2nd Annual Workshop on Research Impact: Research Translation

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<tr>
<td>AIPI</td>
<td>Indonesian Academy of Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>APRU</td>
<td>Association of Pacific Rim Universities</td>
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<td>CDR</td>
<td>Center for Development Research</td>
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<td>CIHR</td>
<td>Canadian Institutes of Health Research</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organization</td>
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<td>UNESCAP</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
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Foreword

The international development community uses scientific research to improve development outcomes around the world. As investment in research continues, it is critical that we, as development funders and practitioners, employ the latest evidence to improve policy and practice. To do so, we must build deep, mutually beneficial collaborations between researchers, program implementers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), other donors, and policymakers to address systemic barriers that limit the potential impact of research and innovation.

To advance these goals, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched an annual series of joint workshops in 2018. These workshops focus increasing the impact of research and innovation, bridging the knowledge to policy gap, and building mutually beneficial partnerships. For our second joint meeting, held in Bangkok, Thailand in October 2019, we gathered a diverse group of academics, policy makers, funders, and NGOs from South and Southeast Asia to share good practices for research translation. The workshop benefited from collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP).

Why the focus on research translation? Until we close the gaps between knowledge, policy, and practice, the world will face the same, seemingly intractable problems, among them poverty, food insecurity, preventable disease, educational inequity, and environmental degradation. To address these challenges, we must apply the latest knowledge and cutting-edge research. Research translation ensures decision-makers, practitioners, and communities have access to the latest evidence and understand how to use it to benefit their people. Through this workshop, we sought to enhance the capacity of university-based researchers, policymakers, NGOs, and other development stakeholders in South and Southeast Asia to translate research into policy recommendations and tangible programming.

This report outlines the importance of research translation, summarizes key discussions from the workshop, and provides recommendations for action based on the experience of participants. We hope it will contribute to knowledge about research translation and will be used by those seeking to improve their ability to effectively translate research to social impact.

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I. Introduction

Background

The U.S. Global Development Lab is a bureau of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that “seeks to increase the application of science, technology, innovation, and partnerships to accelerate the Agency’s development impact in helping to end extreme poverty and promote inclusive economic growth.” The Lab is composed of four centers and three offices. The Center for Development Research (CDR) is one of these centers and focuses on increasing the use of scientific research to improve policy and programming decisions and, ultimately, development outcomes.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is an agency that invests in science and research in the United Kingdom. It is funded through the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and brings together seven Research Councils, Innovate UK, and Research England. Its mission is “to work with partners to ensure that world-leading research and innovation continues to grow and flourish in the UK.” UKRI strives to connect researchers and innovators with users and the public and to maximize the impact for citizens in the UK and the world.

The CDR has an ongoing relationship with UKRI to facilitate the mutual goal of increasing the impact of research as it is translated to policy and practice. In October 2018, the CDR joined with UKRI in planning and hosting a regional workshop in Panama City, Panama on measuring research impact. This first joint workshop brought together approximately 40 researchers, policymakers, donors, and NGOs to discuss the limitations of and best practices for measuring the impact of research. For both agencies, the workshop enhanced understanding of the challenges different stakeholders face and made clear the impossibility of employing a single model to measure research impact. The discussions also revealed the importance of understanding the impact of research use and that clarified for participants that the term “impact” has multiple meanings, depending on the nature of the research activity (UKRI and USAID, 2019).

In early 2019, USAID commissioned NORC’s Research Technical Assistance Center (RTAC) to organize the 2nd Annual Joint Meeting on Research Impact, with a focus on research translation. For this meeting, UKRI and USAID partnered with UNESCAP, which generates analytical products and provides technical assistance, capacity building, and policy advisory services to support regional development.

The objective of the workshop was to enhance the capacity of university-based researchers, policymakers, NGOs, and other development stakeholders in the South and Southeast Asian region to translate research into programming and policy by creating a space among participants for cross-learning and exchange.

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1 https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/organization/bureaus/us-global-development-lab
2 https://www.ukri.org/about-us/
3 https://www.unescap.org/about
4 “Policy” is to be understood as: 1) high-level government policy; 2) general policy advocacy targeting decision influencers; and/or 3) government programming.
The specific goals of the workshop were to:

1. Strengthen the capacity of researchers and development actors to translate research into action in South and Southeast Asia, with a focus on Indonesia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal.
2. Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and exchange.
3. Create an opportunity for participants to troubleshoot challenges and identify opportunities for effective research translation.

The workshop took place October 21 to 22, 2019 at the USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia Training Center in Bangkok, Thailand.

**Importance of Research Translation**

Research translation is the process by which evidence acquired from research is used to inform the work of policymakers, practitioners, and other research. As defined by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) it includes the synthesis, dissemination, exchange, and ethical application of knowledge (information, evidence, and/or discoveries) between researchers and users (CIHR 2012). In our literature review in preparation for this workshop, we identified a framework for research translation developed by CIHR that was especially useful. The framework describes knowledge translation as a nonlinear process that plays a key role at each stage of a research initiative, from its design to the communication of findings. This framework is presented in Annexes 1 and 2.

The knowledge to practice gap describes a disparity between research findings and their application, in other words between what we know and what is being done. Research translation is how we bridge the gap (Hirschkorn and Geelan 2008). This gap is a serious challenge for practitioners in many fields. For example, in medicine, practices not based on the most current research can have life-threatening consequences. Development researchers and practitioners face similar challenges. Programs and policies uninformed by evidence risk being ineffective or having negative impacts that worsen development outcomes. Research activities that fail to take into account the perspectives of potential users in their design risk being irrelevant to the realities, needs, and priorities of the sector (Glasgow and Emmons 2007). In the social development space, programming can have a tremendously positive impact on the health, education, and livelihoods of vulnerable and marginalized populations worldwide, which is why it is crucial to leverage knowledge and evidence generated through research grounded in the perspective of users to inform these activities.

**Key themes from the literature review**

In preparation for the workshop, the organizing team reviewed relevant literature to identify key challenges and opportunities for translating research into impactful development programming and policy. The team began the review using search terms related to research translation, knowledge translation, and implementation science. Terms like research impact, research to action, research policy gap, research uptake, and evidence-based policymaking were added to the overall literature search to broaden results. All search terms were combined with the names of countries where workshop

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5 Research translation and knowledge translation are used interchangeably in this document.
participants were likely to be based: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. The team ultimately reviewed 110 documents including journal articles and grey literature available in the English language.

The review indicates that published literature related to research translation in the region is more prevalent in the fields of medicine, health, and education, with limited literature (available in English) available even in these fields. A few systematic reviews focused on research use have been published by researchers in Cambodia and Bangladesh, which highlight factors and challenges influencing research translation, but there is an evidence gap when it comes to regional trends in research translation.

The literature review identified some publications that attempt to define and analyze research translation and/or to provide frameworks for it. These frameworks tend to focus on links between research and policy, the importance of packaging evidence in a manner accessible to the target audience, interactions and power dynamics between stakeholders, and the presence of external factors that influence research translation.

Several key themes and factors related to the use of research for policy, programming, and practice in the region were identified during the review. Contextual factors such as investment in research capabilities, development priorities, research priorities, availability of spaces and channels for communication and cross learning, and general institutional and political context are important in the demand for research, the value assigned to it, and its subsequent use in decision making. Frameworks and resources available to researchers, knowledge producers, and users support reflection processes that can result in changes in practice by those groups.

Four overarching themes emerged as relevant for research translation in the region: Institutional characteristics, donor influence, the availability and accessibility of research, and linkages between research producers and users. The review found that institutional challenges perpetuated by complex political histories and intricate decision-making environments often inhibit the use of research in decision making in Southeast Asia. Using accessible language and packaging research findings in formats that are more attractive to users is a key component of successful research translation in the region. Dissemination workshops also allow users and researchers to collaborate, ask questions, and inspire the next set of research questions. As donors continue to fund research activities, they have the opportunity to require research products and activities that employ such techniques. Think tanks can also play an intermediary role between users and producers.

**Workshop design**

Based on the review, the following topics were suggested for the joint USAID, UKRI, UNESCAP workshop:

- Setting the context by reviewing basic concepts and a general framework for understanding research translation.

