach the public and to stimulate debate, while giving a voice to many stakeholders including non-influential groups. *Mechanisms for media engagement:* workshops with press coverage*;* editors and broadcasters roundtables*;* 'schmoozing' media*;* e-conferences.

(2) The launch stage
Challenges in the view of some researchers may be that findings / conclusions are as yet unknown, and that this may raise fears and require sensitive handling if there is a public launch and the topic is sensitive. Also publicity may raise other uncomfortable questions (e.g. about cost of research). *Communication aims:* For researchers the aims may range from using a launch to inform target groups; to build links with NGOs, government, and other actors; to build supportive and receptive environments for the research and crucially to build links with media. *Possible media roles:* from the perspective of researchers this may be to to Inform diverse target groups, to build interest and to stimulate debate; to show links (if any) to previous research work. *Mechanisms for media engagement:* press releases and press conferences; TV/radio talkshows; privileged access for some journalists; website and email alerts.

(3) The active research stage
While the research is actually under way researchers' may fear that media attention will influence or skew participation in research; or that attention may distract researchers from their primary role of gathering data and focusing on analysis. At this stage there may also be a lack of useful information to convey, with no research conclusions ready for publicising, in which was 'what's the story for the media?' *Communication aims:* Researchers may aim to

build receptive environments in policy and public arenas, and to build media interest and understanding of the subject area, as well as to build links with relevant networks and individuals. *Possible media roles:* from the perspective of researchers this may be to *provide i*nformation, and to enable dialogue and facilitate links. *Mechanisms for media engagement:* visits for journalists to research sites, workshops, meetings; informal media contact; materials (e.g. workshop conclusions) to media; contribute to newspapers; webpage updates; email alerts of new findings.

(4) The preliminary findings stage
Once researchers have reached the 'preliminary findings' stage they may be concerned that media attention is not welcome because it is still too early in the research process and conclusions may change. Or they may be concerned that media attention will result in an unwanted extra workload at a crucial time of their research. *Communication aims:* These may be to test receptivity, or to build interest in final recommendations. *Possible media roles:* from the perspective of researchers this may be to Informing, enable dialogue, debate and discussion. *Mechanisms for media engagement:* press releases*;* TV/radio talkshows*;* privileged access for some journalists*;* involve media in workshops.

(5) The publicising stage
Once the research is complete and findings are being produced one of the main fears for researchers is that they may lose control on how they are reported. This is a major factor in the relationship between researchers and the media. *Communication aims:* These would primarily be to disseminate findings and generate public debate; but also to 'reach' policy indirectly through the media and to build a receptive environment for implementation of policy. Further aims may be to ensure take-up by campaigning and other groups, or to show accountability to the public. *Possible media roles:* from the perspective of researchers this may be to Informing, enable dialogue, debate and discussion, plus to promote accountability. *Mechanisms for media engagement:* press releases*;* TV/radio talkshows*;* privileged access for some journalists*;* press conferences*;* involve media in workshops.

(6) The post-dissemination stage
After the initial bout of publicity the challenges are that the information / knowledge may soon become old news for the media and public, or the actual researchers have moved on to new subjects. *Communication aims:* At this stage many researchers aim to promote accountability of policy-maker to act, and to communicate the link between past research and current research in order to keep the whole research package relevant. *Possible media roles:* from the perspective of researchers this may be to *q*uestion stakeholders' since research launch, and to enable dialogue. *Mechanisms for media engagement:* press releases about relevance of findings to current issues*;* participation in media events.

Conclusions

The RELAY project has found that there are indeed opportunities for researchers and journalists to work together, based on mutual interest.

It has also found that building a closer relationship between researchers and the media can aid the expression of other people's voice. For example people living in poverty on the margins of society face many difficulties in communicating through mass media; often, researchers can help the media access these people's voice.

> ***Case study:*** *In South Asia the RELAY programme worked in partnership with local research institutes to take South Asian journalists to visit internally displaced person camps in Assam, enabling them to experience first hand the issues faced by displaced people in the region.*

In order to help build an effective relationship between media and researchers, and in order to support the development of capacity and awareness amongst these partners the RELAY project has identified the following key needs:

Activities

1. There is a need to build the capacity of research organisations to develop their own research programmes rather than relying on contracts from Northern institutions.
2. There is a need to support newspapers and radio stations by providing placements, (ie, salaries) for features journalists and resources such as travel grants to enable in-depth reporting on the issues raised by local research.

