A scan of research for development models and approaches

Analysis of five donors and programmes, with a focus on policy influence

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Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ADB	Asia Development Bank
BCURE	Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence
BMGF	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
BSI	Budget Strengthening Initiative (Overseas Development Institute)
CDKN	Climate and Development Knowledge Network
CGD	Centre for Global Development
CIAT	Centre for Tropical Agriculture (Uganda)
DEGRP	DFID-ESRC Growth Research Programme
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DRUSSA	Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa
EAFF	Eastern Africa Farmers' Federation
ECABREN	Eastern and Central Africa Bean Research Network
EPIC	Emerging Policy, Innovation and Capability (DFID)
EPG	Evidence policy group (DEGRP)
ESA	East and Southern Africa Division
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FAC	Future Agricultures Consortium
F&BKP	Food and Business Knowledge Platform
GSDRC	Government and Social Development Resource Centre
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KM	Knowledge management
KP	Knowledge platform
LIC	Low income country

LRPP	Linking research, policy and practice
LSHTM	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
NWO-WOTRO	Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, Science for Global Development department
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PABRA	Pan-Africa Bean Research Alliance
PEAKS	Professional Evidence and Applied Knowledge Services
PSGR	Public sector governance reform
QUA	Quality Assurance Unit
RCS	Research capacity strengthening
RED	Research Evidence Division
REF	Research Excellence Framework
RPC	Research programme consortia
RPM	Research programme manager
R4D	Research for development
SABRN	South African Bean Research Network
UKCDS	UK Collaborative on Development Sciences
WECABREN	West and Central Africa Bean Research Network

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1. Introduction

IDRC is at the midpoint of its Strategic Plan 2015-2020. To support a strategic planning review this paper aims to provide information that will facilitate a clear understanding of the merits of different research for development (R4D) models and approaches as they relate to influencing policy and practice.

This paper presents a brief scan of the R4D landscape and draws on five cases of donors, foundations and programmes, selected in consultation with IDRC to illustrate possible strategic options about the following three domains:

   a) approaches to supporting the communication of results by recipients, and enabling their thought leadership through researcher development;
   b) approaches to supporting translation of funded research into action to influence policy and practice, including at an appropriate scale of impact; and
   c) approaches that research-funding institutions themselves use in synthesising knowledge, having influence, and exercising their own thought leadership, leveraging internal staff expertise, at the national (own country) or international level.

To guide the selection of cases we applied the following selection criteria. While each case does not respond to every criterion, the cases as a group present a broad coverage of these features. Criteria 3 and 4 are qualifying criteria and across the other two criteria, we selected cases that are relevant yet offer a range of different approaches:

1. *Relevance*: to IDRC's areas of programming.
2. *Diversity*[1]: in organisation type (donor, foundation, institution, programmes) and R4D approach (direct research funding, funding intermediaries, capacity building, etc.).
3. *Sufficient data availability*[2]: access to interviewees and documents, people involved with knowledge management. Qualifying criteria.
4. *Active R4D component*: engagements that are currently ongoing and have a sufficient R4D component, i.e. where there is a clear objective to engage in R4D activities outlined in strategy documents supported by financing. Qualifying criteria.

In response to the diversity of selection criteria, the five cases present a mix of actors that take different approaches to R4D: notably the move towards channelling financing through large funds (Department for International Development, DFID); the largest funder of R4D (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, BMGF); a jointly funded research council and bilateral programme that supports researchers (the DFID-ESRC Growth Research Programme, DEGRP); a research organisation that leverages its established reputation and relationships (the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research, ACIAR); and the funding of knowledge platforms (the Netherlands).

This brief analysis took place over three weeks in September 2017. It is based on a desk review of existing literature on the wider R4D environment, for each of the five case studies, followed by six follow-up interviews and additional email exchanges. Due to the limited scope of this paper we were not able to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of the approaches, although where information was readily available we have commented on effectiveness. Drawing upon DFID's definition, the following types of outputs are considered to

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[1] Gerring and Seawright (2007: 86-150)
[2] Peersman, Guijt and Pasanen (2015)

be R4D: books, book chapters, briefings, case studies, conference papers, country reports, discussion papers, evaluation reports, journal articles and issues, lessons learned, literature reviews, manuals, protocols, research papers, systematic reviews, technical reports, thematic summaries, toolkits, training materials and working papers.[3]

The report is organised in three broad sections: (i) a scan of the R4D environment; (ii) a discussion of the five cases; and (iii) a summary. Each section is structured by the three domains, presenting a broad-brush overview of approaches, systems and incentives at the individual and organisational level.

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[3] https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-output
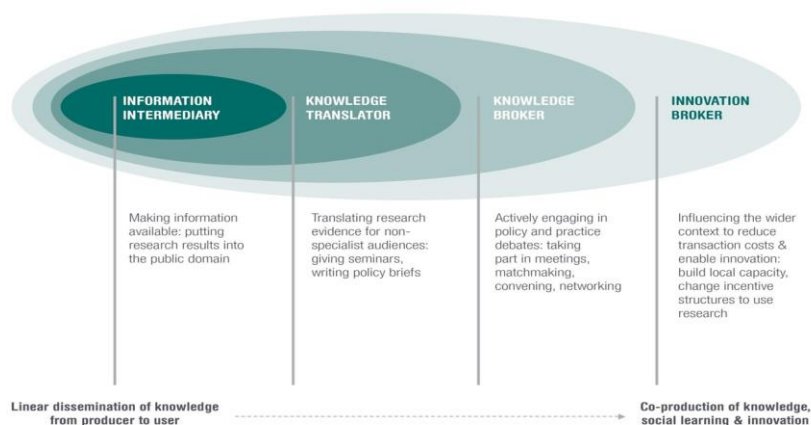
2.   A scan of the R4D environment

2.1. Introduction

There have been two substantial and interrelated landscape changes that have influenced developments during the last decade: (i) the rise of the impact agenda, where funders are increasingly demanding that R4D has an impact; and (ii) in response to this, the movement towards an integrated communication and impact strategy being developed during the research design phase.

Research has shown that research uptake can be advanced through interactive processes that involve knowledge end-users in knowledge creation processes from an early stage (e.g. Nutley et al., 2007; Vingilis et al., 2003). As transdisciplinary research of this nature is challenging, it necessitates adjusted expectations, supported by research programme design and governance structures that explicitly recognise shared 'accountabilities among the participants, while respecting the different perspectives of each group' (Campbell et al., 2014: 1). Factors that are important in achieving this include shared goals, trust, sustained dialogue throughout the research process, supported by sufficient flexibility in funding (Campbell et al., 2014).

There is increasing recognition that working to establish these practices increases the likelihood of research being applied to policy and practice. Therefore, in practice amongst both researchers (for example in universities) and in R4D funding organisations there is a gradual movement towards developing strategic partnerships, networks, communities of practice, and working in a transdisciplinary way. These are key approaches to producing demand driven research that responds to the needs of policy makers. This is important for all three domains as it: (i) ensures that research results are communicated to key stakeholders while the research is ongoing; (ii) directly engages with policy makers to promote the uptake of research outputs into policy and practice; and (iii) requires reflection and knowledge synthesis to successfully bring different stakeholders together through negotiating a common language.

Figure 1: Knowledge roles in the K* framework

INFORMATION INTERMEDIARY	KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATOR	KNOWLEDGE BROKER	INNOVATION BROKER
Making information available: putting research results into the public domain	Translating research evidence for non-specialist audiences: giving seminars, writing policy briefs	Actively engaging in policy and practice debates: taking part in meetings, matchmaking, convening, networking	Influencing the wider context to reduce transaction costs & enable innovation: build local capacity, change incentive structures to use research

Linear dissemination of knowledge from producer to user → Co-production of knowledge, social learning & innovation

Source: Shaxson et al., 2012

To describe the approaches in more detail, and locate the distinctions between the three domains, the K* framework will be used to discuss the different knowledge roles explored by the three domains of this paper. The framework is shown in Figure 1. The framework organises knowledge-related functions—or 'K* activities'—on a spectrum, from making information available to co-creating knowledge, to influencing the wider context and incentive structures. It is not presented as a complete categorisation of the approaches, but rather aims to position knowledge roles that are relevant for the three domains.

Most organisations we reviewed for the scan do not have overarching policies or strategies guiding the organisational work in the three domains. Several approaches sit in between or across two domains. We accounted for this by placing each example in either domain according to what we consider to be their predominant function. We now present a scan of the R4D environment, presenting key examples for each of the three domains.

2.2. Domain a: supporting the communication of research results and the development of researcher capacity

This domain refers to approaches supporting the communication of results by recipients of funding and how enabling their thought leadership through researcher development involves support for putting research into the public domain. A range of different approaches from communication strategies to evidence synthesis services exist. As there has been a move towards integrating communication with uptake and impact, there is overlap with domain b. Therefore, to avoid repetition the approaches explored in this section mainly focus on initiatives to *build the capacity* of individuals, institutions and wider systems to communicate better research evidence.

Recipients at a 2015 UK Collaborative on Development Sciences (UKCDS) workshop indicated areas where they require support from funders to build capacity to better communicate and influence the uptake of research. These included: (i) flexible funding approaches, such as DFID accountable grants[4]; (ii) systems to monitor communications and policy influence to promote focus on audience; and (iii) building capacity to communicate with project beneficiaries at an

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[4] Accountable grants generally provide flexibility to recipients on what to research, rather than a very well defined Terms of Reference being issued up front, are usually long-term and have flexible reporting structures that adapt to changes along the way.

early stage to ensure research uptake (UKCDS, 2015). Additionally, targeted funding for communication activities was noted as an effective approach. These elements are now discussed using examples of recipients' programmes.

Flexible funding and sharing resources

The DFID-funded Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa (DRUSSA) was a capacity-building programme to strengthen the communication and research uptake management of 22 universities across Africa, through training of university staff in communication and research and strengthening networks between DRUSSA universities, other research institutions and external research users, including policymakers. The project emerged from a scoping study on Sub-Saharan universities' demand to build capacity for more effective dissemination and uptake of research funded by DFID in 2010. The strength of the DRUSSA programme approach was that it did not advocate any particular model to institutionalise research communication and uptake management capacity, but worked in a tailored manner through a 'process benchmarking' programme. Each university was administered a questionnaire to identify their structures and processes - both formal and informal - for communications and research uptake, which formed the baseline on which they built their own pathway for improvement. Two subsequent surveys and a benchmarking conference served to track progress and course-correct as necessary. Contributing to the programme's strength was also the strong focus on sharing experiences and learnings between the different universities through a host of events (DRUSSA, 2012).[5] An accountable grant was chosen to fund DRUSSA, because it supported the transdisciplinary capacity strengthening initiatives and tailored approach proposed by DRUSSA.

The programme generated interest from other research capacity programmes in sub-Saharan Africa (Development Tracker, 2017). Characteristics that underpinned the success of the programme included:

- Participating universities identified leaders and champions who would keep programme implementation on track.
- Buy-in from vice chancellors served to ensure dedicated budget for research communication and uptake.
- The programme did not fund any new posts or office set-up costs; universities demonstrated commitment by investing a substantial amount of their own resources.

Audience focused communication monitoring systems

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is an organisation that puts a strong emphasis on the audience of its research and communications. It spent over five years building a comprehensive system, including the team, skills and processes, for effective research communication. This comprised hiring a communication manager to lead evaluating the success of IIED's communication work, as well as building the communication capacity of the team and of external partners and sharing learnings internally and externally. IIED also appointed an audience development manager to ensure that research projects had a strong audience focus, and to encourage researchers to build individual relationships with policy-makers and practitioners globally. This helped researchers visualise the audience they were researching and writing for and maximised the opportunities and likelihood of their work having a profile and being influential.

The emphasis on audience and increased focus on communication has influenced project methodologies in IIED. In some cases, the communication work has even brought in funding for researchers (UKCDS, 2015).