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**Key Themes Identified by the Literature Review**

**Theme 1: Institutional characteristics influence research translation**

**Theme 2: Dependency on donors affects research produced and used as well as policy and research agendas**

**Theme 3: Availability and accessibility of knowledge**

**Theme 4: Linkages between users and between researchers and users**
• Exploring research translation within the South and Southeast Asia context, including specific challenges and opportunities.

• Discussing how to create an enabling environment to increase demand for research and identify windows of opportunity to promote research uptake.

• Creating a forum for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in South and Southeast Asia to share insights, experiences, and recommendations.

• Applying specific tools for stakeholder mapping and identifying key audiences.

• Reviewing the tools and challenges for communicating and packaging research findings in more effective ways to reach key audiences.

• Learning how to communicate research to impact policymaking and program development in South and Southeast Asia.

These topics were then classified by broad categories, which were proposed as foundations for development of the agenda. After further consultations with USAID, UKRI, and UNESCAP staff, RTAC developed the final agenda and the workshop structure. NORC also prepared resource documents (Annex 2) shared with participants to provide additional information on each of the topics covered.

The two day workshop was divided into plenary and breakout sessions and was designed to maximize interactivity and peer-to-peer learning and exchange. The different sessions often included a combination of a presentation provided by a trainer or a featured speaker and a group-based activity that prompted participants to engage in two different types of groups: one multidisciplinary formed by individuals from the same country and one technical-sector made up of participants from different countries.

Workshop participants shared their experiences in research translation and provided diverse overviews of regional contexts and experiences. Speakers represented all countries, technical sectors, and type of participants attending the workshop.
2. The Workshop

A total of 75 participants attended the workshop, excluding organizers, conveners, and other USAID staff. Participants joined from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the U.K., and Vietnam (see Annex 3 for a list of featured speakers).

Women and men were equally represented among participants. In the technical sector, participants worked in agriculture, economics, environment, health, infrastructure, policy, and social development.

About 47 percent of participants were university staff (researchers, professors, other). The rest of the participants included government representatives and staff from NGOs, think tanks, and USAID (Figure 1).

Overall, participants were well balanced between technical sectors, country expertise, and type of stakeholder. Across different group-based activities, participants were divided into nine groups with up to ten participants in each.

3. Setting the Context: Research Translation in South and Southeast Asia

What is research translation and why is it important?

Definitions and Framework

The workshop opened with an overview of research translation and its importance in development policymaking. First, participants provided their understanding of research translation terminology and concepts. Many were familiar with the use of research in decision-making and were also aware of the potential impact of research on communities. Second, presenters offered an overview of concepts and frameworks typically associated with research translation.

The focus on impact on the part of participants was understandable. Researchers and policymakers alike want to see their work result in improved development outcomes. Part of the goal of the workshop was to equip policymakers and researchers with tools to generate and/or increase impact. For this reason, we chose to present a definition centered on process: “Research translation is the process by which
research findings are taken up by users (policymakers, practitioners, or other researchers) and appropriately used to inform practice, policy, or further research." In presenting this definition, we also emphasized that research translation should not be viewed as a unidirectional process. It also involves the translation of policy priorities and evidence gaps into actionable agendas that researchers are empowered to address.

We chose to present a framework that would provide insight into when and how participants might practically engage in the research translation process. The framework (displayed in Annex 1), developed by CIHR, focuses on six key opportunities throughout the research cycle where strategic communication and partnerships can facilitate effective knowledge translation. A simplified version of the CIHR framework is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Simplified Research Translation Framework**

![Figure 2]

According to the CIHR Framework, research translation is possible at all stages of research, enhancing communication, cross-learning, and exchanges between research users and producers. At the research planning stage researchers and research users can collaborate to identify relevant research questions, priorities, and appropriate methods for systematic and robust approaches. Further engagement and/or collaboration is possible to implement research and analyze results. Lastly, identification of best formats to package knowledge generated is crucial to ensure results are accessible, relevant, and useful to diverse stakeholders and help inform subsequent research needs or priorities.

**Breakout Session: Where Do You Fit in the Research Cycle?**

Using the simplified version of the CIHR Framework, each person assessed the stage of the research process in which he or she is involved and their role in that process.

As expected, most researchers identified themselves as more involved in the first four stages in the cycle, while policymakers tended to be more involved in the later stages.

One general takeaway across group discussions was that participants felt isolated in their roles. In particular, development practitioners in one of the Nepal working groups felt less involved in the identification of research questions and methods and...
of the research process than they would like. This aligned with findings from the desk review, which found that the lack of involvement by research users in the development of research questions and methodologies can create a gap in understanding between producers and users.

In one Indonesia group, the facilitator noted few practitioners identifying themselves as involved early in the research process. Another participant, self-identified as practitioner, suggested this was because practitioners view their work (in public health) as too urgent to wait for trials and studies and that a more rapid mechanism to generate evidence is of more use to them. This group’s facilitator also posed the open-ended question, “What is impact?” One participant, a researcher, said evidence generated by research itself should be considered an impact. Others argued that evidence only has impact if it has led to a change in behavior or policy.

Factors influencing research translation in South and Southeast Asia

After breakout sessions concluded, participants reconvened in the plenary session, where a panel of four participants representing Bangladesh, the Philippines, Australia, and Cambodia spoke on the challenges of translating research to impact in the Southeast Asian context. Grace Santos, Director of the Universities and Councils Network for Innovation for Inclusive Development in Southeast Asia, focused on two key questions she considers when thinking about research translation: “For whom are we doing research?” and “Who gains from the research?” She emphasized the importance of inclusive research, which values “base of the pyramid” stakeholders as highly valuable sources of data and knowledge. She presented examples of policymakers working with marginalized populations to develop locally specific and replicable interventions: 1) Malaysia’s Community Innovation Fund, and 2) the Philippines Innovation Act. Both engagements are focused on building trust, competence, and confidence to deliver effective, evidence-based policies.

Haseeb Irfanullah, Visiting Fellow at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, presented on the strong university research ecosystem in Bangladesh. Employing a series of case studies focused on media coverage of
research, Irfanullah asserted that if research demonstrates benefits or positive changes, it is likely to receive the attention of policymakers and media. He noted, sensational research is more likely to be picked up by the media, such as the presence of potential hazardous antibiotics in popular brands of packaged milk. Chandarany Ouch, a Senior Program Manager at the Australian Embassy, focused on contextual factors for research translation. In particular, she spoke about the strong influence government priorities have on research agendas in Cambodia. She also highlighted a positive trend in Cambodia of policymakers doing more proactive outreach to researchers to define research agendas.

**Challenges for research translation**

The presentations and the subsequent question and answer session revealed unique challenges and opportunities for research translation in the South and Southeast Asian context. One challenge familiar to most researchers—and not unique to the region—is pressure from donors to complete research in short time frames. While time-limited projects make effective research more challenging, donors at the meeting said this model is unlikely to change, so it is crucial for researchers and policymakers to work closely in the design stage to set expectations and identify potential obstacles that might impact the timeline. There are opportunities for donors to make changes. However, while donors in South and Southeast Asia predominantly rely on researchers to facilitate relationships with policymakers, it was suggested that dedicated knowledge brokers could bridge the “know-do” gap.

Dr. Irfanullah’s insights about Bangladeshi media coverage of research highlight the challenges of getting attention for research that some may consider mundane or negative. This highlights the importance of developing feasible dissemination strategies that consider the interests and motivations of the target audience. The capacity of local research organizations was also one of the most frequently discussed challenges for research translation in South and Southeast Asia. Independent organizations generally feel they lack space to operate or grow, as universities already have strong relationships with funders and policymakers. Policymakers also tend to be skeptical of research results, particularly when the topic, data, and/or results are highly technical. Working to bolster researchers’ communication skills while concurrently acting to build the capacity of policymakers to understand and use research evidence could build trust and collaboration between the two and subsequently increase research translation.

