Learning about Champions – Individuals Catalysing Social Change

As part of the Transform Nutrition consortium, we are undertaking research to (a) identify individuals who have been or could be influential in contributing to policy changes that can effectively reduce undernutrition, and (b) explore the attributes and characteristics of these individuals. This informal paper presents some of our thinking and preliminary findings to date.

Many of the initiatives seeking to contribute to large-scale, systemic changes in nutrition have sought to leverage individual champions, leaders, or catalytic individuals to contribute to constructive policy changes (Heaver 2005; Mejia-Acosta and Fanzo 2012; Pelletier *et al.* 2011). For example, the Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) initiative has focused on high-level change agents such as executive political leaders and high-profile individuals such as celebrities (Isenman *et al.* 2011). It is also recognised that individuals at various levels of implementing organisations – meso-level bureaucrats, community leaders and experts (such as doctors and researchers), are key in supporting (or opposing) policy changes (Heaver 2005; Pelletier *et al.* 2011; Roberts and King 1991). Accion Contre la Faim (ACF) is running a nutrition champions platform for nutritionists at various levels in West Africa to learn from each other in their advocacy efforts (ACF 2011). In addition to identifying champions and leaders, a number of programmes seek to support and develop nutrition leaders, such as the African Nutrition Leadership Development Programme and the UNICEF-supported Citizens Alliance against Malnutrition in India.

Of relevance to these initiatives that seek to cultivate, strengthen and utilise champions, we ask: how can one identify the 'right' policy 'champions' or leaders for nutrition? What kind of support will enable them to be more effective? Is it possible to 'create' new champions? Our questions are of use far beyond the realm of nutrition; we hope our research may also contribute to other initiatives seeking to turn knowledge into action for social good.

In each Practice Paper published, we share our experience and learning. We are presenting ideas that we are exploring and that others in the intermediary sector might like to explore.

Our experiences contribute to the body of knowledge, but rarely if ever contain incontestable insights. This paper should not be read in isolation, however, and should be seen as complementary to other work conducted on related issues of capacity development, knowledge management, and policy influence.

The knowledge and information intermediary sector comprises those who seek to improve flows of knowledge between actors in decision-making and change processes in order to generate better development outcomes. Intermediaries act in a range of ways: enabling access to information; helping people to make sense of it; and facilitating connections that enable knowledge to be shared between stakeholders. It is a practice sector which cuts across other sectors.

To date, we have conducted a brief but broad review of the wider literature on this topic and are partway through the process of identifying and interviewing stakeholders in order to identify and find out more about the individuals who have been influential in catalysing policy changes. Our research is being conducted in four countries: Kenya, Ethiopia, India and Bangladesh.

The research is exploratory and aims at increasing understandings of the issues, rather than providing definite answers or solutions. The focus of our inquiry is on the ability of individuals to catalyse *policy* changes. We define *policy* change as broader than changes to written legislation (i.e. to include agendas, discourse, capacity, institutional structures, etc.), and also recognise that changes in the policy sphere represent only one facet of addressing nutrition on the ground.[1]

This informal paper shares some of our reflections and thoughts to date from the literature and from our interviews in Bangladesh, one of the four countries. Its nonlinear structure reflects the nature of our research topic. It focuses on the concept of champions: who they are and how they might be supported. The paper does *not* discuss the specific issues and challenges of nutrition in Bangladesh, information about the actual individuals that we've identified, or detail our research methodology. A longer, more in-depth paper will be produced at the conclusion of our study. We hope that this informal interim paper might generate discussion and feedback which could prove valuable to shaping our work as we move forward.

Conceptualising the champion

Leadership and the role of individuals in catalysing change is an area that has received extensive study from a variety of disciplines. One obstacle that we've faced in this study is the different conceptions of what is meant by the word, 'champion'. There are a wide range of terms used to identify the individuals who are instrumental in making change happen – 'champions', 'catalytic individuals', 'leaders', 'mavens', 'change agents'; different people use and define these terms in different ways – it appears the term used often reflects more on one's disciplinary perspective than on anything 'objectively accurate.'

Our own research is largely underpinned by our assumptions about complexity and social systems (see 'The complexity of social systems… and people') and is influenced by the adult development branches of psychology. Our approach has been one of action–research and our thinking in this area continues to evolve.