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[5] For more information, see Development Tracker, 2017. Project completion review 202004 (February, 2017). http://iati.dfid.gov.uk/iati_documents/5707530.odt

Building communication capacity early

The DFID-funded STRIVE project, led by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), is an interesting case of communication capacity built through early engagement with relevant stakeholders. At the beginning of the project, each partner in the STRIVE consortium sought to undertake a landscape analysis to investigate the relevant context for their research dissemination activities. Instead of commissioning a consultant or undertaking a desk study, the project chose to have the Tanzanian partner involve potential research users, i.e. the relevant ministries, in a series of interviews. This allowed the Tanzanian project partner to build a network of contacts and support, which created the channels through which the project research results gained visibility and influenced policy-making (UKCDS, 2015).

Targeted funding for communication activities

Grants can be structured to ensure there is adequate focus on communication activities. For example, the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) earmarks 10% of funding and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO-WOTRO) between 3 and 30% for communication and uptake activities, depending on the type and size of the project, which can include fast track research, workshops and capacity development among others (interview). This is discussed further in the respective case studies.

2.3. Domain b: the translation of research into action to influence policy and practice

This domain refers to approaches to supporting translation of funded research into action to influence policy and practice. There have been two substantial and interrelated landscape changes that have particularly influenced developments in this domain. Due to the rise of the impact agenda, where funders are increasingly demanding that R4D has an impact, there has been a movement towards having an integrated communication and impact strategy that is developed during the research design phase. This is because experience has illustrated that thinking about impact at an early stage and supporting this by ongoing communication during the research is more effective in achieving impact (see for example Young et al., 2014). This domain captures a great deal of the activity that is happening within the R4D landscape.

We present below a scan of approaches of how organisations support the translation of funded research into action to influence policy. Our interpretation of 'research translation' is informed by the K* framework, which includes roles that knowledge translators and knowledge brokers play. Below we explore supply-side and demand-side approaches. These categories are not mutually exclusive, as several organisations feature many of the traits listed.

Supply side

Structuring of grants. Most scanned donor organisations embed forms of research translation, uptake and knowledge brokering in their grants:

- NWO-WOTRO and the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) release calls to create consortia for transdisciplinary research, which involves research organisations, practitioners, governments and beneficiaries of policies (NWO-WOTRO, 2017). This ensures that decision-makers are involved in the research from an early stage, therefore facilitating the translation of the research into action. See the Netherlands case study for more detail.
- NWO-WOTRO, ACIAR and ESRC require researchers to outline impact pathways and theories of change, including how to monitor and learn from them.
- ESRC requires contracts to include participation in additional outreach activities, e.g. initial stakeholder engagement workshops, or kick-off events, to embed research uptake and impact from the outset, and grant holder workshops on impact.

- CDKN requires project impact assessment six months or a year afterwards. ESRC requires monitoring and reporting of uptake in annual reports and provision of information on research output portals. ACIAR requires economic impact assessments, impact pathways analysis and research adoption studies 3-4 years after the completion of projects.

Structuring of programmes. Many organisations also embed mechanisms for promoting research uptake when designing programmes to be funded:

- ESRC holds consultations on research uptake perspectives for programme development and the assessment of applications, which generally involves expert reviewers from relevant research communities. It also establishes advisory committees of international academic and policy experts to steer programmes and ensure focus on uptake.
- DEGRP (funded 85% by DFID and 15% by ESRC) created an Evidence and Policy Group (EPG), which sits in ODI to provide impact services to projects that demanded them. DEGRP ensured research uptake by: (i) putting researchers directly in front of policy audiences through convening panels (two researchers, a technical policy-maker e.g. central banker, and a member of EPG with technical expertise); (ii) always co-hosting events to showcase the research of other organisations to leverage networks; and (iii) funding and engaging directly with policy influencing when the co-host needed support (interview). See case study for more detail.
- LSHTM created a research uptake team in the STRIVE research programme consortium, consisting of a lead and a senior decision-maker from each consortium partner, to ensure tailored guidance for research uptake.

Policies, guidelines and toolkits. Organisations develop policies, guidelines and toolkits to guide both the operation of their own departments and of their grantees:

- DFID's research uptake guidance note, for instance, explains its approach to research uptake and provides practical advice to develop uptake strategies and checklists to review progress (DFID, 2011a).
- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) engages their potential grantees with its grant-making and evaluation policies, which underpins how they operate and sets the expectations with their grantees from the beginning.
- ESRC's impact toolkit illustrates its definition of impact, principles to be aware of when applying for funding and provides guidance and tools for grantees to communicate their work, including media training, public engagement and developing an impact pathway.

Funding intermediaries whose business is to engage in knowledge translation. Donor organisations often contract practitioners to translate the research of projects and programmes they fund, for example:

- DFID has over the years funded several organisations and initiatives to provide authoritative information on science and technology for the Global South (Scidev), support Southern researchers to contribute and debate ideas in development (GDNet), mentor and provide seed funding to early-stage entrepreneurs in developing economies (InfoDev), make research more available, accessible and reusable through data hub (Global Open Knowledge Hub), and supported a charity that strengthens knowledge systems in the South (INASP) (Adolph et al., 2009).
- The Netherlands funds five knowledge platforms to provide brokering services for the communities they serve and the research programmes funded by NWO-WOTRO. An interesting example is the Food & Business Knowledge Platform, which facilitated a public consultation on food security among professionals in the sector, producing a synthesis report and a policy brief for the parliament. These are discussed further in the case study.
- DEGRP contracted ODI to play the Evidence Policy Group function within the project (interview).

- The DFID funded Future Agricultures Consortium (FAC) engaged in the politics of knowledge to encourage dialogue and the sharing of good practice in Africa on the role of agriculture in growth. The programme created regional hubs in Kenya, Ghana and South Africa to analyse the political economy of knowledge where they operate. FAC supports the broader Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme to bring together people and organisations to promote agriculture-led development throughout the continent.
- The Broker is an organisation that brokers different knowledge domains to stimulate online dialogue and debate, with participants coming from universities, research institutes, NGOs, and the private and public sectors. In 2015 they started a series of co-created articles. They have also organised international debates, seminars and workshops for NWO (UKCDS, 2015).

Leveraging multiple roles as development organisations and knowledge brokers this pertains to international organisations, who carry out brokering functions when they engage with governments at the project and policy level, and have easy access owing to their status. One example is the World Bank Institute who created a south-south experience exchange facility, a demand-driven, multi-donor trust fund that provides small grants (up to $150,000) for World Bank teams to support country requests for South–South knowledge exchange. This allows operational knowledge gaps to be filled by catalysing the sharing of country experiences and the production of fast track responsive research between practitioners.

Demand side

Business models ensuring that research is demand-led and uptake is in-built: some organisations ensure a high degree of research uptake and policy influence by structuring their business model, and the associated organisational processes, so that the research they fund is demand-led. Examples of this are ACIAR, CDKN and ODI's Budget Strengthening Initiative (BSI), which are discussed in turn.

ACIAR develops country research strategies – led by a country manager in consultation with the national government, agricultural research community and other donors – to guide the research it funds towards concrete problems, e.g. a farmer's problems with pests. This ensures buy-in upstream in the research process, as early as at the strategy phase (interview). See case study for more detail.

CDKN, on the other hand, implements evaluation criteria to guarantee that the research is demand-led. These include letters of demand from relevant government departments; evidence of established working relationships with government; evidence of real understanding of policy context; and existing engagement with key stakeholders, possibly through former project partnerships. CDKN's regional offices also ensure that the projects ask policy-relevant questions for the country.

BSI's research aims to reinforce and inform the work done at country level and ensure that practical engagement in-country is informed by comparative experience and ongoing international dialogue (Hadley and Tilley, 2017). It has several organisational arrangements in place for providing flexible and demand-driven research. These include funding through a flexible accountable grant, an open-ended design that does not anticipate outcomes and support from ODI whose staff have '*experience of working inside institutions and supporting change processes in a low-profile manner… bring[ing] strong analytical, communication, facilitation and networking skills, together with a familiarity with the politics of reform processes.*' (Cox & Robson, 2013, cited in Williamson, 2015: 47).

Building policy makers' capacity to use evidence: activities under the DFID-funded Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence project (BCURE) have supported building the skills, incentives of policy-makers and decision-making systems through training and mentoring,

supporting evidence champions, building networks, facilitating decision-making processes and establishing systems within ministries and cabinets to improve evidence use.

2.4. Domain c: the synthesis of knowledge to exercise thought leadership

This domain refers to approaches that research-funding institutions themselves use in synthesising knowledge, having influence, and exercising their own thought leadership, leveraging internal staff expertise, at the national (own country) or international level. Below we present examples of how organisations manage and synthesise knowledge and how they use the emerging lessons to lead on specific issues. We present a selection of approaches by organisation type, including multilaterals, bilaterals, governments, learning partners, foundations and NGOs – all of which are involved in the R4D space (see Hovland, 2003 for a characterisation of aspects of knowledge and learning by organisational type). Applying the K* framework, this domain falls into the category of innovation broker, as knowledge is synthesised and thought leadership generated which, in turn, influences the wider context.

Multilaterals

Inspired by the World Bank Initiative in 1996 to become a 'knowledge bank', based on the idea of knowledge as a strategic asset and public good for development; multilateral organisations have increasingly embraced the knowledge agenda. Most of them have created knowledge management (KM) departments or units to synthesise and share knowledge, usually in headquarters, developed specific knowledge strategies or frameworks that have been mainstreamed in key corporate processes, and have substantially increased funding and resources for this area.

The effects of such KM frameworks managed by a dedicated department have been mixed (Independent Evaluation Department, Asian Development Bank, 2014). Interesting practices have emerged, such as: the World Bank leading in making information and data publicly accessible through its Open Development Initiative; the Asian Development Bank (ADB) articulating its knowledge management through communities of practice (COPs) to strengthen internal knowledge; and the increase of international organisations' partnerships to produce and collect knowledge to respond to the different needs coming from different parts of their organisations. It is not clear how much of an impact these systems have had (Independent Evaluation Department ADB, 2014). The KM audience is large and disparate, whereas KM work is concentrated at the corporate level and often uncoordinated with country programmes.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) adopted a slightly different approach by trialling its KM system on a project in the East and Southern Africa Division (ESA) in 2009, and only subsequently adopted it at the corporate level in 2012. It has since been embedded further in the organisation by shaping a pillar of IFAD's results delivery in its 2016-25 Strategic Framework (Hagmann and Gillman, 2017). It is notable that it was developed through practice-based theory, which synthesised the operational knowledge of ESA's project staff, who have been involved in several development projects, addressing concrete operational challenges. One such project was the Eastern Africa Farmers' Federation (EAFF), which received an IFAD grant to implement a KM system to strengthen its secretariat and constituent farmer organisations' capacity. By adopting a KM system, the EAFF members developed new skills, new communication mechanisms and new ways of planning (Hagmann and Gillman, 2017).

Another multilateral organisation utilising an interesting approach is the European Commission. EuropeAid's Evaluation Unit attempts to synthesise knowledge. Its high-level strategic evaluations draw lessons from thematic or country issues that the EU engages with, producing around 12 reports a year, and promoting use of the results. The unit's strategic evaluations aim

to influence EU policies and practices by improving country programming, clarifying concepts, feeding ongoing policy processes, and reconciling opposing points of view. However, it did not achieve its potential impact as an evaluation found that staff 'were either unaware of existing evaluations, did not read the reports or felt it is not part of their work' (Bossuyt et al., 2014:vii).

