# ENGAGED EXCELLENCE

# IDSBulletin

## Transforming Development Knowledge

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## Editors **Melissa Leach, John Gaventa and Katy Oswald**

# Notes on Contributors

**J. Marina Apgar** is a researcher who is passionate about facilitating the creative space between research processes and development outcomes using participatory action research. She has spent over ten years working with indigenous peoples and social movements in Latin America on local resilience and adaptation initiatives building transdisciplinary methods. Through her work with the Indigenous Peoples Climate Change Assessment initiative, she has supported engagement of indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems in global processes such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). She is a Research Fellow with the Participation Research Cluster at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

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**Chris Dolan** has worked extensively in sub-Saharan Africa in a range of academic, civil society and UN spaces. Since 2006, he has been Director of the Refugee Law Project in Uganda, a community outreach project of the School of Law, Makerere University. His practical work with survivors of sexual violence in conflict settings brings him into regular contact with refugee survivors of sexual violence, both women and men, including sexual minority and gender minorities and refugee sex workers. His research and advocacy on male victims is helping to generate more comprehensive and inclusive international policies and practice regarding men as victims of sexual violence.

**Jerker Edström** leads the Gender and Sexuality Cluster at IDS. His 30-year career has focused on gender and development, particularly gender and masculinities, sexual and gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV prevention and children, youth and AIDS. Previously, he led the IDS Gender, Power and Sexuality programme, and Engendering Men: Evidence on Routes to Gender Equality (EMERGE). He co-edited *Men and Development: Politicizing Masculinities* (Zed Books, 2011) and 'Undressing Patriarchy: Men and Structural Violence' (*IDS Bulletin* 45.1, 2014). He convenes and teaches on the IDS/University of Sussex MA in Gender and Development.

**Adrian Ely** is a Senior Lecturer at the Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU), University of Sussex. He is Deputy Director and

Head of Impact and Engagement at the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) STEPS Centre (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) and co-leads the 'Pathways' Transformative Knowledge Network with Anabel Marin (CENIT). He has conducted research on grass-roots innovation for sustainability, pro-poor, low-carbon development and responsible innovation in the life sciences. He previously convened the STEPS Centre initiative 'Innovation, Sustainability, Development: A New Manifesto', which engaged international partners in debates around science, technology and innovation for poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability and social justice.

**John Gaventa** is Director of Research at IDS, and has been a Research Fellow at IDS since 1996. He has written and worked extensively on issues of citizen engagement, power and participation, governance and accountability, and participatory research. He served as Director of the IDS Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (2000–11), Director of the Highlander Center, United States (1976–94), Director of the Coady International Institute, STFX University, Canada (2011–14) and Chair of Oxfam GB (2006–11). In 2011, he received the Tisch Civic Engagement Research Prize for distinguished scholarship on civic learning, citizen participation and engaged research.

**James Georgalakis** is the Director of Communications and Impact at IDS, with overall leadership of the Institute's policy engagement, research impact and corporate communications strategies. He is also Director of the Impact Initiative, designed to maximise the impact of research from two research programmes jointly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Department for International Development (DFID): the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research and the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme. Prior to joining IDS in 2010, James spent a decade as an evidence-based advocacy and policy communications practitioner in the NGO sector.

**Budd Hall** is Co-Chair of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, and Professor of Community Development, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria, Canada. Former Dean of the Faculty of Education, University of Victoria, Budd served as the Chair of the Adult Education Department, University of Toronto (1995–2001), and as Secretary-General of the International Council for Adult Education. He is a member of the International Adult Education Hall of Fame and was selected for the 2005 Canadian Bureau of International Education Innovation in International Education Award. He was granted an Honorary Doctorate by St Francis Xavier University in 2011.

**Darius King Kabafunzaki** joined the Media for Social Change programme (formerly the Video Unit of the Refugee Law Project

(RLP), Makerere University) in July 2014 as an intern. His main role was to document the activities of the RLP and to produce audiovisual materials. His new role as a Video Advocacy Assistant has developed from documentation and production of videos, to advocacy and fundraising, writing blog articles and training clients (who are forced migrants) in video skills. The aim is not only to promote the rights of clients, but to empower them, as well as to create awareness in policymakers and partner organisations.

**Melissa Leach** is Director of IDS. She founded and directed the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) STEPS (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) Centre from 2006–14, with its pioneering pathways approach. A geographer and social anthropologist, her interdisciplinary, policy-engaged research in Africa and beyond, links health, environment, technology and gender with particular interests in knowledge, power and the politics of science and policy processes.

**Dolf J.H. te Lintelo** is a Research Fellow at IDS. He co-convenes the Cities Cluster and is affiliated to the Health and Nutrition Cluster. His research interests concern the intersection of urban informality, wellbeing, poverty and vulnerability and the politics of policy processes. Dolf has pioneered the Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index (HANCI), a global accountability tool assessing government commitment to addressing hunger and malnutrition. Dolf has conducted research in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zanzibar and Zambia.

**Miguel Lovera** is a Paraguayan agronomist who has dedicated his career to *in situ* plant conservation through activities ranging from scientific and technical research, policy and advocacy, activism and civil service. He was the chief scientist and president of the Global Forest Coalition and a member of Sobrevivencia Amigos de la Tierra [Friends of the Earth], Paraguay. He is currently Technical Adviser to the Center for Studies and Research of Rural Law and Agrarian Reform of the Catholic University of Asunción (CEIDRA), providing technical advice to rural development projects implemented by Catholic University programmes. He is a member of the Global Forest Coalition and Initiative Amotocodie in Paraguay.

**Simone Lovera** is Executive Director of the Global Forest Coalition, a worldwide coalition of 81 indigenous peoples' organisations and NGOs from 54 different countries striving for rights-based, socially just forest conservation and restoration policies. She also is a guest researcher for the Centre for Sustainable Development Studies of the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research, University of Amsterdam and is involved as a volunteer forest campaigner with Sobrevivencia Amigos de la Tierra [Friends of the Earth], Paraguay. An international environmental lawyer by training, she worked previously as the coordinator of the legal programme of the IUCN National Committee

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**Dieudonné Maganya** joined the Video Unit of the Refugee Law Project (RLP), Makerere University in 2011, a unit that has since become the Media for Social Change programme where he currently serves as a Video Advocacy Assistant. Some of the videos he has been involved in include: *Men Can Be Raped Too* and *Forgiveness? Unlocking Transitional Justice in Post Conflict Uganda*. He trains forced migrants in audiovisual advocacy and research while actively engaging in dissemination campaigns on the programme's work. He has co-authored a blog on male rape and co-hosted a webinar on the video documentation work. Recently, he authored a blog on empowerment for refugees.

**Anabel Marin** is a researcher specialising in innovation and development. Her initial training is in economics and she has a master's degree in development and a PhD in science and technology policy studies (Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU), University of Sussex). Between 2007 and 2008 she worked as a Research Fellow at SPRU. Since 2010, she has been a researcher for the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET), Argentina, and teaches at the University of Buenos Aires and University of Mar del Plata. She also leads several research projects in Latin America about sustainability in agriculture and the future of seeds.

**Tumaini Mikindo** is Executive Director of the Partnership for Nutrition in Tanzania (PANITA), the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Civil Society Alliance (CSA) for Tanzania. PANITA is one of the largest CSA networks with over 300 members across Tanzania. Mr Mikindo is responsible for the development and implementation of PANITA's vision and objectives, and oversees the main functions of PANITA, including advocacy, coordination and capacity building. He has led PANITA during its transition phase into a fully autonomous CSA, being one of the first platforms to reach maturity under the SUN Global Movement. Mr Mikindo is a member of the Global SUN Movement Executive Committee.

**Aimé Moninga** is President of the Men of Hope Refugee Association Uganda, a Congolese activist and peer counsellor on sexual violence against men in conflicts. He travels Kampala and beyond sensitising the Congolese, Rwandan, Burundian, Somalian, Sudanese and Eritrean communities on issues of male rape. He has featured in various studies and in video/film documentaries including *Men Can Be Raped Too* and *Aimé Moninga: Speaking Out About Male Sexual Violence*. He has campaigned and taken his advocacy to platforms and workshops, including those of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Pan African Development, Education and Advocacy Programme (PADEAP).

**Tero Mustonen** is a passionate defender of the traditional worldview and cosmology of his people, is a Finn, and head of the village of Selkie, North Karelia, Finland. He has worked as the traditional knowledge coordinator for Eurasia for the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment. He works for the Snowchange Cooperative, a non-profit organisation based in Finland. Tero is a well-known scholar of Arctic biodiversity, climate change and indigenous issues, having published over a dozen publications, including co-authoring the ground-breaking *Eastern Sámi Atlas* (Snowchange, 2011) and co-editing *Snowscapes, Dreamscapes* (Snowchange, 2004). Tero has won several human rights and environmental awards for his work with Snowchange.

**David Onen Ongwech** is currently pursuing the MA Social Anthropology of Development, SOAS, University of London. He manages the Gender and Sexuality programme of the Refugee Law Project (RLP), offering inclusive physical, psychological and psychosocial support to survivors/victims of conflict-related sexual violence, training duty-bearers on inclusive response to and prevention of sexual violence. Through RLP and its partners including IDS, the Organization for Refuge, Asylum and Migration (ORAM), Johns Hopkins University and the Women's Refugee Commission, David has coordinated strategic research projects on issues of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) and conflict-related sexual violence against refugee men and women.

**Pauline Oosterhoff** is a Research Fellow at IDS. She has over 20 years' experience in research, advisory services and media production on sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health rights, working with international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), the UN, bilateral donors, private foundations, universities and the private sector. She is interested in how research and public engagement can support progressive, inclusive and effective policy and practice. Pauline is a keen advocate of using mixed and participatory methods and working in multidisciplinary teams. In addition to her research and advisory work, she produces documentary films, installations and immersive interactive events.

**Katy Oswald** is a Research Officer in the Power and Popular Politics Cluster, IDS. She is an experienced facilitator of engaged research processes, in particular participatory action research (PAR). She convenes and teaches a module on Reflective Practice for Social Change for MA students at IDS. She has also worked with several NGOs and UN agencies to facilitate PAR processes that have explored issues such as disability, gender inequalities, and capacity development. She has worked in international development for over 15 years, and holds an MPhil in development studies and a BSocSc in politics and philosophy.

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**Thea Shahrokh** has worked as a researcher for eight years, with a focus on gender, violence and citizenship. Her research specialises in qualitative and participatory methodologies with a critical approach. She worked at IDS for four years and conducted research on the role of collective action in challenging discrimination that constrains social justice. She was also centrally involved in Participate, a research network on participation and accountability in development policymaking. She is now at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, undertaking PhD research on refugee and migrant youth narratives of gender, violence and social change in Cape Town.

**Kelly Shephard** is Head of Open Knowledge and Digital Services at IDS. Kelly is a storyteller. Her prime interest lies in the thoughtful use of technology to share and shape information. After spending 16 years working for the BBC World Service, Kelly transferred her journalistic skills to the world of international development. Her move to IDS in May 2011 was led by a desire to be as much involved in the process as the product. Her journalistic skills, which were shaped in a multimedia environment, enable her to see clarity in complex material and present it in compelling and relevant ways.

**Wafa Singh** is the India Coordinator of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research, and has been engaged in numerous national/international projects under the higher education theme. She has represented the Chair at international forums such as the 2nd Asia Engage Conference in Bali, and the C2UExpo 2015, Canada. Wafa has also authored articles and manuals on community–university engagement, and co-authored the book *Knowledge and Engagement* (UNESCO Chair, 2016). Prior to this, she worked as an independent researcher working on various consultancy projects. Her research interests include water resources and participatory research and sustainability.

**Rajesh Tandon** is an internationally acclaimed leader and practitioner of participatory research and development. He founded the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), a voluntary organisation providing support to grass-roots initiatives in South Asia and has been its Chief Functionary since 1982. In 2012, he was appointed Co-Chair of the prestigious UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. The UNESCO Chair grows out of and supports UNESCO's global lead to play 'a key role in assisting countries to build knowledge societies'. Rajesh has authored more than 100 articles, a dozen books and numerous training manuals.

# Introduction: Interrogating Engaged Excellence in Research

**Katy Oswald, John Gaventa and Melissa Leach**

**Abstract** Approaches to engaged research, which do not just produce academic knowledge, but link with people and groups in society, have long intellectual roots. In recent years, however, for epistemological, practical and ethical reasons, interest in such approaches has gained ground. At the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) we seek to adopt an 'engaged excellence' approach to research. We have identified four pillars that support engaged excellence: high-quality research; co-construction of knowledge, mobilising impact-orientated evidence; and building enduring partnerships. This introduction interrogates this approach, deepening our understanding of what it means, whilst also acknowledging the challenges which it poses. It raises questions about who defines what good quality research is; how, why and who we co-construct knowledge with; what counts as impact; and how we build enduring partnerships. It also touches on some of the implications for both researchers themselves and the institutions through which we work.

**Keywords:** engagement, quality, co-construction, impact, partnership, knowledge.

## 1 Introduction
Across the world, researchers, policymakers and practitioners alike have long struggled with how to create knowledge that is both rigorous in its own right, and relevant and useful to those whose lives and futures are potentially affected by new evidence, insights and concepts. At the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), we seek to combine high-quality, conceptually and empirically innovative research, with extensive engagement with particular countries, localities and people through our practices, partners and students (IDS 2015: 5). We have called this approach 'engaged excellence', by which we mean that the high quality of our work (excellence) is dependent upon it linking to and involving those who are at the heart of the change we wish to see (engaged).

Figure 1 The four pillars of engaged excellence



**Quality**
• Rigorous
• Pluralistic
• Robust
• Relevant

**Co-construction**
• In problem identification, data gathering, analysis, dissemination

**Engaged Excellence**

**Impact**
• Policy influence
• Improved practice
• New ways of understanding

**Partnerships**
• Trust and transparency
• Mutual learning
• Added reach and perspective

Source John Gaventa, presentation at the Transdisciplinary Methods for Developing Nexus Capabilities workshop, University of Sussex, 29–30 June 2015.

We have identified four pillars of engaged excellence (*ibid.*):

● Delivering high-quality research;

● Co-constructing knowledge;

● Mobilising impact-orientated evidence; and

● Building enduring partnerships, emphasising their mutual interdependence.

The articles in this *IDS Bulletin* all challenge us to interrogate this approach, to deepen our understanding of what it means, whilst also acknowledging the challenges which it poses. They raise important questions about *who* defines what good quality research is; *how, why* and *who* we co-construct knowledge with; what counts as *impact*; and *how* we build enduring partnerships.

In recent years, several debates have emerged about how to make academic research more 'engaged'. The motivation for these debates has varied from a recognition that engagement can contribute to improving the impact of research; to normative arguments that research needs to

engage with those it seeks to influence, and to democratise knowledge; to epistemological arguments that the multiple nature of truth necessitates the engagement of multiple perspectives (Oswald 2016). This introduction, together with the articles in this *IDS Bulletin*, contribute to these debates and attempt to articulate IDS' approach to engaged excellence and the unique contribution such an approach can make.

Many of the arguments laid out in this *IDS Bulletin* are not new. Indeed, we at IDS, as well as others, have been making similar arguments for several decades. This is demonstrated by the inclusion in this issue of four archive articles from previous *IDS Bulletin*s, covering a period between 1979 and 2007. In 1979, Howes and Chambers argued for the inclusion of indigenous technical knowledge in development framings, essentially calling on IDS, and development more broadly, to bring together both scientific and indigenous knowledge in order to generate greater relevance and a richer picture where multiple truths prevail. In 1994, Davies stated that knowledge is power, and called on IDS, and other institutions in the global North, to examine our role in the production of knowledge and the framing of global problems. In 2002, Leach and Fairhead explored how science and policy processes are embedded in broader power relations, calling on researchers to engage with and critically analyse the politics of knowledge in policy processes. Finally, in 2007, Standing and Taylor asked us whose knowledge counts within development studies, challenging Northern institutions like IDS to pay attention to how we create partnerships in order to reduce inequalities in knowledge production.

Today, IDS researchers and partners are exploring and applying engaged excellence around diverse topics and issues. Those addressed in the articles in this *IDS Bulletin* range from natural resource management (Apgar *et al.*) and transformations to sustainability (Ely and Marin) to food security and nutrition (Pittore *et al.*), sexual violence (Dolan *et al.*), young people's sexualities (Oosterhoff and Shephard) and the role of universities in democratising knowledge (Tandon *et al.*). They cover a range of geographies, from Finland to Uganda. In so doing, they also raise important questions and challenge us to reflect more deeply on what engaged excellence means and needs to mean in different contexts.

This introduction is structured around the four pillars of engaged excellence: delivering high-quality research; co-constructing knowledge; mobilising impact-orientated evidence; and building enduring partnerships, emphasising their mutual interdependence. Each section draws on the contributions to this *IDS Bulletin* to explore the epistemological, methodological, ethical and practical implications of this approach.

## 2 Delivering high-quality research
The four pillars of engaged excellence are mutually dependent – therefore, high-quality research will need to be based on the co-construction of knowledge, it will need to mobilise impact-orientated evidence, and be based on enduring partnerships – in other words it

will need to be engaged with society, not detached from it. Exactly what 'engaged' means is discussed by all the articles in this *IDS Bulletin*, but two articles in particular, Dolan *et al.* (this issue) and Tandon *et al.* (this issue), turn the phrase 'engaged excellence' around and outline what they believe to be examples of excellent engagement.

The concept of engaged excellence moves us away from an understanding of quality research being that which tells us the 'truth', as if that were a neutral 'thing' to reveal. Jasanoff makes the argument well:

> Science… is understood as neither a simple reflection of the truth about nature nor an epiphenomenon of social and political interests… Co-production… [is] a critique of the realist ideology that persistently separates the domains of nature, facts, objectivity, reason and policy from those of culture, values, subjectivity, emotion and politics (2004: 3).

A similar point is made by Funtowiczi and Ravetzi who state that:

> invoking 'truth' as the goal of science is a distraction, or even a diversion from real tasks. A more relevant and robust guiding principle is quality, understood as a contextual property of scientific information… by bringing 'facts' and 'values' into a unified conception of problem solving in these areas, and by replacing 'truth' by [*sic*] 'quality' as its core evaluative concept. Its *principle of the plurality of legitimate perspectives on any problem* leads to a focus on dialogue, and on mutual respect and learning, wherever possible (2003: 1–3) [italics added].

An interesting discussion that arises in some of the articles in this *IDS Bulletin* is who defines what good quality research is. Pittore *et al.* (this issue) argue that in order for their research to have credibility with the policymakers they are trying to influence, their research, and the methodology it uses, must be seen to be legitimate. In other words, their research methods need to be trusted and seen as robust. There has been a long and vibrant debate within academia about how to define rigorous and robust research. Different research paradigms have different understandings depending on their epistemological viewpoints. An engaged excellence approach, that encourages researchers to engage with each other (interdisciplinary) and actors outside academia (transdisciplinary), helps us to understand that good quality research will be rigorous in whatever epistemological and methodological approach it uses (i.e. be able to explain why a particular methodological approach has been used, based on a particular epistemological viewpoint), and robust in the application of the chosen method(s) and approach. A further criterion that an engaged excellence approach raises is relevance, i.e. that we need quality research that is relevant to the problems we are seeking to address.

Dolan *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) also discuss the value of legitimacy, arguing that one reason for Southern organisations to partner with a Northern research institute like IDS is to benefit from their credibility

amongst donors and other institutions, but they note that these benefits may or may not outweigh the costs of 'reinforcing the notion that excellence only exists in – or is, at any rate, judged in – the North'.

### 3 Co-constructing knowledge
### 3.1 Why should we co-construct knowledge?

The co-construction of knowledge is a process of bringing together multiple kinds of knowledge and multiple perspectives to construct an understanding of research phenomena based on a plurality of situated knowledges (Oswald 2016). This includes the knowledge and perspectives of those outside the research establishment; of people and groups in society, be they members of communities, businesses, governments, activist organisations or development agencies.

The implications of this are that:

> [t]he research process can no longer be characterized as an 'objective' investigation of the natural (or social) world, or as a cool and reductionist interrogation of arbitrarily defined 'others'. Instead, it has become a dialogic process, an intense (and perhaps endless) 'conversation' between research actors and research subjects… (Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons 2003: 187).

This position has long been recognised in constructivist epistemology which argues that knowledge is situated and always represents the standpoint of the knower (Pietrykowski 2015: 244; Haraway 1988).

However, one can argue for the co-construction of knowledge, not just from an epistemological perspective, but also from a normative perspective. The dominant Western paradigm of scientific–rational knowledge has been criticised for inflicting an injustice on subaltern forms of knowledge by failing to recognise alternative ways of knowing and dominating what is understood as 'truth' (Visvanathan 2005; Santos, Nunes and Meneses 2008). Universities themselves have perpetuated this injustice. Gaventa and Bivens argue that:

> universities [need] to think not only about justice in the larger world, but also about their own distinctive role in shaping cognitive justice and knowledge democracy. Without cognitive justice – which focuses on whose knowledge counts – the larger struggles for social justice will not be realized (2014: 149).

From the perspective of cognitive justice and the pursuit of democratising knowledge, the co-construction of knowledge is a moral necessity, but should also ensure that more holistic and pluralistic knowledge is produced, which will mean research is better able to address complex problems (Oswald 2016).

Tandon *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) pick up on and extend this argument by calling for an acknowledgement of ecologies of knowledge that recognise that knowledge is not just cognitive, but that we also know through acting

upon the world and feeling about the world. They state that knowledge can exist in multiple forms: text, images, stories, music, drama, poetry, ceremony, etc. This is demonstrated by Dolan *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) who document the powerful role that participatory video and theatre played in their collaborative research project, arguing that these methods allowed deeply personal stories to be articulated using 'non-verbal expression of emotional truths that are difficult to communicate in words'. In turn, this provided the research with a deeper understanding of participants' experience, and challenged commonly held assumptions (*ibid.*).

Oosterhoff and Shephard (this *IDS Bulletin*) draw on the concept of affective engagement, to argue that emotions and affection play a role in understanding our preferences and choices, and therefore, research that creates an affective link with people may be more likely to have impact on them. Their article directly links the acknowledgement of different types of knowledge being legitimate (feeling as knowledge) with the call to mobilise impact-orientated evidence, by arguing for the creation of evidence that resonates with people at an emotional level. The research Oosterhoff and Shephard (this *IDS Bulletin*) document specifically used creative methods such as music, as a form of knowledge, to document the experiences of young Kenyans and to share them with others. They argue that knowledge shared in this form resonates with young people and is therefore more likely to have an impact.

Accepting non-cognitive knowledges as legitimate ways of knowing is important both for building knowledge democracy and for de-colonialising the academic curricula. Tandon *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) draw on Grosfoguel's 'four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century' to argue that there has been a large-scale epistemological, as well as military, conquest, in which indigenous knowledges have been destroyed and European 'enlightenment' came to have the monopoly of knowledge. Universities themselves are gatekeepers of what is 'good' and 'valid' knowledge; therefore, cognitive justice calls on universities to co-construct what counts as valid knowledge with communities and citizens in order to rebalance this monopoly of knowledge, and make subaltern knowledges more visible.

Dolan *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) challenge universities in the global North, including institutions such as IDS, to reflect on their positions of privilege in the creation of knowledge. They problematise the term 'engaged excellence' by questioning who defines what counts as 'engaged' and 'excellence' in research, and call for the approach to be true to the values of collaboration and respect for multiple subjectivities. They argue that determining what 'engaged excellence' means is a 'politically and epistemologically positional judgement' and this discussion should be the central focus of partnerships, which profess a commitment to this approach.