> **The complexity of social systems... and people**
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> Our research is largely underpinned by concepts from complexity science, and assumes that 'social systems follow the principles of complex systems' (Plowman and Duchon 2008: 144). The incorporation of these concepts can be seen in the shift from 'agent-based' to 'systems-based' notions of leadership (Grebe and Woermann 2011; Collier and Esteban 2000; Uhl-Bien 2006), as described by Mary Uhl-Bien (2006):
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> *'Complexity science moves us away from bureaucratic notions of control and predictability to a view of leadership in complex, adaptive, nonlinear feedback networks. It makes us think about leadership not as top-down influence of individuals in managerial roles but rather, an emergent, interactive process embedded in context and history.'*

In this paper we use the term 'champion' to refer to an individual that plays a significant role in catalysing policy changes that can contribute to addressing undernutrition. We see this as distinct from the concept of a 'champion' as someone who strongly 'pushes' or 'advocates' for a specific cause or approach, or from top-level managers or individuals in prominent formal positions. While some of these people may certainly fit within our definition, we assume that levels of power and influence do not *necessarily* relate to levels of visibility or formal positions of power.

We also recognise both influence and attributes as being on a spectrum, rather than viewing leadership as something absolute: we have not set out to compile a comprehensive or definitive list of the champions or leaders for nutrition, or to create an absolute profiling of the characteristics and attributes of these individuals. Rather, we have assumed that we can identify some of the individuals which have contributed – or have the potential to contribute – to positive changes, and assess some of the attributes and capabilities of these people.

This work also highlights a potential paradox of the agency of an individual vs complex adaptive systems: if it is the system (e.g. structures, perspectives, institutions) that needs to – and continually – changes, then why should we be paying attention to specific individuals? This is briefly discussed in the last section of the paper.

Roles and characteristics of champions

In addition to the variety of terms and definitions, there have also been a variety of classification systems for individuals based on the specific roles they play and contexts within which they work. For example, 'policy entrepreneurs' are people who seek changes in policy and systems reform; 'societal entrepreneurs' are individuals who strive to solve societal problems; and 'institutional entrepreneurs' are people who seek to change their own organisations (Oliver and Paul-Shaheen 1997; Westley *et al.* 2011). Heaver (2005) also distinguishes between 'decision-makers' and 'influencers', and classifies 'champions' as a type of 'decision-maker' and 'policy entrepreneurs' as a type of 'influencer.'

Questions to the reader

Are champions people who inherently play the same roles all the time or do they take on different roles depending on the context?

Is someone who was once a champion always a champion?

In reality, the boundaries between any of these categories are fluid: one person rarely plays just one role. For example, someone who might seek changes in policy may also be seeking to change their own institution; someone who is a 'decision-maker' could at the same time also serve as an 'influencer'. Different roles are needed at different stages and levels of change processes, and in systemic leadership it is assumed that 'influence and power shifts as people assume different roles and responsibilities at different times' (Grebe and Woermann 2011 citing Collier and Esteban 2000).

Despite the plethora of definitions and concepts of roles, the literature does indicate that champions commonly share similar characteristics. They tend to be passionate people who are more motivated by social and environmental concerns than they are driven by economic or personal gain (Jordan 2011; Uphoff *et al.* 1998; Fell *et al.* 2009). They thus tend to be committed to initiate innovative activities aimed at serving the good of society, and seek changes to influence how other actors or institutions operate rather than simply starting their own initiatives (though sometimes starting a new initiative is necessary too).

Questions to the reader

In a context with which you are familiar, do you know people who have contributed towards positive policy changes (in or outside of nutrition)?

How would you describe their personal profile (age, gender), formal training, previous experience, main achievements?

The Fell *et al.* review on the diffusion of environmental ideas and behaviours found that catalytic individuals tended to share at least some of the following attributes: sociable, opinionated, positive, self-confident, highly-connected and gregarious. Others want to be like them, less because of what they do than because of who they are as people, a concept described as 'homophilia'. These descriptions somewhat fit with Max Weber's charismatic leaders, who have influence in part because they are perceived to be authentic (Giddens 1971).

Questions to the reader

What kinds of people are charismatic? How do we know when someone is authentic?

Literature on the characteristics of champions has been primarily focused on Western developed countries and we know less about the extent to which these characteristics are shared cross-culturally. In a review of leadership literature, Marturano and Gosling (2008) point out that although many have attempted to compile attributes across all contexts, conceptions of leadership and agency need to take into account the context. Further, knowing that 'champions' are people which are 'authentic' or 'positive' can only get us so far; what attributes are necessary and what are sufficient? What makes someone authentic?