Bilaterals

DFID shares many of the same approaches used by multilateral institutions to synthesise the knowledge emerging from its research. It has a dedicated unit for learning and knowledge management – the Research and Evidence Division (RED), utilises online resources, and funds four Professional Evidence and Applied Knowledge Services (PEAKS) that capture and deliver useful knowledge to DFID on request - akin to knowledge institutes created by international organisations, e.g. World Bank Institute and African Virtual University. In addition, it also carries out systematic reviews to synthesise evidence on particular topics (ICAI, 2014: 11, 13), much like EuropeAid's strategic evaluation function. Interestingly, Jones and Mendizabal (2010) found that analytical work from consultants was the most useful and influential research within DFID, although rarely providing new insights.[6]

ACIAR makes extensive use of impact assessments to learn about the projects it funds and aims to improve its practice with a dedicated impact assessment research manager (ACIAR, 2017). ACIAR has been a world leader in pushing for improvements in the methodology and scope of evaluations, which in turn inform training for researchers to improve future research designs and management (Australian Government, 2013: 59). It brings all research programme managers together monthly and quarterly to discuss emerging lessons, and sub-committees of research programme managers are formed to conduct project reviews (email communication, discussed further in the case study).

Governments

An interesting approach to knowledge synthesis and learning has been adopted by Colombia, Malaysia, South Africa and Finland, with the creation of evidence units within government to assist policy-makers to make evidence-informed decisions. To be more effective, some of them have adopted a strategy of contracting external research and evaluation services to engage and broker with the government in a neutral capacity. In general, all of them share two key features that have resulted in them being effective: (i) they possess a high status within the government by sitting either in the office of the prime minister or president, and work directly with powerful ministries; and (ii) they were all conceived and backed by strong leaderships (Cassidy and Tsui, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d).

Learning partners

'Learning partners' are increasingly being adopted to facilitate the synthesis of knowledge across large, diverse programmes; although they might be called learning and evaluation partners, learning agenda partners, learning coordinators or knowledge managers. They are often organisations, rather than individuals, and are sometimes represented by a consortium that works alongside a large programme for several years (Buffardi (n.d.). They often contribute with specific expertise and are frequently more internally facing than other approaches listed here, reflecting on internal knowledge and improving performance rather than directly considering external thought leadership.

An example of how learning partners support knowledge synthesis is the Southern African Bean Research Network (SABRN) – a regional innovation network that promotes bean research and development in Southern Africa. The Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in Uganda, which coordinates SABRN, and the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation in the Netherlands worked alongside SABRN for many years and ran a project to improve KM within the network in 2014. The project involved a combination of participatory approaches, identified

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[6] A tension was expressed between the independence and engagement of consultants with the country programmes, which resulted in some recommendations not being as bold as they could be (Jones and Mendizabal, 2010: 7).

learning weaknesses and suggested concrete interventions for its member countries. The SABRN KM team presented the results of this exercise to the Pan-Africa Bean Research Alliance (PABRA), which is the 'parent' network of SABRN and the ECABREN and WECABREN bean research networks, and identified activities to be led at the PABRA coordination level, including the setup of an internal collaborative platform for PABRA coordination teams and regional networks (Muthoni-Andriatsitohaina et al., 2017).

Foundations

An internal scoping study at the Rockefeller Foundation in 2013 was turned into a project that provided additional value outside the organisation. The Foundation's Ocean and Fisheries team started a project on improving the health and wellbeing of small-scale fisheries and their dependents worldwide. . This supported a synthesis of the existing evaluative literature with the Foundation Center's IssueLab service to understand the work that was already being done in this field. This produced a report that identified 20 factors from different perspectives (policy-makers, industry, fishermen) affecting sustainability. The team decided to make both the report and knowledge that informed the public study public, by creating an open access digital library of the paywalled and grey literature used to produce the report (Fitz, 2014).

3.   The Cases

3.1. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

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Key points

•   BMGF does not have an overarching policy for the three domains. However,
    continuous dialogues with grantees and partners to find a common language, align
    expectations, monitor progress and course-correct throughout BMGF's strategy
    lifecycle underpins their approach.
•   Support for communication is decided on an ad-hoc basis between the BMGF
    grant officer and grantee, depending on the individual investment grant's
    objectives, whether communication is a significant part of it, and the grantee's
    needs. The needs assessment is done through an internally developed framework -
    the Global Advocacy and Policy (GPA) Theory of Influence.
•   The framework provides the basis for BMGF and the grantee to agree on the
    individual grant investment's outputs and policy-influencing outcomes. It also
    serves to structure the monitoring and evaluation of the grant's delivery.
•   Besides helping grantees' thinking around communication and policy influence,
    BMGF also proactively targets the private sector and NGOs with its funding to
    create and deliver innovations, especially in the medical field, and find new
    solutions.
•   Evaluation is one of the channels for knowledge synthesis within BMGF. It is
    used to learn about how grant investments are contributing to BMGF's strategies,
    and to make significant policy decisions in areas where outcomes are difficult to
    observe, such as catalysing policy or institutional change.
•   Synthesis of knowledge also occurs during the annual update of strategies, when
    programme learnings are used to reflect and make decisions on future investment
    areas.
•   Informal knowledge sharing is also an important contributor to knowledge
    synthesis. This happens internally around annual strategy reviews, when most
    staff return to headquarters, through monthly home weeks when country office
    staff are expected to visit Seattle, and brownbag lunches. Externally, synthesis
    occurs through the relationship between grant officers and grantees, which has
    contributed to experimenting with new approaches.
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BMGF does not have an explicit R4D policy, but its work relies heavily on science, technology and innovation. The R4D spending in 2006 was $450m (Jones and Young in Adolph et al., 2009: 10). IDRC (2017) estimates their research expenditure reaches approximately $1bn, or 20% of the budget in 2017, making it the biggest R4D donor globally.[7] BMGF has an approach of engaging grantees and partners in ongoing dialogues throughout its strategy lifecycle: teams in BMGF develop strategies, are allocated resources, make grants, monitor progress and integrate learning to course-correct as required. This operational mode influences how BMGF approaches the three domains.

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[7] Precise data are not available as the reported spending on BMGF's website is allocated by programmes and not activities (BMGF, n.d.).

Domain a: supporting the communication of research results and the development of grantees' capacity

BMGF supports grantees' communication of research results on a case-by-case basis within the individual grant awarding process. It is the job of the grant officer to establish whether the grantee has the capacity to communicate its research, and advise on additional support it needs. The Global Policy and Advocacy (GPA) Theory of Influence framework is used to make this assessment, which helps to categorise the outreach that grantees use, who their audience is, what the grant is trying to do and whether communication is a big part of this (Figure 2).

Communication staff, who are embedded in each team within BMGF, facilitate this process by advising on approaches based on agreed overall communication objectives. These can include, for instance, incorporating funds in the grant to build up capacity or outsourcing, as not every organisation needs to have in-house capacity. Communication staff have access to a network of peers that focus on specific issues, e.g. HIV, spread across 17 internal teams, to draw from their experience (interview).

Since 2015, BMGF has adopted an open access policy to support the dissemination of results of its funded projects. Under the policy, users can use BMGF's funded research for all purposes, including commercial. Data used in the research are also provided openly. This is important, as it contributes towards BMGF's standing as a transparent organisation and resource (interview).

Domain b: the translation of research into action to influence policy and practice

Translation activities of research for policy influence are diverse across the organisation, depending on the types of grants. However, every grant investment is guided by the GPA Theory of Influence framework (Figure 2). The framework helps BMGF establish mutual understanding and a common vocabulary with their grantees about how the project fits within their bigger strategy (at country or issue level), and helps the grantee to think in a structured way about how to achieve policy influence. It is used as a template to create a project-specific version in partnership with the grantee, and features long-term outcomes, intermediate outcomes and advocacy and communications tactics to achieve these. For each outcome, indicators are agreed between BMGF and the grantee.

Figure 2: The Global Policy and Advocacy Theory of Influence
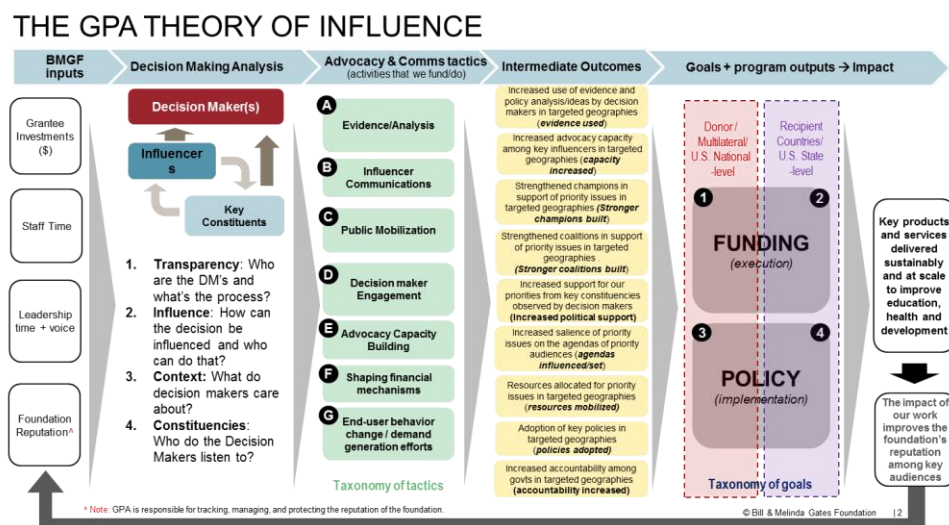
In general, BMGF is seeking to learn about the best approaches to use and build on its experience. For instance, their funding of the Commitment to Equity Institute's programme targets principally the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which are technical audiences. This means that influencing tends to occur on an academic plane, with research papers carrying out this function, without the need for a full-blown communication strategy.

In developing countries, policy influence happens through highly country specific processes (e.g. non-traditional leaders) and alternative fora (interview). In line with this philosophy, the Global Health programme has recently recognised the need for multidisciplinary approaches to solve the complex public health problems it is tackling. It is now focusing more on delivery in its Grand Challenges initiative. New challenges will need to be led by investigators from low- or middle-income countries to address the scientific and social and cultural aspects equally (Sharma, 2015).

To promote research uptake, BMGF also funds the private sector, especially the medical field, to create and deliver innovations and make sure that they reach those in need. Similarly, they fund non-profit organisations that are crucial to finding new solutions and delivering them (BMGF, n.d.).

Domain c: the synthesis of knowledge to exercise thought leadership

Synthesis of knowledge for thought leadership happens in an iterative fashion within the organisation due to its strategy lifecycle, but there are a few main channels through which this happens: evaluation; and learning during strategy updates.

Evaluation

Evaluations help staff and grantees to align expectations, by defining and agreeing early in the proposal process the measurable outcomes and indicators of progress and success. It also allows BMGF and partners to learn about how specific projects, programmes or a cluster of important investments are performing against BMGF's strategies (e.g. thematic, country, overall) and what needs to be improved to strengthen the approach taken. When funded projects' objective is to produce research to be shared with the whole field, the synthesis of findings is part of the evaluation process itself as to how the knowledge achieves agreed outcomes and meets the underlying theory of change (interview).

Evaluation is also utilised when significant policy decisions have to be made, or to fill a knowledge gap. This is particularly important in programmes where outcomes are difficult to observe and knowledge is lacking about how best to achieve results – such as when they collaborate with partners who are working to effect behavioural change, catalyse change in systems, policies, or institutions, or identify, replicate, or scale innovative models (BMGF, n.d.).

Evaluation is not used as proof that BMGF's resources are responsible for the outcomes it funds. Rather, it is used for internal learning and decision-making, and externally with grantees – what BMGF's calls purpose-driven evaluation - which implies a comparatively lighter touch in terms of measuring and reporting during the running of a programme. This approach reinforces the role of evaluation in testing innovation, making improvements, and understanding what works and why, to learn quickly from failure and replicate success.

Synthesis during strategy updates

The annual update of strategies requires a great deal of data gathering, analysis of investments and reflections. Each team scores and ranks the investments performed during the previous year, draws out impact and learning, and sends their findings upwards to management who will ask questions. This is a process that takes significant time in quarter four4 every year. Once the whole organisation has gone through the process, the strategies are then synthesised in the first two weeks of quarter oneof the following year to be sent to Bill and Melinda (interview). More recently, BMGF has engaged in long-term forward planning exercises, with horizons of 10, 20

and 30 years. These will likely inform new streams of projects or redefine existing ones through conversations with grantees (interview).