Apgar *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) also make a normative argument for co-construction, arguing that research into resource management should

make '… space for all knowledge, including IK [indigenous knowledge], to be recognised as embedded in social and cultural institutions and practices that enable more sustainable resource management'. They argue that sustainable resource management systems, and research into them, need to acknowledge and recognise socially embedded indigenous knowledge as being just as legitimate to local communities responsible for those systems, as scientific knowledge. However, they warn against the way in which this is being implemented in several locations. In Canada, for example, formal recognition of IK in shared governance processes has 'led to their knowledge becoming subjected to a bureaucratic process based on government set measures' (*ibid*.), leading to co-option and assimilation of IK into external mechanisms. This is often due to inherent inequalities between researchers and communities, and an instrumental understanding of IK that fails 'to appreciate the broader political and social processes within which knowledge is created and contested' (*ibid*.).

This example highlights the fact that it is not just institutions in the global North that are privileged in the production of knowledge compared with institutions in the global South. Institutions in the North can marginalise the knowledge of indigenous peoples in their own countries. The same can occur when universities and institutions in the South, whose models of knowledge production often mirror those of the North, also marginalise the IK of local peoples.

### 3.2 Co-construction of knowledge in practice

All the articles in this *IDS Bulletin* document some form of co-construction of knowledge. Dolan *et al.* (this issue) draw on Haraway to argue that 'the knowledge we claim is conditioned by the locations we occupy'. They propose that an engaged excellence approach that brings together academic and popular knowledges can deconstruct accepted framings and create an expanded understanding of the world, and that this is meaningful co-construction of knowledge. In their exploration of an ongoing ten-year partnership between researchers at IDS and the Refugee Law Project (RLP) and latterly the Men of Hope Refugee Association Uganda (MOHRAU), Dolan *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) provide a powerful example of a research collaboration based on an understanding that 'we are all "subjects" of our own lives and narratives, not "objects" in the stories of others', which is a challenge to traditional extractive forms of research. They explain how a ten-year learning process, involving masculinity theorists, feminist movements, activists for sexual and gender diversity, and human rights organisations, has enabled a dialogue across contrasting perspectives and challenged dominant discourses in development that frame women as victims and men as perpetrators of violence, making invisible the experiences and rights of male survivors. They argue that engaged excellence is not just about co-constructing knowledge with those at the centre of the change we collectively wish to see, but about finding spaces 'to challenge and shift accepted ways of knowing and acting'. Apgar *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) also show how the co-construction of knowledge can challenge dominant narratives, explaining that the research undertaken

in partnership between the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Snowchange and the Sámi people in Finland countered the idea that their land was 'pristine'.

The co-construction of knowledge also allows us to contextualise knowledge in the practical realities of those interested in or affected by change, thus hopefully making it more useful and relevant. Pittore *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) argue that by partnering with local organisations, who can interpret the value and significance of evidence on nutrition within a specific context, they can co-construct how that evidence is framed and used, and increase the likelihood of achieving policy impact.

Ely and Marin (this *IDS Bulletin*) argue that it is precisely by bringing together diverse perspectives on complex problems that alliances can form around transformative systemic change. They document the formation of two Transformative Knowledge Network hubs in the UK and Argentina that have been created to identify and investigate specific challenges in relation to sustainability. In particular, they argue that such co-construction has the potential to unlock impasses caused by seemingly irreconcilable difference in perspectives held by different actors.

A key challenge when co-constructing knowledge is negotiating ownership and authorship of that knowledge when it comes to be published (Oswald 2016). Castleden, Sloan Morgan and Neimanis (2010) discuss the different ways in which authorship can be understood when working with diverse community members. They argue that '… sharing authorship [can] require no writing at all; rather, if a community member had in some way contributed intellectually to the project, co-authorship was warranted' (*op. cit.*: 27). Dolan *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) reflect on this challenge, with one of the partners reflecting on their lack of presence when research findings are published and presented, and arguing that Northern governments' highly restrictive visa practices often prevent Southern-based researchers from representing their work internationally.

## 4 Mobilising impact-orientated evidence

Defining what we mean by 'mobilising impact-orientated evidence' is inherently challenging. What does it mean to mobilise – are we directly responsible for ensuring our research has impact, or are we just responsible for making our research *capable* of impact? What constitutes impact and who decides if our research has had impact? What counts as evidence, and who decides this? The last of these questions links directly to another – what counts as valid knowledge and from whose perspective? All these questions challenge us to think about knowledge as power, and who has the power to decide on the definitions of impact and evidence?

The four pillars of engaged excellence are meant to be mutually dependent. Therefore, we can't think about what we mean by impact, without thinking about how that relates to quality, the co-construction of knowledge and working in enduring partnerships.

We have already argued that the high quality of our research is dependent upon it linking to and involving those who are at the heart of the change we wish to see. So this implies that engaged research will involve multiple actors, particularly those who would be the users of the knowledge produced, so the research is more likely to be relevant and useful to those actors *as part of the process*. This is a particular strength of participatory action research (PAR), highlighted by Dolan *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) that adopts an iterative process which includes *learning throughout the research*, not just at the end. Similarly, linking research directly to advocacy in order to have a direct impact on policymakers *through the research process* is one of the reasons Pittore *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) argue that separating research and advocacy is a false dichotomy. They state that when research is developed for the purposes of informing advocacy, the evidence can be critically examined by researchers together with policy advocates, and its policy relevance can be improved. An example of this was the presenting of their findings to a caucus in parliament on nutrition in Tanzania, and the subsequent production of a booklet including nutrition recommendations to inform political manifestos in the run-up to the 2015 Tanzanian elections.

Understanding how our research might have impact, depends upon our theory of '[h]ow… knowledge [is] taken up in societies' (Jasanoff 2004: 42). We need to be alert to how the way in which research is initiated, framed, represented and shared will affect who regards it as relevant to them. Cash *et al.* argue that the effectiveness of mobilising knowledge for action decreases '… when stakeholders… [see] themselves as excluded from relevant dialogues' (2003: 8088).

Therefore, when research is a process of co-constructing knowledge with multiple actors, our understanding of impact needs to shift from a linear view, in which impact is something that happens at the end of the research process, to a view of impact as integrated throughout, precisely because of the multiple actors involved.

An engaged excellence approach implies that we need to involve multiple actors in deciding what constitutes impact and evidence, because we need to recognise that there will be multiple perspectives on what counts as impact. Dolan *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) identify several ways in which research participants can be positively impacted by the research process, 'through making visible a social issue, the therapeutic effect of being able to reflect upon and re-evaluate their experience as part of the process, the experience of solidarity in knowing others are also sharing their story, and the subversive or politicised outcome that these consequences may generate'. Apgar *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) argue that when research is engaged, an important outcome for those involved in the research is the recognition of their knowledge being valued in its own right. Therefore, one form of impact can be understood as the recognition and legitimation of different forms of knowledge and subaltern perspectives previously ignored in mainstream research and policy arenas. This in turn can be important to people's rights,

autonomy and self-determination in social and political matters, as Apgar *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) show.

Mobilising knowledge for impact is a political process, involving both the politics of knowledge as well as the politics of policymaking. This has been acknowledged by a body of work looking at the politics of policy processes, which challenges the divide between research and policy. Wehrens, writing about public health, states that:

> scholars have begun to criticize the analytical a priori separation of research, policy and practice domains that is characteristic for the two communities conceptualization… Rather, what counts as a 'scientific' issue and what counts as a 'policy-affair' is often the subject of active negotiations… the boundaries between domains are never as clear-cut as they may appear, as they are negotiated in practice (2014: 546).

Policy processes are inherently political processes, and therefore will always involve a politics of knowledge that is subject to negotiation and debate (Keeley and Scoones 2003). This is precisely the argument of Pittore *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) when they state that there is rarely a direct linear relationship between research and policy change, and policy impact usually takes place over time and requires significant advocacy efforts, by which they mean 'negotiating and mediating a dialogue through which… ultimately decision makers take ownership of your ideas' (quoting Young and Quinn 2012: 26). Ely and Marin (this *IDS Bulletin*) make a similar argument when they discuss who was invited to participate in the Knowledge Network on seeds in Argentina, arguing that despite inviting actors with divergent and, in some cases, conflicting perspectives on the issue, their hope is that this process will ensure commitment and engagement from these actors in the future, and open up policy discussions that were previously not happening.

Finally, working in enduring partnerships also has implications for what we understand as impact, particularly when those partnerships are transdisciplinary. The way in which we 'mobilise knowledge' needs to change. Williams argues that researchers within development studies need to:

> re-evaluat[e] the role of the researcher. It is no longer sufficient to produce 'world-leading' academic articles in isolation: effective scholars, as imagined within impact evaluation practices, are also skilled in communicating their research to multiple audiences, and recognising, realising and evidencing the opportunities for their research to effect change in the wider world (2013: 232).

Researchers need to blur the lines between research and action in order to make their research useful and relevant (Benequista 2011). This is precisely the arguments made by all the contributions to this *IDS Bulletin*: Pittore *et al.* argue for working directly with policy advocates and makers; Dolan *et al.* argue for working in long-term

partnership with activists and civil society organisations; Ely and Marin argue for creating knowledge networks with diverse actors; Oosterhoff and Shephard argue for working with artists and media organisations; and Tandon *et al.* argue for universities to partner with community-based organisations. In all cases, it is because of the mutual impact these partnerships will have on all those involved, but also the potential impact such transdisciplinary partnerships have on the way knowledge is taken up by societal actors.

## 5 Building enduring partnerships

The term 'partnership' is used to cover a multitude of different arrangements, from those indicated previously – working together with policymakers and activists – to subcontracting a research partner, to agreeing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with another institution, to receiving a grant from a funding institution. The term partnership often has implicit implications of equality, but this may hide significant inequalities and power relations in the partnerships we forge (Oswald 2016). However, the articles in this *IDS Bulletin* make it clear that in order to co-construct knowledge and mobilise for impact-orientated evidence, we need to work in partnerships.

As implied by the term 'enduring', we should be aiming to build durable, long-term and stable partnerships (Oswald 2016). Hoffman argues that this requires mutual respect, stating that when building partnerships, particularly with individuals and institutions outside academia, researchers:

> must recognize the extent to which discourse is inherently a dialogue rather than a monologue, a conversation requiring mutual respect and appreciation for the expertise of all sides. In order to succeed, academics need to accept that they do not have a monopoly on knowledge and expertise, and that engagement is a two-way learning process (2016: 86).

The term mutual interdependence implies that we want our partnerships to be reciprocal (Oswald 2016). This does not necessarily mean equal, because it is important to acknowledge that very few of our partnerships will be truly equal, and unequal power relationships will always create challenges for forging enduring partnerships (Strier 2011: 83). However, it does mean that partnerships must be seen as a two-way relationship in which both parties have an active role in shaping that partnership, and see benefit from being in that partnership (Oswald 2016).

Mutual interdependence also implies mutual accountability (*ibid.*). Kajner, Fletcher and Makokis remind us that this means we need to:

> think carefully about that for which they are accountable and those to whom they are accountable. These considerations are important when thinking about scholarly work with communities as well as when working with students and colleagues within the institution. When scholars enter into a shared ethical space and understand

the concept of relational accountability, they respect and embrace
multiple worldviews and increase both the quality and quantity of
relationships (2011: 267–8).

These principles, of mutual respect, reciprocity and accountability, are
actually very challenging to uphold in research partnerships. This is
highlighted by several of the contributions to this *IDS Bulletin*, which
acknowledge the constraints to upholding these principles.

Dolan *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) state that the three partners in their
research were committed to developing the research framing and
questions together, and moving away from the traditional roles that
would have seen MOHRAU conceived as 'research subjects', RLP as
the 'local logisticians', and IDS as the 'researchers'. This was to ensure
that people had the right to have a say in the decisions that affected
them (in this case research decisions). They argue that this kind of
partnership requires an openness by all involved 'to learn from – and
be impacted by – others within this collaboration', and that this was
only possible because the partnership was 'not established within
already preconceived parameters'. This is very rarely the case, as often
research partnerships are established based on research proposals
already designed and funded, or responding to calls for research
agendas set elsewhere. In particular, Dolan *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) argue
that the kind of long-term engagement that such partnerships entail
is extremely difficult to sustain given the funding environment which
tends to focus on shorter-term project-based funding. However, they
also reflect on how they managed to use smaller streams of funding to
sustain their relationship, and they highlight the importance of funding
arrangements to allow for space for collaborations to emerge.

Apgar *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) also discuss how they tried to uphold
principles of mutual respect, reciprocity and accountability. They
document a partnership between the NGO Snowchange and the Skolt
Sámi people in Finland that aimed to restore ecologically damaged
parts of the Näätämö basin. This partnership was based on the Sámi
as agents and co-researchers in the Arctic climate-change assessments,
with Snowchange being a 'bridge' between the worlds of science and
IK. They reflect that the Skolt Sámi gained a sense of power from
seeing their language and culture valued in the research process, and
the process actually had the effect of revitalising Sámi knowledge
through the establishment of an archive. The institutional context for
this research mattered, however, and Apgar *et al.* acknowledge that the
historically undefined role of IK in Finland and the non-interference of
state agencies created a safe space for the Sámi to lead this process.

Ely and Marin (this *IDS Bulletin*) emphasise the fact that the
Transformative Knowledge Networks project, of which their two
case studies were part, was built on pre-existing relationships between
partners, where mutual trust had been established over a long period
extending back many years. Dolan *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) also discuss

the importance that the long-term and pre-existing relationship between partners played in their ability to work together in an enduring partnership, based on mutual trust.

Oosterhoff and Shephard (this *IDS Bulletin*) reflect on the challenges of a partnership between academics and creative artists, coming from different sectors with different ways of working. They argue that the fact that several members of the team had worked together previously and were prepared to be flexible contributed to its success. They note that these kinds of partnerships are time-consuming and iterative, and do not fit into neat project frameworks.

Tandon *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) discuss a particular type of partnership as a way of supporting the co-construction of knowledge: community–university partnerships. The literature on community–university engagement is vast and diverse, and what counts as engagement varies considerably (Tandon, Hall and Tremblay 2015). It can cover outreach, community service, service-learning, community engagement, civic engagement, community-based research, and community–university partnerships (*ibid*: 8). Tandon *et al.* (2015) argue that it is only the latter two that address 'the role of academics and the knowledge production capacities of universities as a means to creating social change and structural change' (*ibid.*: 8). Tandon *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) argue that the co-construction of knowledge in these partnerships is not easy, and they argue for five pedagogical principles to support community-based research within these partnerships: (1) an orientation towards ethics and values; (2) a deep understanding of power and partnerships; (3) multiple methods of enquiry; (4) participatory learning and balancing theory and practice; and (5) thinking about the role of the research as a facilitator.

Glover and Silka (2013) have argued that who initiates a partnership matters. Due to their knowing the funding environment, it is often universities and research institutions themselves that initiate partnerships with community organisations, NGOs, policymakers, etc based on accessing certain funds (Oswald 2016). The universities become gatekeepers to the funding, and this means that they get to set the agenda in terms of research topic and outcomes, and as a consequence the '... limitations, bias and subtle power differentials in such partnerships, never surface' (Glover and Silka 2013: 46).

A further reason for working through enduring partnerships is to ensure that our research has an impact. As already argued, through involving multiple actors in the research process (engagement), impact can start to be understood as something that happens throughout the research process. Therefore, who we partner with, and why, is integral to who our research impacts on. Pittore *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) explain that they chose to work with regional networks who they believed would be influential in nutrition policy, and argue that by working through existing framings already being used in those networks, their research would be more likely to be used by policymakers. Ely and Marin (this *IDS Bulletin*) document

a knowledge network in the UK on sustainable agri-food systems that specifically partnered with producers and growers themselves in order to involve them directly in undertaking the research, thus hoping to impact directly on their growing practices, whilst also creating evidence of alternative business models to share with policymakers.

### 6 What does an 'engaged excellent' researcher look like?

As should be clear by now, research that adopts an engaged excellence approach is not business as usual. This approach has some very real implications for the way in which we as researchers work and correspondingly, the skills we need to have. Referring to a related set of arguments about integrated, co-produced science and policy in relation to the environment, Cornell *et al.* (2013: 68) argue that a researcher would need the following capabilities:

- Humility to recognise the limitations of one's own knowledge and perspectives in dealing with complex systems;

- Active inquiry and openness towards other systems of thought, disciplines and world views and other sources of knowledge and learning, both formal and informal;

- The ability to listen to others, being able to communicate in real, multi-way dialogues;

- A willingness to acknowledge that the partial knowledge that a researcher brings to the dialogue table will be transformed in the process, giving latitude to other contributors;

- Procedural, facilitation and management skills;

- The enthusiasm and ability to share knowledge and learn, rather than impose knowledge.

Engaged research necessarily requires negotiation with those who we partner and engage with, not just in the early stages of formation, but throughout. That negotiation needs to be undertaken in a reflexive way that respects and recognises the position, experience, knowledge and skills each party brings to the partnership (Oswald 2016). Therefore, we would add that researchers also need to be critically reflexive about their own position and power. Dolan *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) make a similar argument, calling for a 'pedagogy of the undressed' (quoting Edström), in that research 'needs to challenge us to reflect on how we are a part of the structures we are aiming to change' (2015: 82). They call on us to have 'transformative dialogues' about what engaged excellence means with all our partners, and be alert to the politics of knowledge that we are enmeshed in.

Apgar *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) reflect on the role that researchers can play as 'bridges' between science and IK, recognising that 'knowledge production is a social process embedded in power dynamics'. This means

that researchers need to be able to 'meaningfully navigate the interactions between fluid, embedded and intimate knowledges' (*ibid.*). They recognise that this role is not always a comfortable one for researchers to play, and they reflect on their own position in research processes as simultaneously guardians of knowledge, gatekeepers, and brokers, that required them to be cognisant of power relations – especially their own power.

This has particularly significant implications for the ethics of our research processes. Traditional ethical considerations in research tend to frame research in terms of researchers and 'subjects', focusing on the possible risks to those 'subjects'. The pillars of co-constructing knowledge and forging enduring partnerships challenge that framing, and call on us to think about the ethics of how we co-construct and partner with others in the creation of knowledge, and how we ensure that we are upholding the principles of cognitive justice. This requires new ways in which to think about our ethical commitments and accountability (Kajner *et al.* 2011).

All this has very real implications, not just for individual researchers and those they relate with in their work, but for the institutional structures in which research is embedded. The articles in this *IDS Bulletin* only begin to allude to these broader challenges, which include conventional structures of funding; of disciplinary and departmental divisions; of the different incentives often in place for academic researchers and practitioners; ethical frameworks that assume we have research 'subjects'; and norms and models that treat research and policy as separate. The articles in this *IDS Bulletin*, in exemplifying the norms and practices of engaged excellence, show that these challenges can be overcome – but this should not detract from ongoing work to address these more structural and institutional features of the research enterprise – something we are constantly seeking to reflect on and address ourselves with respect to our institutional practices at IDS.

## 7 Conclusion

Debates around what constitutes good quality research, how we co-construct knowledge, how our research has impact, and how we develop and maintain enduring partnerships – the four pillars of an engaged excellence approach – have been around a long time. There has been a tendency in the research field to discuss them separately. This introduction, and the articles in this *IDS Bulletin*, bring them together to show that they are interrelated and mutually dependent, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

The complexity and interrelationships become most real when we apply these pillars in practice. The value of this *IDS Bulletin* is that it helps us to see the challenges, trade-offs and difficulties of using such an approach, while at the same time, the exciting possibilities for contributing to a more cognitively just world in which our research engages with those at the centre of the change we collectively wish to see.

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# Knowledge Democracy and Excellence in Engagement

## Rajesh Tandon, Wafa Singh, Darlene Clover and Budd Hall[*]

**Abstract** We often come across theories and aspects related to 'knowledge', but seldom do we try to understand its hidden implications. Knowledge as understood generally is about the information of facts and understanding of a subject. This article essentially argues against this understanding. It explores the multiple dimensions of 'knowledge' through a literature review and illustrations of practical examples. It makes a case for how important the process of knowledge creation is, especially given current societal challenges. It also outlines the importance of co-creation of knowledge, through acknowledgement and valuation of alternate paradigms of knowledge. Further, it discusses the concept of 'knowledge democracy', and how institutions of higher education, by abiding by its principles, can help achieve 'excellence in engagement'. The article concludes with the findings of two studies undertaken by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Chair, which were based on the principles of 'knowledge democracy' and 'excellence in engagement'.

**Keywords:** knowledge, democracy, co-construction, decolonisation, engagement.

## 1 Introduction

> 'There are key opportunities for a transformative knowledge agenda that is co-constructed with those who are experiencing inequalities and are in a position to influence change through policies, practices and politics… In a world in which knowledge shapes power and voice, and vice versa, the fundamental inequality in the production of knowledge about inequality itself must be addressed.'
> *World Social Science Report* (ISSC, IDS and UNESCO 2016: 275)

The 2016 *World Social Science Report* (WSSR), *Challenging Inequalities: Pathways to a Just World* (ISSC, IDS and UNESCO 2016) is a welcome addition to the literature on inequality. Inequality has become a global concern for citizens, activists, scholars and policymakers over the past 20 years, as it is inexorably linked to issues of planetary survival, health,

gender justice, cultural justice and more. One of the most interesting chapters is 'Transformative Knowledge for a Just World'. In this chapter, the editors of the report note that, 'Inherent in this challenge is knowledge inequality itself, and how knowledge inequalities link to other intersecting inequalities. These include inequalities in the construction of knowledge – which kinds of knowledge are produced, by whom and where' (ISSC, IDS and UNESCO 2016: 274).

It is also a welcome addition to our understanding of knowledge democracy. It supports and draws from not only work that those of us associated with the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education have been doing, but also the work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Enrique Dussel, Paulo Wangoola, Shiv Visvanathan, Vandana Shiva and others, including John Gaventa at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and his colleagues.

This article draws from the early work of Tandon and Hall in developing and extending the theory and practice of *participatory research* beginning in the 1970s, from years of linking knowledge and practice in India, Canada and elsewhere, and more recently under the umbrella of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research (CBR) and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. The history of participatory research owes a great deal to the praxis of Freire, Horton, Fals Borda, Robert Chambers, John Gaventa, and others. In this article, we move beyond that history to share thoughts on knowledge and its relevance to the global challenges of our times, movements towards decolonisation of knowledge and the increased recognition of subaltern knowledge, the emerging discourse of knowledge democracy, the contemporary opportunities for Community University Research Partnerships (CURPs), and the challenge of building capacity in both civil society and the academy for a transformative co-construction of knowledge.

## 2 Knowledge

What is knowledge? How it is created? Are there multiple traditions and cultures of knowledge? Has today's dominant positivistic knowledge system been the only one in history? Or is it seen as something subjective – one which is under construction and steadily changing? (Walsh and Rastegari 2015). How does knowledge relate to contemporary societal dynamics? Such varied conceptions of 'knowledge' have continued to intrigue scholars and philosophers of all times. In the growing discourse of both the knowledge economy and the knowledge society, it is fruitful to be aware of diversities and pluralities of knowledge, modes of knowledge production, and forms of knowledge dissemination. Escrigas *et al.* argue that:

> Knowledge is defined in several ways: the facts, feelings or experiences of a person or a group of people, a state of knowing or awareness, and/or the consciousness or the familiarity gained by experience or learning. Knowledge is created through research, through the experience of the wise, through the act of surviving in the world, and

is represented in text, poetry, music, political discourse, social media, speeches, drama and storytelling. Knowledge is linked to practical skills, to our working lives and to universal and abstract thought. Knowledge is created every day by each one of us and is central to who we are as human beings (Escrigas *et al.* 2014: xxxiii).