Photo credit: Anthony Sperber/USAID
4. Identifying Opportunities for Impact

The second day of the workshop focused on addressing the challenges of translating research into action within complex sociopolitical contexts. Presentations by Stephanie Perlson and Ton van der Velden of Population Reference Bureau emphasized that doing so requires strategically identifying and leveraging windows of opportunity. A window of opportunity begins to open up when a problem is identified and defined, when feasible solutions exist, and when political actors have some interest or commitment to take action (see Figure 3). The Indonesian Academy of Sciences (AIPI) provided a presentation on its work to promote maternal and neonatal health, demonstrating how one entity successfully leveraged a window of opportunity. Established in 1990 by the government of Indonesia, AIPI is an independent body of elected Indonesian scientists who advise the government and the public on matters related to social, natural, and medical sciences as well as engineering, arts, and culture. Not only does AIPI promote the use of science through publications, but it also holds scientific conferences and policy discussion forums to allow diverse stakeholders to convene and exchange ideas.
Defining Problems

According to the framing presentation by the Population Reference Bureau, the first step in defining a problem requires recognition of an issue as problematic and conviction that it can be changed. Participants discussed issues they believed should be prioritized by policymakers. For example, although many environmental researchers believe climate change has detrimental effects on health and the environment, some policymakers don’t recognize climate change as a problem. Another example cited was the movement of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh. Since global funding for Rohingya refugees has dramatically increased, the standard of living in refugee camps has substantially improved. This, in turn, has resulted in conflict with Bangladeshis living in peripheral villages. However, policymakers and funders have yet to recognize this as a growing issue, or at least have yet to respond in a manner proportional to the crisis.

Some participants lamented that some policymakers listen to voters and public opinion more than researchers. Stakeholders working in the agriculture sector discussed how competition for funding between those focused on land issues and water issues often forces policymakers to prioritize one over the other. In Indonesia, despite advances in health care and human health research, maternal and neonatal mortality remain relatively high. Both AIPI and USAID cited a dearth of research on the issue in Indonesia, a lack of centralized location for existing data on causes and recommended interventions, and sparse collaboration among stakeholders.

Proposing Solutions

Discussions around proposing solutions demonstrated an alignment between many stakeholders across sectors and countries. Policymakers prefer practical and relevant recommendations. For example, Cambodian policymakers are increasingly seeking case studies that present evidence, along with models that have successfully integrated practical solutions to inform decision making. Solutions should be sensible, cost-effective, feasible, politically palatable, and relevant to the problem at hand.

In its presentation, AIPI described feasible and achievable solutions identified in their work throughout Indonesia. AIPI brought clinicians and researchers together and collected and centralized scientific information on maternal and neonatal health.

Figure 3. Identifying Windows of Opportunity

Source: Population Reference Bureau
mortality in Indonesia, outlined gaps and areas for further research, engaged a diverse set of stakeholders, who in turn provided further evidence and engaged in policy dialogue, and derived short-term and mid-term solutions.

**Politics and the Political Environment**

Participants confirmed that decision-making environments of countries in South and Southeast Asia are complex, often neither linear nor transparent. Furthermore, the demand and use of evidence varies by sector and by country. Both knowledge producers and users asserted they work in stakeholder-dense environments with various donors, think tanks, and research institutions, and far too often, everyone works in silos. For example, in Indonesia, where there are over 17,000 islands with hundreds of distinct ethnic and linguistic groups, participants asserted there is little collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners when formulating policy. In the health sector, AIPI noticed a lack of collaboration among stakeholders working in maternal and neonatal health. Part of the problem resulted from a lack of a central location to store and curate country-specific data and information. This impeded policymakers from easily accessing information. The absence of a platform for stakeholder engagement led AIPI to conduct stakeholder mappings and hold an evidence summit that brought together many stakeholders, including representatives from all eleven Indonesian political parties. These efforts helped the Ministry of Health propose and pass two new policies to promote maternal and neonatal health.

Through discussions and presentations, it became clear that participants saw conferences, workshops, and meetings as major windows of opportunity. They allow researchers to draw attention to a cause while learning about incentives and constraints faced by policymakers. At the same time, policymakers are able to gather additional information, hear different perspectives, and in many cases, gather answers regarding technical methodology.

**Identifying, understanding, and engaging relevant stakeholders**

Ideally, stakeholder identification should occur at the start of the research cycle. This ensures accurate identification of potential end-users and understanding of the incentives and constraints of stakeholders’ decision-making environments, as well as how best to communicate with them. Not only should one identify people, groups, and institutions that may positively influence research-uptake, it is also important to identify those who may hinder the process. Additionally, it is important to identify primary stakeholders with direct influence to create change and secondary stakeholders, who may indirectly influence primary stakeholders or policy decisions. In Cambodia, for example, it is often difficult to gain access to high-level policymakers, making it essential to identify and engage with secondary stakeholders to facilitate change.
While some participants believed stakeholder engagement should occur throughout the entire research cycle, others believed the time to engage with stakeholders depends on the type of research being conducted and the nature of decision-making in that sector. Some said policymakers can be a hindrance if they are engaged too early in the research process, before ideas, plans, and methodologies are fully refined. Regardless, stakeholder identification should be the initial step of a research project, as it provides context to choose who to engage and when to engage them, based on prevailing social, cultural, and political conditions.

Best practices for stakeholder engagement was a topic of interest at the workshop. With policymakers, funders, and other high-level stakeholders inundated with requests and information, it is imperative that research, recommendations, and proposed solutions be interesting and accessible. Many researchers asserted it is imperative to understand the decision-making environments of policymakers and practitioners before engagement in order to propose feasible solutions. Furthermore, policymakers and practitioners often want to know about data quality. Transparency and academic rigor by the researcher help build confidence in the results, as well as trust between researchers and policymakers, improving the likelihood of research translation.

The importance of good communications

Strategic communication can help decision-makers understand and apply evidence to inform programs and policies. Endorsement or involvement in a study by high-level policymakers substantially promotes research uptake. For example, in 2017 the Prime Minister of Bangladesh endorsed the USAID-funded Country Investment Plan for Environment, Forestry, and Climate Change, a body of research that identified 281 priority areas for investment. Once endorsed, the plan became the key guiding document used by the government to develop future policy documents and recommendations.

Asking the following questions will help during development of a strategic communication plan:

1. Who is your audience?
2. What are your communication objectives?
3. What are your key messages?
4. How can you convey these messages in accessible language?
5. What is the best format for your content that results in target audience exposure?
6. How, when, and where will you disseminate the information?

Many agreed that research needs to be written concisely. Participants understood the value of memos, policy briefs, and data visualizations to summarize information; however, one researcher posed the
question to the group “Are we asking researchers to do too much?”, and others agreed that this should be a valid concern. It became evident that some researchers believed their role was in the technical space—to ask questions, define methodologies, and deliver results. Researchers may lack skills in data visualizations, design, and policy-writing, as these disciplines lie outside their area of expertise. This highlights an important gap in the research translation infrastructure as well as a role that knowledge brokers may play in research dissemination. Furthermore, some participants acknowledged researchers do not always think strategically about when to engage in research dissemination. Nevertheless, many people saw the value in utilizing knowledge brokers to determine the best way to communicate with stakeholders and produce effective communications products.

AIPI is one research communicator that has succeeded in the public health arena in Indonesia. The Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU) is one knowledge broker that can fill the much-desired communicator role in the region. Both AIPI and APRU brought together a network of scientists and industry partners to identify research and communication challenges affecting policy development in their respective regions. APRU has succeeded in partnering with large, reputable partners, including The New York Times, Elsevier, United Nations ESCAP, and Google, in an effort to identify additional researchers and deliver their message(s) to knowledge users.

Other strategic communication advice shared by participants included using non-technical language in publications. When communicating, researchers were advised to “soften” their language by using terms such as “policy recommendations” rather than “policy action,” for example, to signal researchers understand that policymakers work under constraints.

Identifying Opportunities for Impact

- Policymakers tend to prefer practical and relevant recommendations—for example, case studies that present evidence along with models that have successfully integrated practical solutions.

- Participants see meetings as key windows of opportunity. They allow researchers to rally attention to their cause while also learning about policymakers’ decision-making processes and political constraints.

- Policymakers and practitioners often want to know about data quality. Transparency and academic rigor by the researcher helps build confidence in the results.
5. **Roadmap to Action**

The following section highlights the types of actions participants identified as important to move forward on the road to research impact.

**Promote demand for research in policymaking and program design**

Stakeholders across sectors and countries have yet to develop a culture of demanding and using evidence to inform decision-making. In these contexts, a cultural shift is an essential preliminary step in order to promote research uptake. The use of successful models and case studies that demonstrate how research was used previously to inform effective policies can generate demand for evidence. In contexts where political powers listen to voters rather than researchers, it is important for researchers to learn how to communicate effectively with the public and/or how to leverage knowledge brokers to rally support.

