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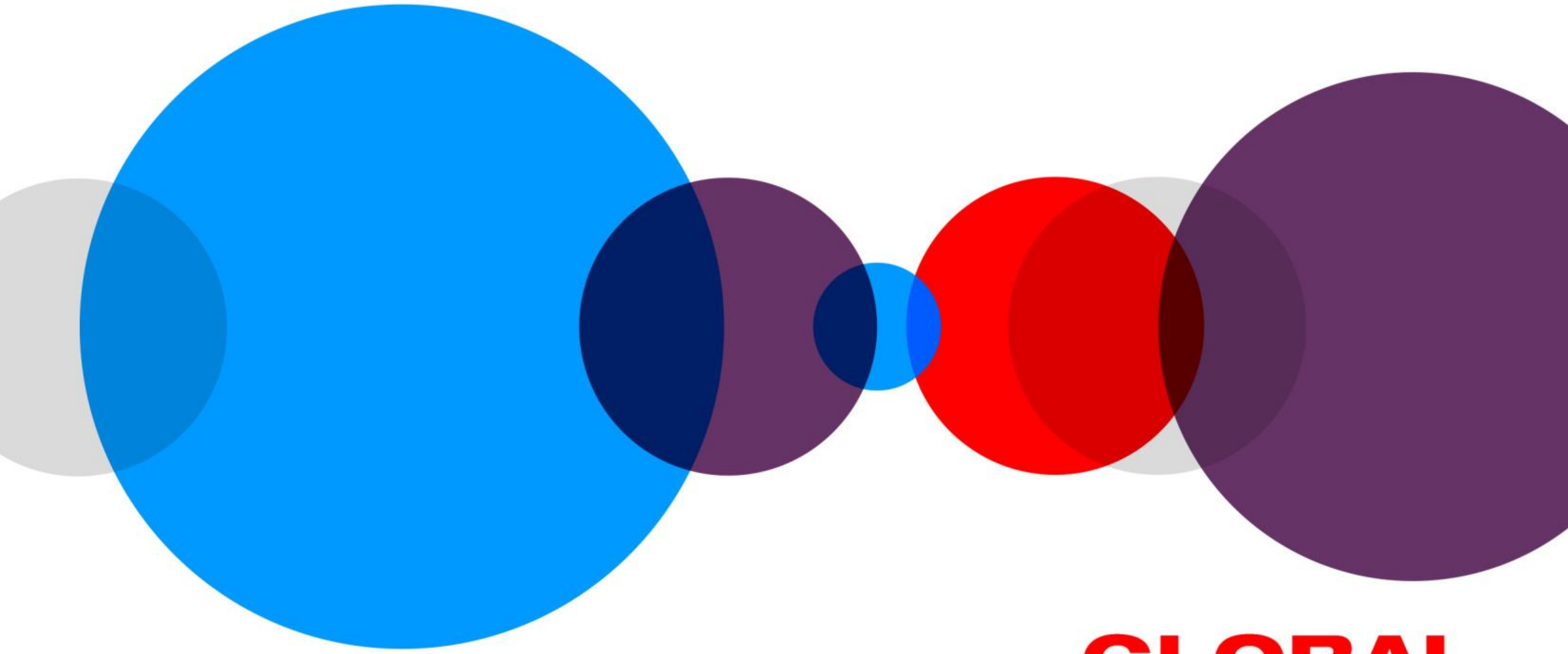
METHOD GUIDE 11

Using research findings for policy-making



Jasmina Byrne, Kerry Albright and Daniel Kardefelt-Winther
UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti

GLOBAL KIDS ONLINE

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www.globalkidsonline.net

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GLOBAL KIDS ONLINE

Global Kids Online is an international research project that aims to contribute to gathering rigorous cross-national evidence on children's online risks, opportunities and rights by creating a global network of researchers and experts and by developing a toolkit as a flexible new resource for researchers around the world.

The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of children's digital experiences that is attuned to their individual and contextual diversities and sensitive to cross-national differences, similarities, and specificities. The project was funded by UNICEF and WePROTECT Global Alliance and jointly coordinated by researchers at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, and the EU Kids Online network.

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You can find out more about the authors of the report here:

Jasmina Byrne
www.globalkidsonline.net/byrne

Kerry Albright
www.globalkidsonline.net/albright

Daniel Kardefelt-Winther
www.globalkidsonline.net/kardefelt-winther

ABSTRACT

Internet-related policy is a topic of fierce global debate, with questions such as, should it be national or international, who should oversee it, what should it relate to, how should it be developed and who should be the main stakeholders? When it comes to children and the internet, things are particularly complex as policies related to child rights tend to be scattered across different domains (health, education, welfare and justice), and are not always linked to broad public policy objectives related to the digital economy, digital society or to internet governance.

This Guide examines the relationship between research and policy in this area, and supports researchers to frame their objectives and findings in ways that (directly or indirectly) support policy development processes that affect children. We start by examining the current policy landscape related to children and the internet, and the key issues and drivers behind these policies. We then make concrete suggestions and recommendations about how to ensure evidence is relevant and used to facilitate the policy-making process.

KEY ISSUES

International policy objectives

The many broad-ranging issues covered under the rapidly developing internet public policy reflect the exponential technological and geographical growth of the internet and its penetration of most aspects of public life. This growth has led to the engagement of various international stakeholders in what is known as internet governance or 'shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programs that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.'[1] While initially concerned with technical issues such as the internet infrastructure, and underlying standards and protocols that enable the internet to function, emerging policy issues now extend to security, economic development, human rights and many other domains. The internet is also increasingly recognised as an enabler in implementing and monitoring many of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

> **"Since children's rights are interconnected and indivisible, policies related to children and their rights on the internet need to be interlinked and mutually reinforcing."**

These emerging themes are more difficult to regulate and implement than the technical issues, due to the trans-border nature of the internet. For example, it is universally recognised that 'the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online',[2] but human rights standards vary from country to country. Cybersecurity, data protection and privacy are other issues that are difficult to regulate internationally because of challenges linked to cross-border legislation and law enforcement, and the differing priorities of governments and the private sector. Most international internet-related policies and processes have emerged through consensus building by stakeholder groups from governments, civil society and the private sector. However, these broader policy processes have barely recognised the distinctive rights and needs of children as a substantial subset of internet users: children are rarely acknowledged in global debates on internet governance. When children's issues are given due consideration it is often in the context of child protection (cyberbullying, abuse and sexual exploitation), while their other rights (e.g., privacy and freedom of expression) are overlooked (Livingstone et al., 2015). Added to the scant recognition of children's rights in global policy debates, the lack of robust evidence on children's internet use makes it hard to predict the implications of the internet on children's lives, and hinders the development of evidence-based policy (Byrne, 2015).