During the last years of the twentieth century, there has been an increased importance given to the role of knowledge. The dominant discourse has been on the knowledge economy. The digital world is making a bigger contribution to the global knowledge economy. However, the growing inequality in the world of knowledge has been a persistent phenomenon. Certain dominant knowledge institutions and knowledge perspectives have been shaping the global socioeconomic order in contemporary society. This assumes special importance in light of the challenges of current times. Today, humanity is faced with the co-existence of both great achievements and failures. Although it has achieved enormous prosperity in the past 50 years, one fifth of all people live in poverty on less than US$1.25 a day. In the midst of plenty, there is entrenched poverty and scarcity: 40 per cent of all children in the world are malnourished; more people have mobile phones than have access to toilets. Rapid economic growth has also been associated with growing environmental degradation (Tandon 2014a: 2).

Clearly, these global trends affect different regions, communities and households differently. The cumulative impacts of these trends imply that humanity as a whole faces enormous global challenges. These challenges have arisen out of certain global forces, models and approaches being adopted around the world. Hence, the solutions to these global challenges have to be approached using a global lens. Although specific solutions to these challenges have to be contextually devised, it is critical that efforts at finding solutions are both local and global. New models of human development and wellbeing that place human happiness at the centre have to be consensually evolved (Tandon 2014b: 5).

Therefore, there is a need to collectively find new and innovative ways for people to work together to take action on the deep issues that confront us all. It is here that equality and co-creation of knowledge becomes extremely important. This is because the democratic process of co-creation of knowledge for social change is an important contribution to the far-reaching transformations that we all desire. The critical role of knowledge has also been outlined by the emphasis placed by the UN in its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One of the targets under achieving SDG 4, relating to inclusive and quality education, states:

> By 2030, [it needs to be ensured that] all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship

and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development (UN 2016).

Society's future directions have to be based on universally accepted values of equity, justice, inclusion, peace and sustainability. The pursuit of these values has to be integrated into the very design of the productive economy, settlement planning, community development, democratic governance and knowledge creation, recognition and sharing. The invention of such models, approaches and formulations has to include at the forefront new ways of knowing, new ways of interpreting cosmologies of knowledge and a diversity of perspectives on knowledge (Tandon 2014b: 5). Further:

> We can address the power of knowledge to build the world we want; a world where social, economic and ecological justice includes all citizens irrespective of class, ethnicity, race, gender and age. A world in which life is respected no matter what form it takes. A world that shares an understanding of the interdependence of the social, human and environmental dimensions and the key of our collective success is cooperation (Hall *et al.* 2014: 301).

Therefore, now is the moment to widen the scope of knowledge in society and move beyond creating fragmented solutions, to a true knowledge-based society through engagement with citizenry as a whole, at all scales of activity, to deal with the problematic issues and global challenges of the day:

> The creation and dissemination of knowledge could contribute to transforming the paradigms and beliefs established in social, economic and political systems, and to moving forward to creative and innovative ways of thinking and imagining new realities (Escrigas *et al.* 2014: xxxiv).

### 3 The case for knowledge democracy
At the heart of the transformative potential of knowledge production and dissemination is a deepened understanding of knowledge democracy. What do we mean by knowledge democracy? Knowledge democracy refers to an interrelationship of phenomena. First, it calls for recognition of ecologies of knowledge and cognitive justice such as organic, spiritual and land-based systems, frameworks arising from our social movements, and the knowledge of the marginalised or excluded everywhere. Boaventura de Sousa Santos has said: 'There will be no global social justice until there is global cognitive justice' (2007: 10).

Secondly, it affirms that knowledge is both created and represented in multiple forms including text, image, numbers, story, music, drama, poetry, ceremony, meditation and more.

Third, and fundamental to our thinking about knowledge democracy, is understanding that knowledge is a powerful tool for taking action in social movements and elsewhere to deepen democracy and to struggle for a fairer and healthier world.

And finally, knowledge democracy is about open access for the sharing of knowledge so that everyone who needs knowledge has access to it. Knowledge democracy is about intentionally linking values of justice, fairness and action to the process of creating and using knowledge.

As Tandon has argued:

> … different voices represent different forms and expressions of knowledge – different modes and articulations of knowledge from diverse experiences, locations and perspectives. This is the essence of 'knowledge democracy' – a movement that respects multiple modes, forms, sources and idioms of knowledge production, representation and dissemination (2013).

So, essentially, the tools of knowledge production are universally available to all humanity. However, what has caused the discrimination is the perpetuation of instrumental rationality as the only epistemology. Tandon argues:

> Humans get to know through thinking; yes, cognition and rational thinking is important. But, humans also know from acting and feeling; yet, acting upon the world (learning by doing) and feeling about the world (phenomenology of everyday life) have not been accepted as legitimate modes of knowing. This needs to change if knowledge democracy has to be established (2014a: 4).

Focusing attention on this theme, Tandon *et al*. argue:

> At this juncture of humanity, as we stand at a crossroads, we seek to ask: What should be the nature of human thought, emotion and action? Should we continue on this path forever? Or should we pause to discover another? The human mind, its knowledge and capacity to dream can provide seeds for re-discovery. In taking steps towards such re-discovery, we need to look around the world at institutions of higher education (2016: 1).

How can the existing recognised centres of knowledge production (such as universities, higher education and research institutions) play an important role in promoting knowledge democracy?

By taking a deliberate standpoint on engagement, universities need to integrate their three missions – teaching, research and service. This is to ensure that engagement is not ghettoised into service alone, but an engaged stance is integrated into research and teaching as well. The production of new knowledge and its learning by students is possible through engagement with communities; such an engagement may also produce socially relevant knowledge. It may open up the possibility that knowledge acquired by students is based on a deeper understanding of their local contexts and a respect for knowledge residing within the communities. It is this process of *co-construction of knowledge* that may enhance the contributions of universities as sites for

the practice of knowledge democracy (Tandon 2014a: 4). Universities can thus provide spaces and intellectual resources to complement and build on the enormous cultural and social capital of communities. UNESCO's recent declarations are exhorting universities to re-examine their research and teaching practices in light of 'preparing the next generation of ethical global citizens' (Tandon 2014a: 5).

> 3. Higher education institutions, through their core functions (teaching, research and service to the community) carried out in the context of institutional autonomy and academic freedom should increase their interdisciplinary focus and promote critical thinking and active citizenship. This would contribute to sustainable development, peace, wellbeing and the realization of human rights…
> 4. [Higher Education] must not only give solid skills for the present and future world but must also contribute to the education of ethical citizens committed to the construction of peace, the defense of human rights and the values of democracy (UNESCO 2009: 2).

Further arguments for such an engaged standpoint are presented in the fifth GUNi Report on higher education:

> The recovery of indigenous intellectual traditions and resources is a priority task. Course structures, syllabuses, books, reading materials, research models and research areas must reflect the treasury of our thoughts, the riches of our indigenous traditions and the felt necessities of our societies. This must be matched with learning environments on which students do not experience learning as a burden, but as a force that liberates the soul and leads to the uplifting of the society. Above all, universities must retrieve their original task of creating good citizens instead of only good workers (Escrigas *et al.* 2014: xxxviii).

## 4 Cognitive justice and ecologies of knowledge

In the early 1970s, Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (Gibson 1999), swept the globe. These books and the nearly two dozen others that followed proposed that 'education, though in inequitable societies predominantly a tool of elites, is also a democratic egalitarian weapon' (*ibid.*). Freire says that 'liberating education lies in cognition, not in transferrals of education' (Freire n.d.). This was followed by the development of participatory tools and methodologies such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and participatory action research (PAR) in the 1980s. These were based on principles such as: direct learning from local people; offsetting biases; optimising trade-offs; triangulating and seeking diversity; analysis by local people; practising critical self-awareness and responsibility; and sharing (Chambers 1994: 1437). However, unfortunately modern systems of collating knowledge and imparting education have been a slave to academic monopolism. This nature of knowledge realities has been acknowledged by several other authors in their literary works, who have linked 'social justice to cognitive justice' (e.g. Santos 2007; Visvanathan 2009).

Boaventura de Sousa Santos has a narrative that begins with his observation that in the realm of knowledge we have created an intellectual abyss, which hinders human progress. Abyssal thinking, he notes, 'consists in granting to modern science the monopoly of the universal distinction between true and false to the detriment of… alternative bodies of knowledge' (Santos 2007: 47). De Sousa Santos makes the link between values and aspirations strongly in saying, 'Global social injustice is therefore intimately linked to global cognitive injustice. The struggle for global social justice will, therefore, be a struggle for cognitive justice as well' (*ibid.*). Shiv Visvanathan contributes to this discourse, expanding the concept of cognitive justice, and noting that:

> The idea of cognitive justice sensitizes us not only to forms of knowledge but also to the diverse communities of problem-solving. What one offers then is a democratic imagination with a non-market, non-competitive view of the world, where conversation, reciprocity, translation create knowledge not as an expert, almost zero-sum view of the world but as a collaboration of memories, legacies, heritages, a manifold heuristics of problem-solving, where a citizen takes both power and knowledge into his or her own hands. These forms of knowledge, especially the ideas of complexity, represent new forms of power sharing and problem-solving that goes beyond the limits of voice and resistance. They are empowering because they transcend the standard cartographies of power and innovation, which are hegemonic. By incorporating the dynamics of knowledge into democracy, we reframe the axiomatics of knowledge based on hospitality, community, non-violence, humility and a multiple idea of time, where the citizen as trustee and inventor visualizes and creates a new self-reflexive idea of democracy around actual communities of practice (Visvanathan 2009).

Globally, there are instances of how knowledge has been produced within communities and people; and the kind of impact it has achieved. Such varied ecologies of knowledge consist of many sources, venues, forms and species of knowledge agents in a symbiotic relationship of productive exchange and value creation. Such knowledge is engaged, active, dynamic and also linked to social, political, cultural or sustainable changes.

> … PRIA's [Participatory Research in Asia] co-constructed knowledge is linked to a variety of social movements in India. Mpambo's mother tongue scholars are stimulating an unprecedented reawakening of Afrikan spiritual knowledge and sharing in Uganda. The shack dwellers of Durban and beyond have boldly taken the word university as their own and turned the knowledge hierarchies upside down in the service of justice for the poor. The Indigenous language champions working with the First People's Cultural Council have staked a claim to epistemological privilege over the western trained non-Indigenous linguists. The healers from South Africa have staked their claims to knowledge superiority not to settle any epistemological

scores with western science, but in their commitment to better serve the health needs of their people. These knowledge innovators have all facilitated various means of creating, sharing and accessing knowledge that is not part of what is often called the western canon. For a variety of justice, cultural, spiritual, environmental, health reasons, the application of knowledge from the western canon in each one of these stories was seen as insufficient. The contexts, conditions, values, uses, politics of knowledge in each of these stories called for an opening outwards of our comfortable assumptions about whose knowledge counts and what the relationship between knowledge and life might be (Hall 2015: 5).

Considering the varied ecologies of knowledge and its role in fostering knowledge democracy, it is important to note that knowledge is uncovered, created, represented and shared throughout our world in dynamic ways that go beyond normative printed texts, peer-reviewed journal articles, books and even new digitised choruses in the form of blogs, tweets and websites. In the lives of communities, in social movements and many other quests for justice, transformation and change, knowledge is created, represented and shared through age-old practices such as the ceremonies of indigenous people, and the sharing of stories that keep alive cultural practices and ways of knowing that would otherwise be erased. Knowledge is also created, represented and shared through poems and songs that call us to witness and action, through sculptures and images of lament, memory and resistance. Transformative forms of understanding and knowledge are also embedded in the collective community quilts sewn by women who protest polluting development schemes, and in the large puppets that accompany demonstrations and acts of defiance. Theatre both on stage as through the work of Brecht or in communities in the form of forum theatre, 'theatre of the oppressed' or popular theatre, has also been used as a powerful form of transformative knowledge-making and engagement.

Through a lens of feminist arts-based education and research, Clover has articulated a number of characteristics or roles the arts have played in knowledge creation and mobilisation (2006, 2012). The first was versatility and diversity, which speaks to the multiplicity of art genres and artistic practices, as well as the types of issues and understandings these arts uncover and represent. The second is universality and familiarity. By this, Clover means that all cultures around the world have forms of artistic practice and expression, which capture and represent the essence of who they are. Thirdly, she speaks of the imagination, and its ability to defy what Wyman[1] calls 'the constraints of expectation and the everyday'. By liberating the imagination through cultural engagement and expression, we can both imagine and re-imagine the world in new ways, thus creating new forms of knowledge. Building on this, Clover speaks to the power of the symbolic and metaphorical nature of art to speak to meanings that go beyond the confines of words and language and make new connections between ideas and understanding.

**5 Decolonisation, epistemicide and subaltern knowledge: pathways to knowledge democracy**

South African students have called for the decolonisation of the higher education curriculum in their universities. When we hear this call, we think that we understand it because of the history of white domination and racialisation of education in that country.

But what do we think when we hear that call by students and activists in India, England, Canada and elsewhere? There are several places in the WSSR that cite the uneven production of academic knowledge, showing how the USA dominates academic publishing (ISSC, IDS and UNESCO 2016: 338). But the idea of decolonising our higher education institutions is much more than this. It is a response to what de Sousa Santos has called the epistemicide carried out by the Western European cultural, economic and political project of the last 500 years. Readers of this article, be they in Tanzania, Brazil, Canada, India or elsewhere know that the core theoretical content, the intellectual substance of nearly all the universities of the world are variations on what is called the Western canon. Lebakeng, Phalane and Dalindjebo (South Africa), Odara-Hoppers (South Africa–Uganda), Wangoola (Uganda) and Ezeanya (Rwanda) have written/worked extensively on the importance of the recovery of the intellectual traditions of the continent. 'Institutions of higher education in South Africa were (and still are) copycats whose primary function was (and still is) to serve and promote colonial Western values' (Lebakeng, Phalane and Dalindjebo 2006: 73). Similarly, Ezeanya adds, 'In Africa, the research agenda, curriculum and "given" conceptual frameworks should be continuously re-examined …with the aim of eschewing all manifestations of new-colonial underpinnings and emphasising indigenous ideas (Ezeanya 2011: 3).

So, decolonisation at the University of Victoria in Canada is a call, among other things, for a recovery and a placement of indigenous knowledge amongst the central aspects of the curriculum. Decolonisation is a revolutionary idea and practice. But how did the Western canon come to dominate our collective higher education institutions?

To understand that we have to look at what Grosfoguel has called the 'Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century' (Grosfoguel 2013). It seems that the story of dispossessing the people from the ownership of their ideas in the medieval universities that brought ecclesiastical power to the new universities was just the start of our knowledge story. Grosfoguel pulls together four distinct stories of epistemicide, stories almost always treated as separate historical processes. In doing so we learn in a powerful manner how intellectual colonisation has emerged. The four epistemicides are: (1) the conquest of Al-Andalus, and the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Europe; (2) the conquest of the indigenous peoples of the Americas started by the Spanish, continued by the French and the English and still under way today in the Western Hemisphere; (3) The creation of the slave trade that resulted in millions killed in Africa and at sea, and many more totally de-humanised

by enslavement in the Americas; and (4) the killing of millions of Indo-European women, mostly through burning at the stake as witches, because of knowledge practices that were not controlled by men. These conquests transformed Europe from itself being at the periphery of an earlier dominant Islamic centre of intellectual power to taking centre stage. But in an historic irony Spain and Portugal, the leading military and intellectual powers of the fifteenth century, have been shut out of the post-sixteenth century Northern European monopoly of knowledge.

What is important for us to understand is that these four conquests were both military and epistemological/ideological. At the height of the Al-Andalus Empire in Europe, the city of Cordoba had a 500,000-book library. This was at a time when other intellectual centres in Europe would have had libraries of 5,000–10,000 books. The Spanish burned the library in Cordoba and libraries elsewhere. They destroyed most of the codices in the Mayan, Inca and Aztec empires as well. Women's knowledge, which was largely oral, was simply silenced as was the knowledge of Africa. African slaves were portrayed as non-humans incapable of Western-style thought. Hegel, for example, in commenting on Africans says, 'Among negroes it is the case that consciousness has not attained even the intuition of any sort of objectivity… the negro is the man as beast (Lectures 218)' (as quoted in Dussell 1993: 70). The continued linguicide of indigenous languages in North America and throughout the world today is evidence that the patterns established through conquest in the sixteenth century is still deeply entrenched in our own minds and most certainly in our higher education institutions.

### 6 Achieving 'excellence in engagement'

Considering the aforementioned account on the role of 'knowledge systems', contemporary opportunities and challenges, meanings of knowledge democracy and its linkages to social justice, we now move towards '*excellence in engagement*'. Engagement is the process of building relationships with people and putting those relationships to work to accomplish shared goals, i.e. involving those who are at the heart of the change we wish to see. Achievement of excellence in such engagement practices can be through a high quality of work in conducting research, building partnerships, and co-constructing and mobilising knowledge for achieving sound impact.

The work of the UNESCO Chair over the last few years has been continuously striving to achieve such 'excellence in engagement' through research, policy advocacy, knowledge mobilisation and capacity enhancement. Two of the projects it has recently undertaken bear testimony to its efforts in this direction. Presented next are the experiences and lessons of these projects, and how they have essentially propagated the agenda of 'excellence in engagement' by promoting ideas which support the latter: 'Strengthening Community University Research Partnerships', which is based on the idea of co-construction of knowledge; and 'Building the Next Generation of Community-Based Researchers', which promoted building capacities for 'engaged research'.

## 7 Practice in co-construction of knowledge: a step towards 'engaged excellence'

Historically, universities have not only produced knowledge but have also been the arbiters of which knowledge is 'good' and 'valid', establishing the very frameworks by which such assessments are made. Tautologically, universities have long considered knowledge produced by universities as the best and most legitimate. But in the face of global crises that challenge humanity's capacity to respond, the value of alternative forms and paradigms of knowledge is being revisited (Bivens, Haffenden and Hall 2015: 6). As the ability of the technical-rationalist knowledge long-favoured and reproduced by universities is questioned regarding its adequacy for the current moment, researchers are increasingly moved to work with organisations and communities outside of the university in order to co-generate knowledge which draws dynamically on multiple epistemologies and life-worlds. Cultivating research partnerships with communities and civil society organisations (CSOs) is a way of making subaltern knowledge visible. Such co-creative acts of knowledge production are at the heart of the university's contribution to deepening knowledge democracy and cognitive justice (Bivens *et al.* 2015: 6).

The sharing of knowledge between universities and their communities has been a prominent feature of the field of adult education in Europe since the establishment of the extra-mural division of Cambridge University in 1873. The extra-mural tradition has found counterparts in most of the universities of Europe as continuing education, extension services and so forth (Hall *et al.* 2015b). The most recent developments in higher education and community engagement have taken different organisational forms. Science Shops have proliferated in European universities, inspired by the Dutch examples from the 1970s. Community University Partnership Programmes have been initiated in England. Offices of CBR have surfaced in Canada and elsewhere (*ibid.*).

Such views have also been expressed in the '"Global Communique on Enhancing Community University Engagement" between the global North and South issues by the Big Tent group of higher education networks':

> … [W]e believe that the transformative potential of our community sector organizations and our higher education institutions is enhanced when we combine our collective knowledge, global connections, skills and resources to address the myriad of social cultural economic health and environmental challenges in our places and regions (Bivens *et al.* 2015: 7).

## 8 Critical factors in research partnerships

'Strengthening Community University Research Partnerships' was a global study (undertaken by the UNESCO Chair during 2014–15) of institutional arrangements for the facilitation and support of research partnership between community groups and universities. Inclusive of a survey on the global trends in support structures for CURPs, and

12 country case studies, the main findings that emerged from the study are as follows (Hall, Tandon and Tremblay 2015a):

Lessons from the global survey:

- A strong need for institutional investment in structures to support and facilitate community and academic interests.

- A large variation in the language, conceptualisation and practice of these engagements, from 'extension' to 'co-creation' of knowledge.

- The 'knowledge cultures' of CSOs and higher education institutions (HEIs) are very different.

- An emerging contradiction between professed commitment to co-construction of knowledge and partnerships with communities, and the actual practice of doing CBR (i.e. origins of research, sharing of resources).

- An expressed need for building community capacity to play equitable roles in the research partnerships.

Lessons from case studies:

- When national policy creates formal expectations to promote community engagement (CE), HEIs tend to show greater readiness; earmarked funding for CE further facilitates CE by HEIs.

- The top leadership of ministries and HEIs can have huge impacts on the promotion of CE in general, and CURPs in particular; by prioritising CE in the research functions of HEIs, such leaders can push co-creation of knowledge.

- Middle-level leadership – deans, centre directors, professors – and student leaders can nurture and operationalise CE (and CURP) by championing these in their faculty, centre or association.

- Even when reporting and monitoring mechanisms exist within HEIs, accountability to communities and reporting to civil society is not a common practice at all.

- Long-term commitment to CE and CURP is required to institutionalise such practice; support for such five to ten-year partnerships is critical.

- Investing in capacity building of students and faculty at HEIs (and in community and civil society) to learn about partnerships and community-based participatory research (CBPR) methodologies is critically missing.

- In general, civil society has shied away from demanding greater responsiveness and accountability from HEIs and the system of higher education in various countries around the world.

- The mind-set in HEIs continues to negate community knowledge and practitioner expertise; widespread systematisation of practitioner knowledge and sensitisation of the next generation of researchers can make a difference.

## 9 Excellence in engagement means building capacity for transformative and co-created knowledge

The concept of excellence in engagement may be understood in several ways. We suggest that one of the most important challenges in implementing a notion as open as excellence in engagement lies in providing many more opportunities for students, researchers, civil society workers, and social movement activists to learn how to gather, promote, identify, create, share and systematise knowledge. Co-constructing transformative knowledge is not easy. Even the recognition of civil society and social movements as privileged locations for knowledge construction is not accepted by many academics. CBPR is not just one more module to be added or highlighted in courses on standard research methods. What does engagement really mean? Can a rather vague concept such as excellence prove itself valuable in contributing to a new understanding of knowledge?

> Questioning where the next generation of community-based researchers would be able to learn CBR, the UNESCO Chair turned to Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada to support a global study titled 'Building the Next Generation of Community-Based Researchers' [('Next Gen')]. The project intended to find out where people in various parts of the world have been learning to do CBR, what principles of CBR might be derived from these diverse learning locations, and explore various partnership arrangements that might lead us toward more collaboration in building global capacity in CBR (UNESCO Chair 2016: 5).

Key take-home lessons from the study are as follows (Tandon *et al.* 2016):

- There is high demand and a low offer of CBR training opportunities. The main challenge is how to meet the existing demand of training in CBR and how to complement the existing offer.

- Specialised training is needed in CBR in the four thematic areas of the 'Next Gen' project (water governance, indigenous research methodologies, asset-based community development, and governance and citizenship) as well as in broader multi- and inter-sectoral fields.

- There needs to be a mix of training opportunities in every region that includes face-to-face learning, online options, experiential learning, as well as short- and long-term training courses.

- Future training opportunities should take into account regional differences (e.g. learning cultures, infrastructure, languages) and provide contextually important learning materials.