Policy

3. There is a need for international organisations to work through research institutions in the South rather than employing developing country researchers on a freelance basis.
4. There is a need for these ‘commissioning’ international organisations to include core funds as part of a research contract to provide the financial security required to increase local research capacity. Such an approach would also ensure that more research is communicated at the local level, given that the remit for communication would lie with the institutes themselves.

Research

5. There is a need to understand better the impact of communicating research through the media in order to build an evidence base to advocate for more research organisations to engage with the media. It is difficult to evaluate the impact of communications programmes, not least because of difficulties in attributing the actions of individuals directly to specific programme activities.

Case studies from the RELAY programme mid-term evaluation

Raising awareness about land rights in Kenya

In 2006, Dorah Nesoba was commissioned by RELAY in East Africa to produce articles drawing upon local research into land conflicts. Dorah writes for a newspaper in Nairobi but also works on issues of governance, development and poverty with NGOs in Kenya. Her articles on the land rights of the pastoralist Endorois people were published in The Link magazine; in response, two members of the Kenyan Parliament wrote asking for more details and the leader of the Endorois community called for more research to be carried out on the issue.

Debating the impact of conflict in northern Uganda

King Radio, in Gulu, northern Uganda, began airing new programmes and improving the quality of their existing programming after attending RELAY training sessions. The New Vision newspaper in Lira, northern Uganda, saw a marked improvement in the quality of their content after their engagement with RELAY activities. Now, content is more research-based and analytical. Readership and circulation has increased.

Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation's rejuvenated commitment to public interest broadcasting

After a RELAY five-day training workshop in Malawi in June 2006, broadcaster Golden Mukelabai of the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) briefed his editor about the value of research as an important source of information and expertise for the media, and made suggestions on how ZNBC could use research 'to rejuvenate its efforts to inform the people'. His ideas were taken seriously and he was later given the go-ahead to launch a new series called 'Research Findings' in a documentary format, drawing more on interviews with a range of people from researchers themselves to ordinary people affected by the research.

Table 1: RELAY Programme - checklist for developing a media strategy

Developing a media strategy				
Research process	**Communication aim**	**Possible media roles**	**Risks and challenges**	**Mechanisms for media engagement**
Identifying the research subject	■ Gather input from civil society ■ Build links for future collaboration in research ■ Increase legitimacy ■ Build ownership ■ Check the level of interest	■ Forum for debate subject ■ Source of information ■ Reach public ■ Stimulate debate ■ Give voice to non-influential groups	■ Limited interest at this stage ■ Build public expectation too early ■ Participation may change research – whose priorities to follow	■ Workshops with press coverage ■ Editors and broadcasters roundtables ■ 'Schmoozing' media ■ E-conferences
Launch the research	■ Information to target groups ■ Build links with NGOs, government, other actors ■ Build supportive and receptive environments ■ Build links with media	■ Inform diverse target groups ■ Build interest ■ Stimulate debate ■ Show links (if any) to previous work	■ Build public expectation too early ■ Findings/conclusions unknown – may require sensitive handling if there is a public launch ■ Raise uncomfortable questions (e.g. about cost of research) ■ Limited media interest	■ Press releases and press conferences ■ TV/radio talkshows ■ Privileged access for some journalists ■ Website and email alerts
During the research process	■ Build receptive environments in policy and public arenas ■ Build media interest and understanding of subject area ■ Build links with relevant networks and individuals	■ Information ■ Enable dialogue ■ Facilitate links	■ May influence/skew participation in research ■ May distract researchers from primary role ■ No conclusions – what's the story for the media?	■ Visits for journalists to research sites, workshops, meetings ■ Informal media contact ■ Materials (e.g. workshop conclusions) to media ■ Contribute to newspapers ■ Webpage updates ■ Email alerts of new findings
Preliminary findings	■ Test receptivity ■ Build interest in final recommendations	■ Informing ■ Enable dialogue, debate and discussion	■ Conclusions may change ■ May result in unwanted workload at crucial time of research	■ Press releases ■ TV/radio talkshows ■ Privileged access for some journalists ■ Involve media in workshops
Disseminating the findings, conclusions and recommendations	■ Disseminate findings ■ Generate public debate ■ Reach policy indirectly ■ Ensure take-up by campaigning and other groups ■ Be accountable to public ■ Build receptive environment for implementation of policy	■ As above ■ Promote accountability	■ Researchers lose control on how they are reported	■ Press releases ■ TV/radio talkshows ■ Privileged access for some journalists ■ Press conferences ■ Involve media in workshops
Later	■ Promote accountability of policy-maker to act ■ Link earlier research to new	■ Question stakeholders' action since research launch ■ Enable dialogue	■ Become old news ■ Researchers have moved on to new subjects	■ Press releases about relevance of findings to current issues ■ Participation in media events

