6-7 June 2018

Wellcome Policy Engagement Workshop

Purpose of the workshop

On 6-7 June, 2018, the Wellcome Trust Global Policy team convened a two-day policy engagement workshop for delegates from Wellcome's Africa and Asia Programmes (AAPs), the India Alliance, and the African Academy of Sciences. Co-facilitated with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the workshop brought together programme staff, researchers, and policy-makers. Policy engagement is a new area of work for Wellcome; while we have increasingly supported public engagement in recent years, we have placed less emphasis on ensuring that research results are integrated into the policy environment. The workshop was designed as part of our strategy for strengthening Wellcome's approach to research uptake by encouraging and enabling the use of research evidence in health policy and practice, and acted as the inaugural meeting of the Wellcome Policy Engagement Network.

The Network is envisaged as a community of best practice in the field of policy engagement, and as a forum for identifying and promoting shared interests and opportunities for the co-production of policies. In line with Wellcome's commitment to shifting the centre of gravity, the recently established Global Policy team is keen to ensure that our work and the policies we produce, such as those pertaining to access to healthcare interventions and data sharing, are inclusive and that they are informed by the knowledge and experience of a diverse community of people working on particular issues in different contexts.

We were keen to draw on the close relationships developed with the AAPs and our strategic partnerships over the years, both to foster inter-programme learning, and to crowdsource ideas and expertise to inform our thinking about how we can most effectively support work that enhances and accelerates the uptake of research into transformative policy and practice for health.

Executive Summary

The workshop made clear that **Wellcome has an opportunity for innovation, thought leadership and transformative partnership in the field of using research to influence policy and practice for health**. By harnessing global learning and adopting effective funding models, we will be well-placed to embed policy engagement as a core Wellcome activity, setting an example for other funders as we do so.

Wellcome could do more to strengthen its reputation for working in partnership, particularly with policymakers. Wellcome's reputation for funding high-quality research means a great deal to grantees. However, participants felt Wellcome could make greater use of its convening power to further strengthen relationships that would foster the supply and uptake of research evidence. This may take time, but it would bolster efforts by individual researchers and research organisations to have their work heard in policy discussions.

Participants brought a range of experiences and expertise to the workshop. **All saw policymakers as essential audiences for their research**; not as an end in itself, but as key to improving people's lives and wellbeing. All believed that influencing policy is an appropriate part of their institutional/programme mandate and is key to

delivering impact at scale. Research managers have communications and engagement skills that could be built on to deliver specific policy engagement work.

Some AAPs have been undertaking policy engagement work for some time but in an ad-hoc and under-resourced fashion. Successes have depended on individual skills and networks rather than on a strategic and systematic approach. Dedicated resources for policy engagement would allow institutions to build sustainable capacity to ensure that future Wellcome-funded research is used effectively to influence policy for health.

Some see policy engagement as part of their day to day work while others would prefer to leave it to specialists. There is no right answer to this: ways of engaging and influencing policymakers will depend on the local context. However, **policy engagement demands a basic skillset which should be shared between researchers, research managers and communications/liaison officers.**

It is important not to load policy engagement work exclusively onto individual researchers. What is important is for the research to be in the right place at the right time. **Wellcome could consider providing policy engagement funding to organisations, not only to individuals**, giving research institutions the flexibility to decide who is best placed to do the work.

Institutional mandates for policy engagement vary. Some researchers and research organisations would rather retain their independence from the politics of policymaking than engage in policy debates directly. Learning from elsewhere shows that much policy influence is achieved through networks where each institution determines its own specific role in the engagement and influencing process.

The policy environment is complex and ever-shifting. **Policy engagement approaches need to be flexible and responsive, which requires flexible and responsive funding modes.** Participants highlighted Wellcome's existing approach to funding public engagement work and suggested exploring whether a similar model could work for policy engagement.

However, **it is not just about the money**. To achieve long-term impacts, it is equally important to provide clear signals that Wellcome values policy engagement and to establish appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems that encourage learning from experience.

Wellcome is a globally respected research funder, and there was a great deal of goodwill in the room to help it step up to the challenge of strengthening engagement between research and policy. Those attending the workshop could form the nucleus of a think-net to help Wellcome design, pilot and review its approach and the types of support it provides.

Looking forward, **Wellcome could demonstrate thought leadership by exploring links between research, policy, and civil society.**

Throughout the report, quotes from participants are highlighted in green while summary observations from the invited presentation are highlighted in blue.

