

Stakeholder Engagement for Development Impact Evaluation and Evidence Synthesis

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About CEDIL: The Centre of Excellence for Development Impact and Learning (CEDIL) is an academic consortium supported by UKAID through DFID. The mission of the centre is to develop and promote new impact evaluation methods in international development.

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Abstract

Introduction

This paper investigates stakeholder engagement with decision-making and research for international aid and social development, to encourage decisions that are both evidence-informed and appropriate to their context. The vision is for policy makers, programme managers and practitioners making decisions to engage with formal research about causal relationships and contextual influences (such as impact evaluations or systematic reviews), and to combine this with the know-how and tacit knowledge from those most intimately involved in the issues at hand. The rationale is that: stakeholders make better decisions when they engage with research findings; stakeholder engagement with the research process leads to research that takes into account their interests and concerns; and, in the absence of research, stakeholders' familiarity with the local context is the starting point for informing decisions and new research.

Background

Stakeholder engagement is encouraged for ideological reasons (because it is considered morally right) and instrumental reasons (to make better decisions), and research focuses largely on the processes of engagement rather than the outcomes. There are extensive literatures on engaging stakeholders with decision-making for policy and practice, including with research findings and with research processes. These literatures offer many different methods for working with stakeholders at different scales and at different stages in policy development and research processes.

Aim

The aim of this paper is to help readers navigate the relevant literatures in order to choose appropriate models for engaging stakeholders with decision-making, with research evidence and with evidence production, both to encourage use of evidence by policy makers, programme managers and practitioners and to help them use research evidence more effectively.

Methods:

The paper begins by constructing an analytical framework (section 3) that combines:

- the contexts of decision-making for international aid and social development as understood by aid agencies, where contexts vary in terms of the relevance of the generalisable knowledge available and what is known about the context of implementing policies or practices; with
- the various contexts of producing research knowledge, distinguished in terms of whether the key concepts are clear and widely agreed in advance, and whether the research is knowingly conducted to produce generalisable knowledge or primarily to meet a local need; and then
- links these two frameworks to allow for knowledge mobilisation, collaborative decision-making and co-production of new knowledge; and

- sets the whole against a backdrop of socio-political contexts that influence decision-making and research.

This framework is then populated by empirical evidence of stakeholder engagement with decision-making (section 4) and knowledge production (section 5), whenever possible drawn from systematic reviews of research, additional learning from the fields of politics, social psychology and systems thinking (section 6), and the findings summarised in terms of the policy-research cycle (section 7).

Constructing the analytical framework progressed simultaneously with searching for evidence. Sources considered first were collections rich in systematic reviews, and specialists in the field. Further evidence is identified by searching reference lists and relevant papers, and subsequent papers citing them. The analytical framework was developed collectively and was shaped with inputs from the authors, participants at a CEDIL meeting, specialists in the field and peer reviewers.

Findings

The final conceptual framework offers a rationale for choosing between the vast array of stakeholder engagement methods depending on the context of implementing decisions or the context of knowledge production. Whether engagement is with decision-making or knowledge production, it begins with identifying the appropriate stakeholders – “stakeholder mapping”.

Stakeholder engagement with decision-making: The choice of engagement methods for policy and practice decisions depends upon the availability of generalisable knowledge (explicit, codified knowledge that can be widely transferred through statistical or theoretical inference) already produced by research, and on how well the local context is understood.

Where generalisable knowledge is available, effective stakeholder engagement with that knowledge to inform decisions includes: strengthening decision-makers’ opportunity, capability and motivation to access and make sense of evidence. This is achieved through, for example: communication strategies and evidence repositories to facilitate decision-makers’ access to research evidence; critical appraisal training programmes; and fostering changes to decision-making structures and processes, such as integrating evidence-on-demand services and evidence-informed guideline development. Decision-making by small groups with mixed membership is improved by formal consensus development methods and deliberation supported by skilled facilitators.

Where knowledge of local contexts is unknown or variable, engaging with generalisable knowledge is insufficient. However, generalisable knowledge may be implemented by adapting international guidelines with local stakeholder deliberation, or collectively refining theories of change.

Where generalisable knowledge is absent, policies can be designed for local circumstances and refined iteratively with stakeholders providing feedback; or they can be designed and delivered in discussion, and possibly sharing decisions, with stakeholders. Where local contexts are also unfamiliar, efforts begin with gathering local knowledge about the context and how people cope from local stakeholders.

Stakeholder engagement with knowledge production: The choice of engagement methods for producing research knowledge can be guided by whether the purpose is to produce knowledge that is generalisable or knowledge only for local audiences, and how well the underpinning concepts are understood and agreed in advance.

To produce generalisable knowledge when the underpinning concepts are well understood and agreed in advance, small numbers can represent various stakeholder groups to bring their wider perspectives to the work. Methods include study advisory groups and peer review processes. Formal consensus development methods and deliberation supported by skilled facilitators improves decision-making for research, as it does for research-informed decision-making.

To produce knowledge when the underpinning concepts are initially unclear or vary with context, clarity is achieved through direct and indirect methods for engaging geographic communities or communities of interest. When knowledge is required for a local context methods include round table discussion, possibly supported by a knowledge broker, and rapid consultation of local stakeholders.

Where prior concepts are unclear, and the aim is to produce generalisable knowledge, more extensive stakeholder engagement benefits from larger numbers and more time for deliberation. Methods include well facilitated multi-stakeholder deliberation, such as international guideline development panels, complemented by wide consultation.

Political analysis: The links between much of the literatures on knowledge mobilisation and political analysis are tenuous. Nevertheless there is evidence of research uptake being influenced by political power, democratic processes, institutional mechanisms, values and priorities. Research evidence tends to influence technical decisions rather than more complex decisions with multiple social implications, and where generalisable evidence is strong, can influence decisions without taking into account local contexts, needs or capabilities. There is however, both work on the theory how politics and interests effect research uptake, as well as relevant development practice, which might inform future models for engaging stakeholders.

Social Psychology: Understanding that behaviour change results from a combination of capability, opportunity and motivation explains much of the empirical evidence and can be used to design new interventions. Small group decision-making can be explained and influenced by the skills and attributes of group members, the knowledge they bring, the knowledge presented to them and the processes for discussion and decision-making.

Systems Thinking: Accountability to stakeholders (which relies on transparency, participation, learning and feedback, and complaints and redress) can be applied to individual activities, priorities and policies generally, and governance and systems, and enhanced through a series of learning loops.

Recommendations:

We recommend research to fill three major gaps in the literature about stakeholder engagement: comprehensive guidance for stakeholder engagement to encourage decisions that are both evidence-informed and appropriate to their context; specific methods for policy-makers to draw on evidence from multiple sources for prediction and decision-making; and understanding the institutional and political context of research uptake.

Section 1

Introduction

This paper investigates stakeholder engagement with decision-making and research for international aid and social development, to encourage decisions that are both evidence-informed and appropriate to their context.¹ It has two key purposes: to help commissioning and research teams to choose appropriate models for engaging stakeholders with research in order to focus on relevant questions, to encourage the effective use of research findings by policy makers, programme managers and practitioners, and to identify what further research on stakeholder engagement needs to be undertaken. It does this by collating the relevant literature on engagement for developing interventions and evaluating their impact, and synthesising the findings to argue how to choose between existing models of engagement and, signposts appropriate guidance.

The vision is for policy makers, programme managers and practitioners making decisions to engage with formal research about causal relationships and contextual influences (such as impact evaluations or systematic reviews), and with the know-how and tacit knowledge from those most intimately involved in the issues at hand. The rationale is that stakeholder engagement with research findings leads to better decision making. Stakeholder engagement with the research process leads to research that takes into account their interests and concerns and, in the absence of research relevant to their context, stakeholders' familiarity with the local context is the starting point for informing decisions and new research. The paper takes readers through the argument for how we make sense of the literature about stakeholder engagement, and then considers the evidence available, and the evidence missing. It does this by collating the relevant literature on engagement for developing interventions and evaluating their impact, and synthesising the findings to argue how to choose between existing models of engagement and, signposts appropriate guidance.

The broad scope and abstract nature of many of the issues raised may make this paper quite dense and difficult to read in parts. This introduction starts with definitions for the key concepts (see Box 1) and principles underpinning the analysis before describing the structure of the rest of the paper.

We justify the scope of this paper by considering in turn each of these key concepts and their definitions. This paper explores stakeholder engagement with decision-making and with research evidence for making those decisions, and stakeholder engagement in the research process for producing evidence to inform those decisions. It focuses on how stakeholders can be engaged with the processes of planning and conducting both impact evaluations and evidence syntheses, as well as with the findings of such research for making decisions. Stakeholders may have specific local interests and responsibilities, and/or much broader, national or international concerns and remits.

Impact evaluations provide evidence of the design, implementation and impact of development policies, programmes and practices. The findings of different evaluations can

¹ The original purpose was to investigate models of stakeholder engagement for impact evaluations and evidence synthesis which promote use of study findings by policy makers, programme managers and practitioners. The scope was broadened on the advice of participants at a CEDIL meeting which discussed the interim report.

be brought together in systematic reviews or evidence syntheses to strengthen confidence in the conclusions. The value of such evidence depends first on how well the evaluations, and subsequent evidence syntheses, addressed the interests and concerns of potential users of the evidence and other stakeholders

Box 1: Terminology and definitions

Users of evidence (adapted from Langer et al., 2016):

- engage with research (or research summaries) and acting upon it in some way; not necessarily using the research to inform policy or practice developments, maybe only considering the research during discussions before decisions are made.

Stakeholders (adapted from Henwood, 2017) are individuals who affect or are affected by policy or programmatic decisions and actions, or research. Impact evaluations (adapted from Stern et al., 2012):

- evaluate the positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects on final beneficiaries that result from a development intervention
- assess the direct and indirect causal contribution claims of these interventions to such effects (including effects on equity) whether intended or unintended
- explain how policy interventions contribute to an effect so that lessons can be learnt.

Evidence syntheses or systematic reviews (Gough et al., 2017) are:

- reviews of existing research using explicit, accountable rigorous research methods
- undertaken to create new knowledge from the separate studies included
- by systematically combining four key activities: clarifying the question being asked; identifying and describing the relevant research ('mapping' the research); critically appraising research reports in a systematic manner, bringing together the findings into a coherent statement, known as synthesis; and establishing what evidence claims can be made from the research.

International development and developing countries: This paper was commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) whose goal is to promote sustainable development and eliminate world poverty. DFID's work focuses on 'developing countries' and international aid from the UK. This terminology is not entirely satisfactory considering that the Sustainable Development Goals apply to all countries, and the language of "aid" refers to the efforts of international donors might be interpreted as a perpetuation of paternalistic and colonial modes of working. The choice of terms varies. We have tended to use the terms 'developing countries' and 'Global South' synonymously, often adopting the term used by the authors whose work we cite. Similarly we use international development synonymously with international aid and social development.

This paper adopts the fundamental principle that sound use of research findings involves, wherever possible, systematically bringing together and drawing on the findings of multiple studies both for producing generalisable evidence syntheses² and for deliberation in local contexts. The potential benefits of such an approach come from drawing on more evidence than a single study and on evidence that allows greater consideration of variation in populations, interventions and contexts, as well as variation in the quality of studies. Specifically with respect to generalisable evidence syntheses, the confidence that can be placed in that evidence for decision-making depends upon the rigour and relevance of the evidence synthesis and the rigour and relevance of its included studies. Opportunities to

² In this paper we highlight reviews with systematic searches with * against the name of the first author, both in the main text, and in the list of references.

judge or enhance this rigour and relevance therefore include: stakeholder engagement with the focus and questions addressed by evidence syntheses, their framing, methods and findings; and stakeholder engagement with the focus and the questions addressed by primary impact evaluations, their framing, methods and findings. In particular, the framing of both the evidence syntheses and primary evaluations needs to reflect far more than the researchers' understandings of what is important, and indeed give preference to stakeholders' interests and world views, including understanding the political economy (i.e. the broader political, economic and social environment which shapes decision-making) in which they and researchers are both located.

This paper recognises that research in general, and evaluative research in particular, is inherently political. It is political because the research questions asked and findings produced can have implications for the various stakeholders' power, jobs, income, legitimacy, and reputation, and maybe even well-being. Furthermore this kind of research necessarily deals with contested understandings of evidence and knowledge, based on people's motivations and interests; academic disciplinary or cultural norms; or deeper still, underlying epistemology or world views. It is recognised that researchers also have interests, incentives and political positionality that shape them and their value systems, bringing for example prestige and the next research contract. As such politics, whether the politics of the researchers or of the wider stakeholders, is a factor in what gets researched and how, who pays for it, the type of evidence sought, as well as in whether findings will or will not be accepted or used to influence decisions. Furthermore power relations between stakeholders are unequal and some voices will hold more sway than others. If one recognises the legitimate role of public policy makers to be responding to the political demands of constituents and citizens, then it follows that other, sometimes competing institutional drives and incentives may make taking up research findings difficult. Box 2 provides an example from the literature on cash transfer programmes.

Box 2: Research Evidence and Politics Relating to Cash Transfer Programmes

An extensive literature evaluating cash transfer programmes provides impressive evidence of the impact of programmes on monetary poverty, education, health and nutrition, savings/investment and production, employment and empowerment in many different contexts (Bastagli et al., 2016). This includes evidence about:

- Monetary poverty: cash transfers can reduce monetary poverty
- Education: cash transfers can raise school attendance, but do not always lead to improved learning
- Health and nutrition: cash transfers can stimulate health service use and improve dietary diversity, but there is less evidence that they affect the height and weight of children
- Savings and investment: cash transfers can help foster the economic autonomy of beneficiaries
- Employment: cash transfers are associated with a reduction in child labour; most studies show either no effect or a positive effect on adults working
- Empowerment: cash transfers can increase women's decision-making power and choices, but may not reduce emotional abuse.

Although this evidence is useful for informing donors and non-governmental organisations supporting programmes, it has little to say to governments who lack the resources to sustain programmes (McCord, 2009). There is much less evidence about the political and institutional context in which an evidence informed approach might flourish, or about the degree to which local political actors and governments might sustain the process, even if it "works" technically. There is an additional risk that this body of evidence, accrued in part because researchers have been able to apply experimental short term outcome evaluations of specific interventions, may inadvertently shape thinking and development of social protection in terms of time-limited standalone programmes rather than building sustainable national policies.

In light of the above, this paper considers engagement of stakeholders with decision-making, impact evaluations and evidence syntheses. The first step involves identifying anyone who contributes to or may be affected by decisions or research that may inform those decisions, directly or indirectly (funders, policy makers, managers tasked with delivering the policy, practitioners, service users and the wider public) and seeking to understand their interests and incentives (this is 'stakeholder mapping'). The first step is to facilitate their role in : (a) identifying and understanding priority problems; (b) systematically reviewing existing research; (c) developing the existing research further if necessary; and (d) making and implementing decisions in light of the research and other knowledge.

Making sense of the diversity of stakeholder engagement currently undertaken is essential for choosing appropriate models for particular circumstances. How stakeholder engagement happens differs depending on:

- the nature of the task
- which researchers and stakeholders are engaged, and their interests, relative power and motivations
- how they come together
- how their discussions and decision-making are supported, and how they interact with the research and each other (Oliver S. et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the context for determining these choices needs to be understood in terms of the political economy in which these same decisions are being made. This raises the question of which models and tools for engaging stakeholders for impact evaluations and

evidence syntheses are widely applicable, and which suit particular tasks and particular stakeholder groups and their contexts.

The backdrop to this paper is the interface between research knowledge and knowledge held by policy makers, programme managers and practitioners. In reality there are multiple interfaces and multiple forms of knowledge flowing through multiple routes, but to initiate our analysis we consider this area as having a single interface that is approached from different perspectives. Researchers approach this interface with their roles, responsibilities and skills framed largely in terms of theories (including theories of how research contributes to policy decisions), research methodologies and empirical findings. Policy makers, programme managers and practitioners approach this interface with their disparate roles, responsibilities and skills framed largely in terms of decisions they face about how to improve lives in terms of health, welfare, education, infrastructure, governance or many other ways.

How both and decision-makers researchers act is also shaped by the institutional context and political economy in which they are located. Knowledge may flow from policy teams, programme managers or practitioners to inform the research agenda, or from research findings and judgements about the confidence that can be placed in them to inform decisions. Or indeed knowledge can be co-produced by researchers, policy makers and practitioners (Boswell and Smith, 2017). Where these knowledge flows include some form of formal synthesis of research findings from multiple studies there is less risk of basing decisions on single studies which might have been too small or set in a context dissimilar to the context of subsequent decision-making, or on studies that by chance offer spurious findings.

The exchange between, and generation of, knowledge by researchers and stakeholders is shaped by how research questions and findings are framed, the political palatability of findings, and the interests of both parties. Inaccessible, irrelevant and untimely research is often a barrier to uptake (Lavis et al., 2003; Oliver K et al., 2014; Langer et al., 2016). The focus of this paper is models of stakeholder engagement to facilitate knowledge exchange in ways that take institutional and political realities into account: the models available, their suitability in many different circumstances, and the guidance available for their practical application, whether for producing or using research. Given the variable circumstances in which impact evaluations or evidence syntheses are produced or their findings used, and the vast array of stakeholder engagement models available, this paper focuses specifically on (a) engagement with knowledge for making decisions, and (b) engagement with the knowledge production process.

In section 2 we describe how we identified and analysed the relevant literature. In section 3 we describe how we developed a conceptual framework to make sense of such a broad scope of literature. We then present models of stakeholder engagement with decision-making (section 4) and research production (section 5), and the additional learning from political science, social psychology and systems thinking (section 6). Lastly, in section 7 we consider how various models of stakeholder engagement suit particular organisational or on-the-ground contexts, before highlighting gaps in current knowledge about stakeholder engagement for development impact and learning, and offer recommendations for CEDIL, DFID and international development more widely.

Section 2

Methods of Enquiry

The broad scope of this paper – the engagement of policy makers, programme managers and practitioners with both existing knowledge for decisions across social development and aid programmes, and research to generate such knowledge – required the authorship, the search for evidence, and the conceptual framework to span a broad range of academic disciplines. Within this broad scope many sub-literatures have already been synthesised systematically, but the relationship between the sub-literatures is not always clear. The challenge was both to understand the literature as a whole and to assess the confidence that could be placed in the findings of prior work.

Understanding the literature as a whole was advanced by combining and developing further two complementary frameworks; one about making decisions in response to the knowledge about causality and context available (Institute of Development Studies, 2015; Green, 2015; Valters et al., 2016); and the other about generating knowledge in the form of policy-relevant systematic reviews (Oliver et al., 2016). Both these frameworks had been developed by groups of professionals reflecting on their own ways of working: the decision-making framework had been developed by donors, NGOs and UN organizations, technology and innovation specialists, researchers, and consultants interested in adaptive programmes and policies in development; and the knowledge generating framework was developed by researchers and policy makers engaged with systematic reviews. The two-way relationship between decision-making and knowledge generation became apparent from the wider literature about using research (Langer et al., 2016). Finally, an integrated conceptual framework was constructed by combining decision-making with knowledge production and setting the two against a backdrop of politics and power.

Confidence in understanding the issues in this way came from populating the framework with empirical studies. These were largely systematic reviews whose authors had systematically scoped and synthesised extensive bodies of literature.

Identifying the relevant literature, making sense of it with an evolving conceptual framework and presenting the evidence taking into account our confidence in the findings was an iterative process that suits open, exploratory questions. The remainder of Section 2 offers more detail for each element of the work.

The Authors: Between them the authors brought experience in childhood studies, crime, education, epidemiology, geography, global health, health systems, philosophy, politics, psychology, social care and sociology. Each of these authors brought experience of working in two or more academic disciplines. Their current interests include: children's rights, conflict and peacebuilding, gender and rights, health inequalities, HIV/AIDS, mental health, philosophy of science, research methodology for impact evaluations in the Global South and evidence synthesis, and spanning boundaries between research and policy or practice, or between academic disciplines. They also brought a track record in practicing and researching different traditions of stakeholder engagement spanning: action research with donors, field research in Africa, policy engagement in Africa and Asia, use of research, capacity building for research and research use, participatory impact evaluation, politics of evidence and results, politics of gender, and research priority setting.

Identifying the literature: This review, which sought to advance understanding by configuring evidence within an evolving framework, adopted the principles of purposive or

theoretical searching. Such iterative searching (rather than linear and comprehensive strategies) poses significant challenges to the reporting of search strategies (Booth, 2016). Bearing in mind the methodological challenges of accommodating the broad range of stakeholder traditions and the extensive literature available in many of these areas initial efforts focused on identifying existing evidence syntheses. Searching began with sources rich in evidence syntheses for developing countries: 3ie database of systematic reviews; 3ie Evidence Gap Maps; and International Rescue Committee Evidence Maps. These were small enough to inspect the titles and abstracts without relying on keyword searches. This strategy therefore combined a breadth of coverage with confidence in the findings produced by systematic reviews.

To complement the research literatures we sought guidance available from leading development organisations. We crowd-sourced evidence and guidance through two series of events in the week 6 – 12 November 2017. These were convened as Humanitarian Evidence Week by Evidence Aid³ and as London Evidence Week by 3ie.⁴ The results of these searches were supplemented by evidence syntheses and seminal papers identified by the authors in their areas of expertise. We crowd-sourced guidance through Twitter using #GlobalDev and a handle with a track record for tweeting about evidence, engagement and international development.⁵ We worked closely with DFID's Evidence and Learning Facility for South Sudan to consider the applicability of models for fragile and post conflict states, not only the Global South more widely.

Early searches identified existing literatures about models and tools for stakeholder engagement that have been synthesised in systematic or critical reviews which focus on:

(a) engagement with knowledge for making decisions, such as: the role of knowledge brokering between researchers and policy makers for making use of research findings (Bornbaum et al., 2015; Kislov et al., 2017); dissemination of research findings (Wilson et al., 2010); using opinion leaders to disseminate evidence-based practice (Flodgren et al., 2011); the science of science use (Langer et al., 2016); combining evidence for decisions from mixed sources (Koon et al., 2013); or

(b) engagement with the knowledge production process, such as: setting priorities for research (McGregor et al., 2014); the role of knowledge brokering between researchers and policy makers in helping to guide studies (Bornbaum et al., 2015; Kislov et al., 2017); managers and practitioners as partners in research (Olivier et al., 2016); and syntheses that underline the importance of politics, and the political and institutional context, in contributing to the likelihood of research uptake. The latter include examples from health policy (Liverani et al., 2013), nutrition policy (Cullerton et al., 2016), transport policy (Sager, 2007), and low carbon technology policy (Auld et al., 2014).

The literatures variously focused on the whole field (science of science use), specific parts of the process (from agenda setting to use), or various actors (knowledge brokers, managers and practitioners). Between them, they included research addressing (inter)personal or organisational engagement with evidence, and behavioural science, communication science,

³ <http://www.evidenceaid.org/events-and-training/hew/>

⁴ <http://www.3ieimpact.org/en/events/3ie-conferences-and-workshops/london-evidence-week-2017/>

⁵ A tweet by @profsandyoliver: 'What are your favourite papers/ guidance for stakeholder engagement with research? #GlobalDev We're pulling together guidance for @DFID_Research and don't want to miss the gems'; made impressions on 6520 Twitter accounts, attracted 24 retweets, ten likes, four replies and signposts to nine authors.

and political science to understand or influence the actions of individuals and organisations, and understand the significance of the wider context.

The Conceptual Framework: Recognising this diversity of focus prompted the need for an overarching framework that would accommodate various models, perspectives and contexts to make sense of the available literature. Analysis spanning multiple disciplines derives its coherence from conceptual frameworks that act as boundary objects, making sense within and across the contributing disciplines. As we became familiar with the empirical literature we drew on frameworks that helped make sense of different parts of the literature. A framework distinguishing different models for producing policy-relevant systematic reviews explained the appropriate contexts for applying peer reviewing processes, expert panels, knowledge brokering and broad consultation and consensus development as methods for stakeholder engagement with knowledge production (Oliver and Dickson, 2016). Our searches for literature addressing engagement with evidence for international development revealed a framework distinguishing the appropriate development contexts for evidence-informed linear programming, adaptive management and accruing more data (Institute of Development Studies, 2015). Links between these two frameworks were apparent from a third which came from studies of research use and recognised the essential interaction between production and use of evidence and wider influencing factors (Langer et al., 2016). The adoption and adaptation of these frameworks and how they might relate to the broader institutional context is described in section 3.

The analysis: The literature identified within the scope of interest was compared in terms of its focus and findings within the conceptual frameworks explained above. The conceptual framework for understanding the context of adaptive decisions and of knowledge production were compared with each other for their mutual coherence. The frameworks were populated with the emerging findings from empirical studies (systematic reviews whenever possible), and then refined to improve their coherence with the findings and their coherence with each other, until they were combined in a final overarching framework capable of enhancing understanding of the empirical evidence spanning the whole scope of this work. Similar findings from different sources offered greater confidence. Dissimilar findings provided a focus for further analysis to reveal possible explanations.

Developing the conceptual framework and seeking and synthesising evidence within that framework was an iterative process following the example of 'best fit' framework synthesis (Carroll et al., 2011) by adopting initial frameworks and refining them throughout the analysis. The lead author of this paper frequently shared with the co-authors the emerging evidence and its interpretation within the developing framework. Co-authors challenged and refined the developing framework, prompting the first version to be abandoned entirely, subsequent versions to incorporate changes in definitions and terminology, and the addition of a higher level of socio-political analysis. Co-authors also incorporated seminal texts from their fields. In addition the paper benefited at various stages from colleagues elsewhere who generously discussed issues within their specialist areas; their contributions are acknowledged at the end of the paper.

The presentation. Drawing together the existing evidence from such a broad field in order to help inform the selection of which stakeholder engagement model may be most appropriate for each circumstance required new insights and understandings. Testing the validity of these new insights and understandings came from presenting and discussion emerging findings at a meeting of CEDIL stakeholders, later from the formal peer review process involving academics and policy makers, and from reaching out to experts in the field for constructive discussion about the findings and their presentation. Their input is acknowledged at the end of the paper. The framework developed makes sense looking back on empirical evidence currently available. The question remains whether it makes sense,

looking forward, to guide the choice of methods for engaging stakeholders in decisions about development, aid or research; whether it helps focus research effort on where it is most needed; and whether it continues to make sense as empirical evidence advances.

Section 3

Frameworks, models and theories for mobilising knowledge

Researchers' and stakeholders' ways of working for social development and aid programmes differ in terms of their priorities, values, language and time scales. In seeking solutions to problems, stakeholders tend to emphasise the relevance of potential solutions to their local problems and contexts, by drawing primarily on knowledge about the local context and only sometimes, also, drawing on generalisable knowledge largely or entirely developed elsewhere. In contrast, researchers, when conducting primary impact evaluations or systematic reviews of such studies, tend to emphasise the rigour in study design and, when aggregating the findings of similar evaluations, the generalisability of study findings, only sometimes, although increasingly, considering how context moderates outcomes. In this way they are able to offer generalisable knowledge while sometimes indicating aspects that may need attention depending on local circumstances. This tendency for stakeholders to prioritise relevance to their local problems and context, and researchers to prioritise rigour and generalisability leads us to distinguish knowledge that is generalisable and knowledge that is context specific (Box 3).

Box 3: Defining generalisable and context specific knowledge

Knowledge that is generalisable – knowledge claims that rest on explicit, codified knowledge that can be widely transferred through statistical or theoretical inference; and that are developed through primary studies and research syntheses to offer new conceptualisations, theoretical understanding or empirical evidence. The kinds of generalisable knowledge useful for development policy include the nature and scale of social concerns, and the recognition and explanation of causal relationships, including mediators and moderators. Knowledge generated in one setting is generalisable to other settings if the influence of contextual factors is either insignificant or well understood.

Knowledge that is context specific – knowledge claims that rest on explicit, codified knowledge developed through local primary studies. Also, knowledge claims that rest on familiarity with local settings, cultures and politics to offer: tacit understanding of the nature and scale of local issues (where 'scale' may rest on impressions indicating matters of priority rather than accurate measures); recognition of trends and forecasting (essential for planning); practice and organisational 'know how'; and sensitivity to context essential for considering appropriateness of interventions and insights into the transferability of the evidence of effects.

On the one hand, evidence synthesis offers a method for providing knowledge claims that are expected to hold widely, thereby creating knowledge from and for widespread groups; and on the other, it can inform deliberation by specific groups to integrate with knowledge of their local context.

This paper is based on the assumption that better research and better decisions emerge when these different perspectives are brought closer together to enhance both evidence-informed policy and policy-informed evidence. It also recognises the importance of debating and negotiating how different stakeholders might come together to improve decision-

making. In doing so, we acknowledge that stakeholder engagement has an inherently idealistic element, and despite the best intentions, the broader political contexts can positively or negatively affect the process and so maybe a key factor in determining success.

Early considerations of getting research into practice saw this as a linear process, with knowledge flowing from primary studies to syntheses of effects to inform policy and practice. Subsequently, more sophisticated accounts of knowledge mobilisation saw knowledge flowing in both directions, or sometimes flowing through multiple routes and sometimes involving co-construction of ideas and evidence (Best and Holmes, 2010). A recent overview of systematic reviews presented eight archetypal approaches (see box 4) that involve different actors engaging with different types of knowledge. Linear models of knowledge production, its communication and advocacy of evidence use mainly seek to engage wider stakeholders with explicit, codified knowledge that was either theoretical or empirical. Relationship or system models add contextual knowledge to support implementation and change management.

Box 4: Archetypal approaches to mobilising knowledge (Davies et al., 2015)

A:	Producing knowledge (product push)
B, C:	Brokering and intermediation (own research; wider research)
D:	Advocating evidence (proselytisers for an evidence-informed world)
E, F:	Researching practice (research into practice; research in practice)
G:	Fostering networks (building on existing networks; developing new ones)
H:	Advancing knowledge mobilisation (building knowledge about knowledge and knowing).

Although these archetypal approaches clarify who is engaging with what kinds of knowledge and for what purposes, their applicability to CEDIL and wider DFID programmes might be contested because the evidence they rest on comes largely from English speaking high income countries (Davies et al., 2015). We therefore turned to conceptual frameworks developed for and with researchers, policy makers and practitioners in the Global South, taking into account different types of knowledge – generalisable and context specific – used or produced for policy or practice decision-making.

The rest of this section describes how we have refined and combined these framework into a single dynamic model that sees the world of research and decision-making more widely interacting in a socio-political context. Box 5 illustrates this with examples of what we know about research and decision-making about HIV.

3.1 Using research for decision-making

Policy makers, programme managers and practitioners in social development work in contexts that are subject to considerable variation and change. They are required to make decisions, whether research findings are available or not, and their decisions may be informed by politics, economics, social norms, organisational structures and procedures, workforce skills and practical experience. Organisational management has traditionally been portrayed as a top down, linear process characterised by standardisation and control to manage the planning and execution of repeatable tasks (Taylor, 1911). However, tensions arise between the compliance this requires of aid programmes and the knowledge held by programme implementers (Natsios, 2010). Where performance standards and indicators are aligned with generable knowledge and local knowledge is aligned with clarity and consensus

about the local context, decisions can make use of either or both whenever they are available. Thus, standards and accountability systems which suit situations that are understood and stable can be balanced with bottom up contextual knowledge and local experimentation, and 'navigation by judgement' which suits environments that are unpredictable because they are unfamiliar or particularly subject to change (Honig, 2018). This idea has been portrayed by a 2x2 matrix (see figure 1).

Earlier versions of this 2x2 matrix were developed collectively over successive iterations by humanitarian organisations to make sense of their own opportunities to make use of evidence when making decision (Institute of Development Studies, 2015; Green, 2015; Valters et al., 2016). The original 2x2 matrix was developed using the term "adaptive management" (Institute of Development Studies, 2015; Green, 2015; Valters et al., 2016). Adaptive management is seen as 'contributing to sustainable development particularly when it has leadership support, public support, and an adequate investment of time... and managing adaptively is more likely to improve outcomes when decision-making autonomy is placed as close to frontline staff and local partners as possible' (Dexis Consulting Group, 2017; p9). We have chosen the term "adaptive decisions" to explicitly broaden the scope to encompass policy, management and practice decisions. Thus figure 1 represents the varied landscape of decision-making for social development or aid programmes. We have made two other refinements. We have replaced "knowledge of context" with "context of knowledge implementation", because the context of implementation may differ from the organisational context of the decision-making. We have replaced knowledge of "causality" (Institute of Development Studies, 2015; Green, 2015; Valters et al., 2016) with "generalisable knowledge" because not all knowledge of causality is generalisable, and the key distinction is between decision-makers drawing on local knowledge and knowledge produced elsewhere.

Figure 1: Adaptive decisions using generalisable and context specific knowledge.

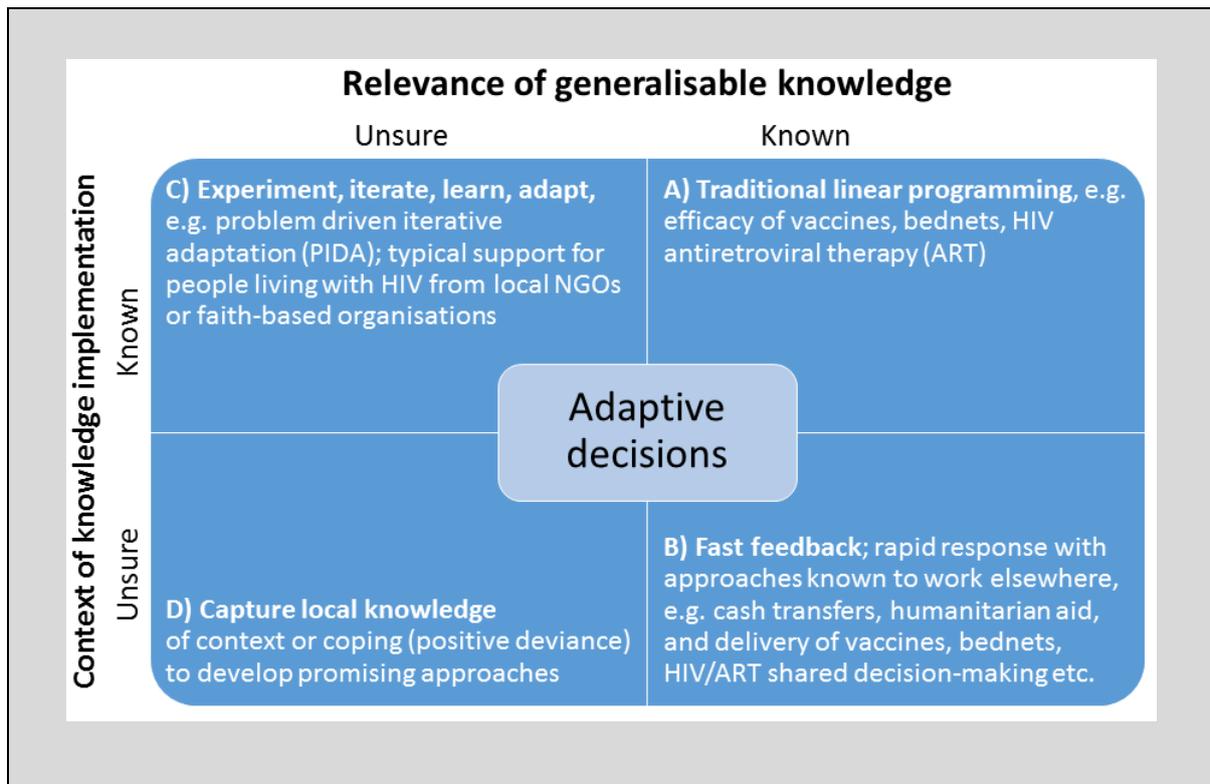


Figure 1 builds on this work to illustrate how decisions are made by policy makers or practitioners who may or may not draw on generalisable knowledge, and may or may not be familiar with, or have ready access to knowledge about the context where research findings are to be implemented. We consider each of four models in turn.

Model A: Decisions are often made on the basis of knowledge about ‘what works’, for instance, about the *effectiveness* of drugs, vaccines, bednets to protect against malaria, or cookstoves to prevent accidents and indoor pollution, top down/ linear programming is appropriate (model A in figure 1). Indeed such evidence underpins international guidance addressing many infectious diseases and other problems.

Model B: However, even when generalisable knowledge is available, the effects of a programme may be less predictable because of the inherent variability of social interventions (e.g. cash transfer or the *delivery* of technical or medical interventions such as drugs, vaccines, bednets or cookstoves), because the context and how interventions or their delivery interact with the context is not sufficiently understood, or sufficiently stable (e.g. following humanitarian crises). For instance, direct observation of therapy to treat tuberculosis has failed when: civil conflict displaced most of the local population and prevented clinic attendance; practitioners rationed incentives to those they considered most deprived and therefore most deserving; and patients found the timing of the incentive (a midday meal) and treatment inconvenient (Lutge et al., 2015). These explanations were derived from researchers drawing on knowledge of local contexts to interpret the findings of their controlled trials.

Model C: Some decisions are made in the absence of generalisable knowledge and rely on the local contextual knowledge available, including knowledge about values, and resources required and available. When there is explicit, codified knowledge of the context, this

understanding can inform the development of programmes through learning by doing, trial and error, or problem driven iterative adaptation, alternative approaches that may vary in their formality.

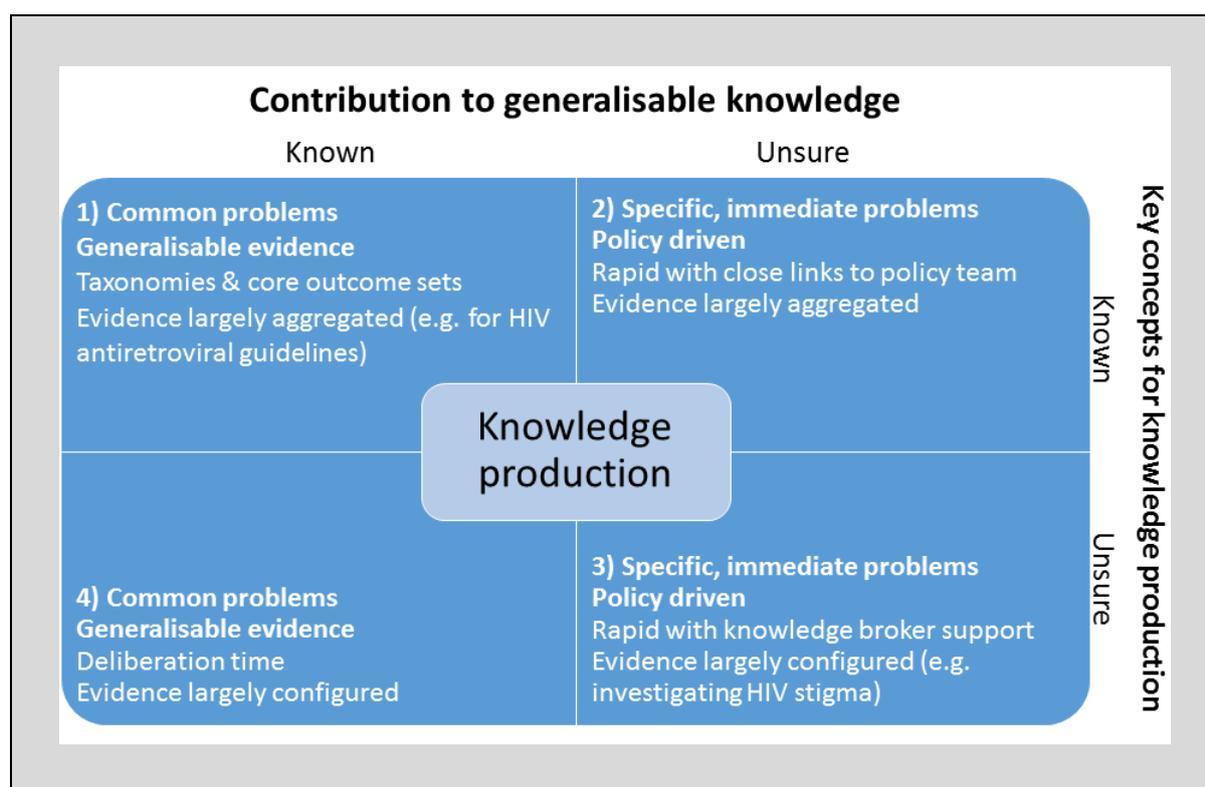
Model D: When both generalisable knowledge and explicit, codified context specific knowledge are absent the first step is to learn from local populations, by capturing their insights or tacit knowledge about factors influencing their lives, and recognising exceptional instances of coping with challenging circumstances (positive deviance).

Section 4 considers the different stakeholder models for engaging with generalisable and context specific knowledge. Before that we consider a framework for producing knowledge for decision-making.

3.2 Producing knowledge for decision-making

Figure 2 illustrates how knowledge is produced. It distinguishes four different models (labelled 1-4), depending on whether or not the purpose is to knowingly contribute to generalisable knowledge for multiple audiences (as a public good) and whether or not key concepts informing the research are clear and widely agreed in advance. It is based on a framework for producing evidence syntheses (Oliver and Dickson, 2016) although the matrix has been slightly amended to accommodate research more broadly. It complements the adaptive decisions matrix. Again, we take each model in turn.

Figure 2: Producing generalisable and context specific knowledge



Model 1: Where there is indeed clarity and consensus over key concepts, considerable standardisation is possible to support replication of studies, multisite studies and syntheses that aggregate the findings of similar studies (e.g. research addressing vaccination).

Model 2: Even when key concepts are clear and widely agreed in advance, some research is tailored to specific settings for a particular policy team (e.g. synthesising medical malpractice in obstetrics).

Model 3: If a policy team requires evidence urgently, but key concepts are not clear and widely agreed in advance, the policy and research teams develop a consensus together, sometimes with the support of a knowledge broker (e.g. evaluating rapid humanitarian responses; public reporting of health system performance improve care).

Model 4: If key concepts are not clear and widely agreed in advance, and evidence is required for global audiences, consensus can be developed among a much broader set of stakeholders (e.g. multi-site studies of similar programmes; synthesis of shifting tasks to less qualified staff).

Section 5 considers the models of stakeholder engagement that suit the different purposes and epistemological contexts of research production.

3.3 The social, cultural and political context of evidence demand and supply

Section 3.1 was about using knowledge for adaptive decisions. Section about 3.2 was about knowledge production. Section 3.3 brings them both together in a supply and demand relationship, and sets them in their wider socio-political context as is shown in figure 3.

However, it has long been recognised that a push-pull relationship is too simplistic for two reasons (Best and Holmes, 2010). First, because research often has a relatively small influence in decisions, with other factors such as social values and resources being major

factors considered. Indeed, costs, values and preferences are now integrated into decision-making for health policy (Alonso-Coello et al., 2016; Gough et al., 2014). Second because researchers' familiarity with concepts underpinning research, and decision-makers being familiar with the challenges they face, can also be combined in a working relationship to co-produce new knowledge.

This more complex picture is illustrated in Figure 3 by linking the two matrices, one of knowledge production and the other of adaptive decisions, to show decision-makers seeking evidence and making decisions whether or not it is available and researchers offering evidence (where it is available and whether or not it is used) for social development and international aid, either proactively or in response to decision-makers' demands.

In addition to these core elements of adaptive decisions and evidence syntheses, in recognition of the centrality of both politics and power, we have placed the two matrices within three important contextual elements (illustrated in red):

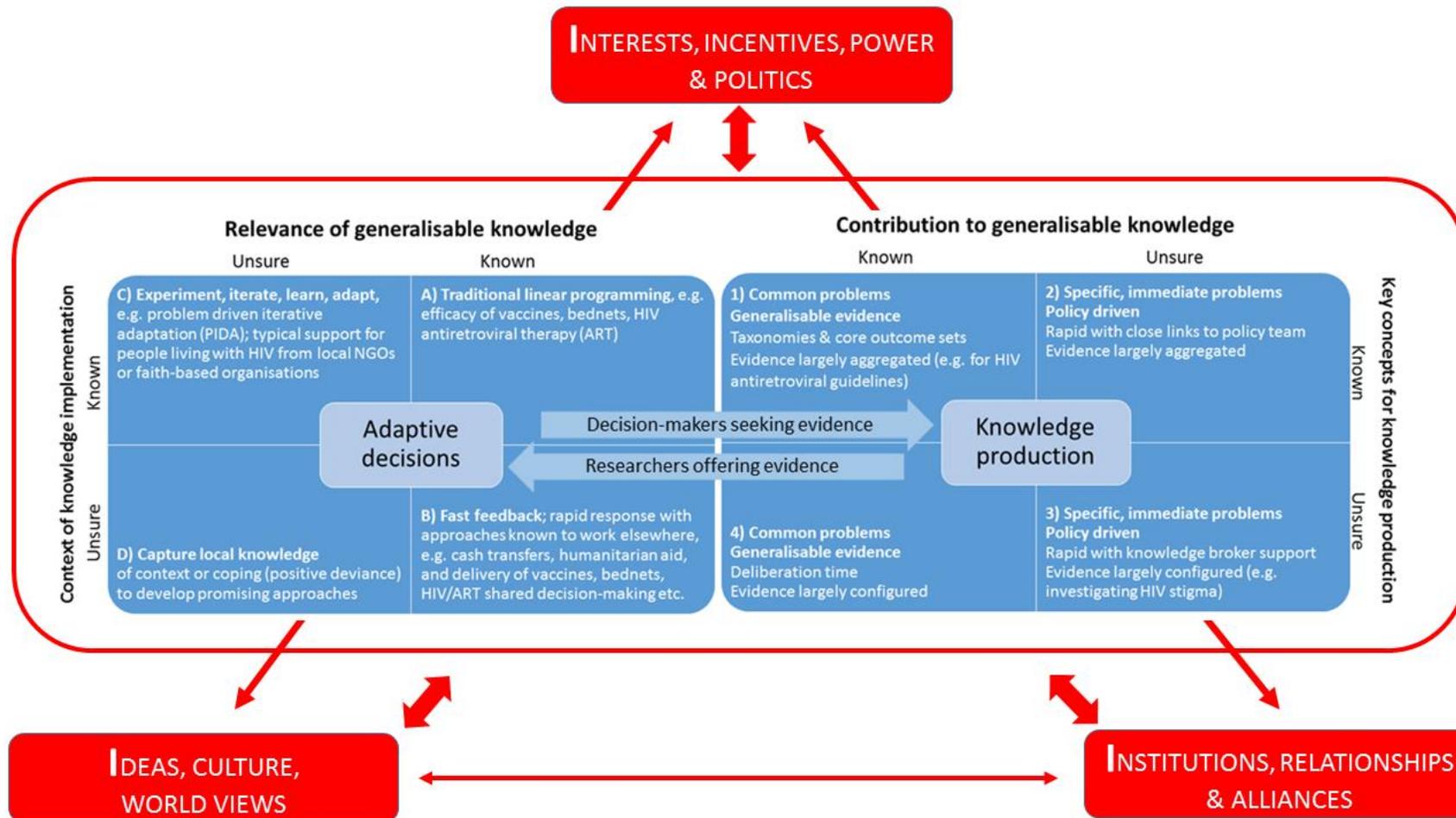
Interests, Incentives, Power and Politics: This domain covers the actors and stakeholders concerned, including the researchers, their interests in the subject matter and the incentives that they are subject to. It also refers to their relative formal and informal power vis-a-vis each other, 'what makes them tick' i.e. what motivates or incentivises them, and what space or latitude they have to effect change (Hudson et al., 2016). At present the technocratic understanding of producing and using research is poorly related to this political understanding of the key players.

Ideas, Culture and World Views: This domain covers the underpinning ideas, perspectives and values that shape interests and incentives, and which are individually and collectively held. 'Politics is, ultimately, a battle of ideas. The capacity of actors to successfully contest and challenge the ideas that underpin institutions is central to explaining how change happens... Ideas are not just an internal psychological phenomenon – they are collectively held and can be powerful forces in mobilising collective action.' (Hudson et al., 2018, p10). These issues help explain why some research findings or forms of knowledge, may or may not resonate with different stakeholders in different contexts. For instance, views vary about the adequacy of studies of water that focus on its functional uses while ignoring its social, emotional and spiritual roles (see section 4.2 for further details).

Institutions, Relationship and Alliances: Formal and informal "rules of the game"- or institutions – embed incentives, ideas and distributional arrangements that produce strong vested interests to maintain the status quo (Thelen, 1999). Alliances, coalitions and collective action are usually the means by which one set of ideas is legitimised or delegitimised. Research findings and the knowledge generated may run with the grain or against the grain of the current "rules of the game". This may determine how findings might be best generated and shared.

As such one can see a potential distinction between the validity and usefulness of research findings and their persuasiveness or political salience to decision-makers. This has led some to propose that notions of rigour should encompass not just methodological rigour and validity, but also the quality of stakeholder engagement and the relevance and utility of the research (Langer et al., 2017). This is discussed below in section 6.4.

Figure 3: Decisions and Research for Development and Aid Programmes within a Social, Cultural and Political Context



The appropriate choice of stakeholder engagement model depends upon the context of the decision-making or research production. Decision-makers (in the adaptive decisions matrix) encounter uncertainty when available evidence is generated in other contexts (as it almost always is), and therefore implementation, if considered appropriate, involves a degree of adaptation and monitoring, based on tacit or experiential knowledge, experimentation and feedback loops. They also encounter uncertainty if generalisable evidence is absent. In such cases, decisions can be informed by engaging local stakeholders to capture their knowledge of context or coping strategies. This is considered in more detail in section 4.

The appropriate choice of stakeholder engagement model for research production depends upon the knowledge already available, the knowledge that is lacking, and local opportunities and constraints; and engagement models or their components may be appropriate in more than one context. These are considered in more detail in section 5.

How these options play out in the area of HIV is described in the next section.

3.4 Decision-making and Research Knowledge to Tackle HIV

Decision-making about HIV in different socio-economic contexts: The challenges of making decisions to suit different circumstances can be illustrated by policy and practice decisions about HIV. Generalisable evidence is available about the effectiveness of antiretroviral therapy for treating HIV (adaptive decisions matrix, model A), so decisions can be made around the world about when to start antiretroviral therapy and on pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV, and such decisions are supported by evidence-informed guidelines developed by the World Health Organisation (2015). However, how best to deliver HIV antiretroviral therapy needs to consider the context of people's lives which varies across the different populations living with HIV. Although not straightforward, the World Health Organisation (2017) has offered guidance for clinical decision-makers who may be less immediately familiar with the local context of people's lives (adaptive decisions matrix, model B).

An analysis of 17 World Bank evaluations found that when generalisable knowledge from elsewhere is initially poorly aligned with local contextual knowledge (adaptive decisions matrix, model B), decisions can focus on: better targeting of services through fast feedback; raising HIV as a priority for community activities; and complementing national programmes with community responses, and vice versa:

'Program designers who are savvy about what CBOs [community based organisations] and other community actors such as caregivers can realistically achieve can maximize the inputs and the results, while stakeholders can play a critical role in helping communities understand their epidemics and identify priorities for their catchment areas.'

(Rodriguez-Garcia et al. 2013)

Generalisable evidence for global audiences is not part of the story for many local initiatives responding to HIV (cells C and D, left-hand matrix). Instead, faith-based organisations and local NGOs have developed their activities based on their understanding of local problems (Rodriguez-Garcia et al., 2013).

Decisions and research specifically about HIV are influenced by their wider social, cultural and political contexts (illustrated by the red triangular backdrop in figure 3). Violence against women, as a cause and consequence of HIV infection, has attracted various prevention approaches and accrued some haphazard learning along the way (Heise L.L., 2011). Approaches targeting power relationships in order to change the social norms underlying violence against women have since been shown to be sometimes effective by a cluster

randomised controlled trial in Kampala, Uganda (Abramsky et al., 2016). However, the importance of context here raises questions about whether the intervention could be implemented and effective elsewhere, even as close as the neighbouring country of South Sudan where social norms have collapsed with civil war.

Research about HIV in different contexts: Although antiretroviral therapy is available and guidance developed about when to initiate it, less is known about how to help patients keep taking the treatment. A recent systematic review (Ridgeway et al., 2018) was able to build on current understanding of interventions (focusing on practitioners, communities, mHealth platforms, and counselling) and adherence measures, to reveal the need for the research community (researchers and those they work with) to design and deliver high quality trials of interventions about how to support adherence (knowledge production matrix, model 1). Although there is a need for such research internationally, some progress has been made in Uganda with a local intervention for HIV patient monitoring (knowledge production matrix, model 2). There, needing to know the effects of training practitioners has been satisfied by a primary evaluation of a specific Ugandan HIV training programme (Kyeyagalire et al., 2010).

However, when generalisable knowledge (knowledge production matrix, model 1) is required urgently to meet a policy deadline, in some areas rapid synthesis (more common for knowledge production matrix model 2) is possible where systematic reviews already exist, for instance, when collating the evidence for the 2013 WHO consolidated antiretroviral guidelines (Chaiyachati et al., 2014).

Open questions seeking local understanding of a phenomenon can be addressed by primary research or research synthesis (knowledge production matrix, model 3). Examples include a rapid, community-based qualitative assessment of how HIV-related stigma impacts engagement to care to inform a combination HIV prevention program in high prevalence South African communities (Treves-Kagan et al., 2016); and a rapid systematic review of Malaysian literature addressing stigma related to HIV (Mehrabi et al. 2016).

Particularly challenging is the situation there is no or little general knowledge available to address relevant questions, and where initial work needs to focus on clarifying and agreeing the key concepts (research matrix, model 4). Potential contextual variation may be taken into account by multi-site primary studies or by systematic reviews guided by international panels developing evidence-informed guidance.

HIV in a world where ideas, interests and institutions vary: A notionally “technical” process of producing and using HIV research can be upended if local and international stakeholders are not engaged (McGrory et al., undated; see section 5.1 for more detail). Kapstein and Busby’s analysis (2010) richly describes the complexity of how different levels of evidence production, and then use of that evidence by activists and lobbyists, that was required for the technical evidence of antiretrovirals to be translated into millions of people accessing those drugs. This required: knowledge of the efficacy of antiretrovirals and then generic versions; evidence of the likelihood of poor illiterate people taking the regimen properly – provided by various NGOs, Governments and the United Nations in Haiti, Brazil, Cote d’Ivoire, Vietnam, Thailand and Chile; evidence that costs could come down if generic companies were permitted to produce the drugs and that the United States, United Nations and others were willing to foot the bill etc. Finally, this evidence had to be used by activists, lobbyists, and decision-makers at various levels, including legislators.

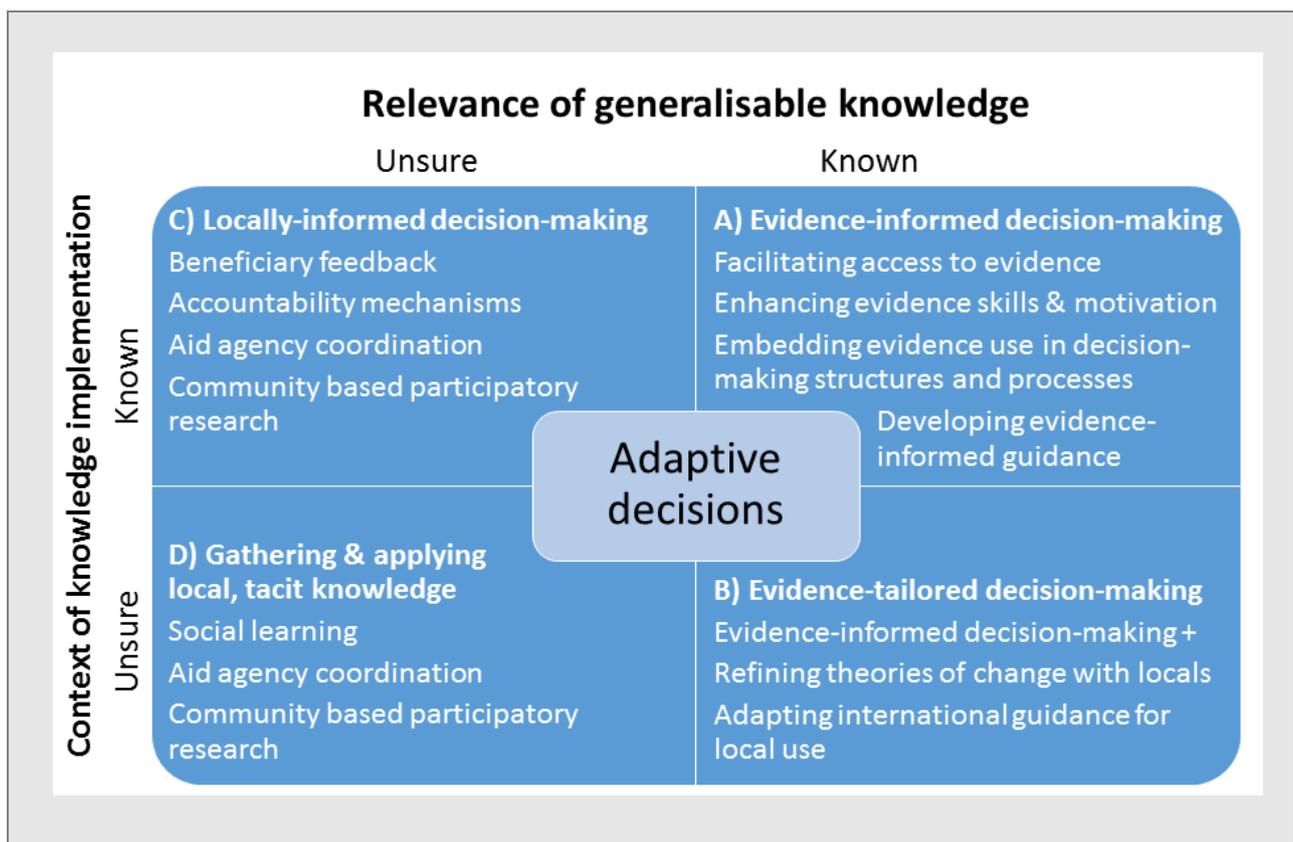
Section 4

Evidence addressing Stakeholder Engagement with Decision-Making

This section looks at components of adaptive decisions, particularly ways to enhance stakeholders engaging with decision-making informed by generalisable knowledge (section 4.1), decision-making informed by context specific knowledge (section 4.2b), and the challenge of combining the two (section 4.3).

In Section 3, Figure 1 illustrated how decisions are made. Figure 4 develops this matrix to illustrate how stakeholders are engaged in the decision-making. Some decisions are informed primarily by generalisable evidence, especially for international guidance (cell A of figure 4) and some are informed by both generalisable and context specific knowledge, especially for national or local guidance (model B of figure 4).

Figure 4: Stakeholder Engagement with adaptive decisions



4.1 Engaging with Generalisable Knowledge

Traditional models of stakeholder engagement fit within the “push” paradigm of moving research findings to decision-making settings (Holmes and Best 2010). These initiatives have focussed on engagement with completed research, with a focus on understanding and making use of the research findings (models A and B, adaptive decisions matrix). Where researchers are working to put research findings on the desks of decision-makers, there is a

need to support decision-makers to make sense of the findings. Conversely, other models aim to increase the usefulness of research to decision-making. These range from engagement with setting research agendas and guiding research through project advisory groups, through to making sense of the findings of completed research and integrating it with local contextual knowledge and local aims, and indeed co-producing research evidence.

Langer et al. (2016) combined these ideas in a multi-stage, multi-level framework that accommodated behavioural theory to review the literature on the effectiveness of different strategies to increase research use – a total of 36 existing reviews assessing what interventions can work to increase research use. Interventions have been applied at the levels of:

- Individual behaviour
- Immediate organisational context (such as where people live or work)
- Broader organisational context (such as local government)
- National and international organisations.

They were seen to work through the following mechanisms (M1 – M6):

M1: Building awareness for, and positive attitudes toward, evidence-informed decision-making

M2: Building mutual understanding and agreement on policy-relevant questions and the kind of evidence needed to answer them

M3: Providing communication of, and access to, evidence

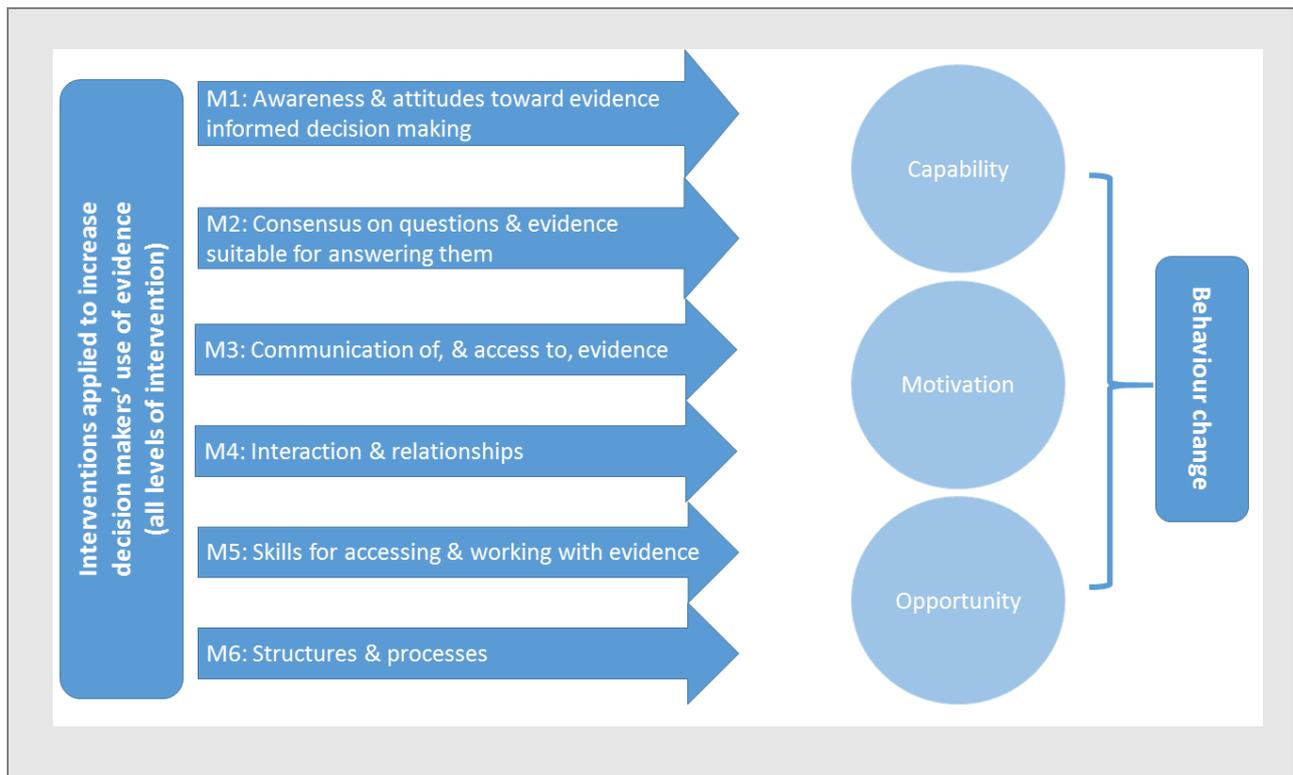
M4: Facilitating interaction between decision-makers and researchers, through joint events, communities of practice, and knowledge brokering

M5: Supporting decision-makers to develop skills in accessing and making sense of evidence

M6: Influencing decision-making structures and processes.

Langer et al. (2016) characterised use of research as behaviour change and then analysed the evidence they found by aligning these mechanisms with a theory that combines capability, motivation and opportunity to effect behaviour change (Michie et al., 2011). This is illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Theoretical Understanding of How Interventions Enhance the Use of Evidence (Adapted from *Langer et al 2016)



Box 6 summarises the findings from synthesising the 23 systematic reviews rated moderate to high trustworthiness and relevance. (Additional findings from their second review of the wider social science literature are considered in section 6.)

An overall finding of the Langer et al. (2016) review was that mechanisms for engagement between users of research and research production were often only effective if the behavioural components of capacity, opportunity and motivation to research were also addressed.

Langer et al. (2016) acknowledge the reliable evidence that some individual interventions characterised by a highly intense and complex programme design lead to an increase in evidence use. Comprehensive training approaches have emerged, which support decision-makers to access, appraise and integrate evidence. There is emerging evidence that training is more successful when conducted using a workshop approach in which decision-makers are able to share their own priorities and challenges and in which support to make sense of research is then tailored to these needs (Stewart et al., 2017). Tailoring the training in this way may well enhance participants' motivation and opportunities, as well as capacity, a combination shown to increase research use (Langer et al., 2016). We also know that on-going support that allows the building of trust between researchers and decision-makers is important for increasing evidence use (Jordaan et al., 2018). This might be via mentorships, secondments and other longer-term arrangements. In some cases, where trusting relationships exist between the producers and potential users of research, we have seen a range of stakeholders working together to co-produce evidence (see more on this above in relation to collaborative research partnerships).

At the core of many skill building interventions are tools to support critical appraisal of research, a necessary but not sufficient condition to enhance research use (Horsley et al., 2011, Langer et al 2016). Many of these tools guide decision-makers to consider both the

rigour and the relevance of the available evidence. Although they typically ask whether the population or intervention of the study being considered is relevant to the readers' context of interest, they seem to assume that readers are familiar with that context and have methods for judging relevance, and offer little or no guidance about how to make such judgements.

Langer et al. (2016) identified a major gap in knowledge about how research findings are used in developing countries. This challenge is attracting the interest of NGOs and academics. Britton (2005) advocates NGOs adopting a strategic approach to organisational learning and basis his analysis on means (in other words, capability), motive and opportunity. A combination of two webinars, an online survey of practitioners, and a literature review on evidence use revealed the problems NGOs face in these areas (Hayman and Bartlett, 2013):

- Poor access to relevant research and evidence
- Weak prioritising of evidence internally
- Capacity and resource constraints, including lack of staff with the right skills, lack of time for research, and limited funding for research, particularly over the long term and for exploratory research
- Different understandings about the value of various types of evidence
- Understanding the best ways to categorise evidence and assess its quality.

Follow-up discussions amongst NGOs, which drew on a series of empirical studies, resulted in recommendations to: define the meaning of evidence and knowledge, and be open to alternative views; reassess the value attached to knowledge and learning; and invest in skills and capacity (Hayman et al., 2016).

Box 6: What Can Work to Increase Research Use by Decision-Makers?
(Adapted from Langer et al., 2016)

Evidence of interventions increasing use of evidence

Interventions **facilitating access to research evidence**, for example through communication strategies and evidence repositories; only when the intervention simultaneously sought to enhance decision-makers' opportunity and motivation to use evidence (reliable evidence).¹

Interventions **building decision-makers' skills to access and make sense of evidence** (such as critical appraisal training programmes); only when the intervention design simultaneously sought to enhance both opportunity and motivation to use research evidence (reliable evidence).

Interventions **fostering changes to decision-making structures and processes** by formalising and embedding one or more of the other mechanisms of change within existing structures and processes (such as evidence-on-demand services integrating push, user-pull and exchange approaches) (cautious evidence).²

There is reliable evidence that some individual interventions characterised by a highly intense and complex programme design lead to an increase in evidence use. Overall, however, and based solely on observation, simpler and more defined interventions appear to have a better likelihood of success.

Evidence of interventions having no effect on use of evidence

Interventions that take a **passive approach to communicating evidence** that only provide opportunities to use evidence (such as simple dissemination tools) (reliable evidence).

Multi-component interventions that take a **passive approach to building evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) skills** (such as seminars and "communities of practice" without active educational components) (cautious evidence).

Skill-building **interventions applied at a low intensity** (such as a once-off, half a day capacity-building programme) (cautious evidence).

Overall, **unstructured interaction and collaboration** between decision-makers and researchers tended to have a lower likelihood of success. However, clearly defined, light-touch approaches to facilitating interaction between researchers and decision-makers, engagement in particular could be effective to increase intermediate CMO outcomes (cautious evidence).

Absence of evidence

Interventions **building awareness** of, and positive attitudes towards, EIDM.

Interventions **building agreement** on policy-relevant questions and what constitutes fit-for-purpose evidence.

None of reviews offering reliable or cautious evidence focused on **developing countries**, and every few of the included primary studies were conducted in developing countries.

¹ "Reliable" refers to evidence based on reviews rated high trustworthiness and relevance in the weight of evidence assessment

² "Cautious" refers to evidence based on reviews rated moderate trustworthiness and relevance.

A fundamental barrier to using generalisable knowledge is the lack of knowledge that suits the needs of specific decision-makers. A systematic meta-narrative review of qualitative literature addressing health research capacity development in low and middle income countries revealed much research that was considered 'too narrowly conceived for implementation' and a demand for stronger links between research, policy and practice

through research directly addressing policy, systems, implementation and operations (Franzen et al., 2017).

In the absence of global knowledge, decision-makers rely on gathering local contextual knowledge.

4.2 Engaging with Contextual Knowledge

Generalisable knowledge is insufficient for decision-making without also understanding the context, and sometimes decisions need to be made with contextual knowledge alone (model C, adaptive decisions matrix), or even gather local contextual knowledge if it is not readily available (model D, adaptive decisions matrix). An NGO systematically reviewed both academic papers and organisational reports on local, traditional and indigenous knowledge in disaster risk reduction, preparedness for conflict, and response, and supplemented this with a stakeholder analysis of organisations and key informant interviews at local, national and international levels (Humanitarian Leadership Academy, 2017). This synthesis offers an in-depth understanding of how donors, international organisations (including research institutions), networks, and national and local organisations are currently supporting, accessing, using or sharing local knowledge (Box 7). This includes participatory processes for recreating and nurturing local knowledge in crisis-affected communities, and the opportunities and pitfalls for sharing the social learning more widely.

Box 7: Local Contextual Knowledge in the Humanitarian Sector (Humanitarian Leadership Academy, 2017)

Contextual knowledge emerges through people's interactions and practices, as described by social learning theory (Bandura, 1963). It helps them develop an ability to live in their own personal social and environmental context as it changes around them. Sometimes but not always they are able to adapt to these changes as people become displaced, or experience unexpected shocks, or have their ways of life threatened or disrupted by others, their ability to adapt may be limited. As the nature of emergencies changes and knowledge is lost between crises, local communities might benefit from support to facilitate processes that create or share local skills, practices or information among themselves.

Demand-driven local knowledge processes require first responders, community based organisation or NGO staff, or local Government to be realistic and have a clear goal of supporting local actors and organisations to deliver a more effective response. Typical documentation processes by NGOs and researchers may provide an entry point into policy discussions but they are less suited to learning, because they produce a form of knowledge that is static and limited to one context. In contrast, agencies can facilitate discussion amongst locals that creates or shares local skills, practices or information. This is social learning whereby knowledge can be re-produced and re-contextualised with greater relevance. Attempts to share local knowledge for the purposes of learning should therefore generally use social means. Such approaches to learning, sharing and networks aim to facilitate co-management of the humanitarian response.

A similar systematic review of academic and development agency⁶ literature sought insights into youth agency and the dynamics of conflict and peace in conflict-affected contexts by similarly drawing on a wide range of study designs (Lopes Carodozo et al., 2015). Its systematic search for research followed by a thematic analysis found limited but growing attention to youth voice and experience as part of responsible programming. Amplifying youth voices risks elite youth being heard over marginalised groups such as women and girls, young mothers, disabled people, ethnic minorities and residents of rural areas, all of whom may have varying needs and experiences to offer through participatory and collaborative approaches to programme design, implementation, evaluation and research. In contrast to gathering local contextual knowledge to inform development decisions, some programmes engage locals in decisions directly. For instance, interventions to enhance the community accountability of service delivery have been designed to increase citizen participation, support good governance and increase the transparency of evaluations (Lynch et al., 2013; Westhorp et al 2014).

Whether the intention is to consult stakeholders or involve them in decisions, the first step is stakeholder mapping to identify relevant organisations and communities. A systematic review of stakeholder mapping (Henwood, 2017) collated methods that analysed stakeholders predominantly in terms of their power or influence, interests and preferences, importance in achieving the desired outcome, position and legitimacy. It concluded by recommending a twelve step guideline (Hyder, 2010). However, this review was restricted to health systems, and 'more creative and participative data collection and presentation approaches' may be found outside the health sector (Henwood, 2017, p155).

Contextual knowledge is also held by aid agencies and there are well recognised coordination models to support the sharing of knowledge between them (Lotfi et., al 2016), although how effective these are is not known (Akl et al., 2015).

⁶ The World Bank, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, United States Institute of Peace, UNICEF and Department of International Development.

4.3 Engaging with Generalisable and Context Specific Knowledge

Drawing on both generalisable and context specific knowledge requires an understanding and consensus about their respective roles, and the skills to debate them and incorporate them into decision-making (adaptive decisions matrix, model A).

Competing or complementary knowledge? A conceptual meta-synthesis of research engagement studies has revealed a sustained interest from academics and NGOs in the intersection between knowledge-production, policy and practice over many decades (Fransman, 2018). A strong tradition in participatory and emancipatory research (Chambers 1994; Friere, 1970; Chevalier and Buckles, 2013) emerged in Latin America in the 1970s, and Hall and Tandon (2014) argue that similar traditions of community engagement evolved independently in Africa and Asia. These traditions radically reconfigured ideas about knowledge and expertise, shifting power away from the professional researchers and towards the people at the focus of the research interest. However, over subsequent decades, much community-based research has been mainstreamed as a methodological tool for dedicated community researchers to reach difficult-to-access populations rather than primarily to empower them to shape new knowledge (Munck, 2014). Indeed, concerns have been expressed about indigenous knowledge in the Global South being overwhelmed by ways of knowing developed to suit the Global North (Visvanathan 1997, 2009; de Sousa Santos, 2007; Connell, 2007; Hall and Tandon, 2017). For instance, a realist review of approaches to water management integrating Indigenous and Western knowledge systems in Canada found that most studies addressed water for its functional purposes such as drinking and sanitation alone, and ignored its emotional or spiritual connections, and its differential relationships with gender and generation, thereby oversimplifying the complex, multi-layered and holistic understandings of water (Castleden et al., 2017).

In contrast, Richards (2016) suggests that merging different understandings, with the local communities learning how to think like epidemiologists and epidemiologists learning to think like local communities, was essential for controlling the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone. A similar argument favours a hybrid of western, scientific knowledge and indigenous knowledge based on experience and embedded in cultural practices, for maximising collective knowledge of livestock production and enhancing sustainable development amongst African cattle herders (Fre, 2018). In line with this approach, the meaning of evidence is being explored by NGOs (Hayman et al., 2016), and by NGOs in partnership with universities (Aniekwe et al., 2012; Hanley and Vogel, 2012). The vision is scientific knowledge that is sensitive to cultural contexts.

Knowledge brokering: A widely recognised mechanism to support such merging of understandings is knowledge brokering (Bornbaum et al., 2015; Langer et al., 2016). A systematic review of knowledge mobilisation identified models designed to: develop local solutions to practice-based problems; develop new policies, programmes and/or recommendations; adopt / implement clearly defined practices and policies; change practices and behaviours; or produce useful research / scientific knowledge (Ward, 2009). The author captured the learning from her review of 47 studies in a 'framework to help knowledge mobilisers identify and clarify their role, situate themselves and their work in relation to the diverse and contested definitions of knowledge mobilisation, navigate their way through the fragmented literature and identify models which might be helpful to them'.

Neither Langer et al., (2016) nor Ward (2009) explicitly presented findings about knowledge use and knowledge mobilisation from developing countries. However, knowledge brokers working in Argentina, Canada, Ghana and Vanuatu, through collective reflection on knowledge-intermediary activities, concluded that five core knowledge brokering practices transcend geographic boundaries, namely: building trust; developing capacity; co-

constructing knowledge; understanding the political, social and economic context; and building culture (Phipps et al., 2017).

Tools for engaging with evidence: Evidence generated in one context can rarely be applied automatically elsewhere. Development studies in particular reveal that whether innovations are taken up depends, not so much on the supporting evidence from where they originated, but rather on how they fit existing systems in a new context (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). Yet the tools supporting decision-makers' critical engagement with research typically address the appraisal of individual research reports of particular designs, whether of a systematic reviews or primary studies, addressing one issue at a time (Katrak et al., 2004). In reality, policy decision-makers and other stakeholders are interested in gathering and synthesising evidence many issues at a time, to develop, modify and implement interventions taking into account their own existing systems. They struggle to use evidence syntheses that do not cross the same boundaries they are required to cross with their decision-making, for instance combining basic sciences, operational sciences and systems thinking (Oliver and Dickson, 2016).

This raises the challenge of just what policy decision-makers are to do with the plethora of information available in order to make credible decisions about how to implement an intervention and the degree to which they can predict its outcomes in a particular individual setting.

Ideally decision-makers need to be able to consult a local causal model of what they think will or could happen in the specific context of interest. They can be aided in this if there is already available a good "theory of change" of what is supposed to happen if the intervention is to be successful. They can then look at the steps in the theory of change, one by one, and think through what is necessary to have in place or to get into place if those steps are to carry through in this individual setting. Munro et al. (2017) offer a strategy for helping research users manage a wealth of different kinds of information in the area of child protection, by providing guidance about how to construct their own 'causal models' to represent the causal complexities and predict outcomes in their own setting. This could be adapted specifically for use in development contexts. A more ambitious programme would be welcome, developing a variety of different strategies that evidence users can adopt to make the most of the evidence, taking into account their very real time, resource and skill constraints.

Whatever the precise method, participants will be taking into account their own local knowledge with knowledge they are presented with, either in documents or discussion, from elsewhere. There is a growing literature on deliberative methods (Abelson et al., 2003). The challenges, implications and further evidence of working effectively in groups to discuss technical issues are considered in the section below on "Social psychology of engagement".

The difficulties of the task could be eased by the use of tools to make sense of the myriad pieces of information that need to be considered simultaneously. One example, widely used during the development of evidence-informed guidelines for health, is Evidence to Decision frameworks. These frameworks combine evidence about effectiveness, acceptability, feasibility and cost synthesised from multiple studies to 'help groups of people (panels) use evidence in a structured and transparent way to inform decisions in the context of clinical recommendations, coverage decisions, and health system or public health recommendations and decisions' (Alonso-Coello et al 2016). Also ideas for frameworks for managing quantities of mixed information about different aspects of policy choice in development contexts can be borrowed from other domains, for instance in the health arena, *SUPPORT Tools for evidence-informed health Policymaking (STP)* (Lavis et al., 2009); in mental health, 'Causal Reasoning Skills Training for Mental Health Practitioners: Promoting Sound Clinical Judgment' (Layne et al., 2014); in social policy generally, *Evidence-Based Policy: A Practical*

Guide to Doing it Better (Cartwright and Hardie, 2012); in nature conservancy (The Nature Conservancy, 2016).

Another place to look for help is in the legal realm. Synthesising a variety of evidence about a variety of different aspects is much like what a jury does in deciding guilt or innocence. There are already tools available to help in representing legal evidence and the relations among the various pieces available, for instance *Wigmore charts* (Hepler et al., 2007). While these are not immediately usable for DFID purposes, they could supply a starting model to be adapted to the kinds of information, and the evidence for it, that bear on the success of a development intervention in a specific setting.

Once a policy decision has been made, how implementation will fare in different contexts may be anticipated by gathering and applying local knowledge. There is a growing literature about discrete-choice experiments with hypothetical scenarios to enhance stakeholder engagement as a strategy to improve implementation (Salloum et al., 2017).

4.4 Communication and Decision-making to Tackle HIV

A series of articles on getting research into policy and practice describe how changes in policy and public discourse have both contributed to tackling HIV (Theobald et al., 2011).

Policy makers were influenced by the strength of evidence about HIV prophylaxis (model A), although local operational research could be taken up more readily than the findings of randomised controlled trials (model C), and personal links between policy and research networks were crucial (models C and D) (Hutchinson et al., 2011).

Other evidence of changing public discourse was not linked directly to policy makers using evidence. Academics in Bangladesh have found a new balance between their roles in research and activism to create a public space, and to facilitate dialogue on sexuality and rights (Rashid et al., 2011). Media coverage of research was enhanced by a sustained mix of strategies to motivate Kenyan journalists, and strengthen their skills and relationships with researchers (Oronje et al., 2011).

Section 5

Evidence addressing Stakeholder Engagement with Research Production

The rationale for focusing on stakeholder engagement with research production is to produce research that is more relevant and therefore more likely to be considered by and be useful to stakeholders. The distinction between knowingly contributing to generalisable knowledge and context-specific knowledge is clear for the production of evidence syntheses, where the intention is either to produce 'public goods' syntheses of international evidence, or to synthesise international (or a small sample of studies) to suit the needs of specific decision-makers (Oliver and Dickson, 2016). This distinction appears less clear for primary impact evaluations, particularly in the evidence syntheses addressing stakeholder engagement where details were sometimes limited. We judged research activities as contributing to generalisable or context-specific knowledge by considering their scale and their substantive focus.

Figure 6: Stakeholder Engagement for Producing Knowledge

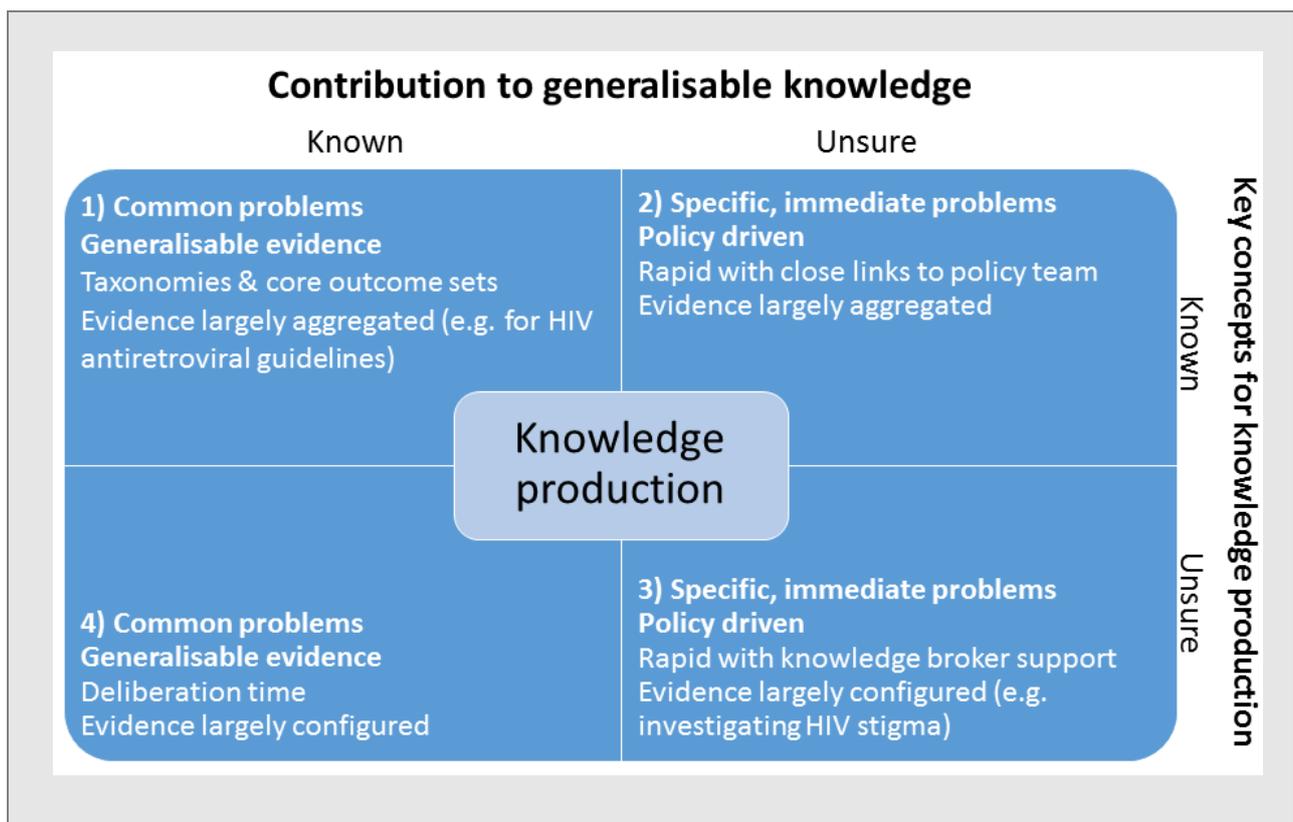


Figure 2 illustrates how research knowledge is produced depending on whether the intention is to produce generalisable knowledge or context-specific knowledge. Figure 6 develops this matrix to illustrate how stakeholders engage with these different approaches to knowledge production.

5.1 Producing Generalisable Research Knowledge

We judged research as aiming to produce generalisable knowledge when it involves large scale priority setting exercises, multi-centre studies, international NGOs, biomedical research (where context is less influential) and environmental science.

There is a growing literature addressing priority setting for health research (Yoshida, 2016). Although much of this literature comes from in developing countries, little information was provided on how stakeholders (most often researchers and government) were engaged (McGregor, 2014).

More has been learnt about community engagement practices in Southern Africa where a systematic review identified eight strategies for engaging communities in the research process: communication protocols; formative research activities; traditional or community leaders' support; community advisory mechanisms; community empowerment; community stakeholder partnership; community sensitisation and education; and community involvement (Musesengwa and Chimbari, 2017). The authors concluded that the results of community engagement activities differ across settings and, although no strategy could be seen as most effective, the review provides sufficient information about various strategies and activities to develop an engagement strategy for a multi-centre study.

A study of development research funded through the Australian Development Research Awards Scheme (ADRAS) (Muirhead et al.2017) focused on how engaging stakeholders with the research process has influenced policy and practice. It offers five foundational factors for successful partnerships between researcher and INGOs:

- Familiarity and prior engagement with research context and users;
- Planning for impact: intentional focus on impact and integrated methods for its achievement;
- Engaging end users: proactive engagement and co-production of knowledge;
- Influential outputs: tailored fit-for-purpose design of outputs; and
- Lasting engagement: ongoing engagement and continuity of relationships.

The authors identified three pathways to impact that involved stakeholder engagement from the original research design onwards:

- Targeted influence: research that was purposefully planned in response to end user information demands and questions;
- Enabled influence: intentional incorporation of multiple facilitators of impact in the research design and process; and
- Emergent influence: relevance of research to national or local context, enhanced by shifting imperatives, narratives, crises or other pressures, and close engagement with key stakeholders.

A systematic review of community engagement strategies for genomic studies in Africa (Tindana et al., 2015) distinguished two overarching approaches: those strategies involving direct engagement with potential research participants and their communities and those that involve engagement through their representatives. Direct engagement accommodated large numbers (50 – 300) through town hall meetings, community gatherings and other meetings or forums. Such meetings, sometimes referred to as "durbars" or "barazas", attract community leaders, chiefs, opinion leaders and the members of the community. Direct engagement like this offers many people an opportunity to get information directly from the research team, and an opportunity for the research team to hear views on their proposed project from a wider audience. However, researchers may encounter challenges in identifying the appropriate communities to engage, in assessing their understanding of information shared in large meetings and in managing large meetings where there is a

tendency for discussions to be dominated by a relatively few vocal people. They may also miss the perspectives of other community members who are unable to attend. Direct engagement also happens in smaller focus group discussions for specific targeted members of the community. Indirect engagement is through community representatives, most often through Community Advisory Boards which link the research teams to the research participants 'to bring in the voice of the target community and also feedback information about the research to the community' (p8). Some boards offer a "broad community" model and others a "population specific" model. The broad community model, which engages a broad range of stakeholders including government officials and religious leaders is considered particularly useful for long term institution-community relationships. The population specific model matches specific patient groups (for instance) to individual studies or set of studies. These representative models can raise recruitment and commitment problems, where some groups are harder to reach and have less time to gift, and the conflicting interests of research teams educating communities who are then meant to hold them to account.

There are growing also opportunities for the general public to engage in data collection for environmental science, so-called 'citizen science'. Although citizen science may be particularly suitable for urban development, climate change and conservation, which are priorities for developing countries, it is developing countries which have the fewest studies (Conrad and Hilchey, 2011) and relatively limited digital infrastructure to support them (Falco and Kleinhans, 2018). Nevertheless, these examples and crowdsourcing of data for agricultural research (Minet et al., 2017) demonstrate the potential for citizen science to address research priorities in developing countries.

Stakeholder engagement with the process of evidence synthesis has lagged behind engagement with primary impact evaluations, notwithstanding early examples from the Cochrane Collaboration and the EPPI-Centre, critical reflections of the process and impact in health and social care (leading sectors for stakeholder engagement) has been rare (Boote et al., 2011; 2012), particularly for stakeholder engagement with syntheses of qualitative research (Rees, 2017). Reflective accounts note concerns about the most appropriate stakeholders to involve, the implications for time and resources, challenges imposed by research ethics systems, and group dynamics, sensitive topics, and episodes of illness (Rees, 2017). Most recent is a 'scoping review' of engaging policy-makers, health system managers, and policy analysts in the knowledge synthesis process (Tricco, et al., 2018). They were engaged in conceptualising and designing reviews (49%), identifying studies (52%), synthesising and interpreting the data (71%), and sharing and applying the knowledge generated (44%). They were most commonly engaged as key informants through meetings and workshops as well as surveys, focus groups, and interviews either in-person or by telephone and emails. The literature was mainly descriptive; the three methodological studies reported challenges (time and resources required, demanding timelines, range/ representativeness of stakeholders, lack of researchers' and stakeholders' experience and mutual understanding, confidentiality and support, dissatisfaction with previous engagement) and factors for success (early engagement, anticipating controversies, clear expectations, ensuring transparency and accountability, building trusting relationships and credibility, pre-meeting briefings and opportunities to ask questions, pre-meeting 'ice-breakers' and follow-up with results).

5.2 Producing Context-Specific Research Knowledge

We judged research as producing context specific knowledge when it was described as Mode 2 research, or included long-term partnerships between research institutions and local communities.

Impact evaluations produced for specific decisions are typically informed and shaped by the policy makers commissioning it and, increasingly, by the people most likely to be affected in their working or personal lives by any findings if subsequently implemented. For primary research, this has been distinguished from researcher-led, disciplinary based knowledge production (known as Mode 1 research) and acknowledged as research shaped by its context of use (known as Mode 2 research) (Gibbons et al 1994). In Mode 2 research, instead of the production and use of research knowledge being discrete processes, they are intertwined as research is produced within the context of its use (Nowotny et al 2001; Greenhalgh et al., 2016).

However, it cannot be assumed that co-production of research will lead to better use of the findings. Indeed, a critical literature review and a case study of Mode 2 studies co-creating knowledge with local stakeholders found that:

'Key success principles included (1) a systems perspective (assuming emergence, local adaptation, and nonlinearity); (2) the framing of research as a creative enterprise with human experience at its core; and (3) an emphasis on process (the framing of the program, the nature of relationships, and governance and facilitation arrangements, especially the style of leadership and how conflict is managed).'

(Greenhalgh et al., 2016).

An emphasis on systems, creativity and ways of working (Greenhalgh et al., 2016) is captured by developing theories of change with stakeholders to design and evaluate public health interventions (Breuer et al., 2016), and developing logic models to frame systematic reviews of health or international development interventions (Kneale et al., 2015). One might argue that even more useful would be research that takes context sufficiently seriously to develop and test mid-range theory so that the success afforded by context to different interventions is made more explicit. This would require understanding how politics, culture and social relations shape processes of social change within which interventions are taking place; and this in turn would require engaging stakeholders. However, we have found no evidence about engaging stakeholders with developing mid-range theory.

Although the Mode 2 approach was originally developed for primary research, the idea can also be applied to evidence synthesis where the purpose is to produce research knowledge for specific decisions. In these circumstances stakeholder engagement is vital to ensure that evidence is tailored and relevant to meet the needs of local policymakers. The relevance of the knowledge produced can be enhanced by engaging with local stakeholders who help shape the review question, contextualise the review findings and support the identification of gaps in the evidence-base to support future knowledge production. Standardised procedures for evidence production and guidelines for engaging with stakeholders may include the process of setting up advisory groups and managing peer review. This process enables additional input into the scope of the review, identifying relevant evidence, and preparing feedback on the structure and content of the findings. However, when producing evidence to inform local policy decision where the need for evidence is urgent, some methodological aspects and stakeholder engagement process 'may need to be prioritised over others, and standardised procedures may need to be adapted, to ensure timeliness and relevance of evidence' (Dickson, 2017, p.5). Options for accelerating methodological procedures include: limiting the publication dates and language of eligible studies; limiting the number of sources searched; avoiding duplicate selection or analysis of studies, and synthesising narratively rather than quantitatively (King et al., 2017).

5.3 Producing Evidence When the Purpose or Prior Concepts Are Not Clear

We judged the purpose for producing generalisable or context-specific knowledge as unclear when studies invited stakeholder involvement or feedback from potential beneficiaries without further detail being available.

Stakeholder engagement when the purpose is unclear: A tradition in interventional development is seeking beneficiary feedback as part of programme evaluation. However, a systematic review (Groves, 2005) has found that the meaning of beneficiary feedback varies widely. Although the value of beneficiary feedback is widely shared, it is often operationalised as an exercise in data collection rather than involvement 'in design, data validation and analysis and dissemination and communication' (p2). The review author recommends a minimum standard of considering beneficiary feedback at each of these four stages, taking into account the quality of methods employed for collecting reliable data.

The evidence addressing stakeholder engagement with programme evaluation more broadly is limited and much of it comes from the education sector in North America (Daigneault, 2014; Brandon and Fukunaga, 2014). Although stakeholder engagement has been seen to enhance the quality of evaluations and their findings, there are concerns about costs, equity and bias arising from that involvement (Brandon and Fukunaga, 2014). Studies investigating use of research have focused predominantly on the decision-makers such as elected officials, congressional staff, policy makers, managers and board members rather than program beneficiaries or of representatives from civil society and citizens (Daigneault, 2014).

Stakeholder engagement when the prior concepts are not clear:

Engagement methods considered so far have been generally applied to quantitative studies, often impact evaluations. Less common is stakeholder engagement in qualitative studies where key concepts are not clear in advance, and the purpose is to clarify concepts and develop understanding and theory. Examples particularly relevant to use of evidence come from stakeholder engagement with reviews systematically synthesising qualitative studies (Dickson, 2017; Rees, 2017). In these circumstances, interpersonal skills are even more important for working creatively within research teams and alongside policy teams for providing constructive enquiries and responding to criticism (Edmondson, 1999). Working in safety and trust environments is particularly beneficial in order to produce timely and high quality evidence outputs. To ensure the review remains closely aligned with policy needs and to gain their input in shaping the review, stakeholder consultation generally needs to take place at key decision points of setting the scope and the scale, before and after an estimate of the studies available, and the interpretation of the findings. Direct engagement and face-to-face communication between research and policy is a key feature of producing evidence for local policy teams. The style of discussion is exploratory in nature, through social interaction by learning more about issues we might encounter and supporting a productive conversation taken between stakeholders (Lomas J., 2007). It builds "community in practice" and fosters "collective learning" to effectively apply knowledge into their practice and decision (Wieringa and Greenhalgh, 2015).

5.4 Stakeholder Engagement in African HIV Research

Leading examples of stakeholder engagement with all types of evidence production considered here have been found in the area of HIV where patient activists influenced the designs of early drug trials. Now patient advocacy is on a global scale. Such organisations explicitly aim to drive the research agenda and have patient/client/user perspectives at the forefront (AVAC: Global Advocacy for HIV Prevention, 2018). Inadequate stakeholder involvement has on occasions led to trials being halted (Singh and Mills, 2005).

'...the central message is unmistakable: In the laboratory perhaps, science can indulge its natural preferences for objectivity, political neutrality, and pristine research environments. But in the field of HIV prevention research, with its numerous sensitivities, that expectation is naïve and can invite failure. Researchers need to fully internalise that insufficient attention to political context, ethical issues, and public perception can halt a clinical trial as definitively and quickly as negative findings at a data safety and monitoring board review. This means that prevention researchers need to do more than nod to "social factors." They need to think about human, social, and political issues actively and strategically at every step of the conceptualization, design, conduct, and follow through of trials. This is especially true in resource constrained countries where economic disparities and complex colonial histories are involved, and even more so when issues involving sex and gender are central.'

(McGrory et al., undated).

Stakeholders engage with on-going studies through various structures:

High level advisory boards for large trials (model 1) include members from organisations that set standards internationally, e.g. UNAIDS, WHO etc.

The World Health Organisation, the normative body for public health policy commissions both primary studies and evidence syntheses (models 1 and 4) to inform its work, and influence others.

Community advisory boards are a common mechanism for stakeholder engagement and feedback (any model) with local policy officials, front line staff, and clients. Lessons from the field reveal early and continuous engagement as critical to the acceptance of large, community-randomised studies useful for prevention research, using methods adapted to local contexts, and 'building trusting relationships between study stakeholders as necessary precursors to the instrumental goals which strengthen the research quality' (Simwinga et al., 2016)

Co-researchers (any model) exemplify the "nothing about me, without me" idea that is strongly rooted in the HIV world and elsewhere. Some advocacy groups, particularly those representing the interests of men who have sex with men in the US, and increasingly unions of female sex workers in developing countries, have been influential in mainstreaming this approach, leading to many projects now including representatives from such groups within the research staff (Blumenthal and DiClemente, 2004; Shen et al., 2017).

Section 6

Lessons from Political Science, Social Psychology and Systems Thinking

This section introduces concepts, approaches and ideas from across academic disciplines which might be helpful in addressing some of the challenges related to stakeholder engagement raised above. In particular we explore questions of politics, behavior change and the broader system of evidence generation and use. This discussion will inform some of the possible ways forward we suggest in the conclusion.

6.1 Politics and Engagement

Research and decision-making are political activities. In this section we first consider how politics engages with research to develop policy, and then how researchers engage with politics through 'stakeholder analysis'.

Politics of using research: The uptake of research evidence during policy development has been reviewed systematically in the area of health policy. Liverani et al., (2013) identified several factors seen to influence uptake of evidence:

- Concentration of political power: Centralized systems seemed less open to using evidence, possibly because concentration of power discouraged debate and thereby reduced the need for evidence to support different arguments; whereas, in decentralised systems research was used to justify decisions or to defend them against opponents' criticisms.
- Democratic processes: Changes in regime have occasionally increased uptake through investment in governance or science; less positively, evidence has been used opportunistically to delay decisions, support positions or discredit opponents; and evidence can become more contested during election campaigns.
- Institutional mechanisms: Responsibilities within government bureaucracies that were too focused and fragmented discouraged use of evidence for complex problems that spanned academic disciplines and policy sectors; use of economic evidence was increased in countries with organisations formally mandated to provide such evidence.
- Relationships: Personal connections between the research community and decision-makers encouraged use of evidence, particularly in developing countries.
- Values and priorities: Selection and interpretation of evidence was *influenced* by values and moral convictions, religious and cultural identity, or nationalism. Impact may result from evidence being closely aligned with policy concerns.
- Technocratic approaches: Technical decisions and decisions about the components of interventions are more likely influenced by evidence than broader or more conceptual decisions with multiple social implications. Aid donors tended to promote interventions with strong evidence bases, without necessarily taking into account local context, needs and capabilities.

These observations of politics influencing use of evidence raise questions about how this influence occurs. Cullerton et al. (2016) sought to understand the theory of policy development by systematically reviewing studies of nutrition policy with a political science

lens. However, of 63 papers identified, only nine analysed data using an empirically tested policy process theory, and none of the studies were set in developing countries. Parkhurst (2017) suggests exploring **models for the governance of evidence** systems. His recent book describes a 'legitimacy framework for evidence informed policy processes' designed to balance scientific and the social/political dimensions, as well as a possible governance framework. Both of these recognise the importance of research that seeks to influence policy needing to be not just methodologically rigorous but also relevant to the policy context, as well as being constructed in ways that are seen as legitimate and useful to decision-makers' goals.

Politics touches on the evaluation process (Taylor and Balloch, 2005) as well as whether or how the findings are used. But neither Parkhurst (2017) nor Taylor and Balloch (2005) focus on developing countries. Instead it is discussed in literature for development practitioners (Eyben 2013; Eyben et al., 2015).

More recently, learning about politics and evidence use comes from the DFID funded Building Capacity for Use of Research (BCURE) programme of six linked capacity building projects across 12 low and middle-income countries in Africa and Asia (Vogel and Punton 2018). At the outset of this programme the key problem was understood to be policy makers' lack of 'capacity to effectively access, appraise and apply research when making decisions'. The evaluation found barriers at all levels of capacity, and identified three ways of working to successfully build capacity:

- Thinking and working politically: Programmes need to understand the political and power dynamics that affect evidence use in government.
- Accompanying rather than imposing change: BCURE was more successful when partners 'accompanied' government partners through a flexible, tailored, collaborative approach that promoted ownership.
- Working at multiple levels of the system: Individual capacity is the bedrock for effective evidence-informed policy making – but programmes also need to strengthen systems, develop tools, and nurture champions.

Whether working with a single ministry, across government or in parliament, change resulted from activating a combination of mechanisms: self-efficacy; critical mass; reinforcement; showcasing; adoption; and facilitation. These findings are discussed in terms of behaviour change theory in section 6.2.

Between them these authors recognise that although evidence and evaluation is inherently political, politics is often underexplored in research and reviews of evidence-informed policy processes, as well as in the design of research outreach processes, evaluation and stakeholder engagement. Nevertheless there are tried and tested approaches to exploring these issues from political science, organisational studies etc. which could be better drawn from and which might help explain why certain policy decisions were taken and how they might be influenced in the future.

There is a tendency within research to see politics as a problem to be got round or bypassed, rather than an inevitable and important part of policy and decision-making which also almost always involves weighing up trade-offs, opportunity costs and moral or ethical questions related to equity, justice, sustainability etc. This often leads to a search for "technical" solutions around for example better communication and framing of findings, or more effective engagement with stakeholders, rather than deliberately factoring in politics. Alternatively, there is a tendency to simply blame the lack of "political will" (or as some have called it "political won't") as the reason for lack of research uptake or implementation of

policy, without any attempt to unpack why that is the case, what the interests are in maintaining the status quo, or what underpinning values, norms or ideas might be at play. Despite a growing understanding of the non-linear, chaotic nature of policy making there is still a tendency for mental models of the policy and decision-making process to assume certain sequences and rational processes based primarily on evidence of effectiveness for specific outcomes, which ignore the ongoing interactions of multiple stakeholders and interest groups, as well as values and norms. The antidote to technocratic approaches starts with stakeholder analysis.

Stakeholder analysis: A systematic review of peer-reviewed literature about developing countries identified 21 articles which, between them, revealed two distinct approaches: analysis *with* stakeholders and analysis *of* stakeholders (Henwood, 2017). Stakeholder analysis *with* stakeholders actively engaged them collaboratively, such as with interactive workshops, or scenario development, in the planning, development, implementation or reform of a policy or programme. Most studies were pieces of research reporting retrospective stakeholder analysis; fewer were conducted to support policy change prospectively. Stakeholder analysis *of* stakeholders collected data about stakeholders from existing literature, surveys, focus groups or interventions and analysed by the research team without involving stakeholders. Analysis was often framed by two dimensional matrices combining power and interest, influence/power and importance, power and predictability, power and position, potential and influence/power, influence and dependence, or importance and uncertainty.

Alongside the academic literature is the emergence of stakeholder analysis by development agencies and practitioner communities who are “thinking and working politically” (Denney and McLaren, 2016), considering “knowledge, power and politics” (Jones et al., 2013b) or exploring everyday political analysis for engaging individual stakeholders and broader coalitions, and supporting front-line development practitioners when making quick but politically-informed decisions (Hudson et al., 2016).

Box 9 offers an example of politically sensitive research that explored in more depth the importance of considering contextual factors, especially the politics of evidence and policy processes and how this can assist in addressing the barriers to engagement between the worlds of research and policy, outlined earlier in the paper. To illustrate these considerations, we draw on an independent impact assessment of UNICEF and partners’ Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children in Peru (Morton and Casey, 2017). The Multi-Country Study involves evidence synthesis, secondary data analysis and primary research in Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe, with the aim of increasing understanding of what drives violence affecting children and what are effective strategies for prevention (Maternowska, Potts and Fry, 2016).

The impact assessment drew out several factors that contributed to impact and can be understood as a theory of change for using evidence. First, engagement and plans for making an impact were embedded from the outset and informed the focus of the research, going beyond the creation of new knowledge to making a difference on the ground. Second, this informed the building of a partnership approach to the research, recognizing the different roles needed to bring change. Third, this included “knowledge-brokering roles” with UNICEF playing a central role, and fourth, building in local research and analysis capacity building as a core component of the approach, developing local ownership (Morton and Casey, 2017). This combination of actors was important in keeping attention on the contextual and political dynamics, particularly following the change of government in 2016. The partnership decided to launch the national report following the Presidential election so that it would not be rejected as belonging to a previous administration and having more traction with the new government. The impact assessment found that “the specific

combination of research outputs, awareness-raising, capacity-building and knowledge brokering activities, built on this partnership approach, and maximised impact” (sic) (ibid., 5).

Box 9: Example of Politically Sensitive Research in Peru

Globally, violence affecting children is often a sensitive issue. In Peru, violence was reported by policy makers as not a priority and nationally representative data on violence against children collected in 2013 had not been analysed as it was deemed too politically sensitive (Morton and Casey, 2017). UNICEF acted as a “knowledge broker” and supported the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP) to establish a committee to lead the research in Peru. This involved a systematic review of the literature on violence prevention in Peru, as well as secondary data analysis conducted by the Young Lives research team in Peru and Oxford and analysis of previously unanalysed data on violence affected children in Peru by the Peruvian National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (INEI), with training and technical assistance from the University of Edinburgh. Besides from the research outputs (see Morton and Casey, 2017 for full details) key outcomes from the research have included the findings being used to influence the passage of new legislation on the prohibition of corporal punishment of children in all settings in December 2015, accompanied by a national action plan and new collaboration between the MIMP and Ministry of Finance, with increased resources for tackling and researching violence affecting children.

An impact assessment was conducted by independent researchers using the Research Contributions Framework (Morton, 2015a) and focused on how the research was used and the impact on national legislation and policies. The Framework captures both the research processes and outcomes and includes contextual factors that may support or impede research impact, using the ISM (Individual, Social, Material) Model (Darnton and Horne, 2013).

Whereas the four factors outlined above (early engagement, building partnerships, knowledge brokering, and building in local research and analysis) have similarities with findings from other studies (Oliver S. et al., 2014) a fifth critical factor was identified as the value brought by the research being part of a multi-country study. Given the sensitivities of violence affecting children, this was important politically, in avoiding appearing to suggest that this was a phenomenon unique to Peru, but instead enabling stakeholders to situate findings and discussions in the wider regional and international context (Morton and Casey, 2017).

A greater understanding of the political context is also likely to reveal the potential for “bundling” of interests amongst key stakeholders, as well where resistance to change might lie. Local actors are invariably better placed to navigate these politics and processes. However it is also clear that external actors can play important convening and brokering roles by creating “spaces” for debate, dialogue, match-making and coalition building (Denney and McLaren, 2016). Furthermore activists are often pro-active in “drawing down” international research and evidence and using it to promote reform and policy change. This has been evident particularly in the domain of HIV/AIDs. Harnessing these processes means that the “demand” for evidence may come from different places than decision-makers. It also helps to remind us that the most effective “messenger” may often not be the researcher or their team, but other third parties who may have greater legitimacy, access or power.

Making research relevant in order to enhance uptake of findings (the last step in a linear model) requires taking ideas, and the framing of research more seriously (the first step). Getting the framing right requires understanding what will convince key stakeholders to back change. This requires effective political analysis and local knowledge which often means early stakeholder engagement in the process. This does not mean distorting research or findings but it does mean presenting work in ways that are likely to resonate with decision-makers and that avoids “trigger” words and phrases which be politically damaging to them. As Dani Rodrik (2018) has recently argued interests are in fact “congealed ideas”.

Understanding the underpinning ideas that inform interests can be important in getting framing right.

Exploring **partnership brokering** early in the research process is widely recommended (but we have found no evidence supporting this timing) for developing mutual understanding of the political pressures and incentives which are at play for both researchers and policy makers. Partnerships are at the heart of the 'Doing Development Differently' manifesto where development is problem driven, politically informed and politically smart (Wild et al., 2015).

More **immersive or "rapid ethnography"** type processes might help to uncover some of the political and institutional dynamics which shape policy and decision-making. The Reality-Check Approach (Chambers 2017) or other approaches could be investigated for their utility in exploring the social and psychological drivers of organisational behaviour (see World Bank, 2015). Recent research on how a selected number of development programs have successfully taken initiatives to improve their political awareness as well as better gender practice, suggests that management practices, recruitment strategies, reporting and performance processes are all critical in ensuring the uptake of good practice (Derbyshire et al., 2018). This includes ensuring that teams include local staff with appropriate knowledge of the social, cultural and political context in which the programs are working and relying less on their technical or managerial skills as criteria for recruitment. All of which suggests our knowledge of the organisational and bureaucratic context that is propitious for research uptake can always be improved. The authors note that 'development practice is outstripping theory in moving beyond silos to exploit the synergy of bringing together work on power, politics and gender'. We note that it is outstripping empirical evidence too.

6.2 Social Psychology of Behaviour Change

In addition to their systematic review of the effectiveness of strategies to increase research use, Langer et al., (2016) revealed insights from the wider social science literature and identified 67 interventions of potential relevance to evidence-informed decision-making (see Box 10). This learning and the empirical evidence considered in section 6.1 is understood in terms of behaviour change theory, where behaviour change results from a combination of capabilities, opportunities and motivations (Michie et al., 2011).

Capabilities, opportunities and motivations feature in the evaluation of the programme Building Capacity for Use of Research Evidence (Vogel and Punton, 2018) mentioned in section 6.1. Although Michie's theory of behaviour change was not cited in the evaluation in Box 11 we annotate the mechanisms identified by the evaluation according to the COM-B model.

Box 10: Insights from Social Science Knowledge to Support Research Use (Langer et al 2016)

Promote and market behavioural norms

- The creation of behavioural norms could be used to support the formation of social or professional *evidence use norms*.

Engage in advocacy and awareness raising for the concept of EIDM

- Advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns to communicate and *popularise the concept of EIDM* to increase awareness for the benefits of using evidence during decision-making as well as the risks of not doing so.

Effectively frame and formulate communicated messages

- Techniques and strategies such as *framing* of messages, *tailoring* communication (e.g. *audience segmentation*), and use of *reminders*.

Design appealing and user-friendly access platforms and resources

- The social science literature on information design could enhance the design of evidence repositories and other resources, and develop evidence informed decision-making apps.

Build a professional identity with common practices and standards of conduct

- Social science insights on social influence, collaboration, relationship building, and group interaction could be used to build a professional identity (through, for example, communities of practice, mentoring, and inter-professional education) relating to evidence.

Foster adult learning

- Social science knowledge on adult learning supporting decision-makers' skills in evidence use.

Build organisational capacities and support organisational change

- Social science research on organisational learning and cultures, management and leadership techniques, and other changes to organisational processes and structures (for example, facilitation to increase the receptivity of decision-making processes and structure to evidence use).

Use behavioural techniques, including nudges

- The influence of behavioural factors on individual decision-making processes including choice architectures, cognitive loads, cognitive biases, and the use of 'nudge' techniques.

Exploit the potential of online and mobile technologies

- The application of online and mobile technologies to increase the reach, convenience, and appeal of interventions (e.g. communication, capacity-building, decision aids).

Institutional frameworks and mechanisms

- Institutional frameworks and mechanisms to advocate and nurture structural changes at all levels of decision-making that includes EIDM.

Box 11: Mechanisms underpinning success for BCURE (Vogel and Punton, 2018) explained in terms of behaviour change theory (Michie et al., 2011).

Accompaniment: where an external partner provides tailored, flexible and responsive support to a government institution through a process of reform, characterised by a high level of trust [Aligns support for engagement with research with existing motivations].

Self-efficacy: where providing information, opportunities to practise skills, coaching or technical support builds individuals' confidence in their ability to do their jobs or achieve a particular goal. [Training strengthens individuals' capability]

Facilitation: where an evidence tool, system or process facilitates government officials to do their jobs or undertake a task more easily or efficiently. [Facilitation enhances individuals' capability]

Reinforcement: where rewards or other forms of control create incentives that motivate officials to work in a particular way. Positive reinforcement includes rewards and encouragement, while negative reinforcement includes reminders, audits and mandatory requirements. [Enhance external motivation]

Showcasing: where good examples of evidence tools or processes demonstrate the value of an evidence-informed approach, which leads to them being adopted elsewhere [Enhance capability to engage with research by providing by tools and processes].

Adoption: where senior government stakeholders decide to adopt a new evidence tool, system or process to help standardise evidence-informed policymaking within a government institution. This can be on a small or a large scale. [Uptake by senior government stakeholders motivates junior stakeholders to follow suit.]

Critical mass: where changes in practice among a sufficient number of government officials diffuse out to influence colleagues' behaviour, and the rate of adoption of new behaviours becomes self-sustaining. [Enhances the opportunity for uptake of new norms]

6.3 Social Psychology of Engagement

Many of the methods for stakeholder engagement apply collective deliberation and decision-making to highly technical issues. A key example of this is guidance development panels. Internationally recognised standards for appraising the outputs of panels (Brouwers et al., 2010) emphasise stakeholder membership but have little to say about how stakeholders engage with the evidence or with each other. More can be learnt from these challenges by turning to the social psychology literature about small group decision-making. A review of reviews covering this literature identified key factors about the performance of committees in making decisions (see Box 12).

Synthesising theoretical models supported by empirical evidence drew out very practical implications for discussions and decisions about highly technical issues by mixed groups of people, as described below (Oliver et al., 2018).

Committee performance depends upon the individuals involved, their attributes and relationships, specifically, members who: are aware of their tasks, roles and responsibilities; understand the wider context and culture; bring analytical and political competence, interest and willingness; offer time and commitment; actively participate; and behave appropriately over external relationships, confidentially and conflicts of interest.

Box 12: Empirical Evidence from Social Psychology about Group Decision-Making (Oliver et al, 2015)

Formal consensus methods, such as Delphi studies or Nominal Group Technique, perform better than informal techniques, such as a roundtable discussion, but the reasons are not clear. There is no evidence to suggest there are any major differences in the outcomes achieved between the effectiveness of the Delphi method (used with geographically dispersed groups) and Nominal Group Technique (for face to face meetings); rather, they may be more or less suitable for different purposes and circumstances. For example, the former may prevent undue influence by individuals, and the latter may provide better opportunities for discussion.

For face-to-face decision-making, groups with six to twelve members tend to perform better than those either smaller or larger. Groups with diverse backgrounds and specialities take account of a range of opinions, with each member likely to advocate familiar options. Larger groups reflect a broader range of outside interests, enhance credibility and widespread acceptance and implementation of decisions, but present difficulties for encouraging equal participation. However, if conflict is managed constructively, more varied membership can lead to better performance and more reliable judgements. Chairs facilitate groups to generate more ideas through encouraging members to express diverse opinions. Little is known about the impact of training for committee work or the physical environment.

An important resource is the knowledge brought by individual members (which is unevenly distributed), or presented to them in committee papers or presentations. Demographic diversity has been seen as valuable in bringing different perspectives and a wider variety of alternatives for consideration. Educational and functional diversity has given teams greater strategic clarity.

In addition to knowledge and skills is the time available for a committee to explore that knowledge to make choices or solve problems. Time for information processing during decision-making allows more sharing of knowledge; the more knowledge is shared during discussion, the more it is subject to evaluation by group members. When time is limited, less knowledge is shared and decisions are more the result of negotiating between prior preferences, rather than evaluation of shared knowledge. When tasks involve judgements (rather than intellectual problem-solving), status within the group often influences decisions.

Over time, with greater facilitation skills to maximise sharing of knowledge, and with greater mutual trust developed as committees mature and members get to know each other, more information about all options tends to be revealed and available for evaluation. The result is more sharing of ideas and individual learning, better quality decisions, more commitment to decisions by group members and wider acceptability of decisions within the group's wider networks.

6.4 Systems Thinking

Pathways to change: policies vs enlightenment: Moving from research and evaluation to decisions for change is often a convoluted journey through a complex system. As Carol Weiss argued many decades ago (Weiss, 1997) 'the major use of social research is not the application of specific data to specific decisions. Rather, government decision-makers tend to use research indirectly, as a source of ideas, information, and orientations to the world. Although the process is not easily discernible, over time it may have profound effects on policy. Even research that challenges current values and political feasibilities is judged useful by decision-makers.' As such it is worth considering the degree to which research and stakeholder engagement is focused on a particular policy or practice, and the degree to which it is contributing to the "enlightenment" pathway whereby the slow drip, drip of accumulated evidence shifts narrative and discourses which in turn make more specific

policy uptake likely. The work of 'epistemic communities' in many domains is testament to this (Adler and Haas, 1992). However as Patricia Rogers notes stakeholder engagement and selection maybe easier for 'instrumental use' (when research findings are used directly for specific decisions) than for 'enlightenment use' (when research findings are used to enhance general understanding of an issue) or for 'symbolic' use (such as signalling that an intervention is working well or that it is being effectively managed)⁷ .

Thus politics, institutional arrangements, interests and ideas combine to shape the degree to which evidence is demanded and used in a collective endeavour with multiple stakeholders. Successful uptake of and ownership of evidence can lead to demands not just for more evidence but to shifts in institutional process and systems in order adapt reward systems, knowledge management systems, and more. (For an example see a review of what works for encouraging the use of evidence in DFID (Evidence into Action and What Works Team, 2014)). Generating evidence about these processes of institutional change and exploring how research processes and stakeholder engagement can contribute to this systemic change would seem to be an important area of further work.

From research products to research systems: In essence all of the above means that research impact comes not from focusing on the findings of a single project, but from successfully navigating the research and decision-making system. Evaluative researchers should, like others, have a credible theory of change based on an appropriate power analysis, an understanding of potential stakeholders and their interaction, an understanding of potential pathways of change, and the skills and inclination to reflect on their own position and biases. Such theories of change and methods of engagement need to take into account the risk of exacerbating existing inequalities across groups and of losing their critical distance and 'going native' (although we do not address this literature here) and may be updated as necessary during the course of the research process based on feedback and learning.

The above also leads to key questions about definitions of research quality, rigour⁸ and the potential trade-offs between thinking and working politically and undertaking high quality research with integrity. This has led some authors to suggest that the utility, process and quality of stakeholder engagement of the evaluation need to be equally factored in to definitions of rigour as methodological concerns focused on particular forms of bias (Langer, et al 2017).

Assessing stakeholder engagement throughout the research system: During a period of change, assessing effective stakeholder engagement needs to recognise the importance of first steps as well as the achievements of further advances. As such a framework needs to provide a potential spectrum of engagement so that initial forays are made visible and the potential to deepen engagement is clear. At a minimum transparency and honesty about processes are an important first step, but without making the "best", the enemy of the good.

Such a framework has been developed to explore social accountability innovations by Australian NGOs (Roche, 2009) by drawing on work done by ALNAP (the **A**ctive **L**earning **N**etwork for **A**ccountability and **P**erformance in Humanitarian Action) on learning and innovation, and One World Trust on accountability. It combines the depth of stakeholder engagement in the research system (from projects to policies, and to governance systems) with overarching elements of engagement (transparency, participation, learning and feedback, and complaints and redress). We portray this framework as a set of assessments

⁷ http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/blog/strategies_for_improving_evaluation_use_and_influence

⁸ For a critique of the narrowness of some approaches to rigour see Befani et al (2016)

that can be made by research teams, by commissioners or by potential research users in research proposals or reports.

The horizontal axis in table 1 considers different levels of learning and accountability based on the idea of learning loops. This might be adapted so that single loops might refer to engagement on particular research projects or activities, double loop process to engagement on the establishment or decision-making about research agendas, policy and methods, and triple loop engagement to research or evidence governance arrangements (see Parkhurst, 2017 and discussion in 6.1 above). As Parkhurst suggests this might include issues related to systems level questions about: the use of appropriate evidence; feedback to citizens on how evidence has been used; and degrees of contestability.

The vertical axis in table 1 considers different elements of accountability, based on One World Trust research: transparency; participation; learning and evaluation; and complaints and redress. This might be adapted perhaps in the following way. Transparency might refer to the transparency of engagement with stakeholder groups, in other words, the degree to which the research process was transparent about its workings and the interests, incentives and constraints researchers faced. Participation might refer to stakeholder engagement in the design, implementation and dissemination of the research at different levels. Learning and Evaluation might refer to the degree to which stakeholders were engaged in providing feedback on the research process and findings and the degree to which it is adapted in the light of that feedback. Complaints and redress might refer to the degree to which processes of grievances are available to stakeholders and redress made available.

Table 1: Framework for Assessing Elements and Depth of Stakeholder Engagement

<i>Elements of Engagement</i>	Research Activities and Projects	Research Priorities and Policies	Research Governance & Systems
<i>Transparency</i>	Degree to which stakeholders are aware of research plans, methods and theory of change; and how this is achieved.	Degree to which stakeholders are aware of research priorities, policies, budgets and approach; and how this is achieved.	Degree to which stakeholders are aware of research system governance, ownership and control and use; and how this is achieved.
<i>Participation</i>	Degree to which stakeholders are engaged in developing research plans, methods and theory of change; and how this is achieved.	Degree to which stakeholders are engaged in developing research priorities, policies, budgets and approaches; and how this is achieved.	Degree to which representative stakeholders are engaged in research governance; and how this is achieved.
<i>Learning & Feedback</i>	Degree to which stakeholders are engaged in providing feedback on the implementation of research plans, methods and theory of change, and there is appropriate adaptation as a result; and how this is achieved.	Degree to which stakeholders are engaged in providing feedback on the implementation of research priorities, policies, budgets and approaches; and how this is achieved.	Degree to which stakeholders are engaged in providing feedback on research governance, and there is appropriate adaptation as a result; and how this is achieved.
<i>Complaints & Redress</i>	Degree to which stakeholders can raise grievances and receive redress if necessary; and how this is achieved.	Degree to which stakeholders can raise grievances and receive redress if necessary; and how this is achieved.	Degree to which stakeholders can raise grievances and receive redress if necessary; and how this is achieved.

Section 7

Discussion and Recommendations for DFID and CEDIL

This paper presents the evidence supporting methods for engaging stakeholders with decision-making and research for international aid and social development, to encourage decisions that are both evidence-informed and appropriate to their context.

7.1 Summary of findings

This review found that stakeholder engagement with research findings can be explained in terms of opportunity, motivation and capability (Langer et al., 2016). The empirical evidence supporting this theory comes predominantly from developed countries, although discussion documents from international development concur with this understanding.

The appropriate choice of stakeholder engagement methods for **decision-making** depends on the degree of confidence in the rigour and relevance of the generalisable knowledge already available about relevant issues and knowledge about the context of implementation. The appropriate choice of methods for stakeholder engagement with **knowledge production** depends on the degree of clarity and consensus about the core concepts shaping the research, and whether or not the purpose is to generate research findings that are generalisable beyond the context of the research setting. These options are considered below.

Whether engagement is with decision-making or knowledge production, stakeholder mapping is a first step; the synthesised evidence readily available for this is recognised 'best practice' in the health sector, although more may be learnt from stakeholder mapping in international development more broadly.

Stakeholder engagement with decision-making: There is reliable evidence that facilitating access to research evidence, for example through communication strategies and evidence repositories, can improve evidence use by decision-makers; but only when the intervention simultaneously seeks to enhance decision-makers' opportunity and motivation to use evidence. Similarly, there is reliable evidence that building decision-makers' skills to access and make sense of evidence (such as critical appraisal training programmes) is effective; but only when the opportunity and motivation to use the evidence are simultaneously enhanced. There is cautious evidence of stakeholders using evidence when interventions foster changes to decision-making structures and processes by formalising and embedding one or more of the other mechanisms of change within existing structures and processes (such as evidence-on-demand services integrating push, user-pull and exchange approaches).

Generally ineffective approaches to engage stakeholders include passive communication of evidence and low-key efforts at skill building. Unstructured interaction and collaboration between decision-makers and researchers were less promising although clearly defined, light-touch approaches to facilitating interaction between researchers and decision-makers may help.

There is also reliable evidence about small-group decision-making (which may apply to decisions about conducting research as well as using research, see below). When mixed

groups of people make decisions about technical issues, formal methods for reaching consensus are recommended, keeping as close as possible to the original designs of Delphi studies (for groups geographically spread) and of Nominal Group Technique (for people meeting around a table). For the latter, six to twelve members, between them representing key stakeholder groups, with sufficient time and good facilitation to share information and reach a decision are recommended.

The remaining evidence about stakeholder engagement is less reliable; it rests more on syntheses of process evaluations or good practice than evidence of specific engagement methods reliably leading to better decisions or better research.

Where there is greater uncertainty about the context there is a greater role for knowledge brokers. Use of evidence may also be supported by engaging stakeholders in refining theories of change that underpin the evidence, or in adapting international guidance for local use.

Where codified evidence is lacking, leading to a lack of generalisable evidence, beneficiary feedback is essential when addressing problems and developing solutions through trial and error. Initial understanding about what works can come from this feedback and from formal accountability mechanisms or even community-based participatory research.

Where requisite generalisable and context-specific knowledge are both lacking, learning begins with efforts to capture social learning about the context and their coping strategies from the local population and practitioners working in the field. Community based participatory research may follow. Learning can be shared through aid agency coordination.

Stakeholder engagement with evidence production: Research well-designed to contribute to generalisable knowledge (i.e. to be translatable beyond the context of its production) makes use of concepts that are clear and widely agreed. In these circumstances engagement can rely on a small number of people representing the key stakeholder groups and be guided by the evidence about small group decision-making (see above). In practice, consensus development methods, which are evidence based, are rarely applied in their formal form for advisory groups. Standard procedures for peer review, with all their shortcomings, are standard practice in these circumstances. The clarity of key concepts also allows clear guidance for large numbers of people to collect data for research that would otherwise be unaffordable, namely citizen science.

But, where the research is conducted for use in the context of its production, the focus is on the strength of relationships between local stakeholders, supported by knowledge brokers.

Where prior concepts are unclear, and the aim is for global use, clearer understanding can come from well facilitated multi-stakeholder deliberation complemented by wide consultation.

Political analysis: The links between the literatures on knowledge mobilisation and political analysis are tenuous. Nevertheless there is evidence of research uptake being influenced by political power, democratic processes, institutional mechanisms, values and priorities. Research evidence tends to influence technical decisions rather than more complex decisions with multiple social implications, and where generalisable evidence is strong, can influence decisions without taking into account local contexts, needs or capabilities. The development of political analysis practice and tools to bring together understandings of power, politics and gender lack a strong theoretical or empirical underpinning.

Social Psychology: Understanding that behaviour change results from a combination of capability, opportunity and motivation explains much of the empirical evidence and can be used to design new interventions. Small group decision-making can be explained and

influenced by the skills and attributes of group members, the knowledge they bring, the knowledge presented to them and the processes for discussion and decision-making.

Systems Thinking: Accountability to stakeholders (which relies on transparency, participation, learning and feedback, and complaints and redress) can be applied to individual activities, priorities and policies generally, and governance and systems, and enhanced through a series of learning loops.

7.2 Strengths and limitations

The strength of this analysis comes from its analytical framework and the priority it gives to existing systematic reviews of evidence about stakeholder engagement.

The analytical framework was constructed by drawing on the perspectives of communities producing research knowledge (researchers and policy makers demanding evidence) and humanitarian networks making decisions for international aid. This framework provides a coherence to an extensive swathe of literature from different academic disciplines, and a way of choosing between different approaches to stakeholder engagement.

The framework was populated with research evidence of stakeholder engagement. As many of these literatures are mature, analysis focused primarily on existing evidence syntheses, supplemented by key papers in stakeholder engagement. However, not all aspects of stakeholder engagement have been systematically reviewed, and many reviews conducting systematic searches offered largely descriptive findings of the research they found rather than appraising the quality of included studies.

7.3 Recommendations for research

This methodological review has identified three major gaps in the literature about stakeholder engagement:

- (a) comprehensive guidance for stakeholder engagement to encourage decisions that are both evidence-informed and appropriate to their context;
- (b) specific methods for policy-makers to draw on evidence from multiple sources for prediction and decision-making; and
- (c) understanding the institutional and political context of research uptake.

All three recommendations are relevant to organisations using research findings or generating new knowledge.

We consider each of these recommendations here, noting particular contributions aligned with CEDIL's mission for developing and testing innovative methods for evaluation and evidence synthesis.

(a) Guidance for designing and evaluating stakeholder engagement: The literature addressing stakeholder engagement spans issues that are methodological, organisational and political. Rarely is the full range considered together. We therefore recommend that CEDIL undertakes empirical research and further literature reviews in order to:

- Develop a model of stakeholders' engagement that: (a) incorporates an understanding of their multiplicity of interests, beliefs and institutional contexts; (b) which distinguishes between engagement with knowledge production and engagement with evidence use or decision-making; and (c) explicitly takes into account uncertainties informing decisions or research plans (see section 5).

Then, based on this model we recommend CEDIL develops evidence-informed guidance for:

- CEDIL researchers about how to better take into account the institutional, political and cultural environment when designing, delivering and communicating their research (section 6);
- Research commissioners, policy makers and implementers including user-friendly methods to manage stakeholder engagement and the great variety of – often conflicting – evidence that can aid in decision-making (see section 4.3);
- Organisational leaders about how to create the institutional and cultural environment which is conducive to evidence uptake (see section 6.4);

And to follow, we recommend efforts to enhance evaluation and monitoring that:

- Develop a conceptual framework and methodology to explore how the quality of stakeholder engagement might be better assessed (see section 6.4). This would involve more clearly defining the various elements and levels of engagement and how these might be measured.
- Undertake follow-up reviews and tracing studies of CEDIL’s research and evaluative studies in DFID to explore how decision-making practice relates to evidence, and how internal organisational incentives, networks and relationships affect evidence up-take.

(b) Methods for policy-makers to draw on evidence from multiple sources about multiple aspects of policy implementation and outcomes: Most tools designed to support critical use of research are designed to address a single study design, yet decision-makers need to take into account multiple pieces of evidence. We recommend developing a manual to provide guidance to policy-makers on how to use evidence from multiple sources for prediction and decisions. It would involve developing and combining for publication in a user-friendly format a set of practical methods, guidelines and ideas for policymakers for ways to (a) manage the great variety of pieces of evidence that can aid in estimating in their context (as best possible) both policy effectiveness and who will be affected in what ways if the policy is implemented; (b) understand how to use this evidence to add value; and (c) assess the overall lessons.

The ultimate *aim*: to produce a manual, geared to development issues and rich with concrete examples, for policy makers and implementors on

- What *kinds of information* can be of aid for estimating policy outcomes *in situ*
- What *evidence* for these kinds of information might look like
- Where they might find this evidence
- How to organise the evidence accumulated
- Ways to arrive at a sensible overall assessment given the evidence
- Who to involve and how

Given the variety of context-local issues that arise and of types of evidence that bear on them, we do not expect a set of rules meant to work everywhere but rather useful ‘rules of thumb’, frameworks, rubrics to make deliberation easier, more systematic, more rational. Although the manual should contain general lessons applicable across a range of development domains, the guidance should be developed with special attention to:

- Use in CEDIL’s central areas of focus: fragile states, gender violence and inequality, humanitarian assistance, governance, private sector development, and extremism
- The real time, resource, skill and political constraints policy makers in these areas are apt to face in gathering and understanding the evidence and assessing its lessons *in situ*.

The work will require a review of what is available plus new conceptual and empirical research to investigate both what can be done and what has been done.

(c) Understanding the Institutional and Political Context of Research Uptake: This paper has focused on the context of knowledge production (what is known before research begins) and the context of knowledge implementation (where decisions make a difference). Neither of these include the context of where decisions are made. How the staff in donor organisations such as DFID or other development organisations actually take decisions and use evidence, including how they manage the trade-offs with other demands, including those of their political masters, peers and development partners, is not well understood.

Research programmes designed to promote the use of evidence (including CEDIL) are often largely silent about the institutional and political aspects of development agencies but these arguably play a critical role in shaping not just the degree to which evidence is used, but what evidence is valued, what methods are preferred, and what questions are asked in the first place.

As such there seems to be an assumption in many of these programmes that the production of more high quality research and evaluations and well tested methodological innovations, which are then shared through guidelines, infrastructure to make learning accessible and training, is sufficient. This seems to fly in the face of what we know about interests, incentives, politics and organisational culture, and effective stakeholder engagement.

We are proposing a more strategic examination of this issue including a focus on gaps in our understanding about how decisions are actually made in development agencies, how trade-offs between evidence and other demands are managed, and what kinds of organisational culture and environment is required for more effective use of evidence. We propose to do this by undertaking some tracing of how evaluations⁹ (including CEDIL's) are received by commissioning organisations¹⁰, how they do or do not inform decisions, and what other factors – including the functioning of internal networks – are at play. This will lead to filling knowledge gaps as well as the production of some practical guidance on these matters.

Such a programme might produce:

- a synthesis of existing research on what institutional structures and arrangements are most conducive to evidence informed research uptake;
- the findings of a DFID staff survey and tracing studies of evaluation impacts and decision-making practice and how that relates to evidence;
- findings of a social network analysis (based on survey questions) which explores how internal organisational networks and relationships effect evidence up-take;
- guidance to researchers about how to better take into account the institutional, political and cultural environment when designing, delivering and communicating their research;
- guidance to organisational leaders about how to create the institutional and cultural environment which is conducive to evidence uptake.

This fits squarely with CEDIL's priority on promoting the uptake and use of evidence from impact evaluations. Indeed it should shape how CEDIL goes about this in the future and may lead to a revision in its theory of change. The exercise also acts as a 'double loop' learning exercise for CEDIL itself.

⁹ This could be focused on sectors or contexts of particular interest i.e. gender, governance, private sector, humanitarian work, fragile or conflict affected contexts etc

¹⁰ This work could be linked to the [Developmental Leadership Program's](#) work with DFAT in Australia who are exploring a similar exercise

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