Source: Panos London (2006a)

Part 3: Research Capacities: Capacity Building for Relevant Research[10]

Over the last decade there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of research knowledge in contributing to development and poverty reduction goals. The World Bank (WB) famously re-branded itself as a knowledge bank, adopting a model that emphasizes creating, sharing and applying knowledge (World Bank, 1998) and other donors such as Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) are increasingly supporting what they dub 'the democratization of knowledge' whereby disadvantaged groups are empowered with the tools to both generate and access information relevant to tackling development challenges (e.g. Furst, 2003). The growing importance of evidence-based policy reform is creating fresh opportunities for exploring and forging stronger links between researchers and policy makers. Nevertheless, recent analyses suggest that research capacity and policy influencing in the South remains an unmet challenge, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Lansang and Dennis, 2004; Jones et al., 2007).

Approaches to research capacity building

While earlier work on research capacity building focused on technical and resource transfers (e.g. Kharas, 2005), more recent analyses have increasingly adopted a broader definition, emphasizing the importance of differentiating between various levels of capacity building.

At the **individual level**, capacity building initiatives focus on building up a critical mass of researchers competent in a particular thematic, disciplinary or methodological area, typically through the provision of post-graduate training or small research grants. Individual level approaches have more recently expanded to include a broader range of stakeholders involved in knowledge generation, translation and uptake processes (e.g. Costello and Zumla, 2000).

At the **institutional level**, the concern is with improving organisational structures, processes, resources, management and governance issues (including institutional reward systems that encourage partnership modes of working), so that local institutions are able to attract, train and retain capable researchers.

Although a comparatively newer area of focus, the **system level** approach is designed to improve national and regional innovation environments. The emphasis here is on the development of coherent policies, strategies and effective coordination across sectors and among governmental, non-governmental and international actors. It includes attention to funding transparency, remuneration, continuing education, access to information as well as strategic planning, priority setting, knowledge management and demand creation (see e.g. Nuyens, 2005).

In addition to a focus on different levels of capacity enhancement work, there is also an important thread in the literature that highlights the need for capacity building initiatives to address **issues of power and relationships**. A number of authors (e.g. Harris, 2004; Stein and Ahmed, 2007) argue that any initiative to support research capacities needs to tackle power relations between northern donors and providers of research capacity strengthening services, and southern 'beneficiary' organisations. Capacity strengthening should be re-envisioned not only as a two-way collaborative process whereby northern partners stand to learn as much as southern partners (e.g. Marouani and Ayuk, 2007), but also to allow for greater investment in South-South, public-private and/or in-country partnerships (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2005).

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[10] This section has been written by John Young, Nicola Jones and Maja Djuric from the RAPID Programme at the Overseas Development Institute (see www.odi.org.uk/rapid).

What works?

While there is much theory, and much practical experience of capacity-building for relevant research, there is very little empirical evidence about what works and why. Organisations involved in supporting research capacity building initiatives have been weak in monitoring the impact of their interventions (Blagescu and Young, 2005). Part of the problem is that attempts to evaluate capacity building efforts and learn from past experiences have been constrained by a) the fact that capacity strengthening is often embedded in other programmes and thus difficult to separate out and monitor and evaluate specifically; and b) outcomes are typically medium to long-term and not easily attributable to a single intervention. In addition, programmes focused on learning-by-doing often lack not only a clear conceptualisation of capacity strengthening but also a theory of cause and effect (ibid).