Workshop activities – Day 1

Participants' needs from the workshop

Introductions from participants highlighted four issues they hoped the workshop would address.

First was the need to **consider policy engagement as being equally important to public engagement work**; committing to being there for the long term to support translation processes[1] and help build innovative systems for promoting evidence use that stimulate policymakers' demand for evidence. Participants welcomed the opportunity to talk, without sugar-coating, about the challenges and opportunities they had faced in their policy influencing work to date.

> *"I want to garner courage from this workshop to do more policy engagement work."*

> *"How can I help Fellows understand the value of policy engagement?"*

Second was a concern about **how to institutionalise policy engagement work within their organisations**. Both policymakers and practitioners wanted to know how to support researchers to a) understand the bigger implications of their research and to see the value of trying to influence policy, and b) understand how to engage and communicate effectively with policymakers to ensure their work is comprehensible and can be acted on.

Third, participants noted that **creating an effective institutional environment for policy engagement work has been challenging without dedicated funding**. While some researchers have had notable successes from their engagement, they have had to do the work 'off the sides of their desks' and as an unfunded additional activity.

Finally, participants highlighted that building closer links between research and policy environments has implications for **how to navigate the tension between remaining independent from political issues, and engaging in policy debates in order to influence them**. Policy engagement can mean giving up some autonomy and allowing users space to set priorities; leading to work that may not have the highest scientific impact. Participants were keen to explore the implications of this tension for how policy engagement and influencing work is done.

> *"I want to learn what else has been tried: what works to influence policy?"*

Invited presentation

The invited presentation began with a plea to consider two linked issues throughout the workshop: language and mandate. It is not a question of 'getting policymakers to do something': they have their own mandates which researchers may or may not fully understand. It is better to talk about engaging with policymakers in order to influence them; this language respects their mandate and encourages researchers to think about the limits of their own.

[1] There were two definitions of 'translation' circulating in the workshop; one that described the process of taking research results through to production of an effective product or service, and one that described the process of ensuring that research results are presented in a language suitable for non-specialists to understand. This reflects the distinction in the academic literature: the second definition is often referred to as 'knowledge translation' which is used here for clarity.

The slides from the presentation are attached and summarised in the blue boxes below.

Linking research to policy: current debates and critical thinking

1. **Accelerating the use of evidence**
   - The different mandates of researchers, research institutes and policymakers create tensions around who does what to accelerate the use of research evidence. Navigating these mandates is key to developing an effective strategy;
   - Evidence does not just inform specific decisions; it is also used to negotiate and contribute to the narrative around key policy issues;
   - Diverse communication is key; policymakers are not a homogenous group and will be engaged in different ways at different times.

The presentation described a framework for thinking about the different ways researchers and other organisations can interact with policymakers (below). Participants found it useful: it emphasises that research-to-policy work exists within a wider ecosystem and that working with other organisations can be an effective way of delivering messages.

"I think it's important to recognise that influencing policy happens in an ecosystem. It's not the sole responsibility of a single organisation."