Informal knowledge sharing and synthesis

Internally building and maintaining a strong staff base, closely linked through networks, is considered a priority. Informal knowledge sharing takes place through annual strategy reviews and meetings when a large proportion of BMGF's staff return to Seattle, through brown bag lunches where specialised research is shared, and through home weeks during the second week of each month when country office staff are expected to visit Seattle. During these events, informal face-to-face networking during and around meetings has been essential for synthesising existing knowledge (interview). External synthesis happens more organically through the relationships that grant officers establish with grantees, to explore new investment avenues and keep abreast of trends in the thematic or regional area they engage in. An example of good relationships leading to knowledge synthesis is BMGF's enlisting of grantees in an advisory capacity. It has engaged a grantee in this way in the past to obtain research to support their tobacco control efforts (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012: 5).

3.2. DFID-ESRC Growth Research Programme

Key points

- The DEGRP programme regards communications and impact as integrated. Its heterogeneous nature has required flexibility and the setting of a general direction to support research into action.
- Flexibility to provide demand-led communications and impact support to researchers is enabled by the programme structure, with the Evidence Policy Group (EPG) providing the link between researchers and policy-makers.
- Central to this approach has been taking the time to build relationships at the outset, which allowed the programme to get to know the personalities of researchers and to work with their strengths while providing support in weaker areas (Shaxson, 2016: 17).
- The programme also had the flexibility so to not impose anything from the start. After developing pathways to impact, researchers were brought together in grant holder workshops, with the option of revising the pathways after one year.
- The heterogenous nature of the programme presented a challenge for the synthesis of knowledge, as the range of countries and topics covered made it difficult to bring research findings together. Funding more discrete clusters of projects might have contributed to increased impact as research highlights could have been consolidated to form an influential body of evidence.
- Formulating emerging research messages in the context of policy questions would have increased potential uptake and influence of the research on practice and policy (interview).

The DFID-ESRC Growth Research Programme (DEGRP) is a jointly funded initiative starting in 2011 with £20.9m comprising: agriculture, finance, innovation and the relationships between China and Africa. It funds 44 different projects, 19 focusing on agriculture. The Evidence and Policy Group (EPG) housed in and managed by ODI was set up in 2012 to support both the programme and its projects with the aim of maximising the profile, uptake and impact of DEGRP's research. The EPG supports academics to develop how they incorporate considerations of impact into their research. The team consists of an impact leader who shapes how impact and policy engagement is understood and technical leads, who have strong networks

in lower income countries and therefore understand the specific policy issues that are important, allowing them to shape the impact support provided (interview).

As the EPG does not fulfil a traditional research governance role, as research governance is overseen by the funders who are also responsible for academic quality, there is a risk that impact could become a 'service' that can be provided rather than a strategic contribution to the overall programme's direction (interview).

Domain a: supporting the communication of research results and the development of researcher capacity

For DEGRP, communications and impact are part of a continuum: developing a communications strategy is seen as the final step in developing an overall impact strategy. Most researchers will have some form of communications support from their university, but this is generally limited to press releases, website hosting, and production of simple reports and policy briefs. The EPG complements these by focusing on translating and communicating research to local audiences in low-income countries and select global audiences. It does not conduct specific training on research communications (though may do so in future). Specifically, on communications, the EPG provides funding and/or advice for:

- Special reports and multimedia outputs such as video and infographics.

- Helping researchers write and pitch blogs to media outlets such as *the Financial Times, The Conversation* and *Scidev.net.*

- Programme-level outputs such as impact case studies and synthesis publications that emerge from events (see below). For example, edited sets of short policy essays capture the outputs of DEGRP events and 'Research in Context' policy briefs set project findings in the wider policy context (Shaxson et al., 2017: 9).

Other support for communications focuses on helping translate research findings for policymakers and practitioners, discussed below.

Domain b: the translation of research into action to influence policy and practice

The overall purpose of the EPG is to support academic researchers to improve the impact of their work on policy and practice (Shaxson et al., 2017: 8) and to build their thought leadership around impact. In an early programme workshop, DEGRP researchers are taken through the DEGRP impact guidance containing three steps that are prerequisites for developing effective communication and engagement strategies: stakeholder mapping; development of a theory of change about impact; and consideration of the different knowledge approaches that the project could use (Shaxson et al., 2017: 8). The final pathways to impact are then used to begin discussions between the EPG and the project teams about specific types of support they would find helpful.

Other than the three steps, the impact guidance is non-prescriptive; to allow projects to embed their approach to impact into whatever project management processes they have already developed, giving them the freedom to innovate. Grant holders are also asked to fill in a post-project completion impact log at six-monthly intervals, to keep a record of what they have achieved.

The EPG's technical leads can draw on very wide networks of local organisations, local policy-makers and practitioners to build audiences for the research with a view to supporting its translation into action by:

- Putting on events where research from individual projects or clusters of projects could be showcased to enhance their likely impact with policymakers and practitioners (such as the DEGRP/REPOA workshop on shaping economic transformation in Tanzania, the

- SAIIA event on China-Africa relationships or the Bangladesh event on the challenges of economic transformation and growth).
- Supporting projects to build on events already planned, bringing in outside experts to contribute to discussions or present papers (such as the public debate sponsored by the EPG on the back of a project workshop run in Ghana).
- Financing or technically supporting in-country policy-engagement workshops (such as funding the flight costs for researchers to attend the Tanzanian National Irrigation Commission's policy engagement workshop).
- Developing workshops and conferences around two or more projects, either in the UK or in country, depending on demand (such as the China-Africa workshop with the South African Institute of International Affairs).

The format of events has been adjusted to support the uptake of research into policy and practice in two ways. Firstly, the approach to impact involves putting research directly in front of policy audiences: the EPG's experience has been that audiences want to hear directly from the researchers, not someone else's interpretation of the findings. DEGRP therefore takes on a supporting role at events, for example convening mixed panels consisting of two researchers, a technical specialist and an EPG member. Secondly, networks are leveraged by co-hosting events with local organisations so that they showcase the research of other organisations (interview).

'The need for a flexible, responsive approach to developing…impact strategies, rather than a prescriptive one' has been particularly important as the support has been used at different stages and in different contexts (Shaxson, 2017: 13). For example, researchers 'with good existing relationships with policymakers and practitioners used it to augment their existing pathways to impact.' (Shaxson, 2017: 13). Support to DEGRP funded research is demand-led and not all researchers have taken advantage of the EPG's expertise or networks. The 'strategic opportunism … may have predisposed [the EPG] to choosing those who are easier to work with – who already have some appetite for impact, who are willing to engage…and who can then put in the extra effort as needed.' (Shaxson, 2017: 20).

As impact is at the centre of the EPG's work, it is supported at different scales with the EPG tailoring the approach to what projects want to say and understanding the level at which impact might take place (interview).

Domain c: the synthesis of knowledge to exercise thought leadership

The EPG is an innovative approach to supporting academic research to have impact. Close working relationships between the EPG and its two funders—DFID and ESRC—have encouraged open reflection on how the EPG has performed and what it has achieved. While technical knowledge synthesis mainly happens at the level of research projects through events, the EPG reflects and synthesises about programme management and impact through the programme reporting process.

Annual events bring the research teams together to reflect and, where possible, synthesise their findings. 'Members of the EPG team have promoted DEGRP research and shared their own research and impact expertise in numerous workshops, conferences, and other external events … including: 2013 UNU-WIDER conference on Industrial development and policy in Africa; the 2014 World Bank public event 'Transforming economies through finance: can we avoid excessive financialisation?' (Shaxson, 2017: 9). Post-event publications are also important for synthesising knowledge. The participants contribute several pages on their reflections and the EPG produces an editorial that interprets and summarises the researcher contributions (interview). The programme reporting process involves consolidating information and reflection (Shaxson, 2017:11) and an EPG publication (Shaxson, 2016) 'presented an opportunity to think differently and to increase the influence of the programme' on future programme designs (interview).

Phase 2 of DEGRP that will soon be commencing will particularly focus on extracting messages, synthesising knowledge and liaising with other DFID programmes in other areas (e.g. private enterprise development, innovation, labour markets, and the Impact Initiative).

3.3. Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research

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Key points

- ACIAR's bilateral relationship model, focused on demand-led agricultural research in developing countries based on country strategies developed together with national stakeholders, has been effective in ensuring uptake of its research and policy influence, supporting the capacity development of developing countries' researchers, and positioning itself as a thought leader in the research for development space.
- ACIAR relies on its wide network to disseminate the results of its funded research, and supports the communication capacity of researchers through training courses. It is currently doing an overhaul of its communication, including hiring in-country communication experts to develop local language publications, run its social media and organise events.
- Regarding domain b, ACIAR's demand-led business model and its strong partnerships with the private sector and NGOs ensure uptake of research. Each project is required to have a credible theory of change and a well-defined impact pathway. ACIAR will contract specialist knowledge brokers to support projects in translating scientific research for end-users.
- Knowledge synthesis is mainly carried out by Research Project Managers (RPMs) through regular meetings to cross-review projects, research proposals and learning discussions.
- Impact assessments, especially research adoption and impact pathway studies, also provide an important avenue to synthesise knowledge.
- Careful nurturing of its alumni network supports ACIAR's engagement in the three domains, with alumni often acting as research partners, trainers, or holding relevant positions in the areas in which ACIAR works, acting as mediators or brokers.

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ACIAR was created by R4D-enabling legislation and its core business is to broker and fund research partnerships between Australian scientists and their counterparts in developing countries. It is attached to the Australian Government's foreign affairs department.

ACIAR delivers research predominantly through a bilateral partnership model, focusing on demand-led, bottom-up agricultural research in developing countries, based on country strategies that are developed together in consultation with national stakeholders. Head agreements are signed between the Australian government and the partner government, and programmes are chaired by the in-country resident Australian ambassador and the head of the agriculture ministry. ACIAR also funds multilateral institutions focusing on agriculture research for development, such as CGIAR (Australian Government, 2013). A strength of ACIAR's model are the strong relationships it has with the private sector that support the development and adoption of new technologies, and with NGOs to leverage networks with local communities to bridge the gap between research output and development impact.

While effective and respected by partners (Australian Government, 2013), ACIAR is seeking to shift its resources away from the bilateral partnership model to focus more on strategic top-down science in response to concerns that its research is too bottom-up and not pushing boundaries that could bring long-lasting benefits (interview). The organisation is currently undergoing a

strategic planning process and is intending to jointly develop research proposals with providers and seek co-investment to support more ambitious research and to leverage complementary strengths. They hope to leverage their 35-year reputation to achieve this.

Domain a: supporting the communication of research results and the development of researcher capacity

ACIAR uses a multitude of approaches and is experimenting with new ones to support the communication of research results. Direct communication is done in a centralised fashion by disseminating research publications through ACIAR's website and through its networks. These publications can be grouped into: (i) scientific and technical publications regarding project results; and (ii) public outreach publications that serve to inform the benefits of ACIAR's work, including factsheets and ACIAR's Partners Magazine. While there remains a preference amongst scientists to publish in international journals in English, ACIAR has steadily increased the number of outreach publications in the languages of the partner countries such as newsletters, policy briefs, 'how to' guides and school education materials, now accounting for around 10% of all publications (email communication).

ACIAR is currently doing an overhaul of its communication. Its research communication budget increased from AUD 0.63m in 2015-16 to AUD 1.5m in 2017-18 (ACIAR, 2017: 114), and is planned to reach 5% of total budget from the current 0.5% (interview). Ideally, ACIAR would like to increase it further recognising that a lot more could be done with it (interview). Changes also include a new website (to be completed in 2018) that will feature an expanded use of videos, infographics and photos – the same will apply to social media – to ensure a wider reach. The website will include an interactive map of ACIAR projects around the world that will quickly provide useful information. Besides its own media channels, ACIAR is working with the Crawford Fund to develop long-term partnerships with media outlets to generative positive coverage of its work (ACIAR, 2017).