**Bridge the gap between knowledge users and producers**

Existing silos separating policymakers, practitioners, and researchers results in inward focus by stakeholders on their specific missions and objectives. Trust and transparency are key in research uptake. Silos can create mistrust among stakeholders. Alternatively, mistrust among stakeholders can create silos. Bringing stakeholders together through workshops, conferences, and meetings and allowing them to exchange ideas and share challenges is one effective method of building networks and trust. Although many stakeholders already highly desire forums for engagement, others may need incentives to participate. In some countries, high-level policymakers are inaccessible due to unavailability or competition for their time and attention. Reputable knowledge brokers with established networks with these stakeholders or the means to reach them should be leveraged in such situations. If endorsement of high-level policymakers or practitioners can be achieved, it should be leveraged into gathering further support for research translation and policy implementation.

**Strategically communicate and frame research and evidence**

There is consensus on the importance of translating evidence into recommendations that take into consideration the research users’ decision-making environment. This situational awareness promotes feasible and relevant avenues for research translation. Carefully balanced recommendations are needed for policymakers and practitioners to determine the best use of limited resources. Showcasing shared goals and objectives and demonstrating how the evidence helps achieve these goals is beneficial. Capturing the interest of knowledge users and drafting targeted recommendations takes time and effort,
which is another reason why leveraging reputable knowledge brokers is advantageous. Careful consideration must also be given to create appropriate research products. Data storytelling, data visualizations, infographics, policy briefs, and memos are gaining traction in the research translation field, but the skills required to generate these communications products are not common among knowledge producers. There is room for academia and donor agencies to invest in building these skills.

**Increase accessibility of research, data, and researchers**

Consolidating and making available existing research, data, tools, and best practices organized by sector and country will help researchers survey the research landscape, understand gaps in the knowledge-base, and identify potential research partners. A centralized system would also help policymakers operating under time constraints quickly access information and adjust priorities. Networks that bring together researchers to allow them to exchange ideas and create a pool for policymakers to tap into have shown to be successful in promoting research uptake in this region already.

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**Key Steps for Action**

- Promote demand for research in policymaking and program design
- Bridge the gap between knowledge users and producers
- Strategically communicate and frame research and evidence
- Increase accessibility of research, data, and researchers

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### 6. Conclusions

Based on preliminary feedback from participants and hosts, the workshop was successful in its objectives. This workshop also highlighted valuable lessons learned for use in future meetings. In particular, key successes of this workshop were: 1) bringing together a network of regional knowledge brokers, including but not limited to scientific researchers, academics, government policymakers, NGO leaders, development funders, and practitioners; and 2) delivering concrete recommendations for all stakeholders to more effectively translate research into policy through research translation.

At the conclusion of this workshop, it was clear there is no single approach to translating research for policy impact. Our participants represented stakeholders with diverse backgrounds, and all benefited enormously from presentations and participant input during group work. As reflected in the evaluation results (see Annex 4), networking opportunities were among the most significant achievements of the meeting. The research and evidence-based policy space in South and Southeast Asia is brimming with intelligent, accomplished, and dedicated professionals, and this workshop provided valuable opportunity for key stakeholders in research and policy sectors to develop constructive and collaborative relationships that we hope will advance inclusive research agendas and research translation across South and Southeast Asia.
References


Annex 1. Knowledge Translation Framework

Figure 4. CIHR Knowledge Translation Framework

Source: Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2007.
Annex 2. Documents Shared with Participants

The following documents were shared with participants at the start of the workshop. They have been reformatted to maintain consistency with this report.

- Setting the context: What is research translation and why is it important?
- Influencing policy and using evidence in complex political environments.
- Creating enabling environments for research use: windows of opportunity.
- Stakeholder mapping and identifying key audiences.
- Communicating, packaging, and disseminating research
- Research translation in the Southeast Asian context: case studies
Setting the Context: What is Research Translation and why is it important?

Defining Research Translation

A common use of the term “research translation” focuses on the communication side—the process that transforms complex academic material into comprehensible, relevant, and actionable forms. Communication is an essential component of research translation, but there is more to it.

Our working definition of research translation is: the process by which research findings are taken up by users (policymakers, practitioners, or other researchers) and appropriately used to inform practice, policy, or further research.

Research translation includes the synthesis, dissemination, exchange, and ethical application of knowledge (information, evidence, and/or discoveries) between researchers and users. However, it is not a unidirectional process from researchers to other audiences - it also encompasses the translation of policy priorities and evidence gaps into actionable agendas that researchers are empowered to address.

A Framework for Research Translation

In our review of literature in preparation for this workshop, we identified a framework for knowledge translation developed by the CIHR especially well designed and useful for our purposes. It describes knowledge translation as a nonlinear process that plays a key role at each stage of a research initiative.

The CIHR Framework focuses on six opportunities throughout the research cycle where key communication and partnerships can facilitate effective knowledge translation: 1) Defining research questions and methodologies; 2) Conducting research; 3) Publishing research findings in plain language and accessible formats; 4) Placing research findings into the context of other knowledge and sociocultural norms; 5) Making decisions and taking action informed by research findings; 6) Influencing subsequent rounds of research based on the impacts of knowledge use.

Figure 5. CIHR Knowledge Translation Framework

Why do we translate research?

The “know-do” gap describes a disparity between research findings and their application or between what we know and what is actually being done. This gap is a serious challenge for practitioners in many fields. In medicine, practices not based on the most current research can have life-threatening consequences. Development researchers and practitioners face a similar challenge. Programs and policies not informed by evidence risk being ineffective or worsening development outcomes. Development programming can have a tremendous positive impact on the health, education, and livelihoods of vulnerable and marginalized populations worldwide—which is why it is especially important to get it right.

How does research influence policy?

We are particularly interested in how research can have an impact through public policy. The pathways that link research and policy are complex and made up of stakeholders with competing interests. In order for research to translate into policy, a complex set of conditions must be met. The system involves not just designing and conducting research but also making that research accessible, communicating the research, determining the policy implications and applications of the research, and advocating for policies informed by the research.

The pathways by which policymakers can help bridge the gap are just as complex and involve similar efforts to ask the right question, design and implement mindfully, and advocate. Policymakers can facilitate and support research that addresses their most pressing problems by developing thoughtful research agendas, advocating for substantial funding for research, and always considering the evidence when making decisions.

Why is there a gap between evidence and action?

Because of the complex processes by which evidence informs decision-making, there are many opportunities for things to go wrong. Research design can impact the applicability of evidence to policy issues. Non-representative sampling means research findings do not necessarily speak to the conditions of a policy’s target population. Research on the effectiveness of particular interventions that do not evaluate their cost, generalizability, or sustainability is of
limited use to policymakers. Even evidence-based interventions informed by sound research design may lack policy applicability because of **intervention-specific characteristics**. An intervention that can be effectively implemented by a research team may be more challenging to scale up at the policy level, especially if it requires **high levels of personnel expertise** or is **specific to a particular context**. There is also the **policy context** to consider. Competing demands for resources, existing rules and norms, and chaotic political circumstances, among others, can prevent an intervention from being implemented at scale. And, of course, all of these factors interact—research designs may be impossible because of political circumstances, and interventions may lack political support because they are designed to benefit only certain population groups.

**Want to learn more?**

Several organizations have developed frameworks, toolkits, and other guidance documents to assist research producers, communicators, and users in the process of research translation. Below we offer a selection of resources that we found useful in the planning of this workshop:

- **UKRI Economic and Social Research Council Impact Toolkit**: [https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/](https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/)
- **Canadian Institutes of Health Research Knowledge Translation Framework**: [http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/40618.html](http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/40618.html)
- **Overseas Development Institute Outcome Mapping Approach**: [https://www.odi.org/features/roma/home](https://www.odi.org/features/roma/home)
- **Canadian National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools, Registry of Knowledge Translation Tools**: [https://www.nccmt.ca/knowledge-repositories/registry](https://www.nccmt.ca/knowledge-repositories/registry)
- **MEASURE Evaluation High Impact Research Training Toolkit**: [https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/training/capacity-building-resources/high-impact-research-training-curricula](https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/training/capacity-building-resources/high-impact-research-training-curricula)

The following publications are referenced in this resource document:

**Influencing policy and using evidence in complex political environments**

Evidence alone is not enough to create policies that improve development outcomes. The complex systems through which evidence informs policy are difficult for researchers and policymakers to navigate in any context but may be even more of a challenge in developing countries, with their unique political and social contexts. While considerable diversity of sociocultural and political contexts across developing countries make it difficult to generalize, we can point to trends and commonalities that may help improve our understanding of these issues.