If we consider that all the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) can be grouped in terms of three Ps[3] – the right to protection, provision and participation – we can similarly categorise policies related to children and the internet:

- 'Protection'-related policies are those dealing with child online abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation material, cyberbullying, 'sexting' (sharing sexualised or nude images among teenagers), and other behaviours that compromise children's safety online.
- Policies dealing with 'provision' are those that enable children to use the internet for education, to develop digital skills and literacies, and to access information. More broadly, they cover the provision of benefits and services that are age-, gender- and culturally appropriate.
- Policies providing 'participation' opportunities for children are those that enable young users to express their views and opinions in safe and user-friendly online forums and platforms, and to engage in civic and political life.

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[1] Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/6(Rev.1)-E.

[2] Human Rights Council Resolution 20/8: The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the internet, 16/07/2012.

[3] See Methodological Guide 1: A framework for researching Global Kids Online.

Since children's rights are interconnected and indivisible, policies related to children and their rights on the internet need to be interlinked and mutually reinforcing. A former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression states in his report that 'as communications technologies evolve, some States have adopted disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression, presenting them as measures to protect children from harm while, in effect, they limit the rights of children and adults' (La Rue, 2014). Therefore, understanding how to achieve the right balance between protective measures and those that enable their freedoms is crucial. Over-restrictive policies can undermine the ways in which the internet can empower children with unprecedented opportunities to learn and participate (Livingstone & Bulger, 2013).

National legislative and policy frameworks: Overview and key issues

A cursory mapping of policies across different continents shows considerable differences in public policy priorities. In Europe for example, the early child-related internet policies focused on protection and online safety. The agenda has since shifted to awareness-raising and empowerment of children and their parents (O'Neill et al., 2013). Instead of providing a safer internet for children, the current (more balanced) agenda recognises the many benefits of internet use, and aims to provide a better internet service for children (European Commission, 2012). This new agenda recognises that policy frameworks cannot focus only on the prevention of risk, but also need to consider how to best provide access and uptake of online opportunities to children, taking advantage of the internet's potential to promote and realise children's rights.

> **"Most of the evidence on children and the internet focuses on risks rather than opportunities."**

Beyond OECD countries, the policy landscape appears somewhat uneven. Comprehensive policy mappings are rare at the global level, although some recent reviews of policies in South Asia and Africa (Bulger & Latonero, forthcoming) show that where child-related internet policies exist, the dominant focus is on children's protection online. As Europe is gradually shifting its focus from a 'safer' to a 'better' internet, other regions are still lagging behind. Exceptions are policies dealing with information and communication technologies (ICT) in education and the promotion of digital literacy that are now widely represented in many national policies across different continents (UNESCO, forthcoming; 2014). Promoting safe and responsible use of the internet through schools seems to be high on the agenda of many governments. However, when it comes to inclusion and the promotion of more sophisticated digital skills that would allow children's engagement as critical, interactive users and digital citizens, policies and practice fail to meet the desired standards (UNESCO, forthcoming).

Some key challenges to the policy-making process

Insufficient evidence

Most of the evidence on children and the internet focuses on risks rather than opportunities. The *Better Internet for Kids Map* (Baudouin et al., 2014) points to the relatively high use of available evidence in policy-making in Europe, with the results from the EU Kids Online survey directly contributing to regional and national policies. However, the report also points to the limitations of the quantitative data to provide an in-depth understanding of children's offline and online behaviour patterns, and to elucidate the main reasons behind certain behaviours.

Narrow legal frameworks

Some legislative frameworks are too narrow to address the complexities of children's experiences. For example, sexting (sharing sexualised or nude images among teenagers) is illegal in some countries and can result in prosecution and punishment under national pornography laws even when there was no evidence that sharing of such images was unwanted (UNICEF Innocenti, 2012). Child rights activists have long advocated against such measures as they unnecessarily criminalise children without offering mitigating or alternative measures for juveniles. In addition to posing a real risk of children being labelled as offenders and placed on sex offenders registers, such measures deter disclosure for fear of prosecution.

Neglect of civic rights in policy

Public policies dealing with issues such as data protection, online privacy, freedom of expression, the right of assembly and participation in civic life are rare. Even when policies attempt to address one of these rights, other seemingly contradictory rights are neglected. One such example is Article 8 of the EU General Data Protection Regulation[4] that recommends parental consent for children under 16 to the use of their data by social media platforms. By placing all children under the age of 16 in one homogeneous group, this Regulation fails to take into account a child's right to participation and his or her evolving capacities. It clashes with Article 12 of the UN CRC, which stipulates that '… the views of the child [should be] be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.'

> **"Even the best-laid plans and policies may be challenging to implement and monitor."**

Mismatch between evidence and policy

In some instances, even where evidence is available and widely acknowledged, ICT policies still do not respond to such evidence. For example, despite the growing body of research that shows that younger and younger children are going online, and that early childhood education is critical for their cognitive and social development, most policies that promote ICT in education and safe internet use are aimed at children older than 12 (UNESCO, forthcoming).

No overarching policy

As indicated above, in most countries, internet- and child-related policy, when it exists, is scattered across a number of sectors, for example, ICT in education, cybersecurity and protection from violence/abuse. These concerns and measures are therefore covered by various ministries and departments in line with their responsibilities and public governance systems (Baudouin et al., 2014). This means that, in addition to thinking about government as an actor in the multi-stakeholder model of governance, we should think about 'governments' (or different sectors within a government) that need to be brought together to conceptualise and implement the relevant policy. This is a challenge, as many of the players that deal with ICT policy may be unfamiliar with child rights, while departments that traditionally deal with children's issues (e.g., social welfare) know very little about the challenges children face online. For example, the UNICEF Innocenti report on child safety online (2012) shows that in countries where guidelines for social workers exist, these are separate from guidelines for the police. It also notes that national investment in reporting online abuse, referrals and coordinated actions were rare. In broader terms, the balance between protection from all forms of violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, and the rights to information, freedom of expression and association, privacy and non-discrimination (as defined in the UN CRC) is not so evident in national policies.