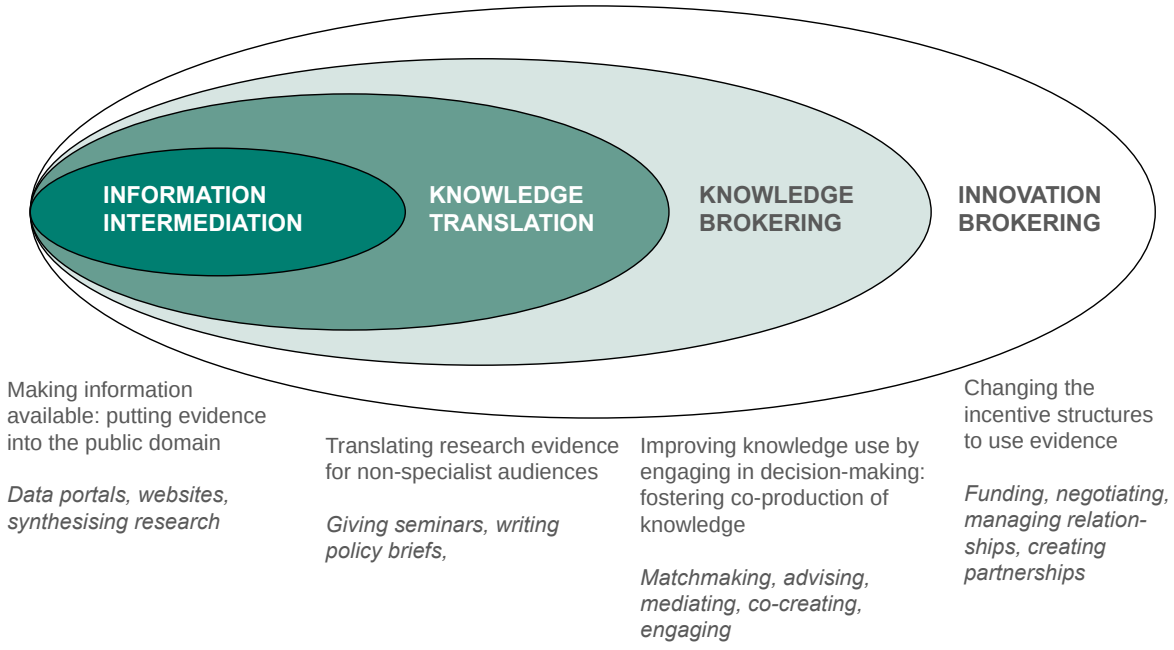


Fig 1: the K framework – the ecosystem of functions for linking research to policy*

Case studies from AAPs and the India Alliance

Slides from the case study presentations will be circulated with this report. The main points that arose in discussion after each presentation are highlighted here.

1. Policymaking is not a single activity: policy engagement demands a tailored approach

> *"Policymakers are all different: we need to adapt our engagement processes to their needs."*

- The idea of difference is weaved through all parts of policy engagement—in the approaches, the organisations, the levels of policy, the context, type of change. An effective approach understands what is needed and by whom.
- This means we need to break down what we mean by 'policymakers' and adapt engagement processes accordingly.
- Linking national goals and targets to local information can really help configure effective actions. The key to sustaining influence in the policy sphere is solving local complex issues and building on small successes.
- Engagement brings issues of priority setting to the fore, and there can be potential tensions between policymakers' and researchers' agendas which need to be navigated carefully.
- It will be important to monitor the impact of policy engagement work: for accountability to funders and to share learning systematically. This is a long-term process, however, as policy engagement may take some time to show results.

> *"Make local data work and local voices count: link national goals and targets to local actions."*

Linking research to policy: current debates and critical thinking

2. Considering stakeholder needs

- Who are the different stakeholders and parties that need to be involved in the process? What is each trying to achieve?
- Who are the funders in this space and what are their drivers?
- Learning what influences others is a fundamental part of the process: there are different levels of accountability between different stakeholders;
- Policy influence happens within an ecosystem of organisations.

2. Engaging with the policy environment means learning to work politically

- Research-to-policy engagement requires 'amphibians': people who are credible, and feel at home, in both environments.
- Simply showing policymakers the evidence isn't good enough: they may not want to hear it, particularly if it is contentious. Clarify what questions they are asking, and then interpret your evidence to help them reach effective conclusions.
- Research should clearly not be excluded from the provision of scientific advice to policymakers, but some researchers believe that direct engagement with the policy sphere compromises their ability to be independent scientists.

> *"Developing long-term relationships with policymakers builds your own credibility as a researcher. Helping young researchers to do this should be part of our work."*

- However, there are many different ways of providing advice: from simply disseminating research results, to doing commissioned work, sitting on expert advisory committees, or even providing advice over the phone when issues are urgent. It is up to individual researchers to decide what they are comfortable with, and what is within their organisation's mandate.

3. Building relationships with policymakers helps strengthen researchers' credibility

- Getting the institutional structures right within research organisations helps improve research-to-policy activities: policy engagement requires time, resources and skills.

"Researcher involvement in policy-led technical working groups is important, both for credibility and relationships."

- However, individual relationships are still important: building these strengthens researchers' credibility within the policy space. This means having regular conversations and adapting activities to address what is needed, not just pushing the latest research.
- Relationships should, however, be built within the ecosystem of organisations working on particular issues. Messages are more powerful when they come from a network rather than from a single institution.

"Use the voice of the network rather than working alone."

4. Policy engagement is a specialist skill, and it requires support

- Policy engagement skills can and should be spread around the organisation. Research managers have a good deal of experience with communication and engagement work: researchers don't need to do it on their own but can use the skills of the wider team.

"Research managers have a lot of experience with communications and engagement work: use them!"

"Learn courage, confidence and dexterity—and build on the skills in your team."

- Younger researchers can and should be mentored by those with more experience engaging with policymakers: they learn courage, confidence and dexterity and—importantly—begin to build their own networks.