In the **macro-political context**, limited political freedoms and rights to democratic expression can inhibit the capacities of researchers, advocates, and policymakers to implement evidence-based policies. These limitations can also extend into academic and media spheres and may reflect a lack of commitment to inclusive policies among governing elites. The **specific policy context** also has an impact on evidence uptake. Factors including commitment to a particular policy issue, degree of consensus or resistance, and climate of rationality among key stakeholder groups all have an effect on whether a policy is based on evidence. There are also questions of **implementation processes** that should be considered. Bureaucratic processes that are not transparent, accountable, and open to public participation are less likely to create policies based on evidence. Additionally, there are **critical points in the policy process** that have a great deal of influence on policy outcomes. We can better understand what these points are and how to leverage them with some of the tools discussed below.

Sometimes in these contexts, the evidence base for a particular policy issue may be biased, incomplete, or inaccurate. This can translate into policies that actually hinder development. If this is the case, more work needs to be done to generate quality and inclusive data and research before a policy issue is ready for an evidence-based approach.

**When an evidence-based approach can be problematic**

The process by which research is used to inform policymaking is a complex process that is crucially under-articulated. Researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders may think about evidence in different ways. Researchers may tend to think of **evidence as setting out scientific reasons** for the need to implement a particular policy. Policymakers, who may be more accustomed to using evidence in the legal context, understand that in **law**, conflicting evidence is used to contest or argue for a case.

Advocating that policy be informed by a good base of evidence is an uncontroversial stance. Despite this common sense proposition, one of the challenges to emerge in the evidence-based policymaking process is the interchangeable use of the concepts of “information” and “evidence.” In complex environments, the distinction between the terms is particularly critical and has several different dimensions. One key consideration is that evidence is generated with a degree of intentionality: to frame information as evidence implies that a particular policy change is required. **This is can be seen as an inherently political claim.**

In contexts that are characterized by conflict or authoritarian tendencies, access to information is dependent on access to power. Evidence is politicized and can tend to reflect the perspectives of the powerful. It can be manipulated to reflect
a certain policy perspective. A lack of evidence is an equally important consideration. **Limited data regarding a particular population can mask true urgent policy needs**—for example, the exclusion of a particular population from a census. If there is no data reflecting the needs of a population, then it becomes possible to frame this lack of data as “evidence” that the needs do not exist. There are also certain issues considered too politically sensitive for authorities to sanction research. For example, there is a marked lack of data on illegal markets like drugs and endangered wildlife. This represents a “**selective approach to what is considered acceptable research,**” which in turn makes it impossible to address certain urgent policy questions with an evidence-based approach.

Furthermore, societies going through political transitions may face difficulties in generating and translating research to tackle urgent policy issues. In post-conflict and transition environments, **access to data, including historical data, is often extremely limited.** It is not uncommon to see researchers in conflict or post-conflict areas subjected to higher scrutiny. Additionally, in some political contexts, the very notion of political debate is a novel concept, and information is used as a tool for control.

**The role of evidence in a crisis: Lessons from the region**

During moments of crisis in which high stakes decisions must be made swiftly and decisively, deficiencies in the flow of information and evidence can have life-threatening consequences. The case of **earthquake relief in Nepal** illustrates how knowledge translation systems can break down in complex crisis environments. In the weeks after the 2015 earthquakes, disaster managers were overwhelmed by information, and they needed to determine as quickly as possible the magnitude and location of earthquake impacts, and the level and type of assistance required. Scientists who wanted to engage with earthquake response were not equipped with an understanding of the humanitarian relief system and did not have an awareness of the kinds of evidence most needed. Designated information brokers tended to be generalists rather than specialists, which hindered their ability to communicate critical information. Managers were also constrained by urgent needs for relief. They could not wait for robust evidence of earthquake impacts. From the Nepal case, we can see that strategically positioned knowledge brokers are not enough. On the part of disaster managers, a lack of understanding of available evidence and what it could offer hindered their ability to use evidence to inform critical decisions. Because scientists often did not understand what kinds of evidence were mostly urgently needed, by whom, and when, critical evidence failed to reach the right people.

**Taking a systems approach: Tools and methods**

The attributes of challenging political environments outlined above are features of a complex system in which actors are prone to unpredictable behavior and are governed by ever-changing sets of rules and norms. These characteristics clash with our tendencies toward simple categorization, standardization, grouping, and linear thinking. A wide variety of tools are available for researchers and policymakers to better navigate complex systems and the decision-making patterns of stakeholders within them, including:
**Social Network Analysis** to help identify actors best positioned to positively impact the social network

Social Network Analysis can be thought of as an "X-Ray" for complex systems. The method can help visualize critical but hidden interconnected relationships constituting a system. The result of Social Network Analysis is a visual representation of a network, showing groups of actors as clusters of nodes and relationships as lines between them. These visual representations allow the identification of critical actors, key gaps, and leverage points.

**Causal Loop Diagrams** to understand what part of the system to engage in change

Causal Loop Diagrams can be used to model how variables influence each other in dynamic systems. They can help reveal underlying feedback structures of a system and help identify key leverage points. They can also help highlight key constraints, which in turn can inform more realistic expectations of how to influence change in a system.

**Want to learn more?**

Below we offer a selection of resources that relate to using evidence to inform policy in complex environments:

Gephi is an open-source and free tool that allows users to map, explore, and understand networks and complex systems. This tool does not require any programming skills. It is highly interactive and can handle big data, including up to 100,000 nodes. https://gephi.org/


London School of Economics and Political Science, Department of International Development, Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit: http://www.lse.ac.uk/international-development/conflict-and-civil-society


The following publications are referenced in this resource document:

Creating enabling environments for research use: Windows of opportunity

A framework for the transformation of knowledge into policy action

In order to address the challenges of translating research into action within complex policy contexts, we need to think strategically about how to leverage windows of opportunity. A “multiple streams,” or systems approach, can help navigate the nonlinear aspects of policy reform. Policymakers negotiate competing interests, agendas, norms, and contested resource allocation to satisfy their constituencies. Researchers balance funding opportunities, policy mandates, and their own interests in specific research topics.

Agenda-setting, coalition-building, and policy-learning are effective measures for creating windows for policy change. Agenda-setting helps policymakers decide which problems to address and is dependent on factors such as the presence of clear, measurable indicators to describe the issue and the involvement of political entrepreneurs, or “champions.” Agenda-setting is about capturing the awareness of policymakers, whereas coalition-building is an exercise in mobilizing and sustaining attention across a broad range of stakeholders. All of this is made possible by effective policy-learning, whereby technical evidence and research findings are translated into appropriate form for stakeholders, and political and economic constraints are sufficiently communicated to researchers.

Figure 11. Theoretical Framework for the Transformation of Knowledge to Policy Action.

Source: Adapted from WHO, 2006.

Figure 12. ODI RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA)

Source: Young, Shaxson, Jones, Hearn, Datta, & Cassidy, 2014.

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6 This section is adapted in part from Ashford, Smith, De Souza, Fikree, & Yinger (2006).
Outcome mapping as a tool for research policy-engagement

Outcome mapping is an iterative process that includes identifying desired changes and working collaboratively to achieve those changes. This approach can be applied to policy engagement processes to better influence change. We strongly recommend reviewing the full guide to outcome mapping to apply the approach to your work (see link in footnotes).

The first component, carrying out a thorough diagnosis, will help you better understand the issues you need to work on, with whom, and where the critical bottlenecks may be. Strategy development represents the crux of the outcome mapping approach: the tools that make up this component reflect the idea that sustainable change comes from incremental changes in individual and group behaviors. Outcome mapping involves a number of feedback loops and requires consistent reflection on how you have framed the policy issue at hand, your plan for approaching it, and how you manage its implementation. Your plan for monitoring policy engagement should balance the need to be accountable with the need to build trust among stakeholders and to become more effective and efficient in your operations.

Ten steps for influencing policy with research

There is no universal guide to influencing policy, but in order to do so successfully, you must be open to different ways of working. The following guide from the Overseas Development Institute highlights key considerations for engaging with policymakers to encourage the use of evidence and research.