Measure of success

Even the best-laid plans and policies may be challenging to implement and monitor. The key message from available policy reviews is to focus on evidence of implementation rather than creating additional laws and policies (Baudouin et al., 2014; OECD, 2011; UNESCO, forthcoming). Legislative measures that deal with offline abuse of children and criminalise illegal behaviour are considered to be largely sufficient and should apply equally off- and online. Even at the European level, evidence of monitoring or evaluation of internet- and children-related policies is extremely rare, so it is hard to conclude which policy models and approaches have made the most significant impact on children.

How policies are developed and the role of evidence in policy-making

In general terms, the traditional and highly stylised model of policy-making views it as a linear process in which rational decisions are taken by those with authority and responsibility for a particular policy area.

A typical model here would include many or all of the stages illustrated in Figure 1.

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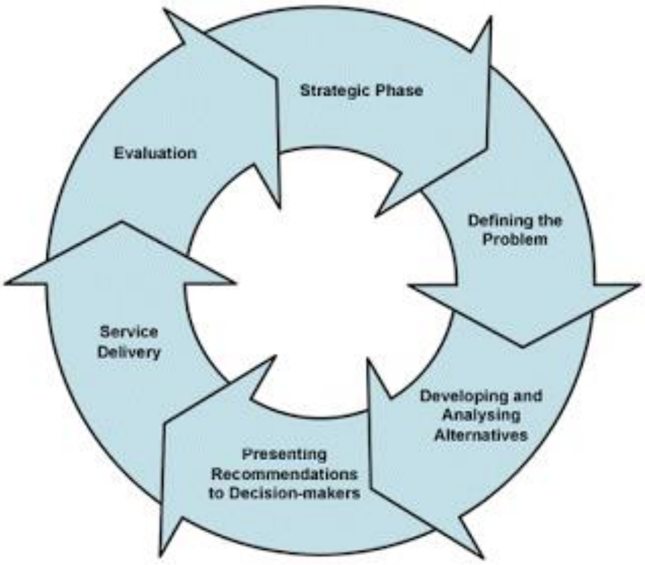
[4] Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation).

Figure 1: A traditional view of the policy-making process


Strategic Phase
Defining the Problem
Developing and Analysing Alternatives
Presenting Recommendations to Decision-makers
Service Delivery
Evaluation

This approach views policy-making as a multi-stage process:

- It assumes that policy-makers approach the issues rationally, going through each logical stage of the process and carefully considering all relevant information.
- It also assumes that there is a clear separation between fact (a rational policy approach based on evidence, science and objective knowledge) and value (seen as a separate issue, dealt with in the political process).
- If politics enter the fray, it is around decision-making (in the realm of value); implementation is an entirely technical procedure (in the realm of facts).
- The role of experts is seen as critical to the process of making rational decisions, and scientific expertise is presumed to be independent and objective. The familiar refrain is that of 'evidence-based policy' or policy rooted in 'sound science' (IDS, 2006).

In reality, however, the best that many can hope for is 'evidence-informed' (as opposed to evidence-based) policy, acknowledging the limited influence of scientific evidence when set alongside other socio-political factors, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Rather than a rational, linear model, a process-based view acknowledges the complex and messy processes by which policy is understood, formulated and implemented, and the range of actors involved.

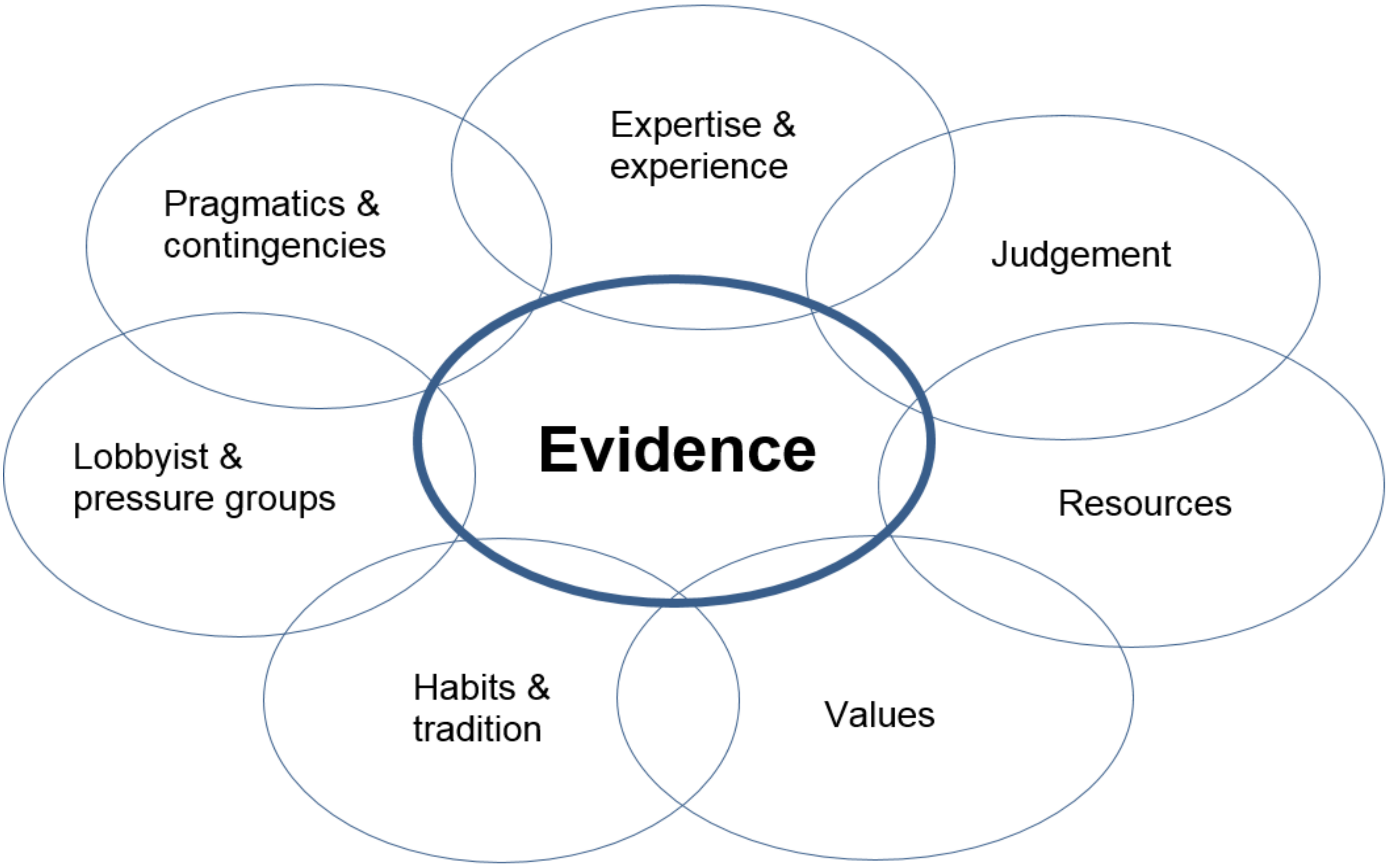
- Policy-making is seen to be an inherently political rather than analytical process; it is often incremental and iterative, and is often based on experimentation, learning from mistakes and taking corrective measures.
- Furthermore, there are always overlapping and competing agendas. There may not be complete agreement among stakeholders over what the really important policy problem is, and decisions are not discrete and technical: facts and values are intertwined, and value judgements play a major role (IDS, 2006).