Linking research to policy: current debates and critical thinking

3. What types of impact can we seek from research?

- *Conceptual*: changes in people's knowledge, understanding and attitudes;
- *Instrumental*: changes in the decisions people take;
- *Capacity building*: changes in their ability to do things;
- *Connectivity*: changes in the existence and strength of networks that can do similar work in future.

Workshop activities – Day 2

Reflections on the day

The main issues participants had raised about how Wellcome could institutionalise policy engagement work fell into three categories:

1. **Building communities**
   - Within this community: learning from each other, without sugar coating (practical actions, how to navigate/adapt to complex contexts, incorporating others' norms & values, how to assess impact)
   - Supporting Wellcome-funded organisations/fellows to build their own communities around policy/practice engagement (clarifying responsibilities & budgets to do this work)

> *"It's important to hear the non-sugar coated stories of how others have managed to influence policy."*

2. **Helping organisations understand how to incentivise and do 'impact work' in a systemic way**
   - Incentivising & building capacities of individual researchers
   - Supporting what research managers already do/raising their profile
   - Helping organisations be more systematic in thinking about (& monitoring) how they can improve the use of research evidence
   - Linking policy & practice engagement to public engagement
3. **Considering how research and brokering activities can find systemic support for work outside the traditional research-to-policy space**
   - Institutional initiatives, not just those linked to individual researchers/pieces of research
   - Over longer time periods, including after grants have ended
   - For different types of organization (policy units), different approaches (interns inside government, for example)
   - Research is only one part of the evidence ecosystem: civil society can also play an important role in influencing policy

Linking research to policy: current debates and critical thinking

4. **Strengthening the demand for evidence**
   - There will be different cultures of evidence in different departments, and different levels of capacity and willingness to engage and use evidence;
   - There may be a need to help policy teams to express their questions better and to support them to access, appraise and utilise robust evidence;
   - The research community needs to understand the policy context so it can prioritise what evidence to put forward to policymakers.

Group work

Participants split into groups to address two questions that had been workshopped the previous day. First, how can researchers and programme staff develop a strategic approach to policy engagement, starting with minimal resources? Second, how can/should researchers & research programmes be incentivized to do policy engagement work? What support systems do they require? How can mentorship be improved? How do we foster and sustain the next generation?

Both groups were also asked what the answers implied for Wellcome as a funding body. Their summarised responses were:

"Wellcome is very good at public engagement: how could we learn from that model to strengthen policy engagement?"

1. Public engagement work has long been incentivised in Wellcome, and this ensures that it is done well: there is a professional group of public engagement specialists with dedicated funding. While the model isn't directly transferable, it could be explored as a precedent for funding policy engagement work.
2. It is important to distinguish between individual researchers, programmes and institutions: all have different requirements for support for policy engagement work.
3. Incentivising policy engagement has been done by other funders through a combination of dedicated funding, requirements for policy engagement plans and progress monitoring.
4. There is a wide range of specific engagement opportunities that could be used at different times. Is it possible to give institutions a discretionary funding pot to enable them to be flexible and responsive to changing priorities?
5. Several existing roles could be expanded to include policy engagement, such as research managers, and communications/ liaison officers. But it is important not to load this just onto individuals: what is important is for the *research* to be available when it is needed . This means a) trying to anticipate policy needs for research so that evidence can be delivered in a timely manner and b) ensuring that research is effectively communicated when windows of opportunity open up—even if the researchers themselves no longer work on the project.

"Policy engagement is a team effort, so funding for policy engagement might need to flow to institutions rather than individuals."

6. It will important to balance funding researchers and funding their institutional environments: both have their merits. Doing both would enhance the policy impact of particular research, while simultaneously contributing to developing a systemic approach to policy engagement that will help build the field.
7. As well as developing researchers' capacity to communicate effectively, Wellcome could investigate supporting government departments to help build their capacity for appraising, using and demanding evidence. However, this has to be done carefully; respecting the relationship between country governments and Wellcome as a whole.
8. Mentoring young researchers is critical, to expose them to existing networks and to how policy is made in (for example) technical working groups. There are funding implications for this work, which will require Wellcome to provide flexible funds that lets people and organisations experiment.

"Mentoring young researchers to do policy engagement work is critical."

9. It is worth carefully considering who could perform different brokering functions. Knowledge brokers (the blue stars in the figure below), could exist within research organisations and within government departments: they do not always need to be in independent institutions. Emphasising the function rather than the person or the organisation encourages a flexible approach that adapts to whatever brokering activities might be needed at different times and in different contexts.