● Different dimensions have to be taken into account when designing and offering more training opportunities in CBR, for instance the location of training (e.g. HEIs, CSOs, community settings); the expected length of engagement in CBR (i.e. over a long period and/ or controlled by local community, or short-term CBR such as in some participatory action research and service learning activities).

The study also established a pedagogical framework for CBR training to be provided to the next generation of community-based researchers. The intention of this framework is to be robust and theoretically well founded, but also flexible and simple enough to be readily translated into effective CBR teaching and training strategies and practices in geographically, politically and culturally diverse contexts. The framework is made up of five pedagogical principles emerging from the findings of the 'Next Gen' project, which tend to underpin the pedagogy of CBR and appear relevant to be included in the future training of community-based researchers (Tandon *et al.* 2016). These principles are:

1 An orientation towards research ethics and values;

2 Development of a deep understanding of power and partnerships;

3 Incorporation of multiple modes of enquiry;

4 Participation in learning CBR and ensuring a balance between classroom (theory) and field (practice);

5 The role of researcher as CBR facilitator.

## 10 An exciting time for knowledge workers

The calls for decolonising and democratising knowledge, the exploration of knowledge inequalities, the increased visibility of indigenous knowledge, and the institutionalisation of structures to support CURPs have opened up a brave new world for knowledge workers, and the communities and movements where they interact. But make no mistake, the achievement of knowledge democracy and excellence in engagement will demand much courage, networking, willingness to stand up to the gatekeepers of the Western canon and disciplinary orthodoxies. There is an open door, however, and we are beginning to pass inside.

As UNESCO Chair, we have launched a K4C[2] consortium to build capacities for engaged research excellence around the world. In partnership with local hubs which bring academia and civil society together, K4C will create classroom, field-based and online learning opportunities for students and practitioners together, situated in local cultural and language contexts. We invite readers of this *IDS Bulletin* to join this journey.

**Note**

\* Rajesh Tandon, Founder of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) in India and Budd Hall, Professor of Community Development at the University of Victoria, Canada are co-chairs of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. Wafa Singh is the Research Coordinator with the UNESCO Chair based in India, and Darlene Clover is Professor of Community Leadership and Adult Education at the University of Victoria, Canada.

1 Wyman is a Canadian artist and public intellectual, former President of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

2 Knowledge for Change.

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# Engaged Excellence or Excellent Engagement? Collaborating Critically to Amplify the Voices of Male Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

**Chris Dolan and Thea Shahrokh with Jerker Edström, Darius King Kabafunzaki, Dieudonné Maganya, Aimé Moninga and David Onen Ongwech**[*]

**Abstract** This article considers the Institute of Development Studies' (IDS) concept of 'engaged excellence' from a postcolonial perspective, interrogating notions of 'excellence' determined in the global North, and calling for deep, long-term and mutually constitutive 'excellent engagement' between institutions in the global South and North. It offers a case study of how excellent engagement has developed over a decade-long relationship between researchers from IDS and from a partner organisation in Uganda, the Refugee Law Project, and how incrementally these have extended to include intensive engagement with the lives and advocacy commitments of an association of male survivors of sexual violence. Engaged excellence, it argues, can only be the outcome of excellent engagement, itself a process that is challenged by structural arrangements related to funding from and academic enterprise within the global North.

**Keywords:** postcolonial, survivors, global North, entitlement, sexual violence, politics of knowledge.

## 1 Introduction

In a context of simultaneous globalisation and fragmentation and a related state of flux in state-level power balances, 'engaged excellence' has been proposed as a new frame to capture ways of working at the level of academic endeavour. The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) has defined engaged excellence as meaning that the quality of the Institute's work is dependent upon it linking to and involving those who are at the heart of the change they wish to see. But what does it really mean? Is it a 'feel-good' buzzword for IDS and its donors, perhaps one that is not always experienced in the same way by its partners in the global South?

Or does it reflect an awareness that against the backdrop of global political change, academic work must also critically scrutinise its ways of working and how it articulates its underlying political commitments?

Such a framing must engage with postcolonial critique of global knowledge hierarchies (Spivak, Landry and MacLean 1996). Who defines 'engaged'? It might easily be critiqued as a self-legitimising tool used simply to negotiate access to 'research subjects' in the global South. Furthermore, 'excellence' is a term that is generally used to other those who are not deemed as worthy of it. In combination, the terms risk being simply fronted to donors and peers in the global North – by actors who have never questioned their own sense of entitlement to 'set the standards' (traditional academic metrics) and/or to determine the rules of engagement in what, notwithstanding the changing international relations and postcolonial landscape, remains a consistently uneven global playing field.

On the other hand, the 'engaged excellence' frame attaches particular value to collaboration, multiple subjectivities and interdisciplinary knowledge in tackling the root causes of complex and interconnected social, political and economic problems. Potentially it enables partners to think through what it means to actually do collaborative research for social change in a context of unequal power relationships and structural obstacles. Taken in this way, it is an understanding that could give rise to what we shall refer to as 'excellent engagement' for enhanced and transformative development research and practice, practice that chips away at rather than compounding existing power inequalities.

It is thus clear that all the foundations of the 'engaged excellence' approach – high-quality research, co-construction of knowledge, mobilising evidence for impact, building enduring partnerships – are laden with ambiguous potentials and political significance for the different constituencies involved. In operational terms, will 'engaged excellence' challenge a prevalent pattern in which Northern institutions believe themselves to harbour expertise and theoretical sophistication (in short, 'excellence'), while Southern partners are lauded for their in-depth local knowledge and wizardry at solving the logistical challenges confronting their Northern visitors?

This article considers what it may mean to 'do' engaged excellence and to engage excellently, both in theory and in practice. We examine the evolution over a ten-year period of collaboration between IDS as a North-based institution, the Refugee Law Project (RLP) as a South-based one, and, latterly, Men of Hope Refugee Association Uganda (from here on, MOHRAU), as a grass-roots social-political 'community'. We reflect, retrospectively, on what insights this learning partnership between researchers, civil society practitioners and survivors of sexual violence, some of whom embody more than one of these identities, offers for realising the frame of 'engaged excellence' going forward.

Taking an inductive approach, we analysed RLP, MOHRAU and IDS' individual and collaborative research reports, participatory films, academic articles, workshop reports and reflective diaries produced over the ten years of our still evolving research partnership. Drawing from principles of cooperative inquiry, we also undertook first-person reflection and group-based reflective discussion to critically engage with our shared and personal learning journeys (Heron 1996). Importantly, this analysis aims to strengthen our own ways of being and relating within collaborative research praxis, as well as provide lessons for others. The article itself involved a collaborative writing process between the different partners: IDS, RLP – with specific inputs from the Gender and Sexuality and Media for Social Change programmes – and MOHRAU.

## 2 Engaged research and alternative knowledges

In establishing 'What is the case?', research communities place value on their particular overarching theory of knowledge, constructions of the world and practices of research (Gergen and Gergen 2008). Institutions in the global North have faced calls for decolonisation of hegemonic disciplinary approaches and research protocols to go hand-in-hand with the invention of new ways of knowing. Concepts such as situated knowledges (Haraway 1988) suggest that essentialism can be countered if we can recognise that the knowledge we claim is conditioned by the locations we occupy. This allows for multiple and shifting perspectives and the possibility of learning about ourselves from the experiences and knowledges of others. Situated knowledges imply mosaic qualities located in time and space, embodied in specific ways, and operating as social and collective points of view.

Where different types of knowledge such as academic erudition and popular knowledge are combined or enter into dialogue, the outcome may deconstruct assumed or accepted framings, leading to the creation of alternative ways of seeing the world (Fals Borda 2013). The extent to which engagement either expands how we see the world or reinforces unquestioned prior positions is an important indicator of whether or not meaningful co-construction of knowledge in research and learning approaches has been achieved.

Robins, Cornwall and von Lieres (2008: 1085) argue that rather than 'importing normative notions with their own culturally located histories and reading people's identifications and actions through them, there is a need for more grounded forms of inquiry' that investigate how different political and historical contexts shape people's realities. Feminist and participative approaches within critical social research aim to deconstruct the given, or the 'norm', and recognise the multiplicity of 'truths' inherent in social relations. They also emphasise the value of the perspectives of those directly affected by a given issue (Hume 2007). The inclusion of this often 'marginalised' knowledge can help reveal the limits of the normativities embedded in dominant discourses, and also help to provide a more substantive basis for rethinking pathways to social justice (Gaventa and Cornwall 2008).

In the case reviewed here, a two-way exchange between practitioners and researchers thinking, framing, researching and reflecting together evolved over time to a more three-dimensional working with survivor activists as a step in challenging dominant knowledge–power hierarchies in social research. This position echoed and in a sense operationalised Freirean pedagogy in that it explicitly recognised that we are all 'subjects' of our own lives and narratives, not 'objects' in the stories of others (Freire 1970). The significance of these forms of multi-directional and multi-stakeholder engagement is amplified in contexts and discourses where people with profound insights are silenced or edged out of the process of constructing that knowledge which will be received as authoritative by those with the power to utilise it to shape policy and practice. The repositioning of three broad categories of stakeholders changes the ownership of the research process, the motivation to actively shape it, and the commitment to utilise the emerging knowledge within each stakeholder's respective spheres of influence for social (and thereby also political) change.

Our experience, therefore, suggests that in developing an 'engaged excellence' approach and frame of reference, determining what 'excellent engagement' means and looks like becomes the central focus. This politically and epistemologically positional judgement in turn plays a role in determining methodologies whose potential to contribute to transformative pathways of social change should also be taken as a key indicator of the quality of research.

### 3 A ten-year relationship

The partnership between IDS and RLP has grown through researcher-practitioners' shared personal and political commitments to questioning structures of gendered and intersecting oppressions. The work done to challenge reductive or essentialist gender discourse has been integrally informed for both RLP and IDS researchers, by an examination of relations on the ground as well as the balance of world power. A critical space for such work has been provided by refugee-led self-help groups which have, with the support of RLP, organised around particular shared experiences or vulnerabilities. While these groups include, among others, women, people living with HIV, people living with disability, and women and men living with specific experiences of sexual violence, the RLP–IDS research collaboration has predominantly been with the latter. From the three male survivors who came together in a support group known as MOHRAU in 2011, the group has since grown to more than 100 members.[1]

RLP, MOHRAU and IDS have, independently and collectively become increasingly concerned with the marginalisation of men's experiences as victims of sexual and gender-based violence within research, policy or practice and a related tendency in dominant narratives to depict men as perpetrators of violence and women as victims. We have interacted and engaged through various symposia, research and advocacy collaborations, training workshops, and through mutual support for the rights of refugees.

**Table 1** Evolution of the RLP, MOHRAU and IDS partnership through programmes, research and learning events[2]

| | 2007 | 2009 | 2010 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Funding/ programme (Funder) | Politicising Masculinities symposium (Sida, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNFPA, UNAIDS, DFID, SDC) | | Mobilising Men to Address SGBV Programme (UNFPA) | Gender, Power and Sexuality (GPS) Programme: connecting local voices to global arenas for equality and rights (Sida) | | | Effective Organised Activism against Gender-Based Violence Programme (DFID)<br><br>• Therapeutic Activism Research and Participatory film-making (Uganda, DFID) | |
| Research and reports (Host partner) | *Politicising Masculinities: Beyond the Personal* symposium report (IDS) | | | *Mobilising Men in Practice: Challenging SGBV in Institutional Settings* (IDS, RLP, CHSJ, MEGEN) | *The Bench*, participatory film (MOHRAU) | *Undressing Patriarchy IDS Bulletin* (IDS) | *Men Can Be Raped Too*, film (MOHRAU)<br><br>*From Dakar to Delhi: Politicising Thinking and Policy Discourse on Men and Masculinities*, 'Stories of Influence' (IDS, RLP, CHSJ, MEGEN) | *Therapeutic Activism* publication (IDS, RLP) |
| Critical dialogue workshops/ processes (Host partner) | Politicising Masculinities symposium (IDS, Dakar) | RLP visiting Fellow at IDS (IDS, UK) | ' | Men, Masculinities, Sexuality GPS workshop (RLP, Uganda) | Undressing Patriarchy GPS symposium (IDS, UK)<br><br>MOHRAU participatory video training – GPS (IDS with MOHRAU, RLP) | | Sexual and Gender-Based Violence – Effective Organised Activism Programme Global Learning Event (IDS, UK) | |
| Global conferences and symposia (location) | | Men Engage Global Symposium (Brazil) | | AWID Forum (Istanbul) | | Men Engage Global Symposium (India)<br><br>'Into the Mainstream' RLP, War Child, PLAN UK and MOHRAU roundtable ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict (UK) | The Rape of Men… Seriously; A Gender Issue? Video-linked seminar and film screening (IDS, RLP)<br><br>House of Lords Committee on Sexual Violence (RLP presentation) | |

The evolution of our work together can be traced in Table 1: in 2015, it led us to design and carry out a joint study of collective action among male survivors of conflict-related sexual violence using multiple methods, including participatory film. Written up as *Therapeutic Activism* (Edström *et al.* 2016), this study, which also resulted in the film *Men Can Be Raped Too*, was a pivotal moment in our collaboration insofar as it was a logical outcome of the preceding years and opened up new possibilities for further work.

### 4 Engagement and the construction of critical gazes

As Table 1 suggests, the partnership between RLP and IDS over ten years has gradually built up engagement as an assemblage of multiple experiences, understandings, perspectives and interests seeking to affect social change at different levels and from respective vantage points. Within this assemblage, we have attempted to create a space for interrogating 'truths' from diverse viewpoints. Problematising our contextual, cultural and academic lenses has been essential, as it is these lenses which help to co-construct the meaning carried forward in research, and which in turn become an indicator of how those we research with should be treated in the world (Hall 1975). Acknowledging the political project that we are engaged in also helped to clarify our objectives and the ways in which our personal understandings and assumptions enter the different research and learning processes (Gillies and Alldred 2002). This partnership has grown through a shared recognition that binary categories can be violent in their effects, not least when certain groups are categorised as subordinate or inferior (Wyatt *et al.* 2014), and others as inherently superior – and, relatedly, invulnerable. This recognition has in turn generated a more social and political commitment to transformation in gender and development research and practice, and shared efforts to deconstruct such mainstream gender binary framings which place men and women as two counter-posed categories.

This assemblage has also been constituted of learning and debate between masculinity theorists, feminist movements, activists for sexual and gender diversity, and human rights organisations who have made visible the importance of explicitly challenging the power inequities at the root of gender inequality, and the role of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity in oppressive gender orders and relations (Shahrokh *et al.* 2015). The Politicising Masculinities symposium in Dakar in 2007 was foundational in this journey and catalysed a methodology of dialogues across contrasting perspectives. This approach has continued throughout our partnership, strengthening and evolving our critical thinking over time.

Working together with partners from the Centre for Health and Social Justice (in India) and Men for Gender Equality Now (in Kenya), IDS and RLP developed a Men and Masculinities stream of work within a Sida-funded Gender, Power and Sexuality (GPS) programme. This stream created space for critical reflection on addressing men's

relationship to structures of constraint to achieving gender justice. Coming together in Uganda, IDS, RLP and partners conceptualised a symposium that was ultimately held in the UK with the purpose – and title – of 'Undressing Patriarchy'. In bringing together global colleagues with contrasting perspectives to meet and discuss the structural realities of masculinities and gender relations within shifting political and economic conditions, we learned about changes in livelihoods and social status, homophobia and gendered dynamics around sex and work. These dialogues put into question more familiar narratives and development sector framings (Edström, Das and Dolan 2014; Dolan 2014).

RLP and MOHRAU's experience of humanitarian sector discourse, policy, law and programming addressing conflict-related sexual violence has been that it frequently continues to depict men as perpetrators of sexual violence, and women as victims.[3] These notions silence the reality that – even within patriarchal gender orders – men can be vulnerable and can experience victimisation. This silencing ultimately prevents male survivors from reporting cases, and accessing services or other avenues for support and justice (Mezey and King 2000; Refugee Law Project 2015). It also reflects a certain politics within the humanitarian system which acts to pursue women's gender equality in ways that have tended to make invisible and marginalise the humanitarian needs and human rights of male survivors (Dolan 2015).

These realities are complicated further by the needs-based discourse of humanitarian actors that construct refugees as homogenised within broad categories of vulnerability and as passive recipients, rather than recognising the agency of refugees to assert their own interests and the importance of voice in this process. As a result, the political interests – or/and bureaucratic expediencies – of donors and humanitarian agencies are often determinative and can easily override the complex nuances of individuals' needs and claims (Trad and Kagan 2008).

Our work to deepen the analysis of evolving gender orders and the power dynamics of dominant discourse and narrative has relied on the diversity and specificity of partners' experiences with working with particular constituencies of survivors of sexual violence in their local contexts; in this case RLP's experiences with MOHRAU. The project on the role of the support group in the recovery of individual survivors, was committed to co-constructing the framing and questions between MOHRAU members, RLP and IDS staff to ensure that those traditionally conceived as 'research subjects' (in this instance MOHRAU), and those frequently regarded as local logisticians (in this case RLP), were able to influence the direction and character of the research (Reason 1994), and to affirm people's right, through research, to have a say in the decisions that affect them (Reason and Bradbury 2006).

As such, our collective challenge to dominant framings is directed from and in multiple directions. It is a challenge to the power of global institutions to determine what will be the accepted forms of knowledge

(and therefore what is perceived to be known). It is also a pushing up from the grass roots, to affect change in the lives of male survivors, by male survivors themselves. As outlined above, these two domains of change – global and local – are often in tension with each other. The purpose of excellent engagement is thus not only to facilitate the co-construction of knowledge with those at the centre of the change we (collectively) wish to see, but also to find moments, channels and opportunities for alternative knowledges to challenge and shift accepted ways of knowing and acting.

**5 Extending space for knowledge construction through visual methods**
In working with members of MOHRAU over the past seven years,[4] RLP has facilitated a safe(r) space within which the group has been able to establish and evolve its identity. Integral to this has been thinking about different ways in which issues could be raised and discussions catalysed. As part of the Undressing Patriarchy symposium, RLP shared the work of RLP's Media for Social Change Programme, and their commitment to working with video as a mechanism both for people to explore and find ways to articulate experiences, perspectives and analyses, and also for communities to use the resultant outputs as tools with which to engage others on pertinent issues on which they are pushing for change. This sparked a collaboration between a media activist from Bangladesh, a member of the research staff from IDS, RLP and MOHRAU to further develop their video advocacy work with communities through the method of participatory video.[5]

Through (re-)presenting their experiences in a participatory video process, communities have the opportunity to make sense of their life worlds in new ways (Shaw 2014). In the first collaboration around video-making, male survivors shared their perspectives on the silencing of refugee voices in general, and those of male survivors of sexual violence in particular, in a short film titled *The Bench*.[6] As explained by one of the Ugandan researchers involved, this process provided an opportunity for male survivors to 'express themselves' and 'tell their story in a way that made sense to them'. His personal experience was that the process also created space for horizontal learning relationships to be established between MOHRAU members, RLP staff and colleagues from Bangladesh and IDS.

Through our subsequent collaborative project on the place of the survivor group in individual recovery from experiences of sexual violence, MOHRAU seized the opportunity to develop their participatory video approach and to create space to have direct ownership over a core element of the research methodology. The resulting film *Men Can Be Raped Too*,[7] which was scripted, acted and filmed by members of MOHRAU, with technical support from RLP on aspects of videography and editing, narrates the under-recognised impact of men's experience of sexual violence in conflict, the complex navigation of social relations in the process of healing, and the role of the MOHRAU group within this. An RLP researcher spoke about the

power of creative expression within the video process: 'I saw something that created a way to tell their stories even when they are so challenging. Sometimes you are not able to share these experiences with each other, but in this free way it was possible.'[8]

The participatory video process was an effort to transform perceptions of accepted sites of knowledge construction within the research collaboration. The story being told was constructed through the gaze of diverse human beings who had lived through a deeply personal and isolating reality, of which key elements were nonetheless shared. The dramatisation of this, as in other methods such as participatory theatre, enabled some of these commonalities to be articulated using non-verbal expression of emotional truths that are difficult to communicate in words. The interaction between the MOHRAU participatory video group and the wider research team conducting in-depth interviews under a shared framing created new forms of interactive and critical knowledge (Benequista and Wheeler 2012); researchers gained an interactive understanding of the MOHRAU members' process of story construction, and the emotions and daily experiences informing this, whilst at the same time developing a deeper critical understanding of issues that challenge frequently held assumptions.

## 6 Pathways of impact and change
Our experience is that engaged and critical social research is stronger and more revealing if adopting an interactive and iterative process which draws meaningfully on partnerships that are dynamic and promote communication and learning between research collaborators, whether defined as traditional researchers, civil society partners or peer researchers situated in the realm of the 'community'. The openness to learn from – and be impacted by – others within this collaboration was central to building trust and evolving new ideas. Members of the Ugandan research team highlighted how important it was that the partnership was not established within already preconceived parameters. Instead, the listening and learning relationship between the different research partners and the community 'being researched', mattered and created a collective process. As outlined by Mehta (2007), development research can (and should) also change researchers – it is a process of engagement and it can change relationships between researchers and communities and can contribute to how both see and act upon the world and the policies within their reach. Furthermore, Edström (2015) argues for a 'pedagogy of the undressed', in that work to address patriarchal gender structures needs to challenge us to reflect on how we are a part of the structures we are aiming to change (2015: 82).

Engaged research does not happen in a vacuum. The lives and experiences of those involved come into the research environment and shape it. Equally, what happens within the research is carried forward into and impacts on the everyday lives of those involved. Our experience is that there are several ways research participants may be positively affected during the research process: through making visible

a social issue, the therapeutic effect of being able to reflect upon and re-evaluate their experience as part of the process, the experience of solidarity in knowing others are also sharing their story, and the subversive or politicised outcome that these consequences may generate.

This is not to discount the important ethical questions that should be posed when research is likely to raise issues in participants' minds that they may subsequently need to come to terms with, including the potential risk of re-traumatisation. In this regard the positioning of the Refugee Law Project as a familiar and trusted organisation that provides access to health-related, psychosocial and also legal support services, played a critical enabling role for the collaboration. This was further strengthened by MOHRAU's role in framing and shaping the research focus and approach, and the up-front discussion of individual dynamics that the process might trigger.

For RLP and MOHRAU, making common cause across geographic and cultural divides is a key political motivation for partnering with IDS, as is establishing interconnections between diverse actors from local to global levels to hold 'transformative dialogues' (Mohan 2001) and critically build a shared agenda for solidarity in the struggle to promote equality and rights for survivors of sexual violence – including men – globally. For MOHRAU, whose members are structurally constrained in where they can travel to as refugees, the connection to international organisations is significant because 'whenever they publish it means they can reach where we aren't able to reach. So, these partners, they are another hand, another voice supporting us to move forward.'[9] Such connections also facilitate members in establishing an identity as global citizens in search of global justice – *despite the structural hurdles* – as well as in spreading recognition internationally of the issues of concern to them. This was also a motivation for the participatory video, as it helped to ensure that they could develop their own research and related communicative action. This research could be accessible and inclusive to different kinds of audiences and the approach enabled the dissemination of their narrative, including with service providers and community members whom the group was aiming to sensitise to the issue.