Social networks

Social networks – the formal and informal connections and relationships between and within individuals and organisations – are one aspect of the context within which individuals operate. Social networks have long been acknowledged as important factors in information-sharing and influence. Studies of catalytic individuals show that influencing a small number of well-connected nodes is often more effective than accessing the top person because people, including leaders, are influenced by the society around them. Individuals which are highly influential are thus often well-placed and trusted and respected in their social networks (Duffy and Pierce 2007; Cross and Parker 2004).

There is some evidence that the process by which collectives adopt a new behaviour, innovation or understanding is a co-evolutionary one (Fell *et al.* 2009). New opinions, norms, and shared understandings are, according to a social constructivist perspective, a result of continual communication exchanges which occur in social networks and also in the process of different social networks coming together and re-forming to create new social networks.

Analysing the characteristic or shape of social networks (i.e. Social Network Analysis or SNA) can help make sense of the stakeholder landscape and identify influential individuals. Individuals can be classified by their 'centrality', 'betweenness' and 'closeness'. 'Boundary spanners' are individuals who typically bridge different groups of people (Muller-Prothmann 2005; P. Williams 2010). The shape of the network (i.e. hierarchical, strict, decentralised, etc.) strongly influences the process of knowledge diffusion and influence. Batchelor (2011) discusses SNA and its applications in more depth in an earlier paper in this series.

While SNA can help us to better understand *more* of the picture, SNA alone is often not sufficient to understand which individuals might affect large-scale or systemic changes, or how they might do so.[2] SNA often gives a snapshot

of nodes and linkages rather than an understanding of the adaptive and evolving nature of individuals, relationships and the contexts in which they exist. Humans, their relationships and interactions, and even the organisations which they comprise, are complex: they are nonlinear, continuously changing and unpredictable. In order to identify the individuals that can catalyse significant change, it is necessary to expand beyond what SNA can tell us and also consider patterns, dynamics and context. Thus, in this research, we are focused on continually expanding our own awareness of the issues, networks, and power relationships in the nutrition policy environment in each country.

Interview excerpt, Bangladesh

'Are nutritionists all talking about the same thing? One group says only breastfeeding; another says breastfeeding plus complementary feeding; another says micronutrients, another says RUTF... At senior levels in government, do they really understand what is meant by nutrition?'

The nutrition policy landscape in Bangladesh

Progress in addressing nutrition issues in Bangladesh has, as in many other countries, been stymied by fragmentation and competing interests between and within various groups of stakeholders (Pelletier *et al.* 2011; Heaver 2005; Taylor 2012).

While disagreements in public policy are not rare, Chapman (2010, citing Heifetz), discusses the difference between (a) disagreements involving conflicts of values (which can benefit from an 'adaptive' approach) and (b) disagreements which are based on different world views between actors responsible for addressing a specific problem (which can benefit from an 'accommodating' approach). In the latter:

> *Each perspective is well articulated and clearly has some supporting evidence... and from each perspective, those adopting one of the other perspectives are contributing to the problem... It is this antagonism between the perspectives that explains why so much energy is directed toward winning policy arguments – and stopping opponents – rather than addressing some aspect of the problem* (Chapman 2010: 238).

From what we have observed in nutrition in Bangladesh, both types of disagreements exist, at various levels. There has thus been a need for:

Changing perceptions (adaptive approach)

- among non-nutritionists to recognise the importance of addressing undernutrition;

- among non-nutritionists to arrive at an understanding of nutrition that may include but is not limited to food security or increasing incomes;[3]

- among the nutrition community, in which some may need to better understand the position of others and/or shift their own position.

Accommodating different world views

- among the nutrition community to manage issues of contention about what should be done about the problem.

In Bangladesh, many of those working on nutrition issues viewed other stakeholders' perspectives about nutrition interventions as solely influenced by one factor – for example, whether they valued evidence or how they felt about the role of the private sector. While there may be a *handful* of people for which this might be true, from our perspective, this view largely oversimplified the disputes.

Indeed, the tactic that has been used repeatedly by many proponents of certain approaches is to produce (and communicate) *more evidence* that those approaches work. The failure of this approach has led to frustration at the 'stubbornness of the other side' to 'accept the evidence'. This approach also seems to be based on assumptions about the efficacy of unidirectional forms of influence, and in some cases can arguably be seen as an approach of pushing one's own beliefs about what is right. It does nothing to mitigate other parties' concerns around the relevance and bias of research questions and methodologies, which are inherent in most research (Kuhn 1996; Sarewitz 2012).