Most importantly, ACIAR is trialling the idea of employing communication experts in its country offices (as contractors) to develop local language publications, run its social media and to organise events. They will work alongside country managers - themselves local hires, usually with PhDs, who play a critical role in delivering the country strategies (interview).

ACIAR offers several capacity-building fellowships for developing country researchers. Specific to communication, it runs an eight-week training on science communication in Australia. ACIAR also designs capacity-building initiatives ad hoc if weaknesses are identified. For instance, it designed a one-year graduate diploma to train officials involved in a fishery project in Papua New Guinea on research policy and communication to strategy development. This was made possible because the director-general trusted ACIAR, and had himself received a PhD scholarship from Australia (interview). This is an example of how tight relations with its alumni contributes to ACIAR's effectiveness: alumni are regularly invited to contribute to training activities and leading projects (Australian Government, 2013).

Among the new approaches ACIAR is trialling are a mobile extension platform, 'Seeing is Believing' for scientists and extension officers to better communicate to farmers best-practice technologies and methodologies to improve on-farm productivity. The platform uses apps, allowing users to capture video and photos of practices being used by farmers and create presentations to illustrate what is possible (Hicks, 2013).

Domain b: the translation of research into action to influence policy and practice

The ACIAR business model aims to build support for its research from as early as the strategy phase. Research programme managers (RPMs) develop thematic research strategies in alignment with country strategies – which in turn are developed by country managers in consultation with the national government, agricultural research community and other donors – to address concrete problems of farmers (Australian Government, 2013). ACIAR's strong relationships

with the private sector and NGOs also contributes to effective uptake of research. ACIAR involves the private sector in projects from the design stage to maximise impact and works with NGOs to field test research outputs (ACIAR, 2015a, 2015b). As an estimate, 90% of ACIAR's research is guided by the likely impacts it will have, and requires projects to have a credible theory of change, a well-defined in-country impact pathway, to be culturally sensitive and context specific (interview).

Country strategies are now adopting a ten-year timeframe, becoming 'country compacts', and have already been created for Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar. This longer time horizon complements ACIAR's typical project development phase of two years, which will allow more time for co-creation (i.e. getting the right people established in the project) and getting commitment from the partner government. ACIAR's Indonesia peat land fire project is 10 years in length, but ideally would be a 20-year project which would shift the project from research *for* development to research *in* development (interview).

In terms of knowledge brokering, ACIAR will employ specialist knowledge brokers (KBs) on a contractor basis to support its projects by applying their scientific literacy to negotiating with scientists and at the same time frame results in the right way to be communicated to end users. Ideally, KBs would be employed in-house in each research team, but a government cap on public hiring does not make this possible now (interview).

ACIAR is also experimenting with new tools for research uptake. The Adoption and Diffusion Outcome Prediction Tool (ADOPT) is being made available for use by project teams to better understand and plan for the adoption of appropriate research outcomes by smallholders and their communities (ACIAR Annual Operational Plan, 2017-18).

Domain c: the synthesis of knowledge to exercise thought leadership

ACIAR utilises several approaches to synthesise knowledge and learn at the project and programme level bringing, research programme managers (RPMs) together on a regular basis and conducting routine project reviews. At the project approval stage, ACIAR has an internal requirement to provide the evidence-base to justify the project itself, and this has often prompted new proposals to explicitly build upon the outcomes and learnings of previous projects (Jarvis et al., forthcoming). For every project review a sub-committee of other RPMs does a 'review of reviews' summarising key lessons that then has to be reviewed and noted by the country program manager and then the CEO. Monthly day-long meetings called in-house reviews, involve all RPMs in assessing new research proposals (either at concept note, Phase 1 or Phase 2 stage), which is 'central to learning in the agency' (Jarvis et al., forthcoming: 7). Every third month a 'special in-house review' is held during which RPMs are asked to propose and document for discussion emergent lessons across the portfolio, which may or may not have arisen from project review or impact pathway analysis (email communication).

ACIAR also relies heavily on its impact assessments: (i) economic evaluations such as cost-benefit analysis of projects; (ii) impact pathway analysis considering factors that influenced outcomes and impacts; and (iii) adoption studies that are performed three or four years after completion of a project and help to assess the wider impacts of projects on scientific and local communities in partner countries and Australia (ACIAR, 2013). An independent review of its operations in 2013 concluded that ACIAR has been a world leader in pushing for improvements in the methodology and scope of evaluations (Australian Government, 2013: 59); however there is little evidence that it has used them for internal learning and external thought leadership (Jarvis et al., forthcoming: 9). The area where ACIAR has made best use of its evaluations is showing accountability to the Australian people: ACIAR's quantitative cost-benefit assessments for projects have shown an excellent overall return from the whole portfolio (Lindner et al. in Jarvis et al., forthcoming: 9). ACIAR is launching a dedicated communication and stakeholder engagement campaign targeting political leaders, agriculture bodies and associations, universities and research community to increase the influence of its learning and accumulated knowledge (ACIAR, 2017: 114).

Updates of research strategies also provide an opportunity for the organisation to synthesise thematic knowledge. RPMs generally have good knowledge of global trends in their respective fields and understand the importance of increases in adoption rates of new technologies as well as the constraints to more-effective impact pathways and adoption rates of research (Independent Review of ACIAR, 2013: 37). This knowledge is then reflected in the strategies.

Overall, ACIAR does project-level impact assessment and learning well, but is weaker on portfolio and cross-portfolio types of assessment and learning. This is in part caused by an inadequate back office system that is unable to collect the right data in project proposals (such as geo-tagging, heat maps, dashboards, etc. –instruments that would facilitate zooming in on thematic questions) (interview). It is expected that when ACIAR's new chief scientist joins in November 2017, he will improve the organisational knowledge management system and improve scientific synthesis at a portfolio level (interview, email communication).[8]

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[8] Part of his remit is to implement Dave Snowden's ASHEN framework.

3.4. Department for International Development

Key points

- DFID's strategic approach has been heavily influenced by developments in the UK on the impact agenda, as well as wider political developments. These have resulted in efforts to translate wider contextual changes into high level policy guidance, with advisory input through the Research Advisory Group. The strength of this is that there is high level support for key initiatives with policies and guidance setting priorities and outlining approaches, for example the 2016 Research Review.

- The Research Evidence Division (RED) is important for synthesising knowledge, but the capacity to do this is limited and processes are not institutionalised. The dependence upon informal methods and individual relationships has emerged in response to the high volume of unprioritised research outputs (ICAI, 2014: 11). These capacity constraints mean that it can be difficult to engage staff: something that can have implications for effectiveness across all the domains.

- The organisation of DFID staff into cadres provides formal and informal mechanisms for all three domains. In addition, dedicated staff in regional research hubs aims to bring implementation and research closer and UK-based research managers facilitate 'research into use opportunism' by sharing information and joining the dots. DFID also has specific projects to support the capacity of researchers to communicate and decision makers to use research evidence. The Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence Programme (BCURE) programme is key in this regard.

- Regarding domain a, DFID's guidance on communications stresses a case-by-case approach to research uptake, depending on the research context and the programme size. Larger programmes and consortia usually have dedicated staff and a substantial budget directed towards communications and supporting researchers' capacity to communicate. The responsiveness of research programme directors and staff to the country context and the needs and approach of the research team is also important. Working with intermediaries via accountable grants and using online research portals help to communicate R4D.

- In relation to domain b, DFID has placed an increasing focus on research into action, reflecting the impact agenda. To receive funding for research, DFID emphasises the importance of a clear research uptake strategy. Project design processes involve the assessment of likely impact by considering quality, deliverability, cost, additionality and the orientation of the research. The business case is a key document, with large projects reviewed by the Quality Assurance Unit.

- Regarding domain c, the Emerging Policy, Innovation and Capability Department synthesises policy thinking on cross cutting issues, building relevant partnerships in the area. Furthermore, the research uptake guidance stresses that the body of evidence is understood before research commences. Systematic reviews are a key tool in this regard. DFID's four specialist resource centres also provide a quick response service that can provide syntheses of evidence and research in a specific area.

- A new approach that DFID has been exploring is grounded in 'Doing Development Differently'. This has been gradually driving a move towards a more adaptive implementation process that responds to information gathered during the project lifetime, and could ultimately see a reduction in a heavy investment in background research during the design process. The application of this approach in practice has however been tempered by persistent tensions around the results agenda and the need to demonstrate the impact of aid in the short to medium term (see Valters and Whitty, 2017).

DFID has no overarching policy for R4D, but invests around 3% of its budget on research (DFID, 2016b: 3).[9] The 2016 Research Review sets out how the UK will focus £390 million per year over the next four years on research and innovation to help address global challenges. R4D is categorised by DFID as (i) research to develop products, technologies or processes that will either have propoor impacts or will generate income and thus contribute to development through growth; (ii) research to understand what works and why, such as whether and why an

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9 R4D outputs are: books, book chapters, briefings, case studies, conference papers, country reports, discussion papers, evaluation reports, journal articles and issues, lessons learned, literature reviews, manuals, protocols, research papers, systematic reviews, technical reports, thematic summaries, toolkits, training materials and working papers (https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-outputs).

intervention works; and (iii) research to understand the world around us, such as improved understanding of the development context (DFID, 2016a: 6). The Research Review states that DFID will 'ruthlessly target… high-quality, high-impact projects and partnerships that will help to address the great global challenges of the 21st century' (DFID, 2016b: 3).

Domain a: supporting the communication of research results and the development of researcher capacity

The approach that DFID takes to research uptake depends on the research context and the size of the research programme, with larger programmes having more dedicated staff and a larger budget directed towards communications and supporting researchers' capacity to communicate. For example, responsibilities for research uptake are with the research programme director, supported by dedicated research uptake staff for larger programmes, although ideally all researchers are involved in communicating the research (DFID, 2016a: 4). For larger projects, particularly those involving consortia, researchers might sit on national government or CSO advisory panels, which supports both the communication of the research results as well as exposing researchers and facilitating their development (DFID, 2016a: 6).

The adaptiveness of DFID's approach is illustrated by an example from Peru where grounding communications in the research findings and developing a joint approach gradually gained the trust of the research team. This was important in this project as the team had a bad experience previously and were therefore initially reluctant to undertake any type of engagement activity (DFID, 2016a: 8). This example also highlights how the adaptiveness of research programme directors and staff is important. Within a research programme, communicating research results involves the activities in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Communicating within a research programme

Source: DFID (2016a: 2)

DFID research aims to add to existing knowledge; therefore, researchers are encouraged to communicate results in the context of the relevant body of research evidence DFID (2016a: 10).[10]

There are three broad approaches to supporting the communication of research results and the development of researchers' capacity: policies and guidance; developing strategic partnerships and working with intermediaries; and using online research portals and repositories.

Policies and guidance

Specific approaches to communicating research results are grounded in higher level strategic positioning, for example in 2007 DFID outlined strategic areas and outcomes from research communication (DFID, 2008, cited in Adolph 2009). Policies informed by reviews include a mapping of the environment to understand where DFID is positioned globally in terms of supporting research capacity strengthening. (i.e. UKCDS mapping exercise 2015).

A review (Hovland et al., 2008) recommended a 10% minimum spend on communication and policy engagement activities within Research Programme Consortia (RPC), having a dedicated communications officer and developing a communications strategy during project initiation.

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[10] Therefore, research programmes are encouraged to understand the relevant body of evidence before they start work, informed by knowledge synthesis products, see domain c.