However, tensions exist in relation to the question of representation in engaged research. For example, written reports shared within international arenas tend to position and see international researchers as translating knowledge on behalf of the research communities who are metaphorically and physically furthest from decision-making spaces. As one MOHRAU member outlined, although they place value on the collaborative research approach and the skills learned through this, 'when the reports are ready for dissemination, and when presentations are being made in given places about the outcomes of the study, MOHRAU members should be present to supplement on these presentations'. The political and personal perspectives of researchers inform the intentions we have for the research. They also inform how we evaluate the impact (Gillies and Alldred 2002). The

multiple subjectivities within our research partnership mean that there are different positionalities on what change should look like and where this should happen. One important question is the extent to which the North-based researcher has any automatic legitimacy as an interlocutor of grounded knowledge within global research collaborations.[10] Another is whether or not North-based institutions are able and willing to challenge their own governments over highly exclusionary visa practices. It is not insignificant to the broader challenge of North–South knowledge–power dynamics that these visa practices effectively prevent South-based researchers from representing themselves and their work in conferences and workshops that take place in the global North, and the absence of their voices has the inevitable effect of re-inscribing the very power dynamics that excellent engagement is seeking to undo.[11]

This latter example points to how the analysis of ethics and power in critical social research must not only pay significant attention to imbalances in researcher/researched relationships, but also give more explicit focus to broader questions about the political role played by research findings and the relations set up by knowledge claims. Our reflection is that a shift is needed in order to situate matters of power in research to include the political aims, uses, dissemination and effects of 'knowledge', in addition to relations internal to the research process.

For many South-based institutions such as RLP, links to a Northern research institution have specific value and utility insofar as such relationships enhance the credibility of findings with donors and other institutions. It is a strategic and shifting judgement as to whether these benefits ultimately outweigh the costs of reinforcing the notion that excellence only exists in – or is, at any rate, judged in – the North, and can only be enjoyed vicariously by institutions in the South. An important factor in this judgement call is the extent to which institutions in the North and South respectively are able to access and use academic 'technologies' to generate products that resonate with the expectations for international policy audiences. The extent to which these mechanisms, even as they enhance visibility for otherwise silenced people, also reproduce power imbalances in development knowledge construction and dissemination, is an important consideration for the engaged researcher.

It is also the reality that any research project (even within a long-term partnership of this nature) is a temporary engagement in comparison to the long-term social change processes that partners engage around. In Uganda, there are very real obstacles to an effective response for male survivors – in terms of recognition of the issue, the provision of services to address their needs as survivors of violence, and the multiple challenges regarding their marginalisation as a result of their refugee identity. The organisations working to address change on the ground also face complex, contextualised sociopolitical barriers to working with this group. Equally, when engaging around such issues, North-based researchers may have a structural position that allows them to come in and out of the discussion, and a certain flexibility to intervene in a

system of power relations that they are free to leave after the project, but this does not extricate them totally from power inequalities within the 'development encounter'; North-based partners often face deep resource constraints in their attempts to sustain engagement with South-based colleagues, as donors show scant interest in issues perceived as 'marginal' or in the kind of long-term funding required to sustain relationships and thereby build momentum for change. These tensions highlight the importance of ethicality in the way engagement happens and the importance of decision-making, starting with the interests of those who have the potential to be impacted the most by the research. This takes us back to the questions of what excellent engagement looks like and how issues of ethical practice and sustainability are considered.

## 7 The structural arrangements of excellent engagement

The above analysis presents a process of engagement and collaboration that is interpersonal, and that involves mutual learning in both directions that is also acknowledged by all parties. It takes time because all the above inevitably rest on trust that is built through success in the above, over time, and in success at working through the differences that inevitably arise through joint activities (whether research, symposia, participation in policy spaces, and the like). In aspiring towards excellent engagement, however, it is essential that the concrete institutional arrangements between the research partners, not least the disbursements of money and the management, analysis and write-up of data, model the commitment to achieving new power balances within these collaborations.

Given the sensitivity of the topic of sexual violence, the importance of designing a partnership that would work for MOHRAU as well as the wider research team was clear. As one of the Ugandan RLP researchers outlined 'given the perceived risk of furthering the stigma and the problem, you need to work with them to hear how they want the stories drawn out and how to address the problem'. This working relationship was made possible by the trust and reciprocity experienced in the historical relationship between RLP and MOHRAU. Those that have worked closely with MOHRAU from the Ugandan team also highlighted that the time IDS researchers took to build rapport with the group and build the structure of togetherness in the project was critical: 'For Men of Hope to see IDS as like a colleague or a counsellor to their ears, and someone that is trying to understand them meant that they could build trust with you and you could slowly begin to understand them'.[12]

Our articulation of excellent engagement establishes that all members of a collaboration should have the space to engage with external organisations, and determine the initial purpose for this. In considering this, the delicate and intricate relationship between funding and engagement is significant. The direction of funding through IDS over the course of our partnership has led to opportunities and constraints. There has been an ongoing productive tension regarding the demands

of a particular grant and underlying interests which are being pursued as best they can within its strictures. As outlined by RLP's director, there was a sense that one earlier project 'pushed us into someone else's agenda, we pushed back in the sense that we worked with both women and men on the [Mobilising Men] project, and from then on we were also more assertive about what we wanted to do'.[13]

Engaging in smaller streams or projects within the framework of larger scale programme funding (within IDS) seemed to better facilitate a joint process as the budget lines were less specific and enabled greater creativity and joint determination of activities. Coming further into the collaboration this also meant that the way that the partnership was positioned was driven by the questions (and realities of researcher capacities and interests) generated through these ongoing engagements. As critical conversations continued and a shared agenda grew, we found that the collaboration also grew in strength to direct the focus of research in line with our increasingly shared critical position. The Therapeutic Activism study discussed here aimed to find out how male survivors of conflict-related sexual violence have sought support and recognition, and did so within a broader research programme on the 'Empowerment of Women and Girls' under the theme of working with men to address sexual and gender-based violence through collective action. To a certain extent we were able to push the boundaries of what was expected ('expected' in that some only recognise the topic when framed as 'violence against women'). This was facilitated by IDS having decision-making power over the use of the grant, by having a leading gender researcher at the organisation as a member of the project team and by the long-term relationship between IDS and RLP strengthening the credibility of the proposition. This highlights the importance of funding arrangements that provide space for the emergent explorations of a collaboration, as opposed to grants that establish a project agenda that simply reinforces certain pre-set agendas.

The sustainability of engagement and what is important to those involved in the collaboration over the longer term also cannot be assumed. MOHRAU in their evolving identity as an activist organisation have ambitions to receive training in human rights education and advocacy that will enable them to build further on the work achieved through the RLP–IDS–MOHRAU collaboration. Instead of undertaking additional research activities, they see that such training would contribute to their capacity to mobilise the knowledge generated in the research and their capacity to be able to drive change. The sustainability of engagement is thus to a certain extent determined by whether our shared commitment to action or political change can be realised across diverse and intersecting spheres and through activities that may not always involve research, but that reinforce the vision and purpose of our work together. The relevance and appropriateness of the type of engagement therefore need to be considered, and IDS needs to reflect critically on the extent to which partners themselves can direct what engagement looks like, and how this contributes to their own interpretation of excellence.

## 8 Conclusion: collaborating critically for excellent engagement

Research is inherently political, structured in hierarchies of power among researchers, between sponsors of research and researchers, and between researchers, intermediary service providers and those traditionally positioned as the subjects of research (Bell and Roberts 1984). These political relations present an array of counterforces to the development of empowering or liberatory research practices, including relations of control and dependency, privileges of the researchers, and the influence of institutional interests. Given these counterforces, the engaged excellence approach risks re-inscribing the researcher into a position of power, as one who has the power to create engaged excellence where others do not. This allows possibilities for exploitation that subvert mutuality, and constrain efforts towards a collaborative or reciprocal quest for knowledge and a practice that models the change we wish to see.

We call for a critical reflexivity within engaged excellence that is alert to the processes of knowledge assemblage in which researchers are themselves enmeshed, as well as to the politics of knowledge that is made possible by the inherent incompleteness, performativity and social construction of research endeavours (Sriprakash and Mukhopadhyay 2015). Through 'transformative dialogues' (Mohan 2001) and across levels and spaces, we can perhaps instead have 'excellent engagement' and enable collaborations that prevent any new 'tyrannies' (Cooke and Kothari 2001), buzzwords or slogans that reify rather than reform research for social change.

The value and weight of such a concept comes in its capacity to create research and learning that is part of a bigger sociopolitical project that challenges orthodoxies, contests established norms or truths and works to make visible knowledge–power and its related oppressions and emancipations. It must recognise the political nature of research and research for social change. Research collaborations across diverse subjectivities should be looking to develop excellent engagement, for which values and principles of critical consciousness, reflexivity and transformation should be core.

The RLP–IDS–MOHRAU research partnership does not hold a blueprint for such an approach, indeed it has, perhaps necessarily, been tentative at times and laden with tensions at others. Nonetheless, we have learned and continue to learn from our praxis, and hope that this expository article supports others to pursue 'engaged excellence' as the possible outcome of a process of excellent engagement, rather than a status that can simply be invoked. Our experience is that without linking research to a shared and deep commitment to social change for equal human rights and recognition, and without openly discussing our intentions for research in the light of our political, professional and activist hopes, we miss the opportunity to develop more effective, ethically responsible research (Gillies and Alldred 2002). For our collaboration, this commitment has and continues to involve challenging the invisibilising hand of patriarchal male order in knowledge–power, in

the politics of the international gender and development sectors, and in complex and marginalising global and national contexts. For this to be possible, any 'engaged excellence' claimed by North-based institutions has to be based on the mutually perceived excellence of the engagement; that is, on a collaborative and open yet critical togetherness across diverse research partners that is able to provide support and solidarity in driving change. As outlined by one of our Ugandan researchers:

> *I learned that being together gives you more strength to handle anything ahead of you, that togetherness really helps you a lot. That you need to involve your team mates, I learned that from Men of Hope, that they are together as a support group and are not trying to cope with things as an individual.*[14]

## Notes

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1 This number is not fixed and not entirely stable, given that some members have been resettled to third countries while new members are joining in an ongoing fashion.

2 All reports, publications and films are listed in the references of this article. All acronyms are given in full in the glossary of this *IDS Bulletin*.

3 These experiences reflect very much Sivakumaran's writing of 2007, 2010.

4 The work with individuals preceded the establishment of the support group.

5 As explained by Wheeler, 'Participatory video (PV), as a digital and visual medium, acts as a lens through which the power relationships, identities, and perspectives of the people involved are projected, reshaped and made legible to others' (2011: 48). PV 'shifts the perspective of who is the "expert" away from the researcher and towards the researched as those who hold the most knowledge about their own realities' (*ibid*.: 50). Facilitators use video activities to mediate group discussion inclusively, establish collaborative relationships and catalyse group action. Video production provides a powerful way for participants to explore their situation, and reflect on experiences together, in order to deepen understanding about reality and forge ways forward based on the knowledge that emerges (Shaw 2014).

6 View *The Bench*: www.refugeelawproject.org/component/allvideoshare/video/latest/the-bench.

7 View *Men Can Be Raped Too*: www.refugeelawproject.org/component/allvideoshare/video/latest/men-can-be-raped-too.

8  Pers. comm., 13 August 2015.
9  Pers. comm., communication by a member of MOHRAU, 12 August 2015.
10 The language that distinguishes the 'international researcher' from the 'local' one itself implies a hierarchy rather than a simple description of geographic location. For this reason, we use here the term 'North-based' rather than 'international' researchers.
11 In the lifetime of the RLP–IDS relationship there have been several instances in which participants from RLP have been blocked from participating in events at IDS (e.g. the Undressing Patriarchy symposium) due to failings on the part of the British authorities.
12 Pers. comm., communication by a member of MOHRAU, 12 August 2015.
13 Pers. comm., 14 August 2015.
14 Pers. comm., 14 August 2015.

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# Moving Beyond Co-Construction of Knowledge to Enable Self-Determination

**J. Marina Apgar, Tero Mustonen, Simone Lovera and Miguel Lovera**

**Abstract** It is increasingly recognised that co-construction of knowledge which brings together researcher-derived understanding, with local, practitioner or non-researcher understanding is necessary to address current global challenges. Emerging empirical evidence suggests challenges remain in bridging across scales and ensuring inclusion of the marginalised. It is unclear whether espoused approaches are in practice enhancing the wellbeing of those currently on the front lines of ecological, social and political crises, or, whether they are inadvertently increasing inequality. In this article, we explore co-construction from our experience as embedded researcher–practitioners through two case studies: the ecological restoration of fisheries by the Skolt Sámi in Finland, and the conservation of agro-ecological and forest management practices by peasant communities in Paraguay. We challenge the idea that co-construction of knowledge is sufficient to engage with regressive institutional and political dynamics that continue to marginalise, arguing for a focus on self-determination to be the foundation for co-construction.

**Keywords:** co-construction, marginalised, self-determination, indigenous knowledge.

> *tomorrow is a new day*
> *other animals*
> *I converse with the fire*
> *tomorrow*
> *it too will have another language*
> *new migration routes for tomorrow's reindeer*
> *the stones will have different traditions*
> *an alien time within time,*
> *alien*

Poem by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää from the North Sámi Society (Gaski 2003: 246). Reproduced here with kind permission.

## 1 Introduction

Addressing today's 'grand challenges' such as climate change and increasing inequality requires participatory and interactive approaches to research (Mauser *et al.* 2013; Hage, Leroy and Petersen 2010; Huntington 2011). At the heart of these approaches is a recognition that there are different ways of understanding and knowing the world, and a belief that bringing these together may provide more holistic responses which are better suited to addressing systemic challenges (Godemann 2008). A multitude of approaches to bridging knowledge exist, such as post-normal science (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1995), transdisciplinarity (Bergmann *et al.* 2012), sustainability science (Spangenberg 2011), Mode 2 (Gibbons 2000), and participatory action research (Reason and Bradbury 2008). While each develops its own nuanced perspective, they share co-construction as a common methodology. Here, we understand co-construction as a process through which different forms of knowledge that stem from different research disciplines (and their epistemologies) and non-researcher ways of understanding are brought to bear on real-life challenges linked to environmental sustainability. This approach moves beyond 'knowledge integration' models common in natural resource management (e.g. Bohensky and Maru 2011), and sits within broader approaches to adaptive co-management (Armitage *et al.* 2008) or co-governance (Kooiman *et al.* 2008) which call for sharing of power, equality and support for social learning.

Indigenous peoples comprise approximately 5 per cent of the world's population, yet they customarily own, occupy or use 22 per cent of the world's land surface and manage 11 per cent of the world's forests, making them important contributors to sustaining the world's remaining biodiversity (Maffi 2005; Maffi and Woodley 2012). Further, much of the world's agrobiodiversity is in the hands of peasants who produce a large proportion of the world's food through agro-ecological practices that provide a broad array of social and environmental benefits (IAASTD 2009; Altieri and Toledo 2011). In spite of a progressive international policy framework supporting their rights,[1] many of these rural communities remain politically marginalised (Coates 2003). They hold knowledge that can support improved environmental management, yet paradoxically, are at the front lines of environmental disruption. As the indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) argues, power relations that stem from colonial interactions continue to obscure and marginalise indigenous peoples' knowledge and practices. In such conditions, engagement of marginalised communities in co-construction initiatives form part of a broader project of decolonisation and social and environmental justice.

As Polk (2015) notes, most co-construction processes remain 'located' within research settings and Choudry and Kapor (2010) argue that the richness of knowledge production from within social movements tends to be overlooked by researchers. Our understanding of co-construction, therefore, tends to be limited to how research reaches out to 'other' forms of knowledge. Seldom, in scholarly circles, do we hear about the experience from the perspective of the 'others'. Our starting premise

in this article is that if research is to ignore the political processes of contestation that co-construction is embedded within, we run the risk that enthusiasm and well-meaning efforts to include the knowledge of local and indigenous communities may, unknowingly, be fuelling greater inequality.

Our aim is to share learning from experiences with co-construction driven by marginalised communities in response to their own goals. First, we provide a brief critical review of the history of bridging between indigenous and local and scientific knowledge, identifying risks and opportunities. We then share two case studies from current work with indigenous and peasant communities. We recognise that definitions of communities as 'indigenous' and 'peasant' are fraught with political and analytical conundrums of representation (Posey 2002). We have chosen to use the terms adopted by the people whose experiences we support and share because we firmly believe in their right to name themselves. We do not, however, claim to be representing their views. Our positionality as authors of this article is as locally embedded practitioners who are bridging to external research institutions, with two of the co-authors (TM and ML) working locally through longstanding relationships of trust, and two (MA and SL) supporting indigenous and peasant movements over several decades. We share learning from our experiences with: (i) ecological restoration of fisheries by the Skolt Sámi in Finland in collaboration with Snowchange Cooperative, and (ii) assessing the resilience of community conservation initiatives of peasant communities in Eastern Paraguay in collaboration with the Global Forest Coalition and the Center for Studies and Research of Rural Law and Agrarian Reform (CEIDRA) of the Catholic University of Asunción.

## 2 The risks of co-construction for indigenous knowledge

We use the term indigenous knowledge (IK) following Posey (2002: 27) who argues that it is an umbrella term that includes all forms of local and traditional knowledge. Anthropologists have shown that IK is situated in institutions and social practices, that it is fluid, and constantly engaging with processes of representation and power (Raffles 2003; Agrawal 1995, 2002). Co-construction processes that work with researcher-derived knowledge and IK are, from this perspective, implicitly embedded within the political struggles of indigenous peoples and peasant communities (e.g. Bryan 2009; Turnbull 2009). Environmental management, however, has historically taken a more instrumental view of IK, with researchers and practitioners seeking to use it to fill gaps or validate scientific knowledge to improve the way natural resources are managed (e.g. Johannes 1993; Huntington 2000). The general trend has been to seek to 'integrate' IK into externally derived models in ways that are seemingly unaware of the politics within which knowledge is created, contested, negotiated and promoted.

More recently, the advent of relational and dynamic approaches of managing 'social-ecological systems' (Berkes 2012) has created more space for all knowledge, including IK, to be recognised as embedded

in social and cultural institutions and practices that enable more sustainable resource management. This is echoed in sustainability approaches, where we see a growing appreciation that co-construction processes are not isolated experiences of knowledge exchange, but are embedded within institutional and societal dynamics (e.g. van Kerkhoff and Lebel 2015; Polk 2015). Particularly in progressive and wealthier national contexts such as North America, New Zealand and Australia, co-construction has now been codified within processes that espouse co-management, described as 'the sharing of power and responsibility between government and local resource users' (Berkes 2009: 1). These approaches create a window of opportunity for co-construction to become a vehicle for sharing power with marginalised groups.

In practice, however, the success of co-management is still measured by the extent to which there is formal recognition of IK, with little analysis of how this recognition affects broader community processes of self-determination. As Nadasdy (2003), for example, shows for the Kluane First Nation in Canada, formal recognition of IK in a shared governance arrangement led to their knowledge becoming subject to a bureaucratic process based on government set measures. As a result, a range of external governance mechanisms replaced traditional practices on the land (such as hunting) that were necessary to reproduce knowledge. The formalisation of IK for the purpose of joint governance, therefore, can potentially lead to co-option and assimilation, putting at risk cultural and social practices including embedded leadership and engagement with the land (Apgar 2010; Apgar, Argumedo and Allen 2009; Lehtinen and Mustonen 2013) which are central to the creation and use of IK. Co-management approaches, therefore, may have moved conceptually towards understanding social dimensions, but they still struggle to overcome the inherent inequality between researchers and communities (e.g. Cinner *et al.* 2012).

In poorer contexts, co-management is even more challenged to overcome marked power relations between 'implementers of co-management' and local communities and often leads to further marginalisation (Béné and Neiland 2004; Wilson *et al.* 2006). As Altamirano-Jiménez (2013) argues, IK is, in many contexts, only embraced when not perceived as a threat to imposed development models. In situations where formal rights of communities are not recognised, co-construction and co-governance approaches are inherently threatening. As others have argued (e.g. Wohling 2009) the disparate power relations that often exist between researchers or managers pushing their models and knowledge on to 'other', and usually poor communities, can perpetuate their marginalisation further.

In summary, instrumental approaches to engaging with IK in environmental management fail to appreciate the broader political and social processes within which knowledge is created and contested. Yet even with co-management and transdisciplinary approaches that move beyond the technical, challenges remain in ensuring quality engagement

across multiple stakeholders, that is contextually embedded and that ensures equity and inclusion of the marginalised (Lebel, Wattana and Talerngsri 2015; Bowen *et al.* 2015). Evidence suggests that it is necessary, but not sufficient, to espouse equality if researchers are aiming to minimise the risk that marginalised communities face through engaging in co-construction. Given these ongoing challenges, how can researchers and marginalised communities negotiate their way through the messy contestations that are inherent in co-construction processes?

### 3 Case studies
### Ecological restoration of the Näätämö River, Finland

Fishing in the fresh waters of Northern Eurasia has been the defining activity that has allowed indigenous communities of the region to survive historically through harsh winters and short summers, with early records of fishing nets dating back 10,000 years (Mustonen and Mustonen 2011). Specifically, the Näätämö watershed in the Finnish–Norwegian borderlands is a major Atlantic salmon stream (Feodoroff and Mustonen 2013) with a wide diversity of fish species (Niemelä *et al.* 2001). Today it is the home of the Skolt Sámi indigenous peoples, most of whom live in the community of Sevettijärvi, Finland. The Skolt Sámi, often referred to as the most traditional of the Sámi indigenous nations, were forced to relocate to this area from their former homelands in present-day Russia in 1944, in the aftermath of the Second World War. They have rebuilt their traditional economies of reindeer herding, hunting and fishing in this new homeland and have, through time, resisted assimilation into European ways of life. Their practices are embedded in the distinct ways in which all indigenous societies of the Arctic understand and engage with time–space which is markedly different to linear scientific environmental management models.

For the indigenous peoples of the Arctic, the driver of life and society is constant change. Most change is a welcome and natural cycle of life. Time, space and engagement with place is understood by the Sámi as circular, and hunting, fishing and other subsistence activities act as means of communication, exchange and relationship building with the tundra and taiga, and through them with the universe. The community thus maintains relationships and reciprocities with natural systems through their everyday engagement. A central component of this engagement are 'events'. An 'event' is often interpreted as embedded in its immediate geographical surroundings, but also in the mythical–spiritual deeper layers of mind and memory. Thus, an 'event' can be understood in multiple ways. It may contain links to mythical times, which are passed down as oral narratives and histories or exist simultaneously in the present and in myth–time. If it involves significant animals, such as the raven, a bird of knowledge, creator and trickster in Arctic societies, it is highly significant. Some places may also represent 'events' and can embody dual or multiple beings too; for example, sacred places such as grave sites or those containing stones or trees. Elders and spiritual people in the communities guide the community to form relationships with and build meaning through an 'event', which

symbolises the reciprocal and deep connection between the Sámi and their traditional lands. The embedded experience of life on the land is, therefore, central to Sámi IK.

Today, management of the Näätämö salmon fishery is part of the Atlantic salmon management bilateral agreement between Finland and Norway. In 1973, Finland re-confirmed the responsibilities the state inherited from Russia towards the recognition of Sámi rights as enshrined in the Skolt Act of Finland. It provides for user rights for 'traditional lifeways' of herding, fisheries and hunting, but in practice has been poorly implemented. In spite of recent attempts by the states of Finland and Norway to converse with different Sámi nations on questions of cultural, linguistic and land rights, the Eastern Sámi peoples feel that their cyclical and non-linear views of the world have not been adequately included in the management of natural resources. They argue that this has, in part, led to the demise of the ecosystems, and is consequently threatening their way of life (Skolt Sámi Nation and Snowchange Cooperative 2011).