Questions to the reader

How important is substantial agreement on policy for good nutrition outcomes? To what extent is compromise required?

In our interviews, stakeholders reported that the disputes significantly delayed the identification of policies that could help address undernutrition and corroded the motivation of policymakers to act. What may be needed to move forward on these particular issues in Bangladesh, therefore, may not necessarily be *more evidence* (or persistent or louder reference to the same evidence) in order to find 'the' solution (as also emphasised by Pelletier *et al.* 2011: 29), but rather *people* who are credible and trusted in their networks and who can appreciate and accommodate the different world views of the stakeholders on every side of the debate to help find a way between them. Such people might be able to find a middle ground, change one side's opinion, or form an alternative framing of the issues; any of which may entail both sides acknowledging the other's (and their own) perspectives to varying degrees. They may also be able to establish functioning systems for continued information exchange and collaboration.

Recognising undernutrition as a priority

Understanding nutrition issues (causes, inteventions, etc)

Agreeing on what can be done to address undernutrition

Questions to the reader:
Are the above factors required to make progress on nutrition policy?

Our research to-date confirms that in Bangladesh, a small number of people which have bridged disparate groups to transfer information, change perceptions or mitigate conflicts have been key to making progress towards policies that could help address undernutrition.

Awareness and sense-making capacities

In any sector, there are plenty of people who understand technical issues but who aren't effective at getting that knowledge to be considered in policy decisions. In addition to the technical issues, one must additionally understand the complexities of the policy environment, including the ways in which individuals and institutions – including governmental, non-governmental, private, research, advocacy, NGOs, donors, etc – relate to and influence one another.

While understanding alone might not automatically translate into the ability to resolve issues, the ability to work effectively in complex contexts hinges, in part, on one's ability to understand the complexity of the situation. The actions that people undertake are shaped by the way in which they conceptualise situations (Kegan 1982).

The relationship between effective leadership and one's ability to make sense of complex systems is highlighted in the fields of:

- complexity science, e.g. in Snowden and Boone's (2007) 'Leader's Framework for Decision Making';

- systems science, e.g. 'change agents understand both how relationships are structured within the targeted system and what types of relationships will be required to bring about desired changes' (Foster-Fishman *et al.* 2007: 198);

- and the adult development fields of psychology, e.g. Brown (2011) indicated that successful leaders have the capacity to navigate and change systems through their perception and understanding of complex systems, drawing, in part, on Commons (Commons *et al.* 1998), Cook-Greuter, and Kegan.

Thomas Jordan, on awareness

'The failure of an individual to notice that there are complex reasons for a particular problem can actually be a powerful explanation of the opinions and actions of that person' (2011: 54).

As concepts of systems thinking and complexity become increasingly popular, it's important to keep in mind the importance of *perspectives* and *self-awareness* in systems thinking:

> Thinking systemically forces us to do what we are not always good at: that is, identifying the assumptions we make when we observe and make sense of a situation. We intuitively put ourselves, our values, our beliefs at the centre of the analysis. Instead, thinking systemically forces you into being an observer of your own mind and your own behaviour (Williams and Hummelbrunner 2010: 20).

Drawing on adult development and complexity science, Jordan (2011) details five domains of awareness – context, stakeholders, one's self, task complexity and perspective awareness – and posits that these feed into the capacities of societal change agents for 'perceiving, understanding and managing complexity'.

Here, 'self-awareness' (which is closely linked to 'perspective awareness') entails the 'awareness of the processes going on inside a person', such as one's thoughts, feelings, emotions, behaviours, attitudes, interpretations, belief systems, etc. This differs from 'having a constructed self-image that tells a story about what character traits one has' (*ibid.*),[4] which can in some ways, be self-limiting to a particular identity or role. Similarly, Brown (2011) and Snowden and Boone (2007) indicate that the success of leaders inherently hinges on their ability to be adaptive and take on different roles depending on the need. This reinforces the earlier discussed concept that champions do not maintain static roles but adapt their aims and actions based on what they perceive to be needed.