A recent review of the research capacity development efforts of donors involved in research capacity strengthening initiatives (Jones et al., 2007a)[11] found relatively few publicly available documents, but combined with key informant interviews identified the following benefits from capacity building support: networks as a useful means to link up researchers and identify common or complementary research agendas; the development of strong North-South partnerships; broader dissemination of research findings; as well as improved research administration, research management and research skill capacities. However, a number of important challenges were also emphasized, including insufficient time horizons and long-term commitment on the part of donors and intermediary organizations; the limited demand-led nature of research and resulting limited impact of research generated on policy; inadequate (both regularity and quality) monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; and the need for more industry-university cooperation to enhance the utility of research capacity building efforts[12].

The RAPID approach

Taking a holistic view

ODI's Research and Policy in Development Group (RAPID) have been working on the research-policy interface since 2001. Extensive theoretical, literature and case study research has confirmed the view that policy-making is a dynamic, complex and above all unpredictable process with multiple stakeholders with differing ideologies and political leverage. Research-based evidence is just one of multiple competing factors that policy makers have to balance when making decisions. Research-based evidence can be very influential and lead to demonstrable pro-poor benefits, but simply strengthening the capacity of researchers to communicate more effectively is not enough.

RAPID has developed a conceptual framework to help establish a holistic understanding of the factors influencing research uptake. The framework seeks to simplify the complexity of the research-policy interface by grouping the myriad of factors that are involved into four dimensions: the external context, the political context, evidence, links and external environment (see Figure 1).

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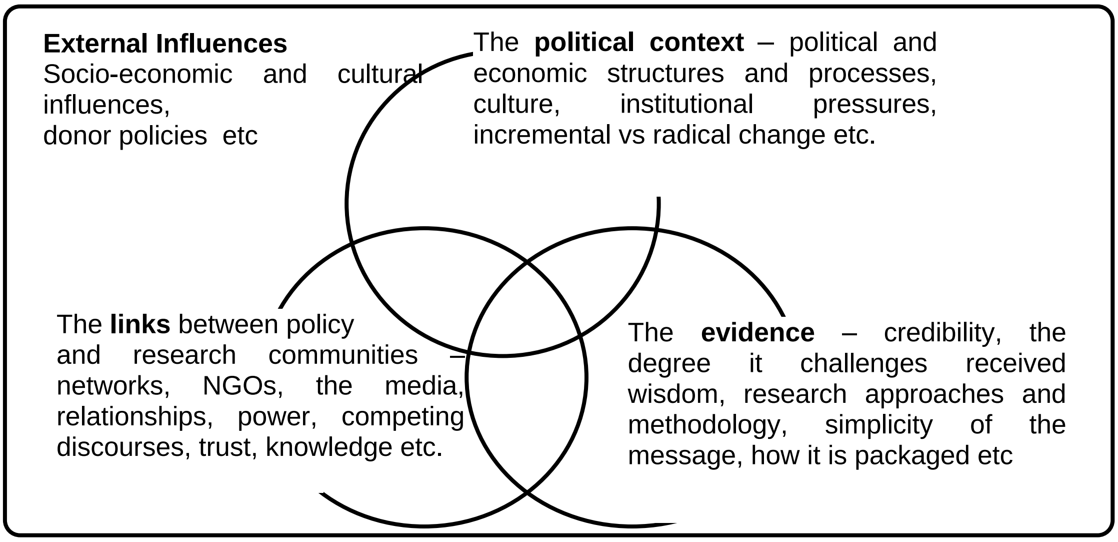
[11] Jones et al. 2007a were unable to find evaluations for research capacity building efforts by private foundations or intermediary organizations. It should be noted, however, that some key informants pointed out that evaluations may have been carried out but had not widely circulated within organisations, let alone to the broader public for learning and communication purposes.

[12] These multiple challenges notwithstanding, the same review identified a number of good practices which could be built on in order to strengthen research capacity for development.

Figure 1 – The RAPID Context, Evidence and Links Framework



RAPID has used this framework to analyse over 100 examples of research-policy interaction. An overwhelming conclusion is that research-based knowledge is most influential in cases where researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders work together throughout the process. Effective engagement and communication are key to the uptake of research into policy and practice.