- Identify your policy objective
  - Being clear about the policy issue, theme, or process that you want to change is a key step to effective policy influencing. Are you looking to influence legislation or a change in policy?

- Know who you want to influence
  - Who has the power to make the policy change that you seek? Who else might be in a position to indirectly influence your target audience? Know the routes to the people and organizations you need to influence and build relationships with them. Remember, too, you might not be the best messenger. An audience mapping tool (such as the Alignment Influence Matrix) can be useful here.

- Know when to influence
  - Consider when your target audience might be best positioned to take action based on your research—perhaps leading up to an election, during a budget cycle, as part of a government consultation, or ahead of a decision-making summit or conference. Opportunities to influence may also come up at unexpected points, so maintain the flexibility to react and adopt. Think “strategic opportunism.”

- Build relationships and networks
  - No one can change policy by themselves, even with the most ground-breaking findings. Identifying allies and collaborators, building trust, and developing a joint plan of action will increase your impact.

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7 This section is adapted from Young, Shaxson, Jones, Hearn, Datta, & Cassidy (2014). A comprehensive guide to outcome mapping can be found here: https://www.odi.org/features/roma/what-is-roma
8 This list was borrowed from Tilley, Shaxson, Young, Rea, & Bell (2017).
• Approach policy development as a nonlinear process

Policy making occurs in the context of a complex, dynamic system with multiple feedback loops. Planning for recurring processes, competing interests, and power imbalances can help set reasonable expectations.

• Recognize the political nature of policymaking

Neither research nor policymaking occurs in a vacuum. Questions of power, resource allocation, and political priorities are deeply entangled in the process of translating research into policy influence. While it may seem antithetical to the principles of objectivity valued by researchers, having a political strategy is essential to influencing policy.

• Have an engagement plan

Communicating research is key to engaging stakeholders. Consider an engagement checklist for your research communication pieces, such as:

- Short, sharp executive summary
- Clear, concise messaging
- Avoidance of overly technical language
- Accessible graphics/data visualizations
- Other outreach activities

• Focus on actionable ideas and solutions

Framing things in terms of what should happen, who could take action, and when and how helps to shape constructive engagements with policymakers. Be ambitious but also consider political and technical constraints.

• Plan for a long and slow political process

Influencing policy takes time and commitment. Impacts are often hard to measure and slow to emerge. Continuous engagement with stakeholders and flexibility in approach are necessary to navigate the political process in any context.

• Learn from your peers and your own experiences

This process will require a willingness to both receive and give feedback from allies, partners, and your target audience. By seeking clarity on what they need and when, as well as what format they prefer for information, you can ensure that your message gets across.

Want to learn more?

Below we offer a selection of resources that relate to creating an enabling environment for research use:


INASP—Context Matters Framework: https://www.inasp.info/contextmatters


The following publications are referenced in this resource document:


Stakeholder mapping and identifying key audiences

What is stakeholder mapping, and why do we do it?

Stakeholder mapping is a technique for identifying key actors, understanding their perspectives and interests, and establishing strategies for engagement with those actors. When our work—research, policymaking, or development implementation—requires buy-in and contribution from a diverse range of actors, it is essential to understand how their varying interests and needs might affect our desired outcomes.

As a tool, stakeholder mapping is particularly relevant to research translation. It can help to bridge the gap between research and policy by identifying all involved in conducting research, relevant policymakers and implementers, and intermediaries between them. Mapping out the various interests and viewpoints of these actors (using a tool like the Alignment, Interest, Influence Matrix, explained below) can help to define strategies to effectively engage stakeholders.

Many are familiar with stakeholder mapping that categorizes actors into institutional categories, such as Government, Private Sector, and NGOs, among others. Another way to classify stakeholders is in terms of their proximity to the issue at hand. Primary stakeholders include actors of immediate interest directly impacted by the research or policy in question, whereas secondary stakeholders are more like intermediaries and often do not think of themselves as direct stakeholders.

Primary steps for a stakeholder mapping and analysis exercise

1. Identifying Key Stakeholders

Once the key policy or research issue has been identified, stakeholder mapping begins with a simple brainstorming exercise to generate a roster of stakeholders. This should be compiled by a small group with varied perspectives on the issue. Stakeholders can include organizations, institutions, informal groups, networks, or individuals. Once this roster is compiled, it should be analyzed to identify clusters of interrelated actors with different levels of interest and influence. At this stage, it can be helpful to ask, “Whose support or lack thereof might significantly influence the success of our initiative?”

While this exercise may seem straightforward, challenging questions often arise while identifying stakeholders. Some groups might be specific and easy to identify. For example, a group constrained to a particular geographic area or a distinct market segment. Others might be more amorphous, such as “the community.” Ultimately, your list may end up looking something like this:

Table 1. Identifying Key Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private Sector Stakeholders</th>
<th>Public Sector Stakeholders</th>
<th>Civil Society Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporations and businesses</td>
<td>Ministers and advisors</td>
<td>Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional associations</td>
<td>Civil servants and</td>
<td>Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual business leaders</td>
<td>departments (bureaucracy)</td>
<td>Schools/universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial institutions</td>
<td>Elected representatives</td>
<td>Social movements, advocacy groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smallholder farmers</td>
<td>International bodies</td>
<td>Trade unions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is by no means a comprehensive list of what or who might be considered a “stakeholder.”
2. Understanding Perspectives and Interests

Generating a roster like the one shown above allows us to map out the diverse roles that different stakeholders might play in a system. With your roster of stakeholders in hand, it can be helpful to ask yourself a series of questions about those listed:

- What are individual stakeholders likely to expect from our initiative?
- What benefits or risks exist for stakeholders?
- What resources will stakeholders need to commit for the initiative to succeed?
- What other interests does the stakeholder have that may conflict with our objectives?
- How does the stakeholder view others on the list?

With answers to these questions in mind, you can then start to think about the varying degrees of power and interest among your list of stakeholders. By *power*, or *influence*, we mean to measure a stakeholder’s ability to impact a specific issue. *Interest* refers to a stakeholder’s degree of support or opposition to an approach for addressing the issue at hand. For example, you can describe stakeholders’ relative power and interest in a table like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Engagement or Role With Respect To Food Security</th>
<th>Influence toward Food Security (High, Medium, Low)</th>
<th>Interest in Food Security (High, Medium, Low)</th>
<th>Strategies for Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Smallholder farmers</td>
<td>Produce food for sale in local markets; create employment opportunities; manage natural resources</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Conduct a focus group with smallholders; invite the leader of a farmers’ association to assist in project development; design indicators; collect data; conduct ongoing monitoring and training; lead a community-based evaluation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An Alignment, Interest, Influence Matrix (AIIIM) allows you to create a sketch of varying stakeholder perspectives, translating your findings into a graphical representation of stakeholders relative to their power and influence. The below version shows key characteristics of actors in different quadrants of interest:

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10 Adapted from USAID GBV Stakeholder engagement toolkit: [https://www.usaid.gov/gbv/toolkit-annex](https://www.usaid.gov/gbv/toolkit-annex)

3. Establishing Strategies for Engagement

When considering how to approach stakeholder engagement, it is important to keep your objectives in mind. Are you aiming to identify gaps to fill and opportunities to complement existing programming? Or are you working to get a new method or approach tested and verified? The AIIM matrix is also a useful tool for determining the best strategy for different stakeholders. This example of a completed matrix shows examples of approaches for different classifications of stakeholders:

![Completed AIIM with Explanations of Stakeholder Positions](source: Mendizabal, n.d.)

Some solutions shown in this AIIM are research focused (e.g., using pilots and evaluations to change minds). Others have more to do with communication and packaging of findings (doing so effectively can facilitate collaboration or “coalitions” among stakeholders). This exercise can also help to prioritize stakeholders for engagement. When setting stakeholder engagement priorities, crucial factors to consider include resources available, technical expertise, and existing relationships. When priorities on who to engage are set, consider what they already may know about the issue and what sources of information they typically rely on for this knowledge. A broader political economy analysis may also be useful to assess the current political landscape. It is difficult to make generalizations on what shapes policy agendas and where initiatives may fit within that context.

Engaging stakeholders can involve many activities, all focused on facilitating an exchange of knowledge. Some can take the form of one-time learning events but most are better suited for longer-term relationship-building and mutual learning efforts. It would be a mistake to think the only time to engage stakeholders is when
research is being disseminated. Involving stakeholders throughout your initiative is crucial to retaining buy-in and successfully managing your relationship with them.

Within the context of your policy goals, **strategic communication** is essential for managing stakeholder buy-in. While this is a topic broad enough to warrant a focused discussion beyond the context of stakeholder mapping, the exercises in this resource document can contribute to a communication strategy. A clear sense of who the most influential stakeholders are and their decision-making processes can help inform **deliberate communications objectives, translate findings into recommendations, and develop evidence-informed policy messages**.

**Want to learn more?**

Several organizations have developed frameworks, toolkits, and other guidance documents to assist research producers, communicators, and users in the process of mapping stakeholders to more effectively translate research. Below we offer a selection of resources that we found useful in the planning of this workshop:

Australia National Health and Medical Research Council: Engaging Stakeholders: https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelinesforguidelines/plan/engaging-stakeholders


Institute of Development Studies: Introduction to Stakeholder Engagement: https://www.researchtoaction.org/2014/02/introduction-to-stakeholder-engagement/


Research to Action. Stakeholder Analysis: A Basic Introduction: https://www.researchtoaction.org/2012/05/stakeholder-analysis-a-basic-introduction/

The following publication is referenced in this resource document:

Communicating, Packaging, and Disseminating Research

Key components to conveying research methodology, design, and findings

To effectively communicate research findings with users, concrete steps are required to communicate, package, and disseminate in a manner that facilitates uptake. Senior policymakers and practitioners may have the knowledge and background to interpret research methodology, design, and findings. However, given the vast amounts of research produced and the rate of policymaker turnover in some South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, it is essential researchers use consistent and effective language to convey commonly used terms.

No matter how rigorous the research, unless its final message is conveyed in a way that is easily understood and remembered, users cannot make practical use of it. Data rarely speak for themselves, and users must always interpret findings to take into consideration the complex environments in which they work. Therefore, researchers should focus on strategically communicated select messages. Presenting key messages up front and then tracing the route to research conclusions help focus the attention of users. Researchers should also consider reviewing initial findings with users prior to writing up final papers, as users can play a unique role in interpreting data, providing cultural context and developing achievable recommendations. Achieving user buy-in and engaging with them during the entire research cycle ensures that researchers and users remain aligned. This relationship may also create a feedback loop that allows researchers to remain informed of changing contextual factors that may affect their methodology and findings.

Achievable recommendations are key to promoting use of research. Given that policymakers and practitioners in this region are often working in low-resource settings with little time to interpret research findings, they often need to know the lowest intensity policy or program they need to implement in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Not only does involving users in developing recommendations make results more actionable and feasible, it also acts as a form of endorsement. When users understand the research, they are more likely to advocate for change or implement the new information in their line of work.

Figure 15. Key Elements of Strategic Communication

Source: Population Reference Bureau, PACE Policy Communication Toolkit.
Four recommendations for writing for a policy audience

It is not common for policymakers and practitioners to review academic journals for research and evidence that can inform their work. Succinct policy briefs have the potential to reach more users. The following are recommendations for writing for a policy audience:

1. Use nontechnical language

Assume you are explaining your findings to a professional who does not work in your field. Write in a conversational style. For example, instead of writing, “The study used ordinary least squares to estimate the effect of the new program on neonatal mortality,” try writing, “The study used an accepted statistical approach (ordinary least squares regression) to estimate the effect of the new program on neonatal mortality.” Always spell out acronyms when they are first used and then use the abbreviation thereafter. Have a list of definitions in the beginning that includes two- to three-sentence explanations of all technical research terms and any analytical methods used.

2. Use subheadings to break up information

Busy readers tend to skim documents, rather than reading from beginning to end. They skip around searching for what is most interesting or relevant. Descriptive subheadings help them find what they need. If you get them to start reading—even in the middle of your brief—they might continue to the end. This is particularly true when writing for the Web, where experts estimate the average viewer reads just 25 percent of content per page. A descriptive heading will help readers decide which parts to read and might help draw them in to read further. Instead of using headings such as “Background,” “Methodology,” “Results,” and “Recommendations,” be creative and to the point. For example, instead of “Analysis,” write the exact technique used in the heading (i.e., using a difference-in-difference estimation to understand changes in learning outcomes over time between treatment and control schools).

3. Use data visualizations to communicate quantitative data whenever appropriate

There is increasing evidence readers are more able to interpret data visualized in a graph than in a table, as the mind is able to more quickly identify patterns than statistics. When creating visualizations, determine key messages you want to convey. Move larger, detailed tables with all data into the annex. Recommendation 2 also applies for tables, charts, and graphs. Instead of writing “Table 1. Findings,” write out the main message of the graph (i.e., Students in treatment schools had a larger increase in attendance over time compared to students in control schools).

4. Obtain feedback

Before finalizing the written product, obtaining feedback from test audiences can ensure the product is ready for dissemination. Ask your “test audiences” to tell you:

- Is it accessible and readable?
- What are the key messages? Are they clear?
- Are the arguments or recommendations persuasive?

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12 This section is adapted from the Population Reference Bureau’s Policy Communication Toolkit, which can be found here: [http://thepaceproject.org/our-results/building-champions/policy-communication-toolkit/](http://thepaceproject.org/our-results/building-champions/policy-communication-toolkit/)
Table 3. Some Examples of Non-technical Replacements for Technical Research Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical Language You May Be Using</th>
<th>Suggested Non-Technical Replacement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The study used ordinary least squares to estimate the effect of the new program on neonatal mortality.</td>
<td>The study used an accepted statistical approach (ordinary least squares regression) to estimate the effect of the new program on neonatal mortality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The study found small effects that were statistically significant.</td>
<td>The study found an effect that was statistically significant. Though small, the size of the effect is relevant for policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistically significant result</td>
<td>A difference that is not due to chance alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterfactual</td>
<td>Individuals in the comparison group provide an estimate of what would have happened with neonatal mortality if they had not received the intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizability</td>
<td>The study included five schools in one region, and its findings apply to similar schools and regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error (SE)</td>
<td>The standard error (SE) indicates the accuracy of the estimated mean. A smaller SE indicates that the sample mean is a more accurate reflection of the actual population mean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation (SD)</td>
<td>The Standard deviation (SD) indicates how measurements for a group are spread out from the average or expected value. A smaller SD means that most of the numbers are close to the average. A high SD means that the numbers are more spread out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Want to learn more?
Below we offer a selection of resources in both using non-technical language and writing specifically for policy audiences:


Research to Action: Policy Engagement and Communications (PEC) Programme:
https://www.researchtoaction.org/dialogue/policy-engagement-communications/

The following publication is referenced in this resource document:

https://thepaceproject.org/our-results/building-champions/policy-communication-toolkit/
Research translation in the Southeast Asian context: Case studies

This document presents successful case studies of research translation efforts in Southeast Asia. These case studies were selected to showcase how stakeholders can engage in activities that fit within the framework for knowledge translation developed by CIHR.

Vietnam Economic Research Network: Building Policymakers’ Capacities to Use Research

Figure 16. Framework for Knowledge Translation: Initial Stages

Building strong research policy links can help create an environment where researchers and policymakers work collaboratively, even in times of policy upheaval. During a period of “economic renovation” in Vietnam, for example, the Vietnam Economic Research Network (VERN) was critical to the government’s efforts to liberalize the country’s economy. A structure that facilitated communication and collaboration between researchers and policymakers allowed VERN to succeed in its efforts: the network’s Advisory Committee, made up of officials from the Vietnamese legislature and civil service, worked with researchers to design studies that responded to urgent economic policy questions.

Figure 17. Framework for Knowledge Translation: Using Research Findings

VERN focused efforts on expanding the capacities of policymakers to use evidence in their work and to identify key intermediaries with influential relationships in research and policy networks to facilitate research uptake. Key knowledge brokers were crucial to translating the evidence generated from VERN trade research to policy. Because the researchers in this case had a good understanding of how to effectively diffuse knowledge among key brokers, their findings that existing tariff and export promotion policies were ineffective helped inform reforms.

Oral rehydration salts: alignment and continued engagement between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in Bangladesh

Figure 18. Framework for Knowledge Translation: Contextualization and Application of Research

The uptake of oral rehydration salts to reduce diarrheal illness, which is associated with childhood mortality, showcases how continued engagement between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers can lead to widespread uptake of an evidence-based public health intervention. Developed by the International Center for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh in the 1960s, oral rehydration salts are the leading remedy for control of
diarrheal illness in Southeast Asia and are one of the most cost-effective public health interventions. Bangladesh was the first country with large-scale experience and success in using oral rehydration salts. The use of oral rehydration salts was first scaled up by Bangladeshi NGOs BRAC and Social Marketing Company, the latter USAID-funded. The initial uptake by the NGOs was possible because of guidance, monitoring, and evaluation by the International Center for Diarrheal Disease Research. Through clinical trials and pilots, the stakeholders learned together. Eventually, The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Washington, D.C.-based Grameen Foundation also became involved, and together all these stakeholders aligned their activities, each filling in a critical gap in either research or practice. For example, BRAC employed a cadre of community health workers to educate and engage with beneficiaries on the ground, Social Marketing Company partnered with local governments to train health care providers, and Grameen Foundation increased the ability of low-income families to buy the product.

**Occupation health priorities: Aligning stakeholders in Malaysia**

The use of the Delphi approach in Malaysia shows one way to ensure alignment between different knowledge funders, producers, and users. In 1997, a British Council project used this approach to determine occupational health research priorities in Malaysia. The steps included:

- Identifying all organizations with an interest in occupational health in Malaysia.
- Grouping organizations and specific stakeholders by sector, including government, industry, and researchers.
- Publicizing the study through meetings with representatives from different organizations to generate widespread interest and support.
- Inviting specific stakeholders to participate in two questionnaires to determine research priorities.

The first questionnaire included an open-ended question asking respondents to identify three broad priority areas for occupational health research and specific topics in each. The top five choices and their subtopics were aggregated by the questionnaire administrators.

The second questionnaire asked respondents to rank in order the importance of these five areas and their subtopics as well as 11 additional specific topics. The results were scored and analyzed for all respondents and then again separately by sector.

Holding a workshop among all the stakeholders to discuss the findings and assess the feasibility of conducting research in the prioritized specific topic areas.

This approach allowed stakeholders from different sectors to have an equal say in setting the research agenda in occupational health and created a platform for thoughtful and data-driven discussion on research priority areas.
Increasing accessibility of research products for impact: Bangladesh and Philippines

Knowledge translators are crucial elements for translating maternal and child health research in Bangladesh and the Philippines. Members of USAID’s Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program, led by Jhpiego, Save the Children’s Saving Newborn Lives Program, and other programs supported by UNICEF have come together in the past few years to create a consortium of knowledge translators. They aim to aggregate, package, and translate research to the World Health Organization and country stakeholders through periodic technical meetings. Using Graham et al.’s Knowledge to Action Framework to guide their activities, they form country groups composed of health professionals such as policy advocates, health care practitioners, and health program managers. Prior to each meeting, country teams and meeting planners create a list of priority technical problem areas to be addressed. Country teams use this list to analyze their local or regional situation and then create posters that aggregate their understanding and knowledge of the issue. Simultaneously, meeting planners create knowledge products such as key message briefs, which aggregate the evidence surrounding the priority technical area to promote action during and after meetings. The meetings also provide a platform for participants to learn how to take action and discuss ways to collaborate. A survey administered among participants of one of these meetings in Bangladesh in 2012 showcased the positive effects of these activities. After attending, respondents “frequently mentioned taking an active role in sharing by packaging the knowledge into new products.” Seventy percent of the participants reported either using or planning to use knowledge gained from the meeting to improve service quality, 68 percent reported using it to advocate for policy change, and 66 percent reported using it to design projects or programs.

Want to learn more?

The following publications are referenced in this resource document:


## Annex 3. Workshop Speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grace Santos</td>
<td>R&amp;D for and with the Poor: Inclusive Innovation Movement in ASEAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haseeb Md. Irfanullah</td>
<td>Translating Research in Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandarany Ouch</td>
<td>Research Translation in Cambodia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amal S. Kumarage</td>
<td>Research Spending &amp; Dissemination in Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aprilia Ekawati Utami</td>
<td>Evidence Summit on Reducing Maternal and Neonatal Mortality in Indonesia:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lessons Learned of Evidence-Informed Policy Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punya P. Regmi</td>
<td>Panel discussion: Identifying Stakeholders and Engaging Them Throughout the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemanthi Goonasekera</td>
<td>Communicating Research for Impact in Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia Mikic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Meyer</td>
<td>Communicating Research for Impact in Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nguyen Hanh Quyen</td>
<td>Connecting Space to Village SERVIR-Mekong: Communicating for Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neelu Thapa</td>
<td>Communicating Research for Impact: Our Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina Schoenleber</td>
<td>Increasing Research Impact: Research Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadi Pratomo</td>
<td>The Development of Kangaroo Mother Care in the Hospital and in the Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in Koja District Hospital, North Jakarta &amp; Karawang District Hospital, West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Java Indonesia, 2015–2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 4. Workshop Evaluation

Post-Workshop Survey

RTAC asked convening participants to complete a survey immediately following the workshop. The survey included questions on the plenary sessions, group work sessions, and the event overall. A total of 42 participants responded.

Plenary Sessions

How would you rate the plenary sessions (panels) that took place yesterday and today in the following areas?

Scale: (1) The plenary sessions were very weak in this area to (5) The plenary sessions were very strong in this area.

As observed above, the majority of participants gave positive feedback ratings of 4 and 5 on workshop.

Table 5. Summary of Responses Rating the Plenary Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provided recent, up-to-date knowledge on the subject</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness of panels</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation of different perspectives</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of innovation in research translation methods</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and expertise of the panelists</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Group Work Sessions

Scale Question 1: (I) The small group sessions did not provide any interactive opportunities to (5) The small group sessions provided ample interactive opportunities.

Scale Question 2: (I) Not clearly at all to (5) Very clearly

Overall, participants considered that the group work provided them opportunities for interaction with their peers.

Figure 22. Workshop Participants Responses to Group Work Sessions

Table 6. Summary of Responses Rating the Group Work Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How well did the smaller group sessions and round tables provide appropriate interactive opportunities?</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How clearly did the smaller group sessions (for example, the sessions where you broke out by country and by topic area and the round tables) transmit the key information and concepts?</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall Workshop Ratings

1. How much do you feel that your professional experience was valued throughout the event?

   (1) I did not feel my experience was valued at all. (5) I felt my experience was highly valued.

2. How much do you feel like you were able to meaningfully contribute your ideas during the event?

   (1) I was not able to meaningfully contribute at all. (5) I was very much able to meaningfully contribute.

3. How relevant was the workshop to your job?

   (1) Not relevant at all (5) Very relevant

4. How would you rate the quality of the networking at this event?

   (1) There were no useful networking opportunities at all to (5) There were excellent, useful networking opportunities.

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Figure 23. Value of Professional Experience

![Value of Professional Experience](image1)

Figure 24. Meaningful Contribution

![Meaningful Contribution](image2)

Figure 25. Relevance to the Job

![Relevance to the Job](image3)

Figure 26. Quality of Networking

![Quality of Networking](image4)
5. How well did the workshop provide you actionable knowledge?

(I) Not actionable at all (5) Very actionable

6. How informative were the materials provided for the workshop?

(I) Not informative at all (5) Very informative

7. Were any special requirements (dietary restrictions, etc.) fully met?
   1. Yes, my special requirements were fully met.
   2. No, my special requirements were not fully met.
   3. N/A – I didn’t have any special requirements

8. Did the workshop change your attitude about the feasibility of using research for decision making?
   1. No, because I always thought that it was feasible to use research for decision making.
   2. No, I did not think it was feasible to use research for decision making and I still do not think it is feasible.
   3. Yes, I did not think it was feasible to use research for decision making, but now I think this is feasible.
9. How well did the workshop provide you with improved knowledge of the research translation process?

(I) Very poorly (5) Very well

10. Overall, how would you rate quality of the whole two-day workshop?

(I) Very poor (5) Very good

### Table 7. Overall Workshop Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much do you feel that your professional experience was valued throughout the event?</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much do you feel like you were able to meaningfully contribute your ideas during the event?</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How relevant was the workshop to your job?</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you rate the quality of the networking at this event?</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well did the workshop provide you actionable knowledge?</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How informative were the materials provided for the workshop?</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well did the workshop provide you with improved knowledge of the research translation process?</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, how would you rate quality of the whole two-day workshop?</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>