In response, the Skolt Sámi engaged in a community-based initiative to understand the status of, and ecologically restore, damaged parts of the Näätämö basin. The initiative was supported by the Snowchange Cooperative. Beginning in 2011, it is the first attempt at a formal process of co-management through co-construction of IK and science in Finland. It aimed to respond to the negative impacts of climate change, and the need to address past ecological damages. All activities were designed and prioritised by the Skolt Sámi themselves and the initiative was co-managed by Snowchange and Skolt leaders. Snowchange has pioneered alternative approaches to the established Sámi Studies (Smith 1999), advocating for Sámi as agents and co-researchers in the Artic climate change assessments (Arctic Council 2005). This follows the idea that the community in question decides, steers and guides the research, while research and cultural organisations such as Snowchange provide a 'bridge' between the world of peer-reviewed science and IK. The transdisciplinary team built for this initiative included geographers, limnologists, biologists and social scientists, all selected based on their openness to experiment with new approaches. The relationships of trust that were built through the bridging of Snowchange meant that day-to-day exchanges between community members and researchers tended to be welcoming and informal.

Co-construction was facilitated through bringing IK and science into a joint process of understanding ecosystem changes and relating them to livelihoods strategies. The initiative started with rigorous baseline work which included preparation of the Eastern Sámi Atlas (Mustonen and Mustonen 2011) containing information of indigenous governance of water bodies practised prior to large-scale colonial presence. Local fishermen and women added to this through conducting interviews in their Skolt language about the salmon, place names and past environmental change, helping to record traditional knowledge (Feodoroff and Mustonen 2013). Building on the historical baseline,

local fishermen and women then led environmental monitoring of the watershed in 2013 and 2014.

During the summer field season, they recorded their observations with digital cameras, and shared them with the science team, developing a new field method called 'visual-optic histories' (see Mustonen 2015). The method led to detection of new species arriving in the ecosystem. For example, the appearance of the southern *Potosia cuprea* scarabaeid beetle was first interpreted as a significant 'event' in the Skolt world and was documented through oral history. Field photographs and observations by the Skolts were combined with a species identification by an insect specialist confirming a new geographical discovery. Observations of water level and temperature fluctuations linked to salmon movement patterns and changes in water quality such as algae blooms and foam, were also co-constructed through sharing local monitoring data with limnological data publicly available for the basin.

During the Atlantic salmon fishing season, Skolts kept records of their catches. Catch statistics were then compared with the scientific surveys of the amounts and qualities of salmon swimming up the river. The Skolt records, for example, noted an expansion of the range of the northern pike to stream sections of the river close to lake Opukasjärvi, an observation science records had not yet detected, but could help interpret in relation to the warming waters. They also recorded 'lost' salmon-spawning areas on maps. These sites had been lost due to state-sponsored land management actions, mainly for forestry experiments in the 1960s and 1970s as well as establishment of new boating routes. The documentation of sites of erosion on lake and river banks, a sign of potential climate change impact, were crucial for informing ecological restoration activities.

For the Skolt Sámi, seeing their language and culture valued led to an increase in self-esteem and sense of power over their resources. The process has resulted in Sámi knowledge revitalisation through establishing a community-based traditional knowledge archive to serve both the community and future research. Further, monitoring using IK has led to new joint management options and actions for the watershed. For example, the range expansion of the pike has led to decisions to adapt cultural harvests. While co-management has not yet been formalised, national institutions such as Metsähallitus,[2] the local Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, and municipalities are interested in learning about new management options through a Skolt research agreement. The aim over the next few years is to build a formal co-management and ecological restoration programme.

The Näätämö case demonstrates that when communities are the main driving force in co-construction, science-relevant local observations can stimulate indigenous culture, land use and practices, and can lead to ecological restoration. In turn, this can support efforts to build resilience to threats such as climate change. The experience argues for

starting with local concerns, ensuring they remain central, and enabling local leadership. Importantly, as the initiative was under Sámi control, fishermen and women and reindeer herders could implement their monitoring through continuing to engage with cyclical nature and continuing to reproduce their IK.

In this case, the historically undefined role of IK in the Finnish context, and non-interference of state agencies in the co-construction experiment meant that a safe space could be created by a bridging activist–research organisation that had established relationships of trust. In this space, the Sámi could conceptualise and demonstrate their needs, interests and depth of their IK as it relates to being embedded on the land and connected to the universe. So while the immediate goal for the use of IK was to instrumentally help build understanding by bridging it with science, the process, starting with a community need and Sámi leadership, meant that their self-determination was never at risk. This first experience of co-construction within a framing of co-management in Finland has created a powerful baseline for future discussions of Sámi knowledge of aquatic ecosystems and ecological restoration.

The Näätämö case opened up an opportunity to challenge the false narratives of 'wilderness' which state agencies hold of Skolt space as a 'pristine' undisturbed nature to reframe engagement as restoration. However, the case remains a relatively isolated success story within Finland. Ironically, the timing of this work has coincided with legislative reforms that have further eroded opportunities for sharing power. The 2013 strategy for the Arctic region (Prime Minister's Office 2013) focuses on building infrastructure, extraction of natural resources and use of science-based monitoring targets, ignoring the presence of Sámi knowledge and lifeworlds. Simultaneously, the contested question of Sámi rights remains unresolved. In this hostile political environment, the Sámi must necessarily engage cautiously with formal co-management processes to ensure that they protect their non-assimilationist IK.

**Rescuing agro-ecological and forest restoration knowledge in Paraguay**
The Community Conservation Resilience Initiative (CCRI) is an international initiative that began in 2015 and is led jointly by the Global Forest Coalition (GFC) and a broad coalition of indigenous peoples' organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on socially just forest policies. It builds on the now well-recognised role that IK and community governance processes play in supporting forest conservation in many parts of the world (Agrawal 2007; Robinson, Holland and Naughton-Treves 2014). The initiative aims to promote respect and support for community conservation and contribute to building resilience through implementation of community-driven participatory assessments of community conservation. Through co-constructed understanding of the strengths and opportunities for building resilience, results from 22 countries, involving over 60 different communities, will provide IK-informed policy recommendations for forest policies nationally and

globally. In each site the process is facilitated by bridging organisations (either NGOs or social movements) with established relationships with communities, and a team of local and external academics and practitioners support the process. Here we share our learning from one of the early assessment processes in Eastern Paraguay.

The Paraguayan territory is highly biodiverse (Cartes and Yanosky 2003) and is located in one of the centres of origin of cultivated plants in Latin America (Lovera 1991). Its rich agrobiodiversity has been nurtured historically through traditional agricultural practices. Paraguayan farmers today supply up to 60 per cent of the national food demand yet occupy only up to 8 per cent of the agricultural land (Lovera 2014). This is possible due to their agro-ecological and traditional farming practices which are based on working with crops that are adapted to local soil conditions, water availability, and conditions of competition with other living beings. Their agro-ecological practices are themselves a form of knowledge co-construction as they blend IK with new agricultural tools. Soil management, water and competition between living beings are seen as contributing factors in an agro-ecological production system. This is in contrast to 'conventional' agriculture, which transforms the conditions of the soil, uses pesticides, manipulates seeds and animal breeds, introduces transgenic crops and eliminates plants and animals not considered useful (Lovera 1998). Such 'conventional' agricultural models are today causing widespread deforestation in Paraguay due to industrial scale export-oriented agricultural production of genetically modified soybeans and beef. While there is a broad policy framework in place to protect biodiversity, guarantee and promote access to land for smallholder farmers, and restrict the abuses associated with industrial-scale production, corruption and corporate interests ensure that it is largely unimplemented (Fogel and Riquelme 2005).

In Eastern Paraguay (39 per cent of the total area of the country), much of the forest cover has now been replaced by cattle farming and industrial scale agriculture. The CCRI assessment was conducted in two traditional peasant communities that are trying to maintain their agro-ecological practices in this challenging context of expanding conventional agriculture linked to national corporate interests. The community of San Miguel Lote 8, in the district of Minga Pora, Department of Alto Paraná and the community of Maracanã in the district of Curuguaty, Department of Canindeyú, share the experience of being forced to leave their original homelands and have resettled in their current locations. San Miguel was founded in 1989 by 250 families and currently occupies 500ha, with half taken up by the community of 700 people, and the rest having been converted to monoculture soy plantations. Maracanã is much larger and 2,000 people occupy 23,000ha, which has been divided equally between all settlers. Some families have obtained a formal land title, but a large part remains the property of the Paraguayan Land Reform agency. Both communities have historically made claims and had to fight for their right to land.

Their knowledge and experience with conservation of agrobiodiversity has not previously been documented or analysed in a way that could support lobbying policymakers using 'evidence' produced through a co-constructed research process.

The assessment was implemented by both communities in 2015 and facilitated by CEIDRA in collaboration with the social movement Namoseke Monsanto.[3] CEIDRA has, over many years of work with peasant communities in Paraguay, shifted away from disciplinary research that engaged minimally with IK, to using approaches with peasant communities that build on their knowledge through co-ownership of the research process and the resulting outputs. Researchers at CEIDRA shifted their approach through their ongoing dialogue with communities over decades, realising together that co-constructed knowledge is better able to meet the needs and support the wellbeing of the most marginalised communities in Paraguay. Nonetheless, at the outset of the CCRI assessment process, some community members expected that the facilitation team would deliver solutions to what they understood as 'new problems' generated through shifting agricultural patterns. The facilitation team worked with community members to adapt the CCRI assessment methodology[4] following its five guiding principles: (i) respect for the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including their right to free, prior and informed consent; (ii) community ownership; (iii) adaptive facilitation; (iv) participation and representation, and (v) effective participation of women and the incorporation of a gender analysis in each of the assessments. Further, the partnership with Namoseke Monsanto, an activist organisation whose goals align with community concerns around 'conventional' agriculture, created the conditions for the assessment to be led by their IK.

The assessment enabled communities to produce evidence of the diversity of species that are maintained in the forests and the conservation and restoration initiatives under way locally through use of their agro-ecological practices. The process also produced evidence of the agrobiodiversity which is conserved through farming of crops and animal raising. The nutritional status of the community was reported as good, providing some local evidence of the importance of agrobiodiversity through seed conservation and traditional exchange systems for sustaining their own food production and food sovereignty.

The results also highlighted, from the perspective of the communities, that a major external threat to their farming practices is the low market prices for their products. The lack of prospects for sustainable income from farming is leading to young people leaving the village in search of poorly remunerated labour in urban centres. Migration of youth was therefore identified as one of the main internal threats to their resilience. Other external threats identified include the use of herbicides and other agrotoxins in the expanding soy plantations fuelling deforestation. In Maracanã, pressure on people to sell or rent their land to large

neighbouring landholders farming soy was a related threat. Further, analysis of community resilience in light of broader policy change pointed to the national agricultural policy, which favours the expansion of soy monocultures, as a central threat to conservation of biodiversity.

While the results of the CCRI assessment process by peasant communities in Paraguay may not seem surprising, they fill a critical gap in evidence of the role that IK, embedded within co-constructed agro-ecological practices, plays in supporting food production and biodiversity conservation. Further, they show that the resilience of conservation practices and their associated knowledge is severely undermined by the expansion of agro-industrial practices that are primarily triggered by increased meat consumption and production, including in intensive livestock production systems that use significant amounts of soy as feedstock. This finding sheds light on the false assumptions of 'co-existence' between agro-ecology and forest conservation practices and large-scale agro-industrial practices used to frame national agricultural policy. The resulting empirical evidence strengthens campaigns of social movements and researcher activities within them, arguing for community forest governance and land reform policies that grant peasant communities the right to secure land tenure as necessary to support conservation of Paraguay's biodiversity.

## 4 Lessons for researcher–practitioners

The two case studies provide three lessons for researchers engaged in the practice of co-construction with marginalised communities. First, they provide evidence that understanding and engaging with IK as embedded within social, cultural and institutional practices related to territory, indigenous worldviews and identity, enables instrumental problem-solving approaches to be embedded within normative approaches seeking social and environmental justice. In both cases, communities perceived co-construction as an opportunity to tackle the complex challenges they face relating to environmental degradation, *as well as* an opportunity to build on political struggles for their rights. By bringing seemingly contradictory approaches to working with IK together, marginalised communities may be able to build confidence in their ability to find viable solutions to their own challenges as central to their self-determination and build a platform from which they may contribute to addressing 'grand challenges'. In both cases the most important outcome for the communities came as a result of their knowledge being valued in its own right. Co-construction, therefore, was a means to achieving a community-defined end.

Second, both cases illustrate that contextualised methods for co-construction need to be cognisant of local dynamics and adapted accordingly. The Näätämö watershed case in Finland was a new co-management project in the Finnish context, building on other experiences in the Arctic and aiming to avoid the risk of co-option of IK into a rigid and externally defined model. Sophisticated bridging of epistemologies at the local level led to methodological innovation

(visual-optic histories) which emerged through creatively finding new mediums to translate and link ancient wisdom to scientific data and understanding. This is an example of eclectic methodological pluralism (see Chambers 2015) emerging through practice. Yet, it was possible to avoid assimilation, in part, because in this context, indigenous worldviews operate in undefined spaces which are difficult to co-opt (Mustonen and Mustonen 2016). Land-based economies such as fisheries and reindeer herding, some of which are unbroken nomadic systems, are part of non-conforming cultural continuums dating back to the post-Ice Age era. The lack of recognition of the Skolt Sámi knowledge system meant they could work safely from their ontological reality. In this case, the lack of formal recognition of Sámi knowledge was an advantage.

In contrast, for Paraguayan peasants, a lack of formal recognition of rights to land undermines the contribution of IK to the conservation of agrobiodiversity, and as a result puts their livelihoods and wellbeing at risk. In the context of national policies supporting large companies to expand their conventional agriculture, the lack of recognition of land rights means peasant movements do not have a seat at the table and their knowledge about genetic resources for food and agriculture and agro-ecological practices is being overlooked in both formal agricultural science and related policy processes. In this context, recognition of IK was the first step in their process of building local resilience and required a more instrumental approach to working with IK. The aim was to first build evidence to support campaigns for inclusion in national and international policy processes – arguing that IK is playing a central role in biodiversity conservation.

The third lesson concerns the role that bridging organisations and researchers often play in working with instrumental and normative approaches to co-construction, and their ability to bring them together to support meaningful change. Knowledge production is a social process embedded in power dynamics, and the epistemological differences between types of knowledge mean co-construction is inherently full of contestation. This is not to argue that researchers are bridging across binary knowledges, but rather, it is about meaningfully navigating the interactions between fluid, embedded and intimate knowledges. Through the case studies, we have shared our experience as engaged researchers playing a facilitating role in the messy processes of co-construction. In Finland, Snowchange has a history of playing the researcher–activist–implementer role successfully, and could therefore forge partnerships with researchers who were willing and able to engage ethically. Likewise, in Paraguay, the coalition of organisations involved, spanning engaged researcher and activist realms meant that strong links to communities existed and trust could be built. In both cases, part of our role was also to build networks across localities and strengthen evidence across sites (a cornerstone of both CCRI and Snowchange), to feed in to national and international policy processes. While working locally helps to co-construct understanding for addressing manifestations of change locally and building resilience, in isolation, it cannot support the systemic

shifts required in policy and practice that can continue to undermine local resilience. In Finland, government policies to exploit the 'wild' Arctic region of the country can undermine the progress made, and in Paraguay, government policies that facilitate deforestation through monoculture plantations continue to threaten the resilience of local communities. The bridging and facilitating role across scales, therefore, enables engagement with broader political and social processes required to support local self-determination of marginalised communities.

We do not wish to suggest that playing an engaged facilitation role is simple, or indeed comfortable for all researchers at all times. In Paraguay, facilitators had to manage expectations of communities and purposefully build their confidence in the leading role that IK could play in the assessment process, while in Finland, understanding of internal community dynamics through years of interaction helped to mediate any tensions that emerged. In both cases, we found ourselves acting as guardians of various forms of knowledge and were simultaneously gatekeepers and brokers. We took our central guidance from community mechanisms that mediate our engagement, and which exist to address potential negative impacts of the 'gatekeeper' at its worst. We suggest, that when the starting point is rooted in local needs, and the supporting partnerships are cognisant of their facilitating and mediating role, then tensions can be negotiated, and co-construction can indeed become a means to support self-determination.

## 5 Recommendations

Enthusiasm for more interactive and participatory approaches to research that co-construct understanding through bridging different knowledge systems creates opportunity for greater inclusion of the marginalised in analysing and addressing complex development challenges, particularly those affecting them directly. We have shown that from the perspective of the communities, the promise becomes a reality when their knowledge systems are understood through their own worldviews and lifeways. We recommend an approach of 'mediated relativity' in line with Purcell and Onjoro's (2002: 171) view of 'accepting the intensified process of cultural hybridisation as a given, but at the same time, underscore the right of indigenous peoples to the highest level of self-determination consistent with community viability under global conditions at any time'. What is centrally important, therefore, is that the territories, knowledge and rights of indigenous and local communities and the restoration of past ecological damages be explicitly acknowledged when mediating co-construction processes.

For researchers using co-construction methodologies in research that aim to have development impact, this constitutes both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity lies in bringing to life the nuanced and contested understanding of knowledge and the power dynamics that they are inherently part of, to facilitate the questioning of underlying assumptions on how research is constructed. This is not to suggest that all researchers should necessarily become political activists but, rather,

that when engaging in messy real-life challenges with communities whose livelihoods are threatened, being blind to politics and power is not sufficient and is unethical. Indeed, at times external agents aiming to support the wellbeing of marginalised communities must let go of their own intentions and respect that communities themselves should determine the levels and ways of engagement in co-construction. At times, this may mean respecting that non-engagement is the chosen path. We argue that the progressive international policies that protect the rights of the marginalised, with associated codes of conduct, such as free, prior and informed consent, should be an explicit part of reflexive, ethical research practice if co-construction is to support the self-determination of marginalised peoples.

**Notes**

1  For example, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security, among others.
2  Metsähallitus is the forest state enterprise of Finland, which manages and 'owns' all public and conserved lands in Finland. It is the primary land manager in the Skolt Sámi area.
3  A network of peasant movements, research centres, indigenous peoples' movements, NGOs and other civil society organisations that have mobilised against what they call the 'sojasation' of the countryside by companies such as Monsanto.
4  See http://globalforestcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/New-Last-CCR-Initiative-methodology_May-2014.pdf for the methodology.

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# Learning about 'Engaged Excellence' across a Transformative Knowledge Network

**Adrian Ely and Anabel Marin**[*]

**Abstract** The 'Pathways' transformative knowledge network is an international group of research organisations, collaborating to explore processes of social transformation and to share insights across disciplines, cultures and contexts. Working across the domains of food, energy and water, the network is experimenting with new methods of research and engagement that both help to understand – and contribute to – transformations to sustainability. This article outlines some of the early experiences of two hubs in the network (UK and Argentina) and reflects on the lessons learned for 'engaged excellence'. It also describes how approaches to transdisciplinary research (building on a diversity of academic and non-academic traditions) vary across different contexts, and how wider lessons in this regard will be shared across the consortium into the future.

**Keywords:** engaged excellence, transdisciplinary research, Argentina, UK, seeds, agriculture.

## 1 Introduction
The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda requires new forms of innovation that combine social and technological change, and research that is capable of understanding and fostering such change across nested and interlinked systems. This article introduces the early experiences of the 'Pathways' transformative knowledge network – one of the activities of the Pathways to Sustainability Global Consortium (http://steps-centre.org/about/global/) – that aims to respond to these requirements. It discusses how the network draws upon insights from various traditions in science and technology studies, development studies and innovation studies to appreciate and contribute to transformative social–technological–environmental change in different country contexts. It points to the value of such international collaborations for learning from the knowledge and literatures from regions in the global South, and adopting a flexible approach to transdisciplinary methods as they are applied in different contexts. The article then reflects on how this ongoing research articulates with

ambitions for 'engaged excellence' and how this might be organised and operationalised across a diverse international network.

## 2 Transformative pathways to sustainability

Researchers have – for decades – recognised that the urgency and scale of sustainability challenges requires *systemic* changes (Schot, Brand and Fischer 1997; Elzen, Geels and Green 2004) across society, rather than merely individual technological innovations or eco-efficiency. The universality and interconnectedness of the SDGs (Nilsson, Griggs and Visbeck 2016) means that this realisation is even more profound, and requires approaches that can also bridge notions of sustainable development from global to local levels (Steffen *et al.* 2015; Leach *et al.* 2012). Numerous traditions in the international literature have tried to address these challenges; however, in the interests of brevity we will focus on those we have drawn upon most strongly, beginning with the pathways approach (Leach, Scoones and Stirling 2010).

A pathway is defined as 'the particular directions in which interacting social, technological and environmental systems and their contexts co-evolve over time' (Leach *et al.* 2010). The pathways approach has been used to understand how power can shape knowledge about those systems and how this can influence the direction of change. The role that technological innovation and social change has played in these processes has been studied with respect to energy (Byrne *et al.* 2014), agri-food (Marin and van Zwanenberg 2015) as well as across these (Cavicchi and Ely 2016) and other domains. Drawing attention to alternative pathways (and their associated knowledges) rather than continuing to focus on dominant, locked-in pathways has delivered novel insights and opened up policy debates to options which may offer environmental and social benefits. For example, work in East Africa has drawn attention to different farmers' perspectives around nine possible alternative pathways (associated, for example, with high value crops, alternative staples and locally improved seed), opening up the dominant focus on improved varieties and maize productivity in food security debates (Brooks *et al.* 2009).

Scholarly approaches to understanding such processes of social transformation date back at least as far as Polanyi (1944), whose ideas of (double) movements and fictitious commodities have since been taken forward by writers such as Fraser (2014) in explaining contemporary ecological, social and financial crises. The more recent literature on socio-technical transitions (Elzen *et al.* 2004; Grin, Rotmans and Schot 2010) has provided a wealth of historical analysis on systemic changes that have occurred over the past two centuries, and offered approaches to influencing such processes through transition management. For example, Kern and Howlett (2009) have investigated how different policy instruments (taxation, voluntary certification schemes, information instruments, subsidies, etc and mixes thereof) have been applied to drive change in the Dutch energy system. Under such perspectives and depending on the stage of the transition, the role of

government is seen as a plural one of facilitator, stimulator, controller or director (Kemp and Rotmans 2005). In comparison to such 'controlled' transitions, Stirling points to transformations as 'more plural, emergent and unruly political re-alignments, involving social and technological innovations driven by diversely incommensurable knowledges, challenging incumbent structures and pursuing contending (even unknown) ends' (Stirling 2015: 1). Under this perspective, the role of government is less central, and greater agency (sometimes in adversarial relations with government) is attributed to civil society.

These various concepts can help us not only to understand transformative social–technological–environmental change as it has unfolded in the past, but also how they inform work of transdisciplinary scholars working in different contexts towards the 2030 Agenda. In such a complex sphere, moving from analysis to action means not only identifying (and supporting) alternative pathways, but also challenging incumbency (and the structures with which it is entangled) in contexts where power relations are often highly skewed in favour of unsustainable production and consumption. This may be possible where effective coalitions and alliances are formed (Schmitz 2015), where pressure is exerted 'from below' through social movements (Leach and Scoones 2015), through galvanisation of grass-roots innovation networks (Smith and Ely 2015), through state–business alliances forged around progressive agendas (Mazzucato 2013) or via political pressure through parties, elections and wider democratic forces. But it raises difficult and fundamental questions for networks embedded primarily within academic research organisations.