DFID recognises this as a principle and supports RPCs to have sound, well-resourced research uptake plans. However, no percentage is suggested in the research uptake guidance (email communication). 'The [share of the] budget for carrying out research uptake will vary by research programme, depending on factors such as the size of the programme and the type of research that is being carried out' (DFID, 2016a: 3).

A quality assured system for supporting researchers to better communicate their research, and being recognised as a good communicator of research, were specified as strategic areas for research communication investment (DFID, 2008, cited in Adolph, 2009). An important part of this is DFID's research uptake guidance which provides general advice for researchers on communicating their research (DFID, 2016a).

DFID provides support mechanisms and capacity-building for more effective communication and has a portfolio for research capacity strengthening (RCS), illustrating the recognition of the importance of this for achieving uptake (Hovland et al., 2008).[11] 'DFID is a key funder of RCS globally, and its support spans the pathway of research production, brokering and use...DFID's active grant portfolio in research capacity strengthening, across 25 programmes and run out of several divisions of the Department, totals an estimated £198m… some of the largest programmes are for government statistical agencies' (UKCDS, 2015). The assessment of the capacity of both internal (i.e. within the programme team and amongst research project grantees) and external (i.e. among potential research users) is encouraged.

The importance of ensuring that research recipients have the capacity to understand and use research is stressed and this includes: (i) understanding research and the skills to find and appraise evidence; (ii) thematic topic knowledge; and (iii) incentives (or disincentives) to consider evidence. Once gaps are identified a capacity-building strategy can be designed, however as this is often challenging, linking to programmes focused on capacity-building for use of research is encouraged (DFID, 2016a: 9). One such programme is BCURE, which provides information about which decision-makers have capacity and which are research-averse, as well as providing training for stakeholders, discussed in domain b. BCURE has links to Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa (DRUSSA), SciDev.Net, Strengthening Research and Knowledge Systems (SRKS), and Global Open Knowledge Hub (GOKH).[12]

All DFID-funded research must be published in an open-access format and is made publicly through the Research for Development website as part of DFID's contribution to global development (ICAI, 2014: 10).[13]

Working with intermediaries

DFID's Emerging Policy, Innovation, Capability (EPIC) department supports four accountable grants to IDS, ODI, IIED and CGD. These grants cover multi-year work programmes 'across a number of themes with practical applications for development challenges and aim to deliver a global public good rather than a direct service to DFID' (DFID, 2014: 12,13). ODI's accountable grant (2011-2016) provided flexible funding that emphasised disseminating 'findings and research to wider and varied audiences, in particular at strategic and key moments, such as at COP21 and in response to the European migration crisis' and has also provided strategic convening capacity (ODI, 2016: 3). The programme delivered 18 stories of change that demonstrate and communicate tangible change. The ODI Insights series has provided an avenue to 'respond quickly to unforeseen events and to adapt to evolving political agendas' (ODI, 2016: 1). There are some schemes that strengthen researcher capacity, although they are broader in

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[11] 'Within DFID's research capacity strengthening (RCS) portfolio, the most significant specific thematic focus area by far is on RCS in statistics (44%), followed by health (11%) and mathematics (9%). The inclusion of statistics within DFID's RCS portfolio highlights an issue around the fluidity of RCS as a concept' (UKCDS, 2015:6). The 2010 change in government in the UK led to DFID's funding for research communication being rebranded as research uptake (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3121132/)

[12] https://bcureglobal.wordpress.com/ Improving the enabling environment for better research uptake was specified as a strategic area for research communication investment (DFID 2008, cited in Adolph 2009).

[13] https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-outputs

scope than communications, such as the DFID-funded commonwealth scholars scheme or Wellcome Trust's major overseas programmes, but these are not specifically considered RCS, although 'they have an undoubtedly crucial RCS function'. (UKCDS, 2015:6).

Online research portals and repositories

These aim to support the communication of high quality research on strategic development issues (Phillipson et al., 2016). An evaluation (Phillipson et al., 2016) focussed on three portals and repositories supported by DFID: Eldis, R4D, SciDev.Net that aim to disseminate good quality, relevant research on development issues to a global audience, with the primary target being users in the South. It found that better availability, accessibility and discoverability of online research evidence led to behaviour change and, to a lesser extent, organisational change (Phillipson et al., 2016: 63). The evaluation suggested ways to increase the usefulness and functionality of the portals. For example, given the demand for the portals, DFID should put effort into making R4D evidence available online, in formats that are easy to scan to find key points, particularly when using hand held devices (Phillipson et al., 2016: 92-94). The paper explicitly discussed how DFID could best support them through making the association to DFID (rather than UK AID) clearer, as it is a trusted source; supporting regular monitoring and learning to inform the activities of the portals by establishing benchmarks and allowing comparative analysis; and training new DFID in-country programme managers on internet skills and resources. The latter was suggested to support them to gain access to lessons learnt and 'how to' guides, with a view to improving global research uptake, as they have 'privileged access to senior policy-makers and a remit to promote change, often most effectively done by showing the latter 'what works'.' (Phillipson et al., 2016: 96).

Domain b: the translation of research into action to influence policy and practice

Impact is a high priority for DFID's research and DFID has placed an increasing focus on research into action (Kinn, 2016: 27, 33).[14] Approaches to supporting the translation of research into action, internally and externally involve: policies and practical guidance; organisation of DFID staff; project design processes; and supporting the capacity of decision makers to use research evidence.

Policies and guidance

The translation of research into action was emphasised in the 2016 Research Review which mapped research opportunities and set priorities. As part of the review, DFID research teams subjected research opportunities emerging from a wide consultation process to scrutiny to determine the likely impact of research investment by DFID; the proposals were then peer reviewed by the Research Advisory Group (DFID, 2016b: 9).

To receive funding for research, DFID emphasises having a clear research uptake strategy, and meeting the standards outlined in the research excellence framework (REF) 'pathways to impact', which include building capacity to understand…and use research (Kinn and McNeil, 2015).

Organisation of DFID staff

DFID's specialist cadres provide a mechanism for increasing the influence of research on policy and project implementation (ICAI, 2014: 11).[15] This happens through three staffing structures:

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[14] Alongside additionality, quality, deliverability and cost. This focus is in line with the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) through which there are increasing demands upon researchers to define and demonstrate impact.

[15] Research Strategy 2008-13, DFID, 2008
http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/consultation/DFID_ResearchStrategy2008LOW RES.pdf. DFID has used its 13 specialist cadres as an organisational structure to manage its professionals. Each cadre is managed as a network, animated by a head of profession who has an explicit role to link people. Most cadres appear to work well as networks of peers. Cadre conferences, such as annual retreats, where groups of staff with similar interests meet and exchange experience and knowledge, are particularly valued for professional development (ICAI, 2014: 15)

- Dedicated staff in regional research hubs in Nairobi and Delhi seek to bring implementation and research closer (ICAI, 2014: 12).

- Country offices (COs) have a significant amount of autonomy, allowing them to be responsive to country contexts and issues and the orientation of individual senior staff in COs has an influence upon the impact of review and evaluation work (Jones and Mendizabal, 2010:4).

- UK-based research managers who facilitate 'research into use opportunism' (interview) by joining the dots, building relationships across teams and applying their knowledge to other projects and initiatives, play a valuable role in supporting the translation of research into action. This information sharing can involve applying lessons that emerge from stakeholder processes, interview datasets building on relationships established during previous projects (interview).[16] While efforts have been made to do this formally, insufficient funding and the completion of projects prevents these efforts being sustained.[17] Therefore knowledge synthesis and lesson learning through this mechanism tends to be more organic and informal.

Project design processes

For large programmes requiring ministerial sign-off, a great deal of time and money goes into carrying out reviews, assessments, and other analytical work to feed into the design process (Jones and Mendizabal, 2010:4). Assessment of likely impact is a central part of testing proposed research investments with questions about quality, deliverability, cost, additionality and the orientation of the research being assessed through business cases (DFID, 2016b: 8; email communication). The business case is a key design and approval document developed by a small team. The approval process for a business case usually involves the team leader, then the head of department, then the chief scientist or deputy chief scientist and then ministers or the secretary of state, depending on the amounts involved. For large business cases, (over £40 million) there is a separate quality assurance process involving the quality assurance unit (QAU). The QAU was established in 2011 'to review large business cases, seeking to make sure that they are founded on research and evidence' (ICAI, 2014: 21). However, as country offices face cuts, 'requirements for highly detailed analysis before the initiation of a project may be unhelpful, as it may be just as relevant to do a rapid appraisal and initiate action, but then use rapid feedback indicators and insights from ongoing negotiations in order to adapt and revise ongoing work' (Jones and Mendizabal, 2010:5).

At the tender phase, DFID's increasing requirement to demonstrate the use of research evidence when seeking aid funding (Phillipson et al., 2016: 63) has encouraged linkages between research and action. There are various approaches to this that depend on the size of the project. For larger consortia projects, key policy-makers might sit on a research advisory board (DFID, 2016a: 6). One recent example of this was a call for a research study to understand knowledge systems in East Africa. It required a regional steering group with government representatives from all countries involved plus UK representation, funding partners and independent advisers; a country advisory group comprising key national representatives and policy makers; and a programme management group comprising key individuals from the governments involved and DFID.[18] This structure aimed to ensure that all key policy-makers are involved in research design, methodology, implementation and are therefore fully engaged as results emerge.

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[16] E.g. the ESPA Deltas project relationships with the Bangladeshi government were taken forward in later projects.

[17] The Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) funded knowledge brokers but after the project ended efforts terminated.

[18] Understanding knowledge systems and what works to promote science technology and innovation in Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda
https://supplierportal.dfid.gov.uk/selfservice/pages/public/supplier/publicbulletin/viewPublicNotice.cmd?bm90aW NlSWQ9Njg5MjA%3D

Supporting the capacity of decision-makers to use research evidence

Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence Programme (BCURE 2013-2017, £13m) implemented through six programme partners - some of which are consortia - in 11 countries in Africa and Asia to access, appraise and apply evidence in policy-making. The projects have targeted diverse audiences and using different approaches to improve policy-makers' use of evidence, for example (Vogel and Punton, 2017). [19]

The SECURE project, targeting health policy makers in Malawi and Kenya, enriched the content of high-profile health financing and free maternal health services' policies by bringing in evidence through convening of technical working groups and supporting concrete follow-up actions from policy cafés, among other fora.

The Harvard project, which builds the project partners' technical capability through pilots, spurred the short-term use of evidence in one of the pilots. The project developed geo-spatial map crime clusters for easier visualisation and decision-making, which attracted the interest of government departments.

Domain c: the synthesis of knowledge to exercise thought leadership

There are strong links between internal knowledge synthesis and reflection and being a thought leader in the wider environment. For example, by reflecting internally and changing internal practices, such as exploring how Doing Development Differently can inform project delivery, DFID has been influencing external stakeholders through two routes: (i) the demonstration effect during project implementation; and (ii) through researchers picking up on these trends and capturing it in papers etc. Therefore, fora such as staff retreats, project design procedures and how evaluations inform design and thinking are all important mechanisms that support influence and thought leadership in the development community.

The Emerging Policy, Innovation, Capability (EPIC) department synthesises policy thinking on cross cutting global issues such as urban development and migration. The 'department invests in new mechanisms for generating innovative ideas, programmes and evidence for tackling poverty'. It is responsible for partnerships 'to strengthen the use of digital tools in development with private sector organisations – especially in technology, internet and digital sectors – with other donors, especially in managing the Global Innovation Fund, and with the design sector' (DFID, 2014: 4).

DFID guidance also aims to ensure that the synthesis of knowledge underpins DFID research as 'research programmes need to understand the body of evidence which exists on their topic(s) of interest before they start their work' (DFID, 2016a: 10).

Approaches to synthesising knowledge include: informally through staff networks; evaluations and reviews; and specialist resource centres.