It is essential therefore to consider factors other than the quality of evidence:

- Trust, politics, timing, cognitive or other forms of bias, self-interest and capacity are just a few of the potential individual and institutional barriers to research uptake and (dis)incentives for use of evidence in decision-making.
- It is also worth acknowledging that it is often tempting for policy-makers and researchers to 'cherry-pick' evidence to suit their political needs (as opposed to using the entire body of evidence to support truly informed decision-making). It is essential therefore to also consider complementary activities to build capacity among policy-makers and policy intermediaries to access, critically appraise, synthesise and use a broad range of evidence in their decision-making, rather than simply enhancing the one-way supply of evidence and reinforcing potential vacuums of critical debate and thinking.

For an excellent introductory reference that helps explain the complicated nature of policy-making processes and the potential contribution of research evidence within these, see Nutley et al. (2007).

Figure 2: Factors influencing policy-making in government



Source: Davies (2004)

Role of the media

Policy-making can be haphazard and driven by public perceptions of the internet as a dangerous place for children. As mentioned above, the early policy discourse, at least in Europe, was dominated by legitimate concerns about child safety online. Evidence from research, coupled with high-profile cases of sexual abuse and exploitation of children online, led to concerted efforts by policy-makers, children's organisations and UN bodies to curb such occurrences.

However, not all polices are driven by evidence and knowledge. Even though cases of child abuse online undoubtedly represent grave criminal offences, sensational media coverage sometimes leads to a public perception of the internet as a growing threat to children and a call for repressive action (UNICEF Innocenti, 2012).

boyd (2014) writes that adults are not always able to understand the positive and complex interactions between technology and young people, and that fear of new technology is a recurring phenomenon. This echoes the words of Critcher (quoted in Drotner & Livingstone, 2008), who claims that public concern about the risks of new technology dates back to the early 1900s and the advent of the public cinema, followed in 1950 by the television and in 1970 by computers. These fears have often been fuelled by moral panic discourses in the media that sometimes lead to public protests and calls to ban or regulate the use of technology, especially by children and young people.

Following this pattern, if media reports of cyberbullying on social networking sites are delivered in an alarming tone, this may instigate a moral panic that, in turn, may lead to calls for creation of new laws and policies that criminalise children's online behaviour. Indeed, a recent study analysing the media coverage of cyberbullying incidents in the US reveals the focus on prominent (and typically tragic) incidents that grab wide public attention (Milosevic, 2015).

Case study: Avoiding moral panics[5]

UNICEF Argentina has been nurturing its relationship with media for more than 15 years. They recently developed a network of journalists to promote democratic communication around issues related to children and adolescents. Journalists from every province in Argentina are involved in the network, and they receive training and information on how to cover issues related to children and adolescents, including sensitive topics. As, over the years, UNICEF Argentina noticed a number of problems with how the media covered issues related to children and technology, they established a monitoring system through contacts with journalists and a partnership with Ombudsmen for media, as well as the national authorities for Communications. These institutions have the power and are entitled to receive claims and mediate or issue warnings and advice on improving media coverage. UNICEF Argentina facilitates improvements in coverage by reaching out to media outlets, and offers guidance on how to cover issues around children and technology.

Studies that monitor the situation of online child abuse over time are extremely rare. However, analysis of internet-enabled and generated data can provide a glimpse into the real situation (at least when it comes to the internet traffic of images and texts) and could be used to help debunk or support media claims.[6]

Because media coverage of children's use of technology is often prominent in steering the public debate, it is important for researchers to pay careful attention to how their studies are reported in the media. Wood (2008) notes the importance of working together with journalists and the media to ensure that they understand the implications of research findings and report them fairly and accurately. This is particularly important when researching topics that might otherwise contribute to unfounded moral panics around the safety and well-being of children.

There are some excellent networks of science journalists who are trained to report on the nuances of scientific research, particularly in a development context. See, for example, SciDev.Net (www.scidev.net/global) and the World Federation of Science Journalists (www.wfsj.org), which have national and regional chapters. It is worth remembering that the audiences for research findings have competing interests: the media often seeks a human/public interest angle, policy-makers usually want to know what they need to do differently tomorrow, and researchers typically seek new insight or knowledge. Targeting communication for each audience is a challenging but important task.

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[5] Provided by Maria José Ravalli, UNICEF Argentina

[6] See, for example, the article by Wolak et al. (2014) about the 'Round Up' software to measure a year-long trafficking of child abuse images on the Gnutella peer-to peer network.

MAIN APPROACHES

A useful simple framework for understanding how evidence is incorporated into policy-making processes is provided by the Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) 'context, evidence and links' framework (also known as the RAPID – research and policy in development – framework). This provides a combination of several determining influences grouped into three areas:

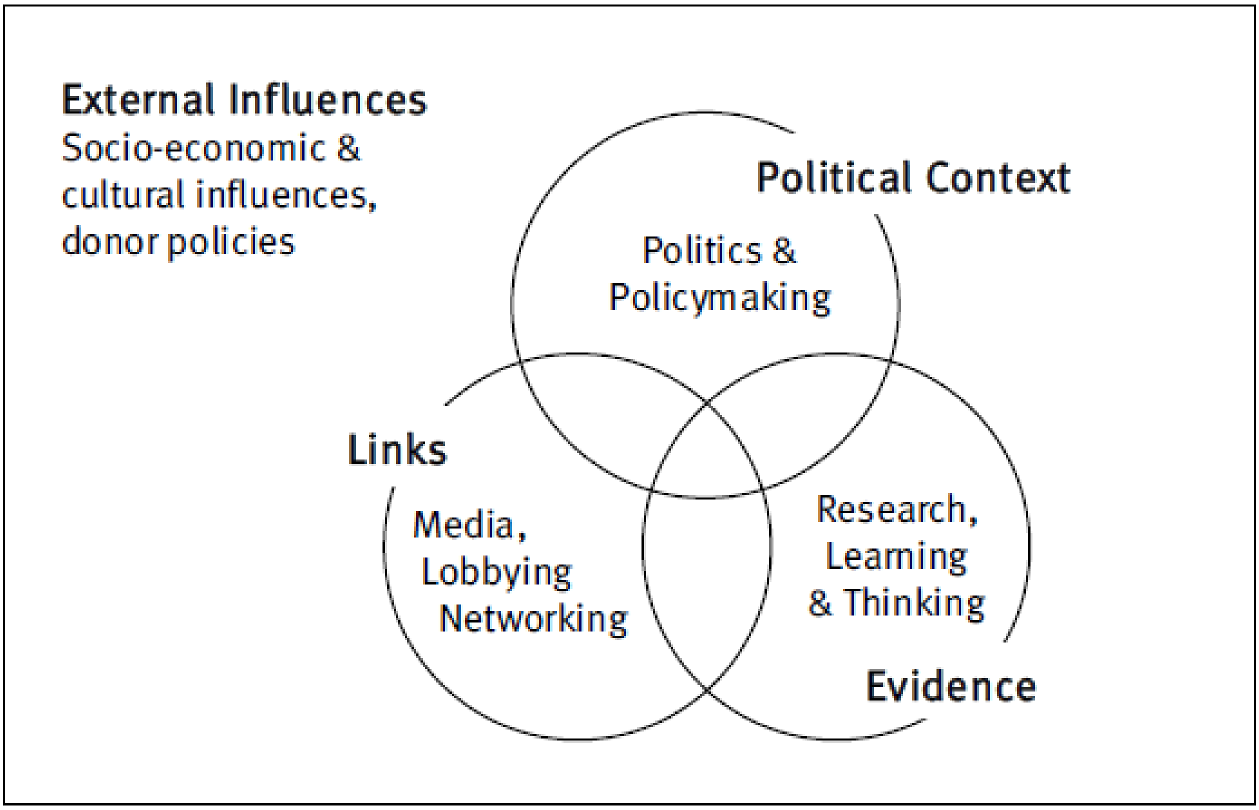
- Political context: political strategies, power relations and wider political context, the policy-making process, opportunities and timing, institutions and capacities.
- Evidence: credibility and communication, including the way evidence is generated and presented.
- Links: including key actors, policy networks, pressure points etc.

The centre of this diagram represents a holistic analysis of the enabling environment (external influences, evidence, links and an understanding of the broad political context). Here, it is possible to identify the specific content of existing policies in the areas you want to influence, the gaps in policy that your research may wish to address and the channels through which you intend to make this happen.

The same publication also provides a useful series of 28 key structured questions about the nature of the external environment, political context, evidence and links. This conceptual framework can help researchers and policy entrepreneurs to understand the role that evidence-based research plays, among other issues, in influencing policy.

The following sections provide more detail about the RAPID framework, summarising key points from the broader literature.

Figure 3: The 'context, evidence, links' (RAPID) framework


External Influences
Socio-economic & cultural influences, donor policies
Political Context
Politics & Policymaking
Links
Media, Lobbying Networking
Research, Learning & Thinking
Evidence

Source: ODI (2014)

Policy content and political context

Thinking at the outset what policy changes you want to initiate or contribute to

- This ‘agenda setting’ is the first phase of any research uptake process. In this case, it requires knowledge of the policy landscape and an understanding of children’s internet use, both in terms of general patterns and specifically in a given country. A useful framework applicable to children’s rights and the digital media is provided in *Towards a better internet for children: Policy pillars, players and paradoxes* (O’Neill et al., 2013).
- Policy objectives might include restricting illegal content; supporting users’ participation and creativity; encouraging parents and guardians to assume greater responsibility for mediating their children’s internet use; facilitating awareness-raising of risks and opportunities, policies on data protection and privacy online; or encouraging the adoption of ICT for education.
- It is important to remain open to the exploratory nature of research, which may take unanticipated directions and raise questions about intended policy objectives and processes (Livingstone, quoted in O’Neil et al., 2013). This openness is essential to prevent the retrofitting of evidence (whether intentionally or not) to meet advocacy requirements. Beware also of the danger of striving for a stated policy impact at any cost: remain open to what the emerging research findings are showing and how this may affect any theory of change[7] and advocacy messages.

How policy objectives fit into the broader context of different policies and goals

- It is essential to understand how your policy objectives relate to broader societal and political objectives and goals, and to position research findings in the wider body of evidence. In relation to children and digital technologies, these would include both overall ICT policies and child-related policies: the former include policies related to access and infrastructure, as access to ICT can be seen as a prerequisite of the realisation of other child rights on the internet.[8]
- Other policies to consider would include those related to research and development, including ICT training and education, trade policies for internet-related goods and services, protection of intellectual property, privacy and personal data and cybercrime.[9]
- Access to internet is not only linked to geography and infrastructure but also to cultural factors that promote or inhibit access to technology by groups that are marginalised in some societies (e.g., girls, children with disabilities, children from ethnic and minority groups). It is therefore important to take account of the broader national anti-discrimination measures and to examine to what extent they apply to the online domain.
- Other general child-related policies may include child welfare laws and policies, child rights action plans and strategies, and education and health policies. Understanding how children’s rights to participation are practised within national contexts is important to help analyse, frame and share the results of research on children’s civic engagement and participation. Are there any obstacles to freedom of expression? Are children generally enabled in society to voice their opinions on social

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[7] A ‘theory of change’ is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It is focused in particular on mapping out or ‘filling in’ what has been described as the ‘missing middle’ between what a programme or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goals being achieved. It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then works back from these to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place (and how these related to one another causally) for the goals to occur (see www.theoryofchange.org/).

[8] For more information see La Rue (2014).

[9] For more information see www.unescobkk.org/education/ict/themes/policy/guidelines/general-ict-policy-elements/

and political matters, and are their voices heard? Do decision-makers view these positively, and are there protection policies in place to safeguard children's anonymity and to protect them from harm by oppressive regimes?

- How research results are going to be communicated in public will depend on the political context: researchers need to be vigilant so that negative consequences (such as restrictive policies that infringe human rights) can be avoided where possible.