What could Wellcome do to support policy engagement at the AAPs and India Alliance?

Finally, participants were asked in what ways Wellcome could most effectively support their policy engagement work.

First, **it is not just about the money**. Wellcome could provide clear strategic leadership about what it is expecting from policy engagement work, assistance to organisations to plan and deliver it, and recognition for when it is done well. Holding researchers and research institutions to account for the funds they receive for policy engagement will help them focus on developing coherent approaches and learning from them.

But of course money is important. There could be a **dedicated but flexible budget for policy engagement work** that is allocated to institutions as well as to individual researchers. Different funding models were proposed:

- seed funding to work on policy engagement (including building individual researchers' capacity and their networks)
- supplementary models that enabled institutions to build researcher capacity and networks
- large, innovative, one-off policy engagement projects such as setting up or contributing to dedicated knowledge brokering units. Support should probably extend beyond the AAPs, as working in partnership with others could well amplify impact
- funding dedicated policy engagement officers (similar to existing public engagement roles), or expanding the mandates of research managers

Wellcome could offer training to **incentivise fellows and local institutions**. Capacity building is needed in different functions such as mapping policy spaces, tools for communications, engagement, translation and synthesis, agenda setting for both policy and research needs and outreach to stimulate demand. This should be delivered in-country so that candid conversations can be had in local languages.

The Wellcome name is not well recognised within national governments. While it is highly respected as a funder of high quality science, Wellcome is not well known in policy circles. It could focus on developing its reputation for working in

"I was just talking to my minister of health and said that I was at a Wellcome Trust workshop. He said 'Wellcome Trust? What's that?' If Wellcome's reputation could be stronger with policymakers in our country it would be very helpful in raising our profile as high-quality researchers."

partnership: while this will take time, one way of beginning could be to use Wellcome's considerable convening power to bring funders and partners to the table to discuss how to jointly support policy engagement to maximise impact.

Conclusions

After a rich discussion with many shared experiences, several messages emerged:

1. **Wellcome now has a real opportunity to innovate in its policy engagement work**
    a. It has a reputation for innovation that could be put to good use in developing a programme of work around policy engagement
    b. There is a large amount of existing work on policy engagement, done by others, that it can harness
    c. It is a globally respected research funder and there is a lot of goodwill to help it step up to the challenge of strengthening research-policy engagement
2. **Wellcome's name means a great deal to grantees, but it is not well known in policy circles in the countries where it works**
    a. Wellcome could do more to earn a reputation for fostering policy engagement, working with other funders and government partners to develop more systematic and less fragmented approaches to the engagement processes
    b. In turn this would raise its researchers' profiles and increase the likelihood of policy influence
3. **Policymakers are essential audiences for Wellcome-funded research: they are key to improving people's lives and wellbeing**
    a. Some AAPs have been undertaking policy engagement work for some time, but it has been done in an ad-hoc way
    b. Policy engagement work is a team effort and should not be loaded onto individuals. Specialist skills are required, but these should be spread throughout the research teams
    c. Dedicated, flexible resources for policy engagement work, combined with training in how to develop a systematic and strategic approach, would help research institutes identify and respond to policymakers' needs
    d. Wellcome's model for flexibly funding public engagement work may hold lessons
4. **It is not just about the money. To achieve long-term impacts, it is equally important to provide clear signals that Wellcome values policy engagement**
    a. Wellcome can demonstrate thought leadership by exploring links between research, policy, and civil society
    b. Providing flexible funding will encourage AAPs to innovate
    c. Establishing appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems will encourage learning from experience

Next steps: July 2018-February 2019

1. Wellcome will establish a mechanism through which members of the Policy Engagement Network can communicate, share resources, and collaborate to develop a community of best practice;
2. Wellcome will work with internal teams, the AAPs and strategic partnerships to invite and develop proposals for 2-3 pilot policy engagement projects in different contexts;
3. Wellcome will seek relevant lessons from colleagues working in public and international engagement, to see which could transfer to policy engagement work and how we might establish a productive relationship between these related fields of work;
4. Together, we will convene a second meeting of the Network at one of the AAPs in early 2019. The meeting will be organised around a particular theme or training dimension, to be agreed by participants.

Appendices

A. ODI Presentation
B. Agenda
C. Participant list

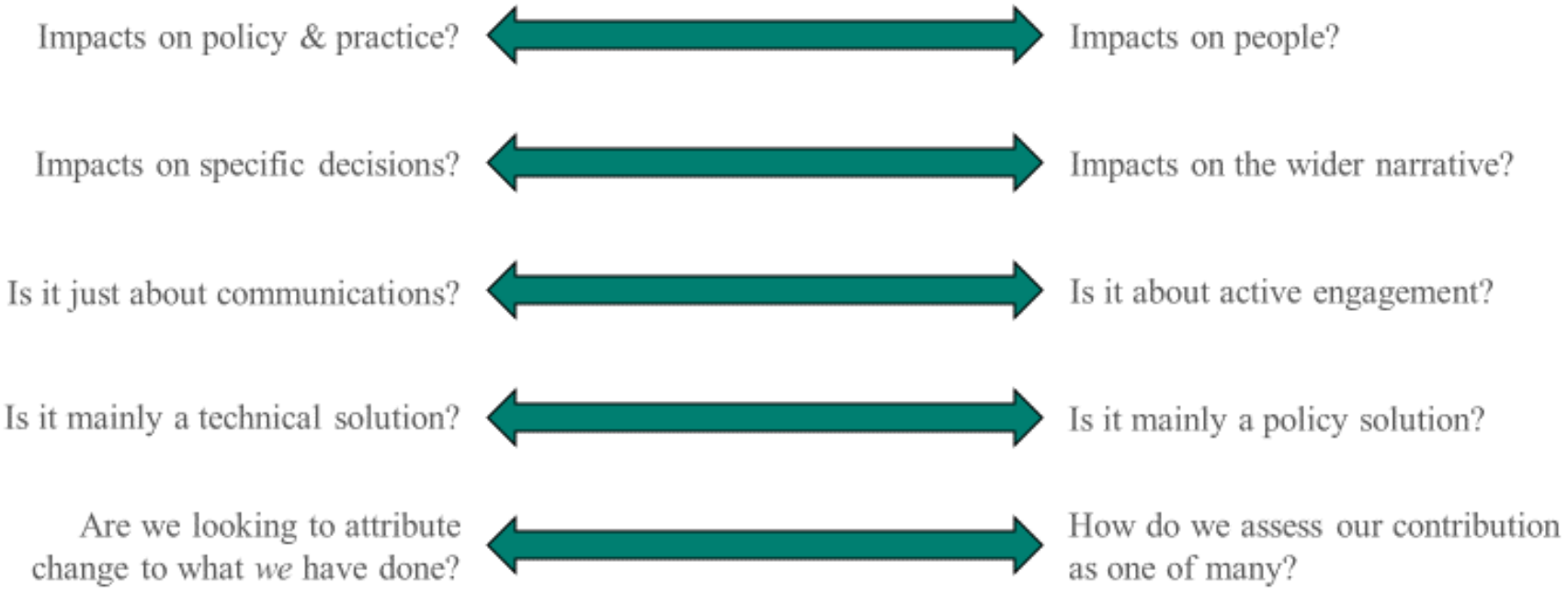
Appendix A

Research
& Policy in
Development

Linking research to policy: Current debates, critical thinking

Louise Shaxson & Josephine Tsui
Wellcome Trust, 6-7 June 2018

Thinking about accelerating the use of research evidence:



What is driving an improved use of research evidence?

Do we want to…

- Advocate for change? *On whose behalf?*
- Be held accountable to our stakeholders? *Who are they?*
- Allocate funding? *Whose funding?*
- Understand a system so we can provide advice? *Which system?*
- Learn about issues? *Which issues? Why choose those ones?*
- Some/all of the above? *How do we prioritise?*