Staff networks

'The networks of professional cadres, the Senior Civil Service, heads of country offices, heads of divisions and departments are a key part of how DFID staff and the organisation learn. They provide conduits for knowledge to flow through the organisation' (ICAI, 2014: 15). Despite investments in systems to synthesise knowledge, such as online resources and generating evidence through evaluations and reviews, staff prefer to use their professional networks and face-to-face dialogue to share and synthesise knowledge (ICAI, 2014: 15). 'Cadres and informal networks are a great source of knowledge and experience in DFID', however their informal and ad-hoc structure could be an impediment (Jones and Mendizabal, 2010:5; DFID, 2013: 3, 22). The cadres' annual retreats that cover a range of priority topics and convene knowledge sharing discussions regularly. However, DFID staff 'find it hard to identify and

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[19] For more information, see Itad's evaluation of BCURE at http://www.itad.com/reports/building-capacity-use-research-evaluation-bcure-realist-evaluation-stage-2-synthesis-report/

prioritise what is important and what is irrelevant' as 'staff find it difficult to assimilate all the knowledge products available' (ICAI, 2014: 14).

Evaluations and reviews

The primary audience for evaluations is DFID's RED, whose role is to synthesise (Phillipson et al., 2016: 13). However, no central single point in DFID receives, collates and disseminates lessons from reviews, therefore findings of reviews do not sufficiently support corporate learning and staff found it hard to identify patterns, common trends and lessons (ICAI, 2014: 22).

DFID uses systematic reviews to synthesise evidence on topics, to 'map the evidence base in an unbiased way as possible, assess the quality of the evidence and synthesize it.' (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2012: 2).[20] They are conducted to 'help to inform policy and programming decisions in strategically important areas' and provide 'key sources of evidence for developing business cases, adapting programme plans and identifying evidence gaps to inform the research agenda'. The research questions are defined 'through a prioritisation process that involves wide consultation with research and policy teams from across DFID' (DFID internal resource). The Evidence into Action team is responsible for commissioning external independent review teams to conduct systematic reviews. While an important knowledge synthesis resource, systematic reviews are however expensive to conduct and not well targeted, such that the high volume compromises their influence within DFID (ICAI, 2014: 11, 13).

Political economy analyses gather and revisit local knowledge and, when published, are often valuable resources that are used by others. These are now routinely undertaken for 'any Public Sector Governance Reform programme (PSGR) to contextualise the proposed PSGR, identify the risks and assess the chances of success' (ICAI, 2014: 4).

Specialist resource centres

DFID funds four Professional Evidence and Applied Knowledge Services (PEAKS) linked to DFID's specialist cadres for health, governance social development (GSDRC), conflict and humanitarian, climate environment, infrastructure and livelihoods, and economics and private sector.[21] All the PEAKS generate, capture and present useful knowledge to DFID upon request from staff and present their reviews on their websites. Outputs and resources include topic guides, literature reviews, bulletins, online libraries, webinars and briefings. Outputs are provided by help desks via a quick contract facility provided through different consortia. They are published online, aimed at a practitioner and researcher audience and are a recognised source of literature reviews or approaches. For example, the GSDRC is a partnership of 'research institutes, think-tanks and consultancy organisations' providing research and consultancy services and online resources for 'DFID, the Australian Government, the European Union, the OECD, the World Bank, and UNDP'.[22] The total budget allocated for these four PEAKS is £8 million (2012-17) (ICAI, 2014: 14).

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[20] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/systematic-reviews-in-international-development/systematic-reviews-in-international-development

[21] http://www.heart-resources.org http://www.gsdrc.org https://partnerplatform.org/eps-peaks

[22] http://www.gsdrc.org/aboutus/

3.5. The Netherlands

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Key points

- The Netherlands has an innovative approach whereby knowledge platforms (KPs) directly involve decision-makers in the research process. KPs develop strategic partnerships with decision-makers and encourage cocreation of research. They also translate policy questions for researchers and communicate research outcomes so that they are applicable for policy makers.
- At the heart of the KPs are the secretariats who guide funding and direct the approach to the research, convene stakeholders and coordinate relationships including with NWO-WOTRO. To do this the secretariats need to be aware of current and emerging issues in their field, however limited capacity makes this challenging.
- The integration of communication, research and action means that much of the work of NWO-WOTRO via the KPs falls into domains a and b. There has been limited synthesis to date. From next year, however, funding for KP activities will cease and there is likely to be a shift to knowledge synthesis activities.
- The contractual requirements outlined in calls for proposals ensure that the key principles of transdisplinarity, integrating research in the knowledge chain, being demand-led, embedding research in an innovation network and effective communication are applied.
- Innovative online platforms have helped to identify knowledge questions for policy and practice, communicate research, translate it into action, and to a lesser extent synthesise. These include the Question of the Week and The Broker.
- The convening role played by the platforms is also important as people are often keen to actively contribute online, only after they have had meaningful face-to-face contact.

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Since 2012, the Netherlands has invested in knowledge and research for development through knowledge platforms (KPs), in response to the need for more focussed and effective generation and use of research and knowledge for development. The KPs are 'responsible for a knowledge agenda that comprises…identifying, accessing and sharing existing knowledge, articulating knowledge needs and drawing-up research agendas, and rechannelling research outputs into policy and practice' (NWO-WOTRO, 2014: 1). This approach has focused on working closely with decision-makers and emphasise research into action, domain b.

The development-orientated scientific research component of the platforms' activities is facilitated by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)'s WOTRO Science for Global Development department , an independent, intermediary organisation for tendering research projects that guarantees the scientific quality of the research and transparency of selection procedures (NWO-WOTRO, 2014: 1). NWO-WOTRO have an R4D strategy, but it contains limited information on specifics of activities. NWO-WOTRO's strategy has three overall and one cross-cutting objectives: of relevance is objective 1 about increasing generation and use of knowledge for development; and objective 3 about facilitating their knowledge platforms for learning and sharing knowledge. The cross-cutting objective is capacity-building, though it does not specify communication capacity but seems implicit (NWO-WOTRO, 2010). In terms of budget, NWO has a separate financial agreement with the MFA, as does each individual knowledge platform (interview) and 'to meet short-term needs and demands of policymakers and practitioners in the thematic areas of the KPs, the four KP secretariats also manage a fund for small grants that can be used for knowledge events, short-term studies, reviews, etc.' (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 42).

The KPs generate: (i) knowledge for policy; (ii) knowledge for developing countries; and (iii) policy for knowledge. The KPs do this by seeking to combine knowledge originating from different sources, agendas and perspectives to produce more coherent knowledge agendas, and

increase knowledge sharing and research uptake. This involves coordinating international networks and facilitating strategic partnerships with organizations from the private sector, science, civil society and policy fields.[23]

Domain a: supporting the communication of research results and the development of researcher capacity

There are several Dutch initiatives that support researchers and there is a focus on strengthening the capacity of individual researchers, and capacity at the meso-level, supporting scientific virtual communities that cross boundaries in which researchers cooperate (e.g. think conferences, peer reviewing communities, etc.) (NWO-WOTRO, 2010). An open access publication policy has been implemented (NWO-WOTRO, 2010). Approaches to supporting the communication of research results and the development of researchers' capacity are: contractual requirements; using online research portals and repositories; communication events; and developing capacity for uptake.

Contractual requirements

Research communication is supported explicitly in the research calls. NWO-WOTRO conducts themed national and international calls for proposals which contain requirements for a percentage spend on research communication. For example at least 3% of the total budget and up to 30%, although this varies depending on the type and size of the call (interview, call for proposal). 'For NWO-WOTRO research calls, consortia are…obliged to design a strategy and earmark a budget for communication and outreach that involves external stakeholders at different points during the research process' (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 78).

Research proposals must be jointly submitted by a partner from the North and a partner from the South, and efforts to 'strengthen the capacity of stakeholders and researchers from the South' are emphasised.[24] The quality of collaboration and capacity development are often included as assessment criteria in calls for proposals. For example, a call from the Food and Business Global Challenges programme of the Food and Business Knowledge Platform (F&BKP) in 2017 ranked submissions against the 'quality of collaboration and capacity building' which accounted for 20% of the total score. In this section one of the four sub criteria was the 'potential for improving the capabilities of individuals and institutes to learn and innovate, the ability to share knowledge and create a supportive learning environment'.[25]

Online research portals and repositories

Share-net supports the communication of research results by sharing existing knowledge, generating new knowledge to address prioritised research gaps, and translating knowledge into formats appropriate for 'intended audiences to contribute to the development of better policy and practice. This includes agenda-setting, development framework for matching knowledge needs, capacity-building workshops (e.g. proposal writing, qualitative research), writing group meetings, and management small grants fund' (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 14).

Communication events involving a wide audience

There is implicit support for research communication through knowledge sharing activities that involve communicating and indirectly building researcher capacity, discussed in domain b. For example, the KP Security and Rule of Law ensures that their annual conference invites a mix of

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[23] For example, see http://knowledge4food.net/about/visionmission/ The different KPs are organized differently and operate differently.
[24] https://www.nwo.nl/en/research-and-results/programmes/population%2C+reproductive+health+and+economic+development+%28PopDev%29/backgr ound
[25] http://www.nwo.nl/binaries/content/documents/nwo-en/common/documentation/application/wotro/food--business-gcp--call-for-full-proposals/GCP4+Call+for+Proposals+FTR+%283%29+%282%29.pdf

'unusual suspects' to take responsibility for the organisation of the event or the delivery of the content. This encourages interaction between organisations that might not normally meet each other, but that share common interests (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 55).

Training for research uptake

All KPs have provided training for research uptake at research kick-off meetings or soon after. For example, INCLUDE and NWO-WOTRO co-organised workshops on research uptake during the biannual working conferences, such as a training on pitching (Nairobi, May 2015). In 2016, F&BKP organised a three-day seminar for the 17 consortia of the ARF-2 call in Benin. As a result of these joint efforts, there is a more proactive attitude among some consortia when it comes to thinking about and working towards research uptake (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 78-9).

Domain b: the translation of research into action to influence policy and practice

Funding research that is integrated in society and innovation networks is a key principle that aims to evoke interest from policy-makers, to inform emerging policy needs and ultimately to enable research to inform action. Understanding the needs of knowledge users and having an effective demand driven approach to R4D has been important in translating knowledge into action (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 83-4). KPs and NWO-WOTRO have a joint responsibility to facilitate and promote exchange between researchers and the KPs 'to raise the relevance of the research, to promote the uptake of research outputs into policy and practice, and to inform and contribute to the knowledge agenda' (NWO-WOTRO, 2014: 6).

The main approaches to doing this are: funding policy-orientated research; contractual requirements; convening for cocreation and innovation; Question of the Week; a working group on research into action; building a strong relationship between KPs and the Dutch government; and developing tools for practice.

Funding policy orientated research

NWO-WOTRO's funding of fast-track policy-oriented research to respond to short-term knowledge needs of policy-makers and development practitioners directly supports the translation of research into policy. For example, a five-year transdisciplinary research programme in three cities in Western India focussed on how urban governance networks can address urban inequalities.[26] Close cooperation with citizen groups and local government through working groups aimed to facilitate the uptake of research and practice results as they emerged (NWO-WOTRO, 2010: 36).

Contractual requirements

The requirements outlined in the calls for proposals to obtain funding for such research are important in ensuring the research is action-orientated. For example, NWO-WOTRO requires applicants to indicate how horizontally integrated the research is within a network of innovation. Calls are designed 'in such a way that researchers and practitioners work together from formulating the research project, executing it and sharing (intermediate) results with stakeholders beyond the consortium' (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 41; NWO-WOTRO 2010). There are three requirements that proposals need to fulfil to integrate different research types along the knowledge chain (from applied research up to and including academic research): (i) highlight a perspective on the position of the research in the knowledge chain and a description of the upward and downward linkages; (ii) be based on a process of interactive demand articulation; and (iii) indicate how the research will be horizontally integrated within a network of innovation. For example, the 2017 call for proposals from the Food and Business Global

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[26] The research team comprised academic knowledge (on technical and software conditions for implementing spatial systems, spatial analysis, human geography, urban planning and civil society organisations in slum areas and the impacts of intervention programs) with networks of local governments and practitioners (WOTRO, 2010: 36).