Understanding the political context

- This is a critical factor shaping the use of research findings. Weiss (1977) categorised the interactions between policy and practice into 'four I's': information, interests, ideologies and institutions.
- Political interests (both group and individual) and the system of ideological beliefs, and moral and ethical values that underpin policy-makers' actions, are important in determining the fate of policy intent. Even when evidence is credible and compelling, whether it will be used depends on the prevailing political and ideological climate. It is therefore essential that evidence is neutral and does not play to the interest of any political group or prevailing ideology. When it comes to children and the internet, if evidence contradicts popular beliefs that all children are in danger online, then convincing decision-makers otherwise may not always be easy.
- It is important to recognise the serendipitous nature of much successful policy influence in terms of 'right time; right place'. As far as possible, this should be controlled through judicious monitoring of likely policy windows and opportunities for influence, aligning with others to enhance your voice where possible.
- Timing is also critical from another point of view. It is important to ensure that your issues get on the agenda before any public statements by policy-makers tie themselves into irrevocable decisions or a firm policy stance, as being accused of 'cognitive dissonance' is still a major reputational risk for many policy-makers in the eyes of the public. Basic tools such as Political Economy Analysis can help structure thinking here.[10]
- Institutional frameworks, organisational culture, capacities, incentives and interests will also determine how and if evidence is used and by whom (i.e., at which level of the institution or organisation). While most textbooks show policy-making as a circular and logical process, it is in fact complex and often disorderly. Policy-makers' decisions are based on a number of factors including political constraints and opportunities (approaching elections, for example), administrative capacity, technical feasibility, time pressures and limited finances (Dhaliwal & Tulloch, 2012).

Case study: Fostering evidence-based policy-making in Brazil[11]

Producing relevant data to foster evidence-based policy-making in Brazil is one of the objectives of the Regional Center for Studies on the Development of the Information Society (Cetic.br). In this context, internationally established methodologies have been shown to be increasingly relevant, but other initiatives are needed in order to engage policy-makers and stakeholders. For this reason, each survey project carried out by Cetic.br relies on the methodological support of a group of experts such as representatives from government and international organisations, academia and civil society.

Through a multi-stakeholder approach, Cetic.br ensures that all phases of the data production process are rigorously tested, thus continuously improving methodological procedures for collecting relevant and reliable data. It also fosters dialogue among stakeholders when policy developments are being discussed, including the role of government and industry, such as in promoting and protecting rights for children online.

With an ever-increasing use of the internet among individuals in Brazil, for example, children have become a key target audience for advertising and online merchandising strategies. Concern about this issue grows as more sophisticated forms of marketing communication emerge.

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[10] http://www.gsdrc.org/topic-guides/political-economy-analysis/

[11] Provided by Cetic.br Brazil

In 2013, as a result of local stakeholders' needs, the Brazilian Kids Online survey, conducted by Cetic.br, expanded its initial objectives. The Ministry of Justice, through the National Consumer Bureau, requested specific indicators and data on the exposure of Brazilian children to advertising online. In this context, in addition to investigating how children access and use the internet, the survey started to monitor children's exposure to advertising online, following the demand from stakeholders.

Evidence (theories of change, evidence presentation and communication)

A good theory of change provides a structured framework and is a living tool to capture any necessary changes in logic or thinking which may occur (see Methodological Guide 1). A child rights framework offers a context for analysis of both opportunities and risks, and is a good starting point for such a theory of change. As previous Methodological Guides address the Global Kids Online (GKO) research design, methodology, comparative analysis etc., and we have talked in previous sections about the limitations of research evidence in policy-making processes, we simply highlight a few key messages on the presentation and communication of evidence (i.e., research findings) here:

- The starting point for any research communication activity has to be high-quality evidence that adds to the existing body of knowledge. For an excellent informal overview of the potential dangers of communicating bad science, see Goldacre (2009).
- Wherever possible, synthesise and present your results in the context of the wider body of evidence to minimise the 'cult of the expert'/'loudest voice syndrome', which can prejudice decision-making processes.
- It is essential to plan long-term strategic communications from the outset rather than only as findings start to emerge. We have already discussed many key concepts such as mapping and understanding the context in which you are trying to communicate, identifying key events and influencing opportunities to get your research on the agenda as well as potential allies from the outset. Social network analysis can also help identify important players and linkages among your target community.
- Such a communications strategy should incorporate the '5WH' principle (Who, What, Where, When, Why, How), and be adapted and updated as your research progresses. Tailor your output style, length and format to different audiences. Use easy-to-understand language and good data visualisation to make your research readable and interesting to non-specialist audiences.
- Put yourself in the shoes of a decision-maker. Ensure that the evidence presented takes account of the policy-making context, is obviously relevant and acknowledges contextual difficulties. Highlight key recommendations with suggested concrete actions where feasible, and indicate where the evidence is mixed or missing. Highlight where policies are working and where they are ineffective, and analyse why.
- Ensure that recommendations are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attributable, Realistic and Time-bound) to allow subsequent tracking and evaluation.
- Make use of social media and new online platforms and channels (to encourage immediate feedback and two-way interaction with your research) as well as traditional publishing in academic peer-reviewed journals (to contribute to the long-term global body of knowledge). It is important to understand what social media platforms are used in your country by researchers, policy-makers, advisers and different interest groups so that the right messages reach the right people.
- Wherever possible, keep your key stakeholders

> **"A good theory of change provides a structured framework and is a living tool to capture any necessary changes in logic or thinking which may occur."**

(identified at the outset) continuously engaged with the progress of your research rather than expecting them to have an interest in new findings over which they have little ownership at the end of your research.

- Build the skills of researchers to interpret and communicate findings from their research from the outset, focusing on two-way engagement. Think about what skills will be needed on your research team to effectively present the findings and communicate them to broad audiences to stimulate debate and engagement. Recognise the unique skills of professional communicators, but also the importance of credibility that academics can bring.

An excellent source of practical guides on understanding audiences, developing a communications strategy and presenting your research can be found at The Global Guide to Research Impact (www.researchtoaction.org/).

Links and networks

Successful research to policy processes also requires knowledge about the main actors in your particular field. When it comes to key players, it is important to identify and mobilise a wide group of policy-makers, influencers and advocates in support of your objectives.

> **"Successful research to policy processes requires knowledge about the main actors in your particular field."**

Build the critical appraisal skills of those you want to influence

It is vital not only to understand clearly the objectives of the research yourself, but also to build the critical appraisal skills of policy-makers and influential intermediaries (such as Parliament and its associated committees, civil servants, special advisers, librarians etc.) so that they understand and can appraise research evidence objectively. You can do this by collaborating with others to help ensure a receptive enabling environment for evidence-informed policy-making.