RAPID has also used this framework to help individuals and organizations develop strategies to increase the use of research-based evidence in policy for all actors. It can help researchers to identify the political factors that may impede the uptake of their research and to identify the other actors they can work with the get the message across. It can help policymakers to understand researchers perspectives and how their own attitudes and institutions can reduce their ability to use research. It can help intermediary groups like CSOs and networks to understand the policy context and to identify the most appropriate research-based evidence to inform their work.

RAPID's approach to capacity development

RAPID's aim is to improve the use of research-based evidence in development policy. RAPID has worked with a wide range of actors in a wide variety of policy contexts, sectors and issues at national, regional and global levels. The interventions mainly take place at organisational and institutional levels, but encompass individuals as well as the broader context within which evidence-based policy making takes place. A major element of our work over the last three years has been helping research institutes, think tanks, NGOs and research networks across Asia, Africa and Latin America to implement research-based evidence to promote pro-poor policy. They have formed the evidence-based policy in development network (www.ebpdn.org). We are also increasingly collaborating with research users including southern parliamentarians, legislators and local bureaucracies. Some examples of our work are included in Box 1

Box 1: RAPID's Evidence-based Policy Capacity Development activities	
Across diverse political contexts	• *Fragile states* – capacity building support on policy research design, analysis and communication for the Nepal Planning Commission and the Nepal Participatory Research Network (NEPAN) • *Transitional states* - a training workshop on key concepts in evidence-based policy influencing researchers from Central and Southern Vietnam in partnership with the Centre for Analysis and Forecasting (CAF), Vietnam
Across different policy sectors	• for Africa Humanitarian Action: a support visit to assess organisational and individual staff needs, help strengthen staff capacity and the policy impact of AHA Humanitarian Response Programme in Southern Africa. • for the Commonwealth Education Foundation (Zambia, Bangladesh and Mozambique) - workshops aimed to enhance knowledge and skills in advocacy, lobbying and policy entrepreneurship • Capacity development through collaborative action research on with southern CSO partners. Examples include evidence-based policy influence in Zambia' on land re-distribution policy, Uganda – chronic poverty and PRSPs
Evidence-based policy engagement across different policy levels	• Regional level – training workshop on Policy Entrepreneurship as part of the capacity development support provided to CSOs in Nile Basin countries for improved impact on the water resources management policy in the region. • Global level – capacity building and mentoring support for the collaborative Japan G8 Global project trying to influence the effectiveness of Japanese aid through research-based evidence

RAPID's overall approach to capacity development is shaped by three key principles:

1. *Partnership and collaboration*: Equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships are the main vehicle used to strengthen research-policy interface. The interventions are structured around a collaborative research and practical activities, where partners work together on an equal footing at all stages of the initiative including setting the agenda and research design, management and delivery. RAPID also works with key strategic partners to strengthen their capacity to become regional capacity building suppliers to other CSOs in the region wishing to use research-based evidence.

2. *Learning-based process:* The emphasis is on partners' analytical and adaptive capacities to assess and respond strategically to changes in the policy-making environment. The experiential learning activities (i.e. action research projects), for example, provide excellent opportunities for partners to learn more systematically about the nature of policy making and experience the practical challenges of policy engagement. RAPID also supports organisations to institutionalize their internal knowledge management and learning systems and create a reflective environment that fosters new ideas and improved ways of working.

3. *Mixed methods*: responding to the multidimensional aspects of capacity building, RAPID uses a wide range of approaches and tries to adapt them to specific cultures and contexts. Support can be through the provision of information and toolkits in response to requests for information, through single advisory visits, seminars and workshops, through a series of inputs over a short period or through a longer series of interactions leading to a long term partnership.

Specific examples and case studies

Practical training:

RAPID has been commissioned to run many workshops and seminars designed to equip participants with knowledge and practical policy entrepreneurship skills. Training is offered on policy analysis and strategic influencing, knowledge management, communication, networking, and advocacy. Workshops enable individuals and organisations to learn about the latest theory and practise by using new tools and methodologies. Workshops are participatory and activity-based often involving teams to design the strategy and action plans for policy engagement. For example, RAPID has recently organised a workshop for Transparency International Bangladesh to help their staff to develop a communication and advocacy strategy. While one-off training courses are rarely enough to achieve change on their own, they can be surprisingly effective in the right context. If participants are highly motivated to learn new skills which they can put into practice immediately in a supportive context, a single workshop can provide the tipping point for change. Robin McLay and Melanie Boyd provides an example in Box 2 where RAPID was commissioned by CIDA to provide a short training course to support an on-going internal process within CIDA to make better use of its own research.