In seeking transformative pathways, in which directions are potentially unknown (or at least uncertain) but normative commitments are shared, the role of transdisciplinary research becomes one of fostering, supporting or reconfiguring such coalitions and alliances, and working with them to co-construct and mobilise impact-oriented evidence. The aim here is system innovation (with innovation seen as emerging from the recombination of different resources, including knowledge, in new ways, as per Schumpeter 1934). The next section introduces the approach that is beginning to be adopted by the 'Pathways' transformative knowledge network.

### 3 The 'Pathways' transformative knowledge network

The Transformations to Sustainability programme is coordinated by the International Social Science Council and funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), and represents a contribution to Future Earth.[1] Alongside two others, the programme is supporting the 'Pathways' transformative knowledge network (full title 'Transformative Pathways to Sustainability: Learning across Disciplines, Contexts and Cultures'). The network launched in April 2016 with an inception workshop hosted by the Centre for Research on Transformation (CENIT, Argentina), one of the lead institutions (with the STEPS Centre, UK) in the network. Prior to this, seed funding had already allowed these and other hubs (the African Centre for Technology Studies in Kenya, Jawaharlal Nehru University in India,

Beijing Normal University in China and Arizona State University in the USA) to convene co-design workshops that identified sustainability challenges and shared research priorities amongst knowledge partners convened by each hub. This co-design component, built upon established relationships of research and policy engagement, builds on long traditions of development studies in the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), from where much of the literature on participatory research has emerged (Chambers 2014; Participate 2015) but also science policy and innovation studies (Martin 2012); for example, the role of multiple actors in the production of 'Mode 2' knowledge (Gibbons *et al.* 1994). The growing literature in science and technology studies (STS) (Jasanoff *et al.* 1995; Hackett *et al.* 2007) greatly enhanced our understanding of the social and political dimensions of science and technology, and contributed to more sophisticated notions of engagement and coproduction (Jasanoff 1996; Mauser *et al.* 2013).

Similar scholarly debates took place in Latin America starting in the 1970s and 1980s about what might now be called sustainability or sustainable development. These called for new forms of knowledge requiring broader participation in research and policy processes, which offered novel trajectories of socio-technical change that better responded to local priorities, problems and circumstances (Herrera 1979; Sunkel and Gligo 1981). Concurrent debates that point to the role of science–society interactions and collaboration in India (see e.g. Krishna 2001; Abrol 2005), China (Li, Qi and Xu 2009), and sub-Saharan Africa (Mamdani and Diouf 1994; Urama *et al.* 2010) have all pointed towards ideas that resonate with the 'engaged excellence' agenda (Oswald, Gaventa and Leach, this *IDS Bulletin*), but the real potential for learning from experiences across these different regions has not been realised. Our network attempts to contribute by adopting a consistent but flexible approach across the six regional hubs.

In each hub locality, transformations (processes of deep systemic change) are already ongoing – understood as centred on technologies, market incentives, state-led support or citizen mobilisation (Scoones, Leach and Newell 2015). We aim to further elucidate these processes and – through strategic use of social science research and evidence – help to steer them in more environmentally-sustainable and socially just directions. We will draw on and further develop concepts around social innovation labs (Westley and Laban 2015) to run 'transformation labs' (or T-labs, first experimented with at the Transformations 2015 conference in Stockholm). These will convene different system actors with different resources (e.g. social capital, networks, skills, technical expertise), to provide a safe space in which we try to support novel recombinations and therefore 'bridging innovations' that can contribute to transformative pathways. The selection of actors has been informed by considerations related to 'transformative agency' (Westley *et al.* 2013) but has also been driven by existing partnerships, trust relationships and windows of opportunity in each context. The reasons for these selections in each case have been recorded as part of the research and reflection process.

Beyond two specific events that will punctuate the project in years one and two, the T-labs constitute a multi-stakeholder community of continuous interaction and engagement with the transformative knowledge network hub. Analysis of these engagement processes, and monitoring change over the coming three years will draw on social science literature on the politics and governance of transition processes (Smith, Stirling and Berkhout 2005), the role of knowledge in wider policy processes (Keeley and Scoones 2003), understanding networks and leadership in transformations (Olsson *et al.* 2006) and how different forms of innovations and policy regimes can combine to produce positive and negative outcomes (Ely *et al.* 2013; Fressoli *et al.* 2014). Findings will be shared and discussed throughout the project via a virtual platform offering:

- A document repository for internal and external reports, outputs and for other literature (academic or otherwise) that can support analysis and comparison of the processes occurring in each hub;

- A site for peer review (e.g. of T-lab designs, on the basis of templates shared in advance) and discussion fora, offering opportunities for continuous exchange of ideas and experiences between the different hubs;

- Real-time drafting for the production of co-learning blogs (which will highlight insights emerging from comparisons and collaborative work, facilitated by research exchanges between paired hubs in the network).

Through such a structured process for learning from different disciplines, cultures and contexts across the network, we hope to document and analyse the activities and findings in each region and to strategically enhance our abilities to engage in these systemic changes into the future. In so doing, the network is designed to learn about the concept of 'engaged excellence', at the same time as seeking to practise it.

## 4 Entry points and opportunities to engage in systemic change

The challenges identified in the hubs are diverse, but fall within the three areas of agriculture and food systems (UK and Argentina), low-carbon energy transitions that serve the needs of the poor (Kenya, China) and sustainable cities (India, USA). For the purposes of this article, we focus on the area of agri-food systems and the activities in the UK and Argentinean hubs. In each case, we have adopted different entry points to engage with the wider (global) agri-food system. These have been defined through co-design workshops which will frame the research and engagement processes going forward. We briefly outline these differences below.

### 4.1 Transformations towards a sustainable agri-food system in Brighton and Hove (UK)

The UK team have started (locally-bounded) work on a project to help foster a sustainable agri-food system in Brighton and Hove (a city region in the south of England with a population of approximately 300,000), recognising links to the national, European and international levels.

Building on established relationships between researchers and knowledge partners, the co-design workshop convened academics, representatives of local firms (local horticultural producers), growers from a community food initiative and civil society organisations (a city-wide food partnership, a permaculture organisation and a national family-farm advocacy group). Whilst the scale at which these groups worked differed, their interests were largely aligned around the desirability of more environmentally benign agriculture, and more localised production and consumption.

The half-day workshop was structured so as to learn about the ongoing activities of the different groups, to compare their perspectives on the challenge identified and to identify a specific area of research and engagement that could potentially contribute to transformations. The workshop was convened and facilitated by researchers, but attempts were made to limit the prevailing research (and other dominant) voices by splitting into smaller groups and then feeding back individually to the plenary. During the co-design workshop, the group identified the role of medium-sized (family) farmers as bridging some of the benefits of the micro-scale (e.g. health, education, rehabilitation strengths of the community-growing niche) (White and Stirling 2013) with the ability to overcome constraints that urban agriculture faces in supplying cities' demands for vegetables and wider food security (Martellozzo *et al.* 2014). This was seen as an important but little-understood group within the food system, and one for which there was scope for increased support, either by policy or civil society actors. The discussions identified surveys or interviews with small to medium-sized farmers around the city as an appropriate research approach, and the context and discussions were written up and circulated to all participants for comment, prior to publication (STEPS Centre 2015). The focus also raised questions about access and ownership of resources (e.g. land, genetic resources in seed, etc) to enable sustainable food production at sufficient scale.

The co-design workshop identified knowledge gaps around such farmers' growing patterns (especially innovative approaches to agro-ecological farming), and also around new business models that were enabling smaller-scale growers to compete as niches in relation to the dominant agri-food pathways characterised by large farms and vertically-integrated supermarket retail. These included farmdrop or box schemes, as well as a growing number of specialist retailers and restaurants serving the market for locally-produced, sustainable food in the city. Research into these issues could provide useful evidence to policymakers at local and national levels, but also facilitate engagement with growers and other actors in the supply chain to build legitimacy and momentum for the envisaged transformation. The outputs of the co-design workshop were written up in a concept note that scoped out possible strategies for research and coproduction (STEPS Centre 2015).

Building on other work conducted by members of the project team, interviews will initially focus on agro-ecological farmers identified in the area surrounding Brighton and Hove, investigating the policy drivers

and constraints for agro-ecological production and supply, current practices and how actors across the city region could work together to support a higher proportion of locally and environmentally sustainably-produced food in the city region. Following a period of pilot qualitative research interviews in autumn 2016, we convened our first T-lab event in December 2016, refining our research and engagement activities for the subsequent year with similar (and additional) knowledge partners to those who joined the co-design workshop. Further opportunities for engagement are enhanced as a result of the current state of flux in local, regional and national agri-food policies. Brighton and Hove's City Plan 2 is under discussion (with a draft plan due in autumn 2017), providing a perfect window for research-led input. The South Downs National Park (which surrounds Brighton and Hove to the north) is in the process of reformulating its management plan and the UK's food and agricultural policies are entering a period of intense uncertainty and disruption as a result of the referendum vote to leave the European Union ('Brexit'). Building on the engagement to date, the foundation of expertise and research that will be strengthened by the current work will position the team not only to strategically plan our future engagement activities, but also to be adaptable enough to work with normatively-aligned partners at key moments.

### 4.2 The future of agriculture and seeds in Argentina

The Latin American team have adopted a different entry point to the global agri-food system, but one which has been identified as central to the political economy of the system as a whole (Kloppenburg 2005; Wach 2016). It decided to focus on the future of seeds because that issue provided a window of opportunity to engage with the broader issue of agricultural sustainability, given that Argentina was embroiled in contentious debates about the reform of intellectual property related to seeds (Marin 2015). A new seed law was being discussed, leading to increased political salience/controversy as seeds are a key input for large-scale agricultural production (by far the country's most important export). Argentina was faced with the option of adopting a number of models in their new law, drawing on aspects of the various agreements of UPOV (International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants), as well as potentially novel approaches such as open source seeds (Kloppenburg 2014). There was, therefore, a sense of urgency to discuss the topic, which helped to bring a diverse group of influential people to the table, and as the law is still being discussed there was also, and indeed still is, a perception that the outcomes of the work undertaken in the workshop could have a real influence. In practice, though, the issue also provided a lens through which participants could talk and reflect on desired agricultural futures. The workshop was based on established networks, and a legitimacy built on the basis of years of previous research. A range of actors participated, from academic researchers, representatives of commercial and family farming, government officials, representatives of civil society organisations, national seed firms and other institutions related to seeds – representing many more diverse views than those assembled at the co-design workshop in the UK. This

contentious entry point was used as a lens through which the group could begin to explore future agricultural visions and pathways amongst a varied group of actors, and in the hope of ensuring commitment and engagement from those actors to future work.

The workshop was structured around a 'World Café' debate on four possible scenarios related to changes to the seed law:

1   Preserve the status quo, based on UPOV 1978 which allows saving and utilisation of seed;

2   Restrict the rights of farmers to save seed but retain breeders' rights to use seeds as a basis for further breeding;

3   Retain farmers' rights, but restrict the breeders' exemption to use seeds in varietal improvement; and

4   Restrict both actors' rights as in UPOV 1991.

The participants discussed implications of these scenarios to 2030 for food supply (and social and economic diversity), technological services for industrial farmers, resources for biological research and biodiversity.

Given the diversity of perspectives of the participants, it was expected that there would be divergent views on the issue. Indeed, from the discussions, two distinctive views were identified about the future of seeds and agriculture. One, a macro, nationalistic, market-focused perspective was concerned primarily with enhancing the productivity of large-scale agricultural production, as well as ensuring adequate incentives for the development of local production and technological capabilities (as opposed to reliance on multinational corporations). The other, a state-centred perspective, was concerned primarily with promoting food sovereignty and security, and enhancing the social and economic diversity of farming (including small- and medium-sized independent farmers).

The very different framings of the challenge and the interests at play of the different participants (discussed further in Marin, Ely and van Zwanenberg 2016) explained the lack of general consensus and divergence in views; a political and social reality which is in some respects a hindrance to identifying pathways to sustainability. The considerable empathy shown by almost all participants for the objectives underlying the alternative perspective, however, suggested that there may be scope, in future work, for negotiating novel strategies that satisfy at least some of the key concerns held by both groups. To identify these strategies, the team plan to work on future research with the idea of 'bridging innovations' that might help to address issues of overlapping interest, such as the need to support domestic capabilities in seed development as fundamental to any kind of desired agricultural future (which workshop participants agreed were threatened by strict intellectual property rules). These bridging innovations can be, for instance, new policy proposals that help to shift perspectives about the future of seeds and agriculture.

The mapping of different perspectives in this first co-design workshop, as detailed in a concept note produced following the event (CENIT 2015) will provide the basis for future work. The team in Argentina is proposing to use Q method (Previte, Pini and Haslam-McKenzie 2007) and multi-criteria mapping (Stirling 2006) as novel social science approaches that enable engagement with diverse groups and a structured mapping of their different perspectives that facilitates the 'opening up' of policy discussions. Along with other research already conducted by the CENIT team (Marin and Smith 2012), this will provide new knowledge resources that can recombine with those held by other actors in the system, with the potential to foster social innovation that can help negotiate novel pathways of change around seeds and agriculture in Latin America.

## 5 Emerging insights and implications for 'engaged excellence'

On the basis of the accounts given previously, the 'Pathways' transformative knowledge network is already delivering early insights with regard to engaged research across disciplines, cultures and contexts. It is also raising questions about the role of researchers pursuing 'engaged excellence' in different contexts across the world, and how the social sciences can work within a transformative SDG agenda.

The collaborative work offers lessons regarding the various challenges of working across aligned and non-aligned networks in co-design (Marin *et al.* 2016) and the kinds of modifications to concepts such as 'social innovation labs' that might be appropriate in each context. Whilst it is clear that researchers can play many roles in attempting to contribute to transformative pathways, the ones emerging from our experiences so far in the two hubs covered in detail here include:

● Providing strategic (impact-oriented) evidence, identified by a range of stakeholders, as filling a crucial knowledge gap or unlocking an impasse caused by seemingly irreconcilable differences in perspective held by different actors;

● Convening diverse actors in order to explore different perspectives, seek to bridge or build consensus between them, or (relatedly) to bring together different resources and foster social innovations that can both address issues of consensus and adequately respond to issues where there is disagreement;

● Building networks to create agile groups that can coproduce knowledge and evidence to inform adaptive management – as the cases of 'Brexit' and the Argentinean seed law illustrate, 'engaged excellence' does not necessarily start from research, but often from established, trusted networks that allow quick, robust and well-informed responses to changing circumstances.

Reflecting on these various roles in turn, it appears that (at least some) stakeholders afford the evidence produced through formal 'research' a validity beyond that held by (or produced by) other actors. It is

necessary to remember this power asymmetry when talking about 'impact-oriented' research, and to recognise the ways in which our own research approach might be influenced by other powerful actors. Likewise, the legitimacy of researchers as convenors (both of aligned and non-aligned groups) requires us to be aware of our limitations as mediators, and requires us to enter processes such as T-labs without predefined goals. This often requires trust relationships/reputations that are built over many years. Retaining some level of flexibility to exploit windows of opportunity is a challenge for researchers, but also for funding organisations with more traditional models of accountability.

The experiences described above are also beginning to identify challenges to practising 'engaged excellence' through this kind of networked approach. Although (as discussed previously) there has been some flexibility afforded to the network, striving to deliver the outputs promised in the proposal has required partners to work to a specified time frame, and to some extent has limited their scope for creativity around methods. Constraints (in terms of the amounts of funding available and time frames) have greatly limited the scope of the research, but also to some extent forced teams to be parsimonious with regard to the project's ambitions – continuing on similar research trajectories (rather than establishing new ones), collaborating with existing trusted partners (whilst reaching out) and working with the grain of (at least some) ongoing transformative changes.

Through project infrastructure such as a virtual platform offering peer review (of T-lab designs) discussion fora, and production of co-learning blogs, the network hopes to extend these initial findings across the other hubs, and to further reflect on experiences within different contexts. At the same time, we will be monitoring (potentially transformative) changes and using the evidence to enhance the direct impact of our activities. Exchanging ideas from the literatures around transdisciplinary work in different regions may also help us to be reflexive about our own assumptions regarding transformation, and to appreciate engagement approaches that may at first seem in conflict with our own. Whilst there are limited opportunities for in-person exchange, the infrastructure (virtual and otherwise) that is integral to the project design allows periodic monitoring and reflection as we operationalise the ideas of transformative pathways to sustainability across our diverse international network. We hope to generate broader lessons that can serve to inform researchers, funders and other actors in the design and implementation of transdisciplinary research for achieving the SDGs.

The opportunities for learning about 'engaged excellence' across the transformative knowledge network also bring an appreciation of how these insights are linked to historical, cultural and contextual factors (as well as how understandings may be conditioned by the situatedness of disciplinary/analytical frameworks). This is incredibly stimulating as an academic exercise. The challenge (which we do not underestimate) will be to convert these insights into useful knowledge for action beyond the

scale of the individual sites in which we are engaging in transdisciplinary work. Our ability to do this in a relatively short three-year programme is necessarily limited, but we will be organising our activities in a way that enables us to learn as much as possible from our experiences – both positive and negative – and to apply these lessons in future work.

## Notes

1 Launched in 2015, Future Earth is a ten-year initiative to advance Global Sustainability Science, build capacity in this rapidly expanding area of research and provide an international research agenda to guide natural and social scientists working around the world.

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# Affective Engagement: Teaching Young Kenyans about Safe and Healthy Sex

## Pauline Oosterhoff and Kelly Shephard[*]

**(With contributions from the following partners: Emmy Kahega Igonya, Hannah Wallace Bowman, Arno Peeters, Iris Honderdos and Natalie Lukkenaer)**

**Abstract** Research suggests that young people are arriving at sex education sites mostly through campaigns on social media and paid sites. Whilst not everyone is accessing porn, it is essential to find creative ways to engage with young people to strengthen and build on existing online sex education. In this study, a team of researchers, international project staff, musicians and multimedia artist worked effectively together on mobilising audiences based on research evidence on sex education for young Kenyans. The approach taken was innovative but it was also rooted in high-quality research evidence. This article focuses on two areas of learning from the programme – *how research can support a creative team to discuss sexuality in a radically open fashion* and *how to remain focused when working in multidisciplinary teams.*

**Keywords:** sex, affective engagement, online, Kenya, action research, education.

## 1 Introduction
Sex and relationships have a big impact on young people's lives. For most young people in the world, apart from pornography, getting information about sexual pleasure can be difficult. And it is even harder if you live in parts of the world where often the decision on who to date or marry, and how many children to have, is not your own. Academic research is inaccessible to most people who are not academics, whether young or old.

Online information on sexuality is successful because it is hard to get good information in real life. Research suggests that young people are arriving at sex education sites mostly through campaigns on social media and paid sites. As not all young people are using these sites, it is essential to find other ways to engage with them, and ensure that offline information strengthens and builds on the existing online sex education.

Figure 1 Shanty L and 20 More Days perform at the Love Matters concert in Kenya



Photographer Iris Honderdos. Reproduced by kind permission of Love Matters.

Online information sharing can result in individual and collective action when online and offline social networks are affectively and practically linked (Oosterhoff, Hoang and Quach 2014).

Our study 'Affective Engagement with Research Evidence about Young People's Sex Education in Kenya' (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2016) used 'affective engagement' as part of a multi-layered and multi-method interdisciplinary participatory action-research process on online sex education for young Kenyans. Affective engagement is a person-centred conceptual approach that focuses on the role of emotions and affection for understanding rational thoughts, preferences and choices. Affective engagement as theorised by Massumi (2002, 2008) can be helpful in understanding user preferences, or artistic and musical preferences and choices (van Oosten, Jochen and Valkenburg 2015). It is also a helpful concept to understand political and social choices and preferences, such as the rise of celebrity activism. When people lose faith in traditional leaders, institutions and authorities, it can create room for other types of leaders (Tsaliki, Frangonikolopoulos and Huliaris 2011). The post-election violence in Kenya in 2008, for example, opened up the way for celebrity runners to discuss peace (Wilson, Van Luijk and Boit 2015). People trusted them and felt a positive, emotional connection. Working with Massumi's theoretical concept of affective engagement, we reasoned that for research evidence to have an impact and inspire people to change we needed to create affective linkages and partnerships with people who can have a real say in how this evidence is presented, and have the freedom to take it to their audiences or use it to find new ones.

The project was jointly undertaken in a partnership between the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Love Matters headquarters, Love Matters Kenya, a Dutch composer/music producer and a Dutch

multimedia artist specialising in community-based art production, the Kenyan record label Penya and the Sauti music academy in Nairobi.

Love Matters is an international organisation dedicated to online sex education for youth. It offers playful and thought-provoking articles, testimonials, blogs and advice columns. The social media sites host lively conversations, which are all tuned into regional culture. In this project, we wanted to explore the meaning and relevance of themes that emerged from analysis of online behaviour on the Love Matters platform, and offline research on gender roles and sexuality by young people. The intention was to better understand if and how online information on sexuality is relevant to young people in Kenya, a country that has recognised the existence of many problems with the sexual and reproductive health of young people but where sex education is still taboo. Love Matters was specifically interested in innovative creative approaches and methodologies that could mobilise young people, giving the other partners full creative freedom.

With the support of the 'creative team' comprising the Dutch composer/music producer and multimedia artist and a Kenyan music producer/director/teacher, 15 musicians studying at the Sauti Academy wrote songs based on the research analysis and uploaded recordings of them on YouTube. Online voting for the People's Choice resulted in the winners being signed by Penya and all the participants performing their songs in front of a live audience, an event which was recorded.

We found that the issues raised by young people in Kenya using online platforms such as social media sites, blogs and online discussions were also relevant to offline non-users. Interpersonal exchange between the young people directly involved in the study, the sexual health experts and the international creative team were key to stimulating critical reflection on meanings of sex and love, and creativity in the production of original songs during the project.

The young musicians involved said that they had learned how to communicate effectively about sexuality, expectations and affection. The participants also became aware of how to use their own experiences to connect with people, and most said they realised their responsibility and potential as artists to make progressive social change.

The process was joyful but not without challenges. This article is framed by the four pillars of the IDS 'engaged excellence' model: delivering high-quality research, co-constructing knowledge, mobilising impact-orientated evidence and building enduring partnerships. IDS prides itself on delivering research that is built on solid evidence. It is the authors' belief that affective engagement brings an additional emotive angle to this evidence which is important as it will increase its resonance amongst partners and beyond. This article focuses specifically on two interconnected areas of learning from the programme – *how research can support a creative team to discuss sexuality in a radically open fashion* and *how to remain focused when working in multidisciplinary teams.*

## 2 Delivering high-quality research

As a project team, we developed a broad basic concept for a collaboration that included working in partnership with a Dutch composer/music producer and a Dutch visual multimedia artist. Both had already worked with the lead researcher on many interdisciplinary community-driven art projects. We agreed to find Kenyan partners for a participatory musical action-research project with a launch and an installation. With this aim in mind, we developed a partnership with the Sauti Academy in Kenya. The brief was broad to begin with because we wanted to leave space for creativity and work through the details and the budget with Kenyan partners.

The project used affective engagement in our collaborative action research as a strategy to engage with different and new audiences on research findings about sexuality and relationships. Affective engagement is a person-centred conceptual approach that focuses on the role of emotions and affection for understanding rational thoughts, preferences and choices. It shapes attachment and belonging in environments where everything is in a state of flux (Barker 2014). Affective engagement is important to understand artistic preferences and choices (Massumi 2002). In order to accept messages through the arts, people need to feel affective engagement with the artist as a person, or his or her style, which is not something that can easily be predicted or imposed.