Some policy-makers react strongly to the mention of certain risks that sound harmful, but where there is not enough solid evidence to support either the claims of harm or the efficacy of proposed interventions. An example of this is the discourse on internet addiction, for which restrictions to children's computer access are sometimes proposed as a solution (Kardefelt-Winther, 2015). However, there is little evidence that restrictions would solve the underlying problem that causes internet addiction, and such restrictions could reduce children's opportunities to learn, communicate and improve digital literacy and skills (Livingstone et al., 2011; Smahel et al., 2012).

Make best possible use of existing intermediaries and networks

There are likely to be other actors with existing or potential interests similar to your own. Parliamentarians, journalists, parent forums, interested children, gaming communities etc. can be powerful allies. Help them to understand findings accurately and to debate findings with others or communicate them in reports or through stories to spread the word about your research and policy goals. Holding workshops to bring different stakeholders together to understand each other's needs and constraints can also be powerful, so long as the objectives of such activities are clear from the outset.

> **"Identify allies and champions as well as possible blockers through stakeholder engagement and co-ownership from the outset."**

Do your homework to identify 'champions' and 'blockers'

Identify allies and champions as well as possible blockers through stakeholder engagement and co-ownership from the outset. This helps identify the needs and demands of these stakeholders, which can be used to effectively guide communication of findings and target policy-makers accordingly. For example, parents can be helpful allies by demanding better content for their children, expressing the need for built-in safety features in mobile devices and apps or parental control features that are provided by internet service providers (ISPs). This explicitly points to certain policy interventions that one can leverage, here targeted at the industry.

Blockers can sometimes appear in unexpected groups such as human rights activists who believe that remedial measures that deal with child abuse online (such as removal of child sexual abuse material) clash with human rights and freedom of expression of other users. Identify trusted sources of information (people or products) for your target audience and set out to influence their opinion or content. Examples of simple tools to facilitate analysis in a structured manner include ODI's Alignment, Influence and Interest Matrix [12], Force Field Analysis[13] or Social Network Analysis[14].

> **"Do your best to ensure coordination of different ministries, departments and independent bodies."**

Try to facilitate joined-up thinking

Do your best to ensure coordination of different ministries, departments and independent bodies (education, ICT policies, child protection and child welfare, home affairs, ombudspersons and the ICT industry), as each is likely to emphasise the importance of one aspect of children's internet use over the other. In this context, also ensure that a focus on risk does not overtake the focus on opportunities, as children have a right to provision and participation as much as they have a right to protection.

Case study: Multi-stakeholder approach[15]

At the start of the GKO project in Argentina, the team from UNICEF Argentina initiated a dialogue with the government by sharing the prospective idea of a survey as well as previous results from research on children's use of technology. They also hosted individual meetings with stakeholders, relevant ministries and the private sector. Once the results were released, UNICEF Argentina hosted a number of roundtable discussions with representatives from academia, relevant ministries or bodies involved in policies around ICTs and the private sector. Following the roundtable meetings, individual meetings were also hosted.

Through this multi-stakeholder approach, the uptake from the research process has been promising. Following the release of the Argentina Kids Online report, UNICEF was invited to participate and provide input into the new Convergent Communications Law currently being deliberated in government, and was also invited to participate in the Commission of Children and Communication. They are involved in the promotion of more and better training and resources for teachers on digital citizenship; UNICEF's team is currently developing a curriculum for teachers/protection officers, parents and children in the largest province in the country. They are also developing guidelines for the media on how to cover issues related to children's use of technology.

The main challenge in terms of outreach observed by the team in Argentina was how to harmonise and integrate different internal public policies. As is the case in many countries, different policies are implemented by different ministries at the same time (e.g., the Ministry of Education may be promoting access to internet in schools, while the Ministry for Communication and Modernisation is promoting access to the internet in rural communities), so there is a need to harmonise the different policies and to make sure that the ministries and bodies involved work together. This is an ongoing process in which UNICEF Argentina plays a key role.

Monitoring the impact of your research

Monitoring and evaluating the influence of research uptake activities is still an emerging science, but it should aim to go beyond publication statistics, citation analysis and other bibliometrics. That said, it is acknowledged that assessing research outcomes and impact is difficult because of issues such as:

- intended/unintended/positive/negative impacts;

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[12] www.odi.org/publications/5288-stakeholder-engagement-stakeholder-analysis-aiim-alignment-interest-influence-matrix-roma

[13] www.odi.org/publications/5218-force-field-analysis-decision-maker

[14] www.odi.org/publications/5210-social-network-analysis-networks

[15] Provided by: Maria José Ravalli, UNICEF Argentina

- whether proof of direct contribution or generic attribution is good enough;
- the usual time lag between research production and any form of impact;
- the fact that research is by its very nature experimental, and as such, high ‘failure rates’ should be expected;
- the tendency for researchers to over-estimate the importance of their own research;
- the general lack of agreement between research funders on how to assess research impact;
- the limits of research influence in setting policy;
- the nature of policy processes (real-world factors such as power, networks, budgeting concerns etc.) and the serendipity factor of research uptake, to name just a few.

Defining research impact

At UNICEF’s Office of Research - Innocenti, research impact is defined in a holistic manner, seeking contribution rather than attribution. Impact is conceptualised in four ways:

Academic: contributing to the long-term scientific evidence base through publishing high-quality, relevant research in peer-reviewed books, journals and other relevant forums.

Conceptual: influencing discourse, debate and dialogue among key stakeholders (academics, policy-makers, NGOs, media) to affect their knowledge, understanding and attitudes both on- and offline.

Capacity building: building the capacity of Southern researchers to engage in research design, analysis and implementation in focus countries, to engage in new practice and policy development processes, and to enhance their international profile.

Instrumental: being able to demonstrate a plausible contribution to changes in policies, programmes and practice in focal countries and within UNICEF as well as more general broader impact pathways.

Morton’s new Research Contributions Framework (RCF) (2015) (a case study approach based on Contribution Analysis) may be an interesting new tool to explore (see Figure 4). It has at its heart the notion that the process through which research is conducted, communicated and taken up is as important as final utilisation in assessing impact. It acknowledges the importance of networks and of research impact as a process involving many actors interacting over time. As such, it may prove one way of assessing outcome or influence, even before formal outputs are produced, and it also helps to provide an academic framework to recognise forms of research impact beyond policy and academic impact.