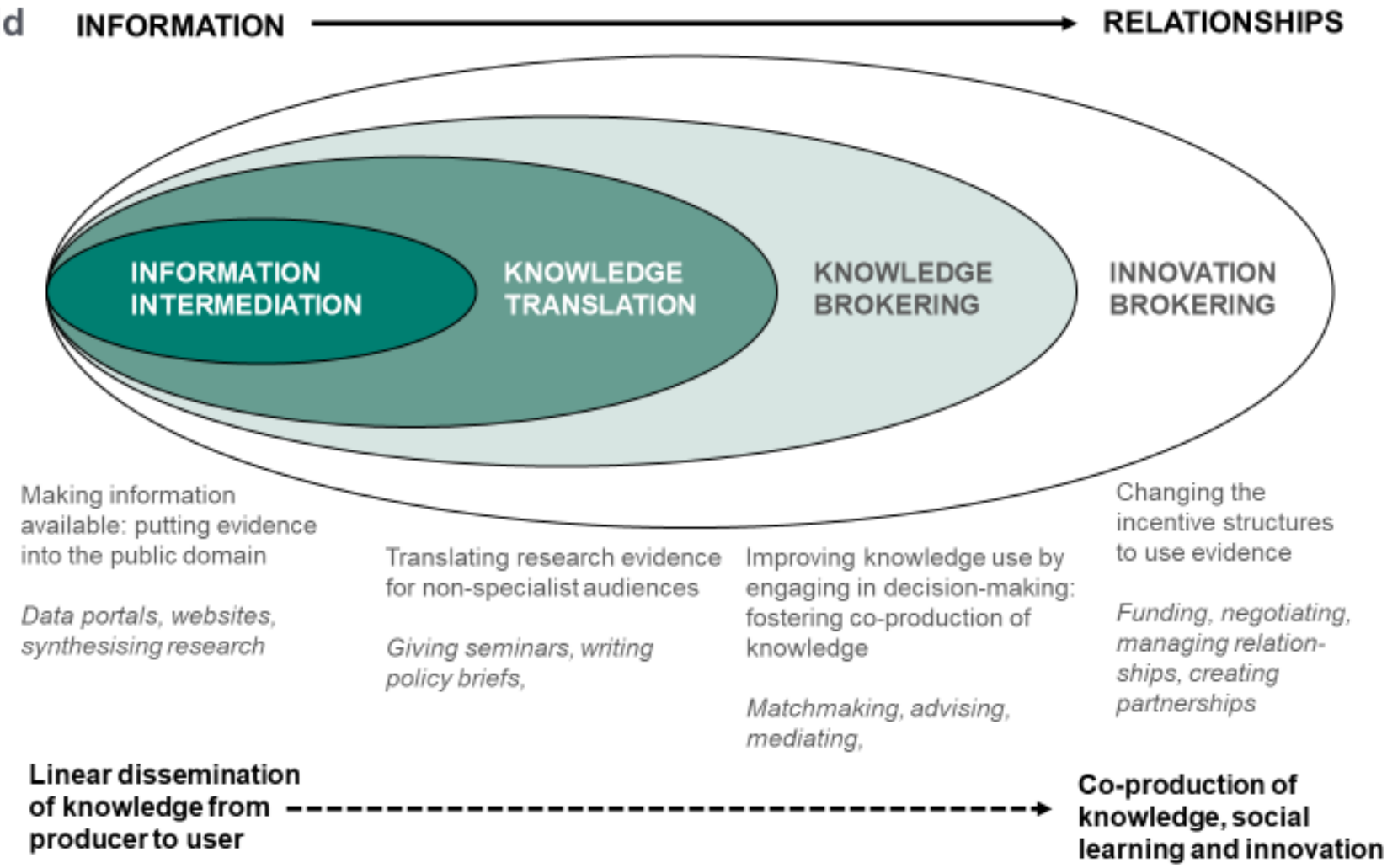
What types of impact should we seek from research?

- **Conceptual:** changes in people's knowledge, understanding and attitudes
- **Instrumental:** changes in the decisions people take
- **Capacity building:** changes in people's ability to do things
- **Connectivity:** changes in the existence and strength of networks that can do similar work in future

How is responsibility for impact shared between researchers, policy-makers & practitioners?

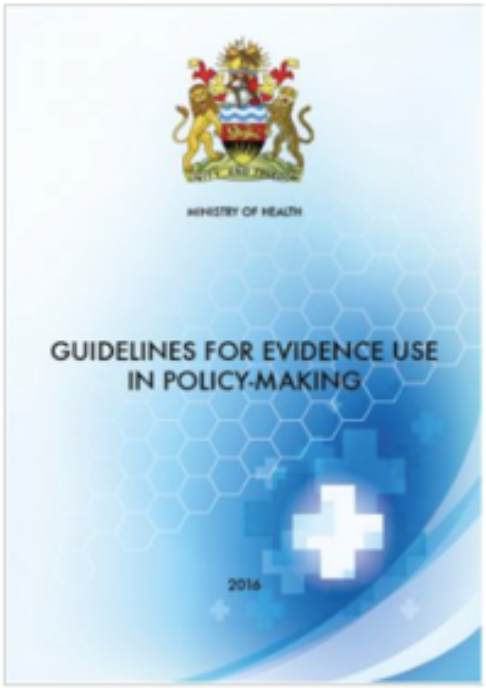
How should we account for local agency?

How should we think about our roles in achieving impact?



How could we synthesise and communicate the evidence we produce?