The creative team supported a group of music students from the Sauti Academy to explore the meaning and relevance of themes that emerged from analysis of online behaviour on the Love Matters sex education platform, and offline research on gender roles and sexuality by young people.

While the creative team was at first hesitant about talking explicitly about sex, they were reassured when presented with the research findings from the project's sexually explicit focus group discussions. The creative team also observed the Kenyan researcher and an international sexual health expert interact with the students, speaking in plain language about a wide range of sexuality-related topics.

The themes included:

- *Being responsible:* Both boys and girls talk about responsibility. Responsibility can be a duty, a burden, and a desirable characteristic. How does pleasure relate to sexual responsibility?

- *Expectations of sex and relationships:* Boys and girls have quite different expectations of sex and relationships but they are not talking openly with each other about these expectations. There is a lot of suspicion about each other's motives and many young people question whether their thoughts and desires are 'normal'.

Participation in the workshop was open to music students aged 18–30 years. The Sauti Academy was rigorous in its selection to ensure that everyone was over 18 and committed to the whole process. The

**Figure 2 Love Matters workshop with students**



Photographer Iris Honderdos. Reproduced by kind permission of Love Matters.

musicians wrote songs that were inspired by the research findings and which were then promoted through the Love Matters website and associated social media. Entries were critiqued by a panel of judges that included well-known experts from various disciplines (development, sexual health, music and the media). Meanwhile, global audiences voted via YouTube for a People's Choice Award. The winners were signed by Penya, a major Kenyan record label, and all the participants were invited to perform for a live audience. The concept and details of the performance were kept open, allowing the Kenyan participants to shape the event.

At the heart of the project was the recognition that culture informs norms, values and practices with regard to sex and pleasure. The arts can be an effective way to give voice to lesser heard groups and reach broader audiences. However, being able to reach people does not necessarily mean that they will adjust their behaviour in accordance with the explicit or implicit messages in art works.

Whilst the approach we took was innovative, it was also rooted in research evidence and local urban realities. This was a rigorous research project that relied on a thorough understanding of both the digital environment and the lived experiences of the Kenyan youth (Oosterhoff and Kageha Igonya 2015; Oosterhoff *et al.* 2016). Love Matters has done extensive research on how connected young people in Kenya are before its launch and continues to do so. Kenya has a high internet penetration rate of 68.4 per cent.[1] Kenyans can easily access social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp. Eleven per cent of the population currently use Facebook – this percentage has steadily increased over the last few years, together with the spread of mobile phone use.[2] Facebook is an important gateway to the Love Matters website, with over 800,000 fans in 2015. YouTube is popular and widely watched on mobile phones – by both individuals and groups of friends. There is censorship, but it is mostly focused on

terrorism and more present in print media. However, sexually explicit material, for example a Durex commercial for condoms, was censored in the media. In January 2016, religious groups led a proposal to only allow talk about sex on the radio[3] between 10pm and 5am in order to protect children. Love Matters Africa has to be careful to avoid conflicts with some of these traditional offline gatekeepers, and with censorship by transnational corporate gatekeepers such as Facebook and Google. Love Matters' main target audience are urban, connected and educated young people. For this project, we wanted to explore linkages with a broader group of urban young people.

IDS researchers involved in the study conducted a review of the formal and informal literature on sexuality, gender, pop music, and sexual and reproductive health. Drawing from information-seeking behaviour collected by Love Matters as part of its standard quality control, we analysed online behaviour of 1,806,873 users in the period 1 June 2013–31 August 2015. We looked at the page views, pages/session average, session duration and bounce rate.[4] To understand if and what the added benefit is of a pleasure-based approach, Love Matters uses a system to classify user behaviour in a session. Web searches under the headings of 'sex', 'love and relationships', and 'marriage' are classified as pleasure. Sessions are classified as sex education when users go to the site sections that are marked 'his body' or 'her body', 'disease prevention' (which has a subheading of 'safer sex'), 'sexually transmitted diseases' and 'family planning' (which has subheadings of 'birth control' and 'pregnancy').

We combined these standardised quantitative data with more qualitative data on questions and comments for Love Matters experts on social media. Based on our analysis of this information, we developed questions around gender, masculinity and sexuality for five focus group discussions with young men and women in Nairobi and Mombasa. The Kenyan interviewers all had extensive and very detailed experience of talking about sexuality with young Kenyans in urban settings, allowing them to answer many questions that emerged during these often very lively discussions.

We also tried to understand young people's music preferences. Penya and the Sauti Academy are based in Kenya and are well established but underfunded parts of the national music industry. The Dutch artists stayed in Kenya for one month and led online research on music, followed by individual interviews with people working in the commercial music industry in Kenya, and people with experience of collaborations with Kenyan musicians and the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector. The findings were discussed with IDS and Love Matters and translated into focus group discussion questions about music and musicians which were conducted by Kenyan researchers.

Meanwhile, the researchers built on their experiences of working in the region by observing offline environments in slum and entertainment areas in Nairobi and Mombasa, and conducted informal exit interviews

with the students towards the end of the project to assess what they had learned that was valuable for them as musicians and artists as well as at a personal level. Throughout the whole research process, different people were leading on drafting and finalising texts, tools and plans that were shared.

### 3 Co-constructing knowledge

Although the researchers designed the action research and decided the themes of the competition, we allowed others to decide if, what and how they wanted to communicate and disseminate the results. The resulting songs were directly related to the research themes but treated and presented in fresh ways to audiences – one entry chose to target random smartphone owners on a bus and encourage them to listen and vote. These complementary, unique and different roles highlight the importance of partnership in the co-production of the concept, the process, the products and the knowledge in effective action research.

Working in multidisciplinary teams can result in collaborative and exciting outputs but they come as a result of a lot of brainstorming and discussion. In the Love Matters project, there was a great deal of mutual respect for roles. This developed as artists, researchers, donors and various project staff spent much time discussing and reaching a common understanding of the distinct responsibilities and roles. This understanding was then formalised into project documentation that included terms of reference and partner contracts. This level of clarity and documentation helped the project team to stay focused. Speaking on the planning for the event, international producer and sound artist Arno Peeters commented: 'First you have to let all ideas come to mind as if sky and budget are limitless and not hinder the flow of ideas by the sheer notion of failure'.

However, there was a financial reality and some difficult choices had to be made. A proposed joint preparatory visit by team members from Love Matters headquarters and IDS to explain in person to Love Matters staff in Kenya what this project was about – and how it could possibly benefit Kenya – had to be cut; instead, these discussions were done by email and Skype. We could only all meet at the very end of the project. Setting aside time to just 'be' with each other before, during and after the project creates a buffer for misunderstanding and frayed nerves. Although introductions are costly, interpersonal communications help to get to know your team, talk about how you like to work and be aware of people's sensitivities and personal workflows.

The collaboration process from the perspectives of the Dutch composer and artist has been documented in various interlinked blogs.[5] The purpose of the blogs from a researcher's perspective was to help external audiences understand the detailed work that goes into creating affective engagement with research. In the academic sector, several blogs focused on the use of action-research methods, including the IDS Sexuality, Poverty and Law website,[6] whilst on the IDS website[7] we documented

Figure 3 **Omari performing at the Love Matters concert**



Photographer Iris Honderdos. Reproduced by kind permission of Love Matters.

the wider contextual challenges. Processes and vocabularies that are familiar to NGOs and researchers such as TOR ('terms of reference'), FGDs ('focus group discussions') and the comms plan ('communication strategies') are not self-explanatory to outsiders, including the artists. Three months prior to the arrival of the Dutch artists in November, the project team had regular meetings (mostly on Skype) and exchanged over 146 emails with them alone to secure the details of the work plan and budget. Despite this, there was still a risk that the music students ultimately would not be interested in writing songs based on sex-related themes – after all, inspiration cannot be forced.

We could only plan so far. And it is worth reiterating the interpersonal and intercultural challenges of managing an internationally distributed workforce. Virtual communication can be misconstrued, especially when working to tight deadlines and when each player is juggling their own organisational demands, processes and expectations. For this reason, it was important that we created a work plan with clear milestones and key delivery dates.

We developed an idea for a contest during Skype calls between the Netherlands, the UK and Kenya and clarified some details. Together with the creative team we worked through the logistics of the performance, whilst leaving enough space to be responsive to the students' ideas. Inevitably, there were frustrations – Love Matters and IDS could not always respond to the suggestions or needs of the creative team immediately. This delay left some of the key players feeling that their investment or feedback was not valued; meanwhile, behind the scenes, emails were flying backwards and forwards as meetings were hurriedly scheduled to make decisions on things that could not be called at the individual level – hence the perceived time lapse. Added

to this was a local context with unfolding events over which none of us had control. For example, shortly before the planned live performance in Nairobi, a tour of three African countries by Pope Francis meant the centre of the city was locked down.[8] We quickly responded by changing the date and venue for the event, which required an extra risk assessment and lots of head scratching.

### 4 Mobilising evidence for impact

Throughout the project, members of IDS and Love Matters developed targeted communication plans. These included reaching out to relevant media organisations and sharing tailored outputs that included videos, blogs, news stories and press releases. Media mentions were monitored and page impressions were captured as a way of measuring reach and impact.

Within a period of two weeks, tens of thousands of people watched the videos and voted. Love Matters carefully tracked these statistics. One song alone attracted over 33,000 'likes' on Facebook. YouTube[9] views were in excess of 30,000 with 87 per cent of watching time taking place within Kenya. Meanwhile, the audience split was balanced with 56 per cent of the YouTube audience being male and 44 per cent female. Reaching an audience is not the same as having an impact on their behaviour, but the online comments did suggest that audiences had carefully listened to and received the messages contained in the songs, which were based on interpretations of the research findings.

The live performance was considered crucial to showcase the work of the participants to an invited audience of Love Matters users and partners, and the press. It also provided a way to highlight the 'guiding themes' and physically connect different elements of the project by drawing a line from where this project began with the focus groups, through to the online competition, and the live final. The scenes on stage provided a theatrical interpretation of the research themes and a richer context for the songs. Based on input by the students, the two Dutch artists developed a show with a storyline that connected the songs in an entertaining way. They developed a script[10] and a scenario involving pre-recorded sound and video, and devised a stage plan that used four locations of the venue. A student acting as master of ceremonies led the audience from stage to stage as the stories behind the songs unfolded. Special props were made, including the so-called 'Heart Art' that was decorated by the students and included short but powerful messages.[11]

The event planning notes clearly state, *NOTE: this is the ideal scenario. No doubt there will be a need to demonstrate resourcefulness and flexibility.* This principle was really put to the test. Whilst the event was well attended and enjoyable, it had its management challenges. Although the performances were scripted and planned as far as possible,[12] rehearsals could not take place and on the day itself the students arrived too

late to do a proper run through. As they had worked together before, the students had faith in each other's abilities and remained calm. Meanwhile, technical challenges saw the main sound engineer departing at midday with half the light and sound equipment and leaving a sole, unprepared technician to do all the work with the equipment that remained. Complaining to the company would not have been useful but, consequently, some corrections were needed during the show.

In spite of the challenges, the students performed well; however, the sound quality was suboptimal. The venue provided some extra loudspeakers, but unfortunately they were broken since they had been left in the rain at an earlier concert. While researchers, NGO members and the creative team took turns cringing at squeaky sounds, the audience evidently enjoyed the performance.

The event was widely covered in the international and national press. Written coverage included *The Guardian*[13] and One World Media,[14] and locally in *The Star*[15] and *Mpasho*.[16] Meanwhile, Ghetto Radio broadcast daily evening shout-outs in the four days prior to the event, with calls to social media action and voting.

Individual interviews with the student participants, the Dutch artists and various NGOs as part of the review of this project showed, not surprisingly, that different people had appreciated different things at different times. Musicians said that they had learned at the workshop how to communicate effectively about sexuality, expectations and affection.

> *This project helped me as an artist and as a person. As a person I learned how to communicate better with my own partner. I learned about the value of communication to work things through. I also learned that I can engage as an individual with my audience and use my own feelings to create songs about important topics in Kenya* (female student, pers. comm. 2016).

Participants also learned how to use their own experiences to connect with people, and most said they realised their responsibility and potential as artists to make progressive social change.

> *I wanted to be an artist of the people. But I did not know what that meant. I now know what it means to be engaged* (male student, pers. comm. 2016 ).

> *I am proud to have created a song about something bad that happened to me and see how much others appreciate this artistic and personal honesty* (female student, pers. comm. 2016).

The Love Matters project staff are used to communicating with their audience online. Given that the number of webpage views has constantly been rising, and mobile phone and internet usage in Kenya is very high, some staff initially felt no need to extend their audience offline. None of the students who participated – either in the focus groups or the performers – knew of Love Matters at the start of the project. The research showed that there were potential audiences that

Figure 4 Helena performing at the Love Matters concert



Photographer Iris Honderdos. Reproduced by kind permission of Love Matters.

were not being reached, and highlighted the value of interpersonal contact in helping individuals reflect on sexuality and relationships.

> *I was a bit sceptical about this approach. I am used to a more controlled digital environment. But I can now see how we can engage offline with a different audience that we are not reaching through an online entry point* (staff member, Love Matters, pers. comm. 2016).

## 5 Building enduring partnerships
The varied contributions from partners have been key to the success of this innovatory project. They have actively contributed and many have reported the importance of co-constructed knowledge and the desire to build enduring partnerships that go beyond the project funding.

Love Matters Kenya continues to work with the songwriting participants and has, for example, organised a concert as part of a campaign against sexual violence. They also continue to be interested in the work on sexuality. One of the winners plans to start an NGO for teenage rape victims and use her song as a first step towards this.

Working in partnership can strengthen understanding of needs and contexts and make a broader contribution to partner effectiveness and capabilities; however, it can be time-consuming, as roles often need to be sorted out on the spot. During this project, the IDS researcher found herself dealing with copyright issues and finding a guard and machete to clear the overgrown land for the performance space; Love Matters staff ended up rehearsing a play; and the Dutch artists became counsellors on a variety of life topics, as well as managers and bookkeepers. Artists and researchers all worked on research and

evaluation based on discussions on the management of the partnership and workload. This project was possible because all the team members had worked in different fields previously, some people had known each other for decades in different roles, and everyone was willing to use whatever skills were necessary to get things done and keep the relationships alive in the thick of it. In that sense, this project was *building upon our enduring partnerships*, not constructing them from scratch as part of a research project.

The principal outputs from this project include songs, videos, artwork, articles and written think pieces. Whilst the quality of the outputs has been high, often delays in the production process put pressure on the team: a producer falling ill, a winner who was elected as a student leader which took up more time than planned, car breakdowns and tour schedules that clashed with studio availability. It can be difficult to explain to outsiders or funders who are not used to these kinds of innovative but complicated co-productions why they take longer than, say, writing an article and why it makes no sense to plan everything in advance in a logical framework. This kind of innovation is therefore rather difficult in the current donor environment, with its emphasis on logical frameworks and often long and time-consuming procedures, to adjust planning to actual realities in larger and multi-year projects. The funding for this project was not nearly enough to cover the real time that any of the people involved have put into it. And, paradoxically, we think that it was probably only because we had such a small amount of funding – and thus less administrative burdens and requirements – that we were able to do this hybrid innovation. Technically speaking, this process can be expanded and scaled up in many countries with larger budgets. But that would require a partnership with a donor that can actually manage the unpredictability that comes with innovations, and invests in both partnerships and building trust where there is a larger innovation budget.

For the researchers, the competition confirmed the importance and the potential of linking online and offline social networks and social mobilisation in affective and effective engagement with participatory action research found in other settings (Hoang and Oosterhoff 2016). The creative modes of disseminating information provided new and enjoyable experiences that could be built on and replicated in other projects. For the researchers, this meant a developed understanding of creative processes and the need to trust and be flexible; for the creative team, lessons were learned about management processes and the need for some structure in order to deliver on time and to budget.

### 6 Conclusion

Overall, we found this multidisciplinary approach to be both successful and joyful. In this study researchers, international project staff, musicians, the composer/producer and multimedia artist worked effectively as a team on mobilising audiences based on research evidence.

Affective engagement with both the research topic and socially engaged art was important in inspiring musicians to produce compelling and original songs. This collaboration involved a conscious and positive radical shift of power away from the researchers. Whilst everyone had clearly defined expertise, the project was fluid in its approach and had a collegial atmosphere where members felt able to share responsibilities and discuss issues freely.

The research supported the creative team to discuss emotionally charged themes related to sexuality in an open fashion. While the creative team was at first hesitant to talk explicitly about sex, we could reassure them by pointing out that 5.5 million sessions online on the Love Matters website is an indication of people's interest in the topic, and by sharing findings from sexually explicit focus group discussions.

Meanwhile, the creative team learned more about the questions young people have about sexuality from watching the Kenyan researcher and the international sexual health expert interact with the students, speaking in plain language about a wide range of sexuality-related topics. This helped them to understand what topics are relevant to students and how they can be discussed.

The impact of the research is still growing through these partnerships as the winning musicians release their songs and video clips. Meanwhile, the partnerships and connections forged as a project team are enduring: signing off an email one day, one member thanked another and said, 'You are a darling. Love *does* matter, you see ;)'.

**Note**

\* This work discussed in this article was funded by the Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS) Dutch government; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Government of the Netherlands.

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2 www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm.

3 'Kenya Crackdown on Sex Talk and Preacher Shows', *BBC News*, 8 January 2016, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-35261898.

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# Choosing between Research Rigour or Support for Advocacy Movements, a False Dichotomy?

**Katherine Pittore, Dolf J.H. te Lintelo,
James Georgalakis and Tumaini Mikindo**

**Abstract** Using the case study of the Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index (HANCI), this article seeks to answer key questions relating to the conceptualisation and operationalisation of engaged excellence, exploring the tensions between research and policy advocacy. While the concept of 'engaged excellence' recognises that excellence can be constituted by high-quality research as well as by research that supports efforts to influence policy, it could be more specific in taking position on discussions that situate these to be mutually incompatible. Evidence from multiple contexts has shown that research is much more likely to influence policy if researchers engage with civil society. Research for international development, which explicitly aims to reduce inequalities, accelerate sustainability, and build more inclusive societies, can gain from active engagement with policy advocates. It is a false dichotomy to separate out research from research for advocacy, and there is much to be gained from such a collaboration.

**Keywords:** advocacy, policy engagement, civil society, hunger, nutrition.

In order for research to be engaged, researchers need to work with those whose lives will be impacted by the research. This definition of what the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) terms 'engaged excellence', however, fails to address the critical question of *how* this engagement will happen, and how the engagement process itself can strengthen research. There is an inherent tension around the role of researchers as advocates, and between policy-orientated research and evidence-based advocacy. Some of these tensions may arise from a belief that research is value-free. However, (policy) research is not neutral in its analysis. Even if exhibiting academic rigour and excellence, research is shaped by the political context in which it is produced and used to further the values of those who produce and commission it (Young and Quinn 2012). While one may accept that research is not value-free, deciding to actively engage with advocates and advocacy groups can be viewed with scepticism. Advocacy is viewed by some as an inappropriate activity for

researchers as it is believed to undermine the neutrality of the research, and potentially to negatively affect research rigour. Some researchers have been more comfortable with a 'research uptake' model where researchers simply re-package research for non-academic audiences, believing this to be more neutral. However, this allows knowledge brokers and policymakers to cherry-pick the evidence that appears to support an existing position, and thus is no more neutral, and perhaps less rigorous, than engaging directly with advocates.

This tension around the role of researchers as advocates is illustrated by the UK government's plans to introduce an anti-advocacy clause into all grants which specifies that tax-payer money cannot be used to 'support activity intended to influence or attempt to influence Parliament, government or political parties… or attempting to influence legislative or regulatory action' (GOV.UK 2016a). This clause has been hugely controversial, especially within the research community. Initially, the government responded to these concerns by announcing that institutions of higher education would be excluded from the clause, eventually leading to a pause in its implementation in April 2016 (GOV.UK 2016b). This, however, raises the question that if research needs to be engaged, how, specifically will this engagement happen? And can this engagement also serve to enhance research rigour?

In attempting to explore the 'how' of engaged excellence, IDS has further defined engaged excellence to be about producing high-quality, methodologically sound research which, we argue, can be enhanced by engaging with advocacy partners who are experts in the local political realities. Partners are able to provide a necessary understanding of the context, improving the likelihood that research is accepted. Developing a structured process of engagement between researchers and partners ensures that methodological rigour can be maintained. Building strong and enduring partnerships is essential to facilitate use of evidence by partners over a longer time frame, allowing research evidence to become a core element of their strategy (IDS 2015). This definition of engaged excellence builds upon work by others such as the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) who have developed an insightful conceptual framework to better understand the links between research and policy. It includes three distinct elements: the context, including the politics and institutions; good quality research evidence, including effective policy engagement and dissemination; and finally, the links between the researchers, knowledge brokers and policymakers and their various influences on one another (Crewe and Young 2002). IDS has built upon and expanded this conceptual model in its definition of engaged excellence, focusing on the critical importance of partnerships to enable contextualisation of the research.

This article will use the case study of the Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index (HANCI) to answer key questions relating to the conceptualisation and operationalisation of engaged excellence, exploring the tensions between research and policy advocacy; specifically exploring

how engagement can take place. This article argues that while the concept of 'engaged excellence' usefully recognises that excellence can be constituted by high-quality research as well as by research that supports efforts to influence policy, it could be more specific in taking position on discussions that situate these to be mutually incompatible. The debates about 'research versus research for advocacy' posit a false dichotomy. Rather researchers can fruitfully support evidence-based advocacy and strengthen civil society movements in their efforts to influence policy, without compromising the rigour and methodological robustness of the research. This analysis shows that where research is developed for the purpose of advocacy, and research evidence is critically examined by researchers together with policy advocates, its chances of usage, and social and policy relevance can be dramatically improved. Crucially, this can be achieved without compromising research rigour. As development is about fostering progressive change in the world, researchers cannot sit on the fence. While their research cannot be value-free, they must adhere to the disciplinary logics and norms for conducting rigorous research. As they do so, there is much to be gained in collaborating with advocacy groups that are better placed to influence public policy.

## 1 Navigating the research to policy advocacy nexus

There is disagreement among researchers about the extent to which they should be involved in policy-influencing processes. Some researchers believe that those who take a public stance on a particular issue may be perceived to lack objectivity, which may have implications for the acceptability of their research (Brownson *et al.* 2006). The role which researchers can, or are willing, to play in the 'advocacy' space also depends on how advocacy is being defined, varying from raising awareness of an issue to communicating the findings of research to policymakers, to taking an active role in encouraging the adoption of a specific policy (Stoto *et al.* 2006). In some fields, researchers are expected to engage with advocacy. The American College of Epidemiology, for example, expects researchers to report findings in an understandable way and to serve as advocates for affected communities (Brownson *et al.* 2006). At the furthest end of the spectrum are researchers who actively support developing others' capacity for engagement, moving from research for development to a process of research as development (Datta 2012). Recognising that 'researchers no longer have a monopoly over knowledge production and communication' (*ibid.*: 10), it is critical to support and actively engage with advocates and others working actively to affect change (Crewe and Young 2002; IDS 2015).

If researchers want to influence policy, they must engage others (Court and Maxwell 2005). While there are growing donor pressures for development research to demonstrate (policy) impact, it has long been known that there is rarely a direct linear relation between a piece of research and policy change (Petticrew 2004). Court and Young's (2003) study of 50 case studies from around the world underwrites this argument, and finds that usually impact took place over time and required significