Engaging stakeholders with evidence and uncertainty

Sandy Oliver, Laurenz Langer, Mukdarut Bangpan, Promise Nduku

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The team

Spanning research, development practice & humanitarian aid

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**Digital Solution Foundry:** Chris Penkin
The current study

Assumptions and work planned

1. Stakeholder engagement is a key factor for the success of impact evaluations – both doing them and using their findings
2. Earlier study collated models for stakeholder engagement and how to choose between them depending on what is known from generalizable research and what is known about specific contexts
3. This study explores the face validity of these models to develop more practical guidance about choices and application of stakeholder engagement models for impact evaluation & synthesis
The current study

Today’s opportunities

1. The study team to reflect on how we describe different models of stakeholder engagement and how to choose between

2. Workshop participants to discuss models of stakeholder engagement and how to choose between them

3. An option to participate in the study by
   • Offering written feedback, or
   • Volunteering to be interviewed later this week

   and giving us your name and email address – for more information to options for involvement
The Problem
The design, implementation and impact of programme on what individuals/households can afford and sustain (Bastagli et al. 2006)

Effects of CCTs on children’s work participation (Kabeer and Waddington 2015)
Cash transfers: what does the evidence NOT say?

Little about the
• political and institutional context in which an evidence informed approach might flourish (McCord, 2009)

Little about the
• degree to which local political actors and governments might sustain the process, even if it “works” technically. (McCord, 2009)

People queuing with their cash vouchers outside a bank in South Sudan.
Photo credit: Dauda Koroma/Oxfam
Engaging stakeholders: a possible solution

What do we know from living and working in, for instance, South Sudan?

What do we know from studies of similar contexts elsewhere?

Discuss with stakeholders:

- **generalisable knowledge** to maximise rigour of research used for decisions
- **context specific knowledge** to maximise relevance of research to, for instance, South Sudan
Your role in relation to research?

ACTIVITY

• Conducting research, or making decisions that (could) use research findings?
• Describe a familiar project briefly
• List the stakeholders who might be affected and their interests
• Underline those you have involved, or might involve in the project
• List ways you have involved them or might involve them?
Framing the evidence ecosystem
1) Common problems
   Generalizable evidence
   Trials, counterfactual studies
   Taxonomies & core outcome sets
   Review evidence largely aggregated (e.g. for HIV antiretroviral guidelines)

2) Specific, immediate problems
   Policy driven
   Rapid studies with close links to decision-makers
   Evidence largely structured & aggregated

3) Specific, immediate problems
   Policy driven
   Rapid studies with a knowledge broker
   Evidence largely configured (e.g. investigating HIV stigma)

4) Common problems
   Generalizable evidence
   As above, plus...
   Extra deliberation time
   Evidence largely configured (e.g. optimising roles for tasks)

What works, where & how?

Contribution to generalizable knowledge

Known | Unsure
--- | ---

Key concepts for knowledge production

Known | Unsure
C) Experiment, iterate, learn, adapt, e.g. problem driven iterative adaptation (PIDA); typical support for people living with HIV from local NGOs or faith-based organisations

A) Traditional linear programming, e.g. efficacy of vaccines, bednets, HIV antiretroviral therapy (ART)

B) Fast feedback; rapid response with approaches known to work elsewhere, e.g. cash transfers, humanitarian aid, and delivery of vaccines, bednets, HIV/ART shared decision-making etc.

D) Capture local knowledge of context or coping (positive deviance) to develop promising approaches

What suits here & now?

Relevance of generalisable knowledge

- Context of knowledge implementation
  - Known
  - Unsure

- What suits here & now?
  - Unsure
  - Known
Introducing stakeholders
and knowledge exchange, or knowledge mobilisation
A) Policy decisions
e.g. efficacy of vaccines, bednets, HIV antiretroviral therapy (ART)

1) Common problems
- Generalizable evidence
  - Trials, counterfactual studies
  - Taxonomies & core outcome sets
- Evidence largely aggregated (e.g. for HIV antiretroviral guidelines)

Using evidence

Producing evidence

- Decision-makers demanding evidence
- Researchers offering evidence
Stakeholder engagement – ‘KE’

Using evidence

- A) Policy decisions
  e.g. efficacy of vaccines, bednets, HIV antiretroviral therapy (ART)

- Access to evidence libraries
- Packaging evidence to suit each audience
- Building evidence literacy and ‘intelligent customers’
- Incentives for using evidence
- Building social norms for using evidence

Producing evidence

- Decision-makers demanding evidence
- Researchers offering evidence

- 1) Common problems
  Generalizable evidence
  Trials, counterfactual studies
  Taxonomies & core outcome sets
  Evidence largely aggregated (e.g. for HIV antiretroviral guidelines)

- Research priority setting
- Advisory panels
- Peer review through infomediaries/ translators
- Citizen science
- Relevant evidence not available in the libraries?
- No prior clarity or consensus on the key concepts?
- Evidence ‘context sensitive’ and implementation unpredictable?

Using evidence

A) Policy decisions
  - e.g. efficacy of vaccines, bednets, HIV antiretroviral therapy (ART)

Producing evidence

1) Common problems
   - Generalizable evidence
   - Trials, counterfactual studies
   - Taxonomies & core outcome sets
   - Evidence largely aggregated (e.g. for HIV antiretroviral guidelines)
‘Simple’ KE only part of the picture

Relevance of generalisable knowledge

Known

Unsure

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   - Evidence largely structured & aggregated

What suits here & now?

Decision-makers seeking evidence

Researchers offering evidence

What works, where & how?

3) Specific, immediate problems Policy driven
   - Rapid studies with a knowledge broker
   - Evidence largely configured (e.g. investigating HIV stigma)

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B) Fast feedback; rapid response with approaches known to work elsewhere, e.g. cash transfers, humanitarian aid, and delivery of vaccines, bednets, HIV/ART shared decision-making etc
Relevance of generalisable knowledge

- Unsure
  - C) Relevant research NOT available in advance, context of project familiar and well understood

- Known
  - A) Relevant research available in advance, context of project familiar and well understood

Contribution to generalizable knowledge

- Known
  - 1) Common problems, key concepts understood and agreed in advance

- Unsure
  - 2) Specific, immediate, local problems, key concepts understood and agreed in advance

What suits here & now?

- Unsure
  - D) Relevant research NOT available in advance, context of project NOT familiar or well understood

- Known
  - B) Relevant research available in advance, context of project NOT familiar or well understood

What works, where & how?

- Known
  - 4) Common problems, key concepts NOT all well understood and agreed in advance, but emerged from the work

- Unsure
  - 3) Specific, immediate, local problems, key concepts NOT all understood and agreed in advance, but emerged from the work
Stakeholder engagement
Methods and tools
Tools that might help

Questions or prompts to help people understand the nature of the uncertain knowledge they face as they embark on a new task

A diagram, flow chart, network or mind map to help them identify:
(a) why involving stakeholders might help; and
(b) appropriate methods for engaging stakeholders with their task
(c) where differences in interests and power might lie

A map of the evidence underpinning those methods
A map of tools supporting those methods
An appraisal tool for assessing the suitability of a method given the nature of the uncertain knowledge they face
Making decisions

Using evidence in different circumstances
Making decisions
informed by generalisable evidence
in contexts that are understood suits
Traditional linear programming

Relevance of generalisable knowledge

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Making decisions
informed by generalisable evidence
in contexts that are understood suits
Traditional linear programming

Relevance of generalisable knowledge

- Access to evidence libraries
- Packaging evidence to suit each audience
- Building evidence literacy and ‘intelligent customers’
- Incentives to use research
- Building social norms

What suits here & now?

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Context of knowledge implementation

- Known
- Unsure

Access to evidence libraries
Packaging evidence to suit each audience
Building evidence literacy and ‘intelligent customers’
Incentives to use research
Building social norms
Decisions about contexts that are understood and informed by generalisable evidence, decision-makers engaged in **programming as a technical exercise** by

- **Facilitating access to research evidence**, (e.g. communication strategies and evidence repositories) if ALSO enhancing decision-makers’ opportunity and motivation to use evidence

- **Building decision-makers’ skills to access and make sense of evidence** (e.g. critical appraisal training programmes), if ALSO enhancing both capability and motivation

- **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)

Decisions about contexts that are understood and informed by generalisable evidence, decision-makers engaged in **programming as a technical exercise** by

- **Facilitating collective decision-making** by small, well-facilitated committees (6-12) with time to share and debate relevant evidence, making the most of constructive conflict

- **Research organisations embedded in networks** have good reputations, research capacity, quality and quantity of connections to decision-makers

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“We challenge DFID to better evidence generation, transmission, adoption”
Making decisions informed by generalisable evidence in contexts that are understood suits Traditional linear programming.

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Relevant evidence IS available in the libraries, BUT:

- Evidence ‘context sensitive’ and implementation unpredictable
- More people required to understand context of knowledge implementation
Making decisions
informed by generalisable evidence
in contexts that are understood suits

*Traditional linear programming*

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**What suits here & now?**

Relevant evidence IS available in the libraries,
BUT:
• Evidence ‘context sensitive’ and implementation unpredictable
• More people required to understand context of knowledge implementation

Plus:
• Access to evidence libraries
• Packaging evidence to suit each audience
• Building evidence literacy and ‘intelligent customers’
• Career incentives
• Building social norms
• Inviting regular feedback
• Collective deliberation about current state of knowledge and implications for action
Decisions in unfamiliar contexts informed by generalisable evidence

- Refining theories of change with local stakeholders
- Adapting international guidance for local use
- Knowledge brokering to support organisational change
- Making technical decisions by committee
- Better complementarity of community efforts and national programmes
Directly observed therapy for TB failed when...

- Practitioners rationed incentives to those they considered most deprived and therefore most deserving;
- Patients found the timing of the incentive (a midday meal) and treatment inconvenient; and
- Civil conflict displaced most of the local population and prevented clinic attendance.


Andrew Kivori, 53, receives directly observed treatment (DOT) from a World Vision Liaison Officer at the Port Moresby General Hospital (Photo: Tanya Hisanan/World Vision)
Making decisions
in the absence of generalisable evidence
where context is understood suits action research

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What suits here & now?

Relevant evidence IS NOT available in the libraries,
BUT:
• Context of knowledge implementation is known
Making decisions in the absence of generalisable evidence where context is understood suits action research.

Relevant evidence IS NOT available in the libraries, BUT:
- Context of knowledge implementation is known

- Pooling knowledge about the local context, and solutions, already held by local organisations
- Developing knowledge and solutions with them

Relevance of generalisable knowledge

- Unknown
- Known

- C) Experiment, iterate, learn, adapt, e.g. problem driven iterative adaptation (PIDA); typical support for people living with HIV from local NGOs or faith-based organisations
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Decisions about familiar contexts lacking generalisable evidence, stakeholders engaged in trial and error by

- Stakeholder mapping
- Beneficiary feedback
- Accountability mechanisms
- Aid agency coordination
- Community based participatory research
Accountability ‘interventions promoted inclusive service delivery… through the enhancement of skills, knowledge and access to resources which enabled citizens to take incremental steps along the ladder of power and strengthened the voice of some of the most excluded people in Africa.
Making decisions in the absence of generalisable evidence and when context is NOT understood suits mobilising local knowledge.

**Relevance of generalisable knowledge**

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What suits here & now?

- B) Fast feedback; rapid response with approaches known to work elsewhere, e.g. cash transfers, humanitarian aid, and delivery of vaccines, bednets, HIV/ART shared decision-making etc.
Making decisions in the absence of generalisable evidence and when context is NOT understood suits mobilising local knowledge.

- Pooling knowledge about the local context held by individual practitioners and community members.
Decisions in unfamiliar contexts lacking generalisable evidence, stakeholders engaged in mobilising local knowledge by

- **Gathering and applying local, tacit knowledge**
  Capturing their insights about factors influencing their lives,
  Recognising exceptional instances of coping with challenging circumstances (positive deviance).
  Participatory processes for recreating and nurturing local knowledge in crisis-affected communities

- **Remote programming practices**: remote control, remote management, remote support, remote partnership
Pastoral knowledge is embedded in the cultural, spiritual, political and social system of pastoral societies. The cultural aspect is particularly important; the knowledge is often transmitted orally and passed down to each generation through stories, songs and other rituals, where cattle are revered.

Making decisions

Relevance of generalisable knowledge

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Learning from political science
The diagram illustrates the relevance and contribution of generalizable knowledge in various contexts. It highlights the importance of aligning decision-makers' needs with the available evidence, considering the interests, incentives, power, and politics involved. The diagram integrates ideas, culture, and world views with institutions, relationships, and alliances to provide a comprehensive understanding of the knowledge production process.

Key Concepts for Knowledge Production:
- **Knowledge Implementation**: Known
- **Context of Knowledge Implementation**: Unsure
- **Relevance of Generalisable Knowledge**: Unsure
- **Contribution to Generalizable Knowledge**: Known
- **Decision-Makers Seeking Evidence**: Known
- **Researchers Offering Evidence**: Known
- **What Suits Here & Now?**
  - C) Experiment, iterate, learn, adapt, e.g., problem-driven iterative adaptation (PIDA); typical support for people living with HIV from local NGOs or faith-based organisations.
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- **What Works, Where & How?**
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  - 4) Common problems: Generalizable evidence
     - As above, plus...
     - Extra deliberation time
     - Evidence largely configured (e.g., optimising roles for tasks)
Every day political analysis

Understanding interests
Understanding change

Desk work
Team discussion
Ask an expert
Conclusions
When context is clear and agreed in advance

When meaning of context known and agreed before implementation

When meaning of key concepts known and agreed before research

**Methods of choice**

- Small numbers of stakeholders, drawn from key organisations
- e.g. Committee membership, key informant interviews, partnering stakeholder organisations

**Limitations:** may miss important voices
When context is unclear, variable or contested in advance

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When meaning of context unknown or contested before implementation

When meaning of key concepts unknown or contested before research

**Methods of choice**

- Large numbers of stakeholders, selected for diversity
- e.g. Widespread consultation, facilitating discussion and deliberation, capturing mutual learning

**Limitations:** may miss important deadlines
At the centre of this landscape

Decisions tend to be made by (inter)national organisations, who
• Particularly value technically rigorous research, and
• Emphasise how the evidence is appraised technically rather than how stakeholders interact to make sense of it

Limitations: may be lead by the evidence more than the problem
At the margins of this landscape

Decisions tend to be made by local organisations and practitioners, who
• Particularly value locally relevant research, and
• Emphasise the influence of politics on how decisions are made and
  implemented rather than the technical appraisal of evidence

Limitations: may ignore relevant evidence generated elsewhere
Another problem

This is the perspective of evidence ‘geeks’

Evidence geeks have a
• Panoramic vision of global evidence

Development practitioners have a
• Zoom focus on setting of interest

So let’s turn the landscape inside out...
When context is clear and agreed in advance

When meaning of context known and agreed before implementation

When meaning of key concepts known and agreed before research

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At the centre of this landscape

Decisions tend to be made by local organisations and practitioners, who
• Particularly value locally relevant research, and
• Emphasise the influence of politics on how decisions are made and implemented rather than the technical appraisal of evidence
• Often have most influence on the ground

Limitations: may ignore relevant evidence generated elsewhere
At the margins of this landscape

Decisions tend to be made by (inter)national organisations, who
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Limitations: may be lead by the evidence more than the problem
Next steps

After this taster session

• One-to-one interviews with evidence ‘geeks’ and development or humanitarian practitioners
• Refining the framework
• Developing tools to support thoughtful choices of stakeholder engagement methods
• Signpost evidence and tools

If you’d like to offer your expertise through a one-to-one interview please contact me: sandy.oliver@ucl.ac.uk
Original working paper


sandy.oliver@ucl.ac.uk