Strengthening the demand for evidence



Support policy-makers to access, appraise and utilise evidence

(AFIDEP & MoH Malawi)

Strengthen and systematise the demand for evidence **(evidence strategies in South Africa)**

Some final questions / issues for joint exploration

How can we build acceptance of key issues and evidence?

Evidence can confirm, challenge, explain, enrich, scope opportunities for change… but for whom?

How do we work within the authorising environment?

Understanding the political economy within policy and practice

Whose ability needs to be strengthened?

Is it about building capacity or co-creation of skills? What does this mean for researcher impartiality?

How can research contribute to adaptive & responsive approaches?

The perennial question of timeframes

Research
& Policy in
Development

Thank you

Louise Shaxson – Senior Research Fellow

Josephine Tsui – Research Fellow

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Policy engagement workshop
Darwin 7, Wellcome Trust
6-7 June 2018

JUNE 6th		
Time	Session #	Topic
09.15 – 09.45		Registration and coffee/pastries
09.45 – 10.00	1	Welcome
10.00 – 11.00	2	Introductions • Workshop intentions and outcomes • Policy Team & Research Uptake overview
11.00 – 11.45	3	Linking research to policy and practice Presentation & discussion
11.45 – 12.00	Break	
12.00 – 13.15	4	Case studies & discussion: KEMRI and AHRI
13.15 – 14.15	Lunch	
14.15 – 15.30	5	Case studies & discussion: MWL and AESA
15.30 – 15.45	Break	
15.45 – 17.15	6	Case studies & discussion: MORU, OUCRU, India Alliance
17.15 – 17.30	7	Wrap up • Introduction to tomorrow's activity • Wellcome policy people introductions
17.30	Photo, drinks and networking at Wellcome	
19.00	Dinner: Conchigila, 125 Great Titchfield Street	

JUNE 7th		
Time	Session #	Topic
09.15 – 09.30	Coffee/pastries	
09.30 – 10.00	8	Reflection on yesterday • Plenary session
10.00 – 11.45	9a	Parallel session: developing a strategic approach to policy engagement
10.00 – 11.45	9b	Parallel session: incentivising researchers and research programmes to do policy engagement
11.45 – 12.15	Break	
12.15 – 13.30	10	Where and how could Wellcome's support for policy engagement be most effective?
13.30 – 14.15	Lunch	
14.15 – 15.00	11	Reflection on the two days • Review of key points and shared learning Next steps for using and maintaining the network
15.00	Close	

Appendix C
Participant List

Kemri-Wellcome Trust Research Programme	Edwine Barasa: Nairobi Director Mike English: Principle Investigator Benjamin Tsofa: Centre Director of Kemri Centre for Geographic Medicine Research Charles Nzioka: Head of the Research Unit, MOH David Kariuki: Head of the department of policy and planning, MOH
Malawi - Liverpool- Wellcome (MLW)	Kamija Phiri: Dean of School of Public Health and Family Medicine, College of Medicine Eliya Zulu: Executive Director, African Institute for Development Policy and Co-Lead for Policy MLW Wathando Mughandira: Head of Policy, MOH
African Health Research Institute (AHRI)	Nceba Gqaleni: Science Engagement Fellow Sandile Buthelezi: CEO of South African National AIDS Council
Mahidol Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit (MORU)	Elizabeth Ashley: Director of Clinical Research Direk Limmathurotsakul: Head of Microbiology Yoel Lubell: Head of The Economics and Translational Research Group
Oxford University Clinical Research Unit (OUCRU)	Katrina Lawson: Grants and Communications Manager Abhilasha Karkey: Vice Director at Oxford University Clinical Research Unit Hugo Turner: Lead Health Economist
African Academy of Science (AAS)	Isayvani Naicker: Director of Strategy and Partnerships Juliette Mutheu: Head of Communications
WellcomeTrust/ DBT India Alliance	Shahid Jameel: Chief Executive Officer Bela Desai: Grants Adviser Suveera Dhup: Grants Manager Devaki Nambiar: Intermediate Fellow

With many thanks to all our workshop participants for their enthusiasm and goodwill; to Wellcome's Internal Meetings, Conference and Events teams and catering staff for their invaluable role in ensuring the workshop was a success; and to Louise Shaxson and Josephine Tsui of ODI for their engaging and responsive facilitation and the drafting of the report.

Wellcome exists to improve health for everyone by helping great ideas to thrive. We're a global charitable foundation, both politically and financially independent. We support scientists and researchers, take on big problems, fuel imaginations and spark debate.

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