Box 2: CIDA’s human rights-based approach

Despite significant investment, international networking and experimentation in applying a human rights-based approach to development over the previous decade, CIDA realized in 2004 that it had reached the limits of what could be accomplished through individual initiative and interest. The federal government’s re-affirmation of the importance of human rights in *Canada’s International Policy Statement* in 2005 provoked much criticism of this failure.

In response to this, CIDA’s Research and Analysis Division, began exploring the research-to-policy connection. Recognizing that ODI was a leader in this area, the division engaged the think tank to deliver a two-day policy workshop designed to provide underpinning theory and practical tools on how to use research more effectively for policy and practice. The workshop in June 2006 was attended by over 40 researchers and policy advisors from CIDA, IDRC and other Canadian federal government departments, including a representative of the analysis and research division. A number of the discussions, case studies and tools presented were of direct relevance to the division’s work, especially to an on-going study of the implications of adopting a human rights-based approach for the Agency. In particular, it became clear that the process of formulating research questions was as critical as gathering the evidence, and that engaging all stakeholders was key.

As a result, the division made the decision to move away from the more traditional approach of drafting and consulting terms of reference for a study that would then be contracted to a consultant. Instead, it undertook a participatory approach in which a cross-agency working group was established and through a series of focus groups used a “lines-of-enquiry” approach to identify specific research issues of interest throughout the agency, and a participatory approach to gathering the evidence..

This novel approach has been recognized by both senior management and programme teams as a useful change process, and the Research and Analysis Division is planning to apply it to other issues.

Robin McLay and Melanie Boyd, Research and Analysis Division, CIDA, Ottawa.

Collaborative research

Another key element of RAPID's capacity development work is collaborative research. RAPID has worked with a wide range of partners on action-research projects exploring how research-based evidence can be used to better effect. These include national regional and global examples. RAPID provides technical support to develop the approach, provides funds for the work, and provides mentoring support throughout the life of the project. One example that is nearing completion is work by the Zambia Land Alliance to gather evidence from civil society organizations to prepare an options paper for land policy in Zambia. Carol Sorensen from the Alliance explains what was involved in Box 3.

Box 3 Zambia Land Alliance Land Policy Project

"The process has been time consuming, due to the extensive consultations and to incorporating the input from a range of stakeholders. Also we worked with a larger group of civil society (the Civil Society Land Policy Review Committee) to whom we repeatedly referred. However, we feel that we have accomplished a special task, in that the paper is confirmed by civil society as expressing their views on what constitutes a good land policy for Zambia.

The paper is central to our advocacy strategies for this year: The paper has been submitted to the government, and ZLA has issued a press release about the paper. An 8 page pullout is about to be published in the press. Talking points are being prepared, and guided by these, the policy options paper will feature in television and radio programs, as well as in community meetings throughout the country. We will use the paper to develop Policy Briefs. Other advocacy strategies are to lobby the National Constitutional Conference, which is in the process of developing a constitution for Zambia, and lobby MPs, international funding agencies and the 'private sector'. We will also ensure that our Policy Options are discussed at international levels, wherever possible. We still have a lot of work ahead of us!"

Carol Sorensen. Policy and Advocacy Adviser. Zambia Land Alliance, Lusaka

Network facilitation:

Networks can be a very effective way of exchanging information, knowledge and expertise; facilitating practical collaboration and advice between members across countries and policy issues; mobilising technical and financial resources; and forging links with end users through dissemination of results and best practice via public forums, conferences and seminars. RAPID has been instrumental in creating two worldwide communities of practice:

- the *Evidence-based Policy Development Network* (www.ebpdn.org) which now has 20 core member organisations, and over 400 people working to promote evidence-based policies across Asia, Africa and Latin America, and
- the *Outcome Mapping Learning Community* (www.outcomemapping.ca) which provides a vibrant online platform for outcome mapping practitioners to learn new skills, share ideas and showcase good practice.