Challenges programme ranked submissions against the 'relevance for innovation in development', accounting for 40% of the total score. In this section one of the five sub criteria was the 'potential for contribution to the demand of end-users, such as farmers, service providers (e.g. civil society organisations, extension staff), private sector parties and/or government officials'.[27] Additionally, the quality and feasibility of research impact pathways are assessed (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 78).

Convening for cocreation and innovation

KPs effectively use their convening power to bring stakeholders together to co-create the knowledge required to inform and strengthen policies. This has enabled them to build on existing knowledge from multiple sources to respond to knowledge needs. Effective cooperation between NWO-WOTRO and the Secretariats has been important in achieving this (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 42, 96). The applied research programme under the F&BKP, for example, is a practitioner-led research programme, directed towards innovation. Additionally, calls for proposals often have guidelines specifically on involving stakeholders.[28]

Convening interested parties is an important way in which the KPs link research to policy and practice. It ensures they are up to date with emerging topical issues; in turn enabling them to identify emerging issues to prioritise on the agenda, and to respond dynamically to a changing policy agenda. For example, 'F&BKP identifies such trending topics based on input and demand from the F&BKP network, meetings, documents, amongst which those in the knowledge portal, and the NWO-WOTRO research groups. After exploring ideas and demands around a new theme [through for example studies, literature reviews and mapping exercises], F&BKP facilitates the gathering of actors [through seminars] willing to devote energy and time to work on emerging knowledge questions and to develop a knowledge network' (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 28). However, this is challenging as keeping up to date places pressure on already stretched secretariats to gather data (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 85).

Question of the Week

One of the KPs, INCLUDE, holds Question of the Week, an innovative approach to encourage knowledge sharing with a focus on uptake, which must have policy relevance (Lammers and de Winter. 2017: 69). It is coordinated by the secretariat who encourage network members (research institutions, civil society organizations and other stakeholders) to engage in the discussion on these questions. Policymakers are also invited to participate in the discussions(email communication). It offers the opportunity to identify relevant knowledge questions for policy and practice, and to generate exchange between different stakeholders on possible answers and new viewpoints. It is an online tool that INCLUDE disperses among its newsletter subscribers, through their website, social media, and through direct engagement of relevant stakeholders (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 66, 69).

Working group on research into action

The Share-Net International working group Linking Research, Policy and Practice (LRPP) aims to understand linking research, policy and practice and the role of knowledge by: (i) stimulating research-informed policy and practice; and (ii) stimulating research relevance for policy and practice. Some of its activities included a 2015 study on strengthening linkages; asking all member organisations to share their knowledge needs and communicating these to students and NGOs; and encouraging interaction between researchers and practitioners to exchange knowledge. (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 68, 94).

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[27] http://www.nwo.nl/binaries/content/documents/nwo-en/common/documentation/application/wotro/food--business-gcp--call-for-full-proposals/GCP4+Call+for+Proposals+FTR+%283%29+%282%29.pdf
[28] https://www.nwo.nl/en/funding/our-funding-instruments/wotro/population-reproductive-health-and-economic-development-popdev/population-reproductive-health-and-economic-development-popdev.html

Relationship between KPs and the Dutch government

Individual relationships are critically important for the KPs and often the organic development of these is a strength as KPs learn from one other (interview). However, the platforms underscore the importance of moving away from a knowledge culture based on individual relations, towards an environment that is supported by institutional linkages (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 97). An important example of this is KPs developing a close relationship with MFA so increasingly making inroads into MFA and being able to show their relevance. This has allowed certain KPs to directly contribute to the formulation of policy strategies. Activities to support this include networking and KP events in which MFA participate, developing a good rapport with individual policy makers by establishing a physical presence of Secretariat staff at the MFA and ' learning to understand how this institution operates and how to navigate its social rules' (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 54, 94).

Tools for practice

KPs support the development of various practice-oriented tools. These include toolkits, expert meetings, online consultations and the Broker magazine website. The online consultations are at the invitation of the MFA and often last for several months. For example, the F&BKP organised a two-month public online consultation to ensure that the latest topics were included in a review of Dutch food security policy. INCLUDE conducted a one-month online consultation (Lammers and de Winter, 2017: 83-4, 94; NWO-WOTRO 2010). The Broker has developed into a valuable medium and virtual platform for exchange, and is discussed further in domain c.

Domain c: the synthesis of knowledge to exercise thought leadership

The design of KPs and the close working relationships that underpin cocreation support knowledge synthesis. However, no explicit strategy of knowledge synthesis has been pursued, indeed this is expected to change as now that funding for research has finished, the next phase is likely to focus on synthesising research results. Approaches that have been used to synthesise knowledge to date are: fostering collaboration; online magazine; and ad hoc activities.

Fostering collaboration

KPs are at the centre of knowledge synthesis, by fostering close collaboration between the platforms, researchers and KPs, and amongst knowledge communities comprising 'scientists, policy makers and practitioners (both public and private) with expertise in specific thematic fields' (NWO-WOTRO, 2010; NWO-WOTRO, 2014; interview). NWO-WOTRO facilitates the KPs, allowing them to learn from one another and, additionally, calls upon the researchers to actively participate in KP activities such as knowledge forums, virtual exchange platforms, workshops and other knowledge sharing activities. There is also a network for exchange and dialogue between various umbrella organisations within the Dutch knowledge system (NWO-WOTRO, 2010).

Online magazine

The website-cum-magazine by The Broker is a valuable medium for synergy-building. NWO-WOTRO is aiming to link the knowledge themes to special issues or articles in The Broker, thus disseminating such research outputs and using the virtual platform of The Broker for wider discussion and reflection (NWO-WOTRO, 2010).

Ad hoc knowledge synthesis activities

One example is learning via an ongoing pilot study to highlight the added value of NWO–WOTRO-funded research in providing knowledge for the Dutch knowledge system for global development. Other synthesis activities are undertaken by NWO-WOTRO programmes, for example the Conflict and Cooperation over Natural Resources in Developing Countries (CoCoon) programme brought together a group of practitioners, scientists and policy-makers together to reflect on how research could contribute to innovation, and how an effective programme should be designed (Lammers and de Winter, 2017).

4.   Summary

Amongst the organisations and programmes reviewed there has been a gradual movement towards developing strategic partnerships, networks, communities of practice, and working in a transdisciplinary way; reflecting the recognition that research that is integrated in-society increases the uptake and influence of R4D.[29] These changes sit in the context of the rise of the impact agenda, where funders are increasingly demanding that R4D has an impact; and the movement towards an integrated communication and impact strategy being developed during the research design phase. There are moves towards more adaptive project/programme implementation processes that respond to information gathered during the project lifetime. If this trend continues and overcomes the tensions around demonstrating results, it may see changes in the way that knowledge synthesis is used to inform programme design with lighter touch methods being adopted.

These contextual changes and the movement towards the integration of communication and impact cut across the three domains, although they are predominantly related to domains a and b. With regards to domain a, these trends ensure that research results are communicated to key stakeholders while the research is ongoing. Concerning domain b, they push for direct engagement with policy-makers to promote the uptake of research outputs into policy and practice. Finally, with regards to domain c, they require reflection and knowledge synthesis to successfully convene different stakeholders and negotiate a common language.

The case studies and the scan have highlighted the range of different models and processes that are present and how these vary across different parts of organisations. Some are applied at different levels, from high level strategies to individual country approaches or on a case-by-case level. Some involve systemic changes with the creation of specific departments or advisory groups, whereas others require culture change and might be enforced through contractual requirements. Due to this diversity, often the approaches have been applied to varying degrees and differently in diverse contexts.

Domain a approaches focussed on initiatives to build the capacity of individuals, institutions and wider systems to communicate better research evidence. These included: (i) flexible funding approaches, such as DFID accountable grants that funded DRUSSA and DEGRP; (ii) systems to monitor communications and policy influence to promote focus on audience, as done by IIED's appointment of an audience development manager; (iii) building capacity to communicate with project beneficiaries at an early stage to ensure research uptake, e.g. the DFID-funded STRIVE project that involved research users in interviews, and DEGRP's building of relationships at the outset over an extended period of time;(iv) targeted funding for communication activities in contracts, such as the percentage spend on communication activities by ESRC and the variable amount by NWO-WOTRO; v) guidance from DFID on communications that stresses a case-by-case approach to research uptake, depending on the research context and the programme size; (vi) using online research portals help to communicate R4D; and (vii) increasing local language publications, as in the case of ACIAR. In addition, BMGF has a notable approach: their support for communication is decided on an ad hoc basis between the BMGF grant officer and grantee, while the structured Global Advocacy and Policy (GPA) Theory of Influence framework guides the discussion and clarifies expectations.

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[29] The ACIAR case study noted an innovative way to engage with these by nurturing its alumni network such that alumni act as partners, mediators or brokers.

Domain b captures a great deal of activity happening in the R4D landscape due to the movement towards having an integrated communication and impact strategy. On the supply-side, the scan covered a range of activities. Perhaps the most notable is the growing recognition of the effectiveness of funding intermediaries to engage in knowledge translation (e.g. the Dutch knowledge platforms). ACIAR and The Netherlands recognise the function provided by knowledge brokers to translate policy questions for researchers and to communicate research outcomes so that they are applicable for policy-makers (e.g. via online platforms). DEGRP is structured so that the Evidence Policy Group (EPG) provides brokering services at the programme level.

Other domain b approaches that are arguably more straightforward to implement include: (i) structuring grants to embed forms of research translation and uptake into the grants (e.g. transdisciplinary research consortia, impact pathways, outreach activities, integrating research in the knowledge chain, embedding research in an innovation network); (ii) structuring programmes to embed mechanisms for promoting research uptake, developing policies, guidelines and toolkits (e.g. DFID's research uptake guidance note, BMGF engaging grantees with their policies); and (iii) international organisations carrying out brokering activities when they engage with governments. On the demand side, structuring business models and organisational processes so that research is demand-led is an approach taken by ACIAR, CDKN, ODI's Budget Strengthening Initiative (BSI) and DEGRP. Additionally, the BCURE project has supported building the skills and incentives of policy-makers and decision-makers.

Domain c approaches to knowledge synthesis are both formal and informal and broad in nature, including outputs such as briefings, lessons learned, systematic reviews and evaluations. This knowledge contributes to organisations' thought leadership. For example, in the case of BMGF, evaluation is a comprehensive process used to align expectations at the beginning of a programme and serves to inform programme officers how investments perform and what to invest in. This in turn enables the organisation to position itself in the knowledge field and to demonstrate thought leadership. For BMGF and DFID, informal knowledge sharing is also an important contributor to knowledge synthesis.

Organisationally, structures for knowledge management (KM) include multilateral organisations creating KM departments to share knowledge and to develop knowledge strategies, e.g. the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Often, however, such KM work is concentrated in headquarters and is uncoordinated with country programmes. IFAD in contrast trialled its KM system on a project before adopting it centrally. Evidence units are used by governments as well as bilateral funders, such as DFID with its Research and Evidence Division. DFID also has an Emerging Policy, Innovation and Capability Department to synthesise policy thinking on cross cutting issues, to build relevant partnerships in the area.

Impact assessments (ACIAR) and systematic reviews (DFID) are an important internal tool for knowledge synthesis, allowing organisations to exercise external influence. To facilitate the synthesis of knowledge across large programmes, 'learning partners' can be employed, under various titles, and DFID uses specialist resource centres to provide a quick response syntheses of research in a specific area. Diverse programmes such as DEGRP presented a challenge for knowledge synthesis as bodies of evidence were difficult to compile, suggesting that a more focussed approach would aid synthesis and thought leadership.

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