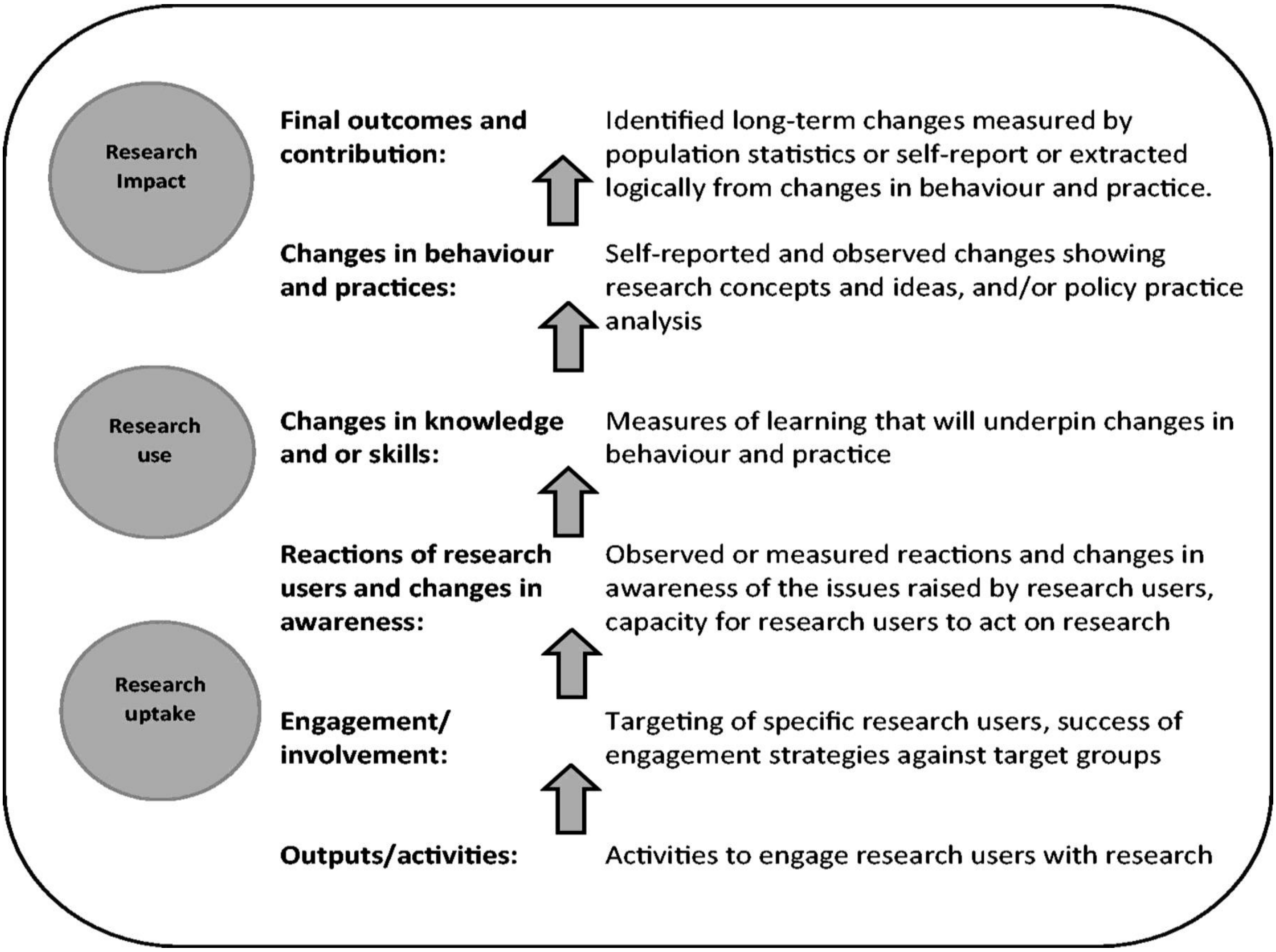
> **“Monitoring and evaluating the influence of research uptake activities is still an emerging science, but it should aim to go beyond publication statistics, citation analysis and other bibliometrics.”**

Another potential tool to help track the impact of your research is Altmetrics, a new tool that claims to capture the way in which different users interact with digital content in today’s social web. Altmetrics argues that analysis should extend beyond traditional academic citation to capture alternative sources of potential impact, including discussion in social media or news media (such as science blogs, Wikipedia, Facebook and Twitter); being saved in social bookmarks (such as Mendeley) as an indication of utility; being recommended, for example, used by F1000Prime (post-publication peer review endorsements); or being cited in the scholarly literature tracked by Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar and others. Such alternative metrics are still in their infancy and may be open to criticism, in particular that they show influence or engagement rather than any longer-term impact on the progress of science (see http://altmetrics.org/manifesto/).

LSE’s ‘Impact Blog’ may provide additional insights into how best to capture the impact of your research (see http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/).

Whichever tool or method you choose, the fact remains that it is important to track the impact of your research beyond academic citation, and to assess its impact on policy and practice in the real world.

Figure 4: Sarah Morton's Research Contributions Framework (2015)



Final outcomes and contribution:	Identified long-term changes measured by population statistics or self-report or extracted logically from changes in behaviour and practice.
Changes in behaviour and practices:	Self-reported and observed changes showing research concepts and ideas, and/or policy practice analysis
Changes in knowledge and or skills:	Measures of learning that will underpin changes in behaviour and practice
Reactions of research users and changes in awareness:	Observed or measured reactions and changes in awareness of the issues raised by research users, capacity for research users to act on research
Engagement/ involvement:	Targeting of specific research users, success of engagement strategies against target groups
Outputs/activities:	Activities to engage research users with research

USEFUL ONLINE RESOURCES

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CHECKLIST

(Adapted from DFID Research uptake: A guide for DFID-funded research programmes)

Question	Yes/No	Comments
Stakeholder engagement		
Is there a plan to map relevant stakeholders?		
Are there plans for ongoing engagement with stakeholders throughout the programme?		
Are there plans to facilitate evidence-informed discussions?		
Are you considering how stakeholders might help disseminate your findings?		
Policy content and political context		
Have you considered what policy changes you want to contribute to?		
Do you understand how policy objectives fit into broader political and policy agendas?		
Are there any political or ideological challenges to uptake of your findings?		

Evidence		
Are there plans to carry out research synthesis during the inception phase and/or later?		
Are you building the skills of your researchers to communicate findings to the media and the public?		
Are you building the skills of policy-makers and their intermediaries to understand and engage with your research evidence through joint workshops, training or other activities?		
Are there plans to carry out research synthesis during the inception phase and/or later?		
Communicating		
Is research uptake appropriately reflected in the logframe/other project documentation?		
Is there a strategy for gathering and recording data on research uptake?		
Is there an appropriate evaluation strategy?		
Are sufficient resources allocated to ongoing monitoring?		