RAPID has worked with members of the ebpdn network to develop localized versions of policy engagement tools and approaches through a series of workshops with local experts in South Asia, East Africa and Latin America. Vivian Kazi from the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) in Tanzania describes one of these workshops in Box 4.

Box 4 Evidence-based policy tools development workshop in Tanzania

ESRF is one of the leading development think tanks in Tanzania. Our mission is advancing knowledge to the public and private sector entities through sound policy research advice, capacity development and by advocating good development management practices. Since 2005, we have been working in partnership with RAPID on a number of initiatives to strengthen our internal capacity to meet these objectives[13]. These include practical training, consultative workshops and collaborative research. These activities have assisted ESRF's staff, especially junior and middle level researchers to develop their research and policy influencing expertise as well as gain valuable international experience on issues related to CSOs, and public as well as private sector development policies.

In 2006 ESRF with RAPID's assistance organized a regional workshop to strengthen the capacity of East African organisations to use evidence in policy processes. The workshop brought together CSO practitioners, facilitators and researchers from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda to develop a training manual for evidence-based policy that is contextualised for use by CSOs in the region. Participants had an opportunity to practice policy analysis and engagement tools and methodologies, some of which were new to them, and to share various analytical tools that they use themselves in the policy advocacy work in their respective areas and countries.

The workshop revealed a strong need to customize the training manuals to specific local contexts. This is because the policy situation in each region is dramatically different and therefore the challenges faced in policy arena are also quite unique. Workshop participants are now planning to use the manual they produced to run training courses on packaging research based evidence to influence policy" for local CSOs in Arusha and Mwanza regions in April 2008.

Vivian Kazi, ESRF, Tanzania.

Institutional development:

RAPID also provides other types of institutional support to enhance the performance of organizations and capacity of CSO as a sector to build coherent and sustainable programs to promote evidence-based policymaking. This has included *small grants* used by partners to undertake research projects and train their staff, ad*visory inputs to* think tanks and research institutes facing management and reorganisation challenges. For example, RAPID is helping the Bernard Van Leer Foundation to senior management team to develop an organisational change strategy, which will enable increased support of its grantees to contribute towards public policy influence, and to the Nigeria Economic Summit Group to reorganize in the face of a rapidly changing national context; and *Human resource development* including training fro individual staff members, staff exchanges and secondments.

Impact

RAPID has had relatively limited resources to invest in collaborative projects and capacity-development, so far and has only just established a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation, there is already some evidence of impact:

- CIPPEC, in Argentina has started its own programme to strengthen its capacity to enhance the impact of its research on policy, and to share these ideas and learn more from other CSOs in the region
- Unnayan Onneshan, in Bangaldesh claims the partnership has already helped it to engage better with national and international organisations, and to identify pathways by which civil society and social movements can better use research to influence policy.

[13] ESRF is a core member of the RAPID-facilitated Evidence-based Policy Development Network (EBPDN).

- *"CIES' (Peru) mandate is to strengthen the capacities of our 38 member associations to produce and disseminate useful knowledge to analysts and decision makers in the public sector, civil society, the media, the international community and the private sector. Both ODI's technical assistance and financial support have allowed us to better achieve this mandate in the last semesters".* Javier Portocarrero Maisch Director Ejecutivo (e) - Consorcio de Investigación Económica y Social (CIES). Personal Communication.

Conclusion

Capacity development to enhance the uptake of research-based knowledge in policy and practice through improved communication and engagement requires more than just training and institutional support. Policy making is a political process, involving a very wide range of stakeholders and processes. Effective communication is key, but it needs active practical engagement and interaction as well as the provision of appropriate communication outputs. It is a change process which, if taken seriously, has fundamental and far-reaching implications, for not only the skills and behaviours of researchers, but also power dynamics within and between institutions.

This brief review of international best practice and RAPID's suggests that capacity-development for enhanced research uptake requires a thorough understanding of all stakeholders, not just the researchers themselves, and of the political, social economic and cultural factors that influence policy processes; an approach which builds on local demand and capacity, and encourages and sustains local ownership and development; a commitment to change within research organizations, and a long term flexible approach among donors and intermediaries; and practical action-learning approaches.

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