In Bangladesh, the individuals which were identified[5] as having catalysed positive policy changes for nutrition in Bangladesh had, based on very preliminary analysis,[6] relatively high capacities for systemic understanding of both the nutrition issues and policy landscape. They demonstrated high levels of both stakeholder and perspective awareness: they were 'attentive to information that might allow them to understand how different stakeholders think, feel, and act' (Jordan 2011: 26). Based on this, they adapted their own 'style of communication, conversational strategies, and actions to fit the particulars of each stakeholder' (*ibid.*). They recognised the perspectives of different stakeholders *as perspectives*, shaped by a plethora of factors. Their ability to bridge disparate stakeholder groups meant that they served, in social network language, as 'boundary spanners'.

In the field of adult development, this type of understanding is typical of people which fall within the 'post conventional' stages of ego development (Cook-Greuter 2004; Kegan 1982; Joiner and Josephs 2007). In these stages, one takes more of a systems view of reality. This can contribute both to (a) being able to see beyond one's own interests and ego in order to more clearly navigate a way forward, as well as (b) being perceived by others as genuine rather than having a vested interest or stake in the issue (be it institutional, personal, etc.).

> **Questions to the reader**
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> **How might nutrition policy dynamics be different if more people had stronger capacities for perceiving, understanding and managing complexity… both in terms of approaches to address malnutrition and nutrition policies and stakeholders?**

Supporting individuals to catalyse 'good change'

As more initiatives in nutrition or other fields consider identifying and supporting 'champions' as part of their change strategies, this research raises a number of questions for consideration.

This research stems, in part, from a growing interest among the international nutrition community to identify and utilise individual champions in order to address undernutrition. Are these initiatives identifying the right leaders? Are they providing the right people with the right kind of support? How does the identification of champions itself help contribute to improved policy outcomes? Does it have any distorting effects? These are issues which merit further exploration.

One may also ask to what extent can (and should) we 'cultivate' more leaders to effectively address societal issues such as nutrition in the future? If making positive changes to nutrition policies requires capacities for perceiving, understanding and managing complexity, particularly with regard to stakeholder perceptions and social networks, then it could potentially be useful to try to facilitate the development of these qualities and skills in people that hold positions of influence or who are directly involved in some of the issues that need to be addressed.

It is difficult to say exactly how a person develops these capacities, though one of the trends we have started to notice is that people who were identified as 'catalysts' have typically experienced a diversity of world views: they might have studied abroad, had close ties with people from very different backgrounds and/or worked in a variety of settings, spanning research, practice, policy or different sectors. This may have facilitated their questioning their own perspectives and catalysing a process of development. If so, this could serve as rationale for encouraging more individuals to experience different fields, organisation types and otherwise diversify their experiences (as opposed to a linear career path). It is also possible to develop one's capacity for systems thinking and self-awareness through training

and support; incorporating such capacity-development into leadership or nutrition courses could also be useful. However, it can take time for people to change their habitual patterns of awareness.

Jordan (2011) distinguishes between (i) individuals who habitually have high levels of awareness, (ii) individuals who have the capacity of awareness but have not turned their attention towards these issues, and (iii) individuals who don't have the capacity to process this information. Mapping this against Cook-Greuter's estimates of the spread of action-logics among the adult population, very few people fall into the first category (2004).

In order to move forward on nutrition policy in Bangladesh, it could be helpful to *consult with* those individuals in the first category in order to gain a better understanding of the context, needs and possible ways forward. They might also benefit from some further development of their capacities for awareness, depending on where they are on the spectrum.

Providing support to individuals in the second category could also be very useful. For these people, even though their *habitual* levels of awareness are weak, they may still have the *capacity* to be aware of, understand, and manage complexity when provided the support to do so. Engaging these stakeholders in processes[7] that facilitate an expanded awareness in relevant domains (i.e. task, stakeholders, context, perspectives, self), could help to 'transform' nutrition in the near-term through changing perceptions and encompassing world views (of both the participants and the people with whom they interact), whereas longer-term support could enable these individuals to strengthen their habitual capacity for awareness in these areas.

Any support strategy would need to respond to the particular needs being faced by the country: in Bangladesh we saw the need for both changing perceptions and encompassing a diversity of world views. While there are certainly similarities in the nutrition policy landscapes of various countries, the policy context in each country is unique and therefore calls for unique approaches to match.

Questions to the reader

How does the identification of champions itself help contribute to improved policy outcomes? Does it have any distorting effects?

Paradoxes and ways forward

In this research, we acknowledge what seems to be a paradox between the agency of the individual and the complex adaptive system, which includes formal and informal structures and networks (e.g. social networks, bureaucracies, etc).

Questions to the reader

To what degree does change depend on individual 'champions'?

At the same time, it seems that the people who have the most impact are those that are able to create a lasting systemic change: a significant change that continues after they have moved on (the difference between, for example, food distributions vs an intervention that enables the same people to sustainably access to food). For that reason the term 'catalyst' appeals to us.

Questions to the reader

'Where does change start, and how do we define the limits to the factors that we believe influence it?'

Marturano and Gosling (2008)

Depending on the context, one could catalyse systemic change through a variety of pathways, some more visible than others: it might be through working to improve the functioning of existing institutions and structures, creating new ones, chatting over cups of tea with policymakers, serving as a figurehead, mediating conflict, mentoring peers or students, or being stubborn despite pressure to compromise. In a complex adaptive system, any of these activities (or non-activities) has an effect, and due to the unpredictable nature of social systems, they may be larger, smaller, or different than anticipated. The timescales, magnitudes and nature of the changes will vary.

The changes to the policy landscape that we know about and deem to be beneficial determine, in large part, the individuals that we identify as being champions. In other words, our own understandings could limit or distort the group of people that we identify as influential. In order to mitigate this, we endeavoured to speak with a wide spectrum of stakeholders related to nutrition to understand what had been perceived as positive change from a variety of world views. Surprisingly, despite the differences in perspectives, we found substantial agreement on what changes had been beneficial and who had been instrumental in bringing them about.

We again refer to some of the guiding assumptions of this research: that it is possible to identify *some* (not all) of the individuals which have contributed – or have the potential to contribute – to positive changes, and partially assess *some*

(not all) of their attributes and capabilities, while recognising that influence and attributes are on a spectrum, and not absolute.

Our research is a process of action inquiry: our thoughts and assumptions about this work have been challenged as we identify and interview people in each of our target countries, reflect on our findings and continually add more literature to the reading list. We welcome feedback on the questions we inserted throughout the paper and any other aspects of the work to help shape our research moving forward.

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Endnotes

[1] Issues of funding and coordination structures are examined in the IDS Analysing Nutrition Governance Series. See www.ids.ac.uk/project/analysing-nutrition-governance

[2] SNA can be considered one method of thinking systemically, but we think that systems thinking and analysis should to be conceptualised to include more than what typical social network mapping processes include, even those that bring in considerations of power, such as Schiffer and Hauck's Net-Map approach (2010).

[3] The fact that food security or income alone does not necessarily translate to improved nutritional outcomes has been shown by many, e.g. Subramanyam *et al.* (2011)

[4] In adult development theory, this would reflect individuals in a conventional stages of meaning making.

[5] Through network and power mapping and consultations with key informants, approximately 75 relevant stakeholders were identified in Bangladesh and semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 24 of these stakeholders. These interviews provided information to assess the attributes of the interviewee and other influential stakeholders (i.e. self-reporting and peer-reporting) in addition to providing further insights into network and power dynamics and case studies.

[6] Note that our study did not attempt to provide an absolute measure of their awareness or skills; a more in-depth analysis of their awareness and skills may be of interest for future work under Transform Nutrition or related inquiries.

[7] Such processes include Ross' Integral Process for Complex Issues (2006), Checkland and Scholes' Soft Systems Methodology (1999) or other ways of combining systems thinking with action research (e.g. Ison and Russel 2000; Burns 2007; Ricigliano and Chigas 2011; Torbert *et al.* 2000), which have been applied to complex societal issues with varying degrees of success (see Jordan *et al.* 2013 for reflections on applying such approaches).

Learning about Champions – Individuals Catalysing Social Change

About the Impact and Learning Team (ILT)

What makes development research accessible, relevant or appropriate for people outside the research community? Does development research get its due in policymaking and practice? What would be value for money in research communication?

The Impact and Learning Team at IDS are interested in how communication of research brings about change - in particular, what happens when people and technology mediate between researchers and decision makers. We use the term 'intermediary' to describe people and technology acting in this way. We think they play a critical role in making knowledge accessible, relevant and responsive to demand.

The work we are doing in the Impact and Learning Team (ILT) is exploring and testing this assumption using action research. We support people to think about the difference they want to make as well as how they are going to go about it. We draw insights and approaches from IDS's history of research, and the fields of marketing, strategic planning and evaluation, and capacity development.

This Practice Paper is an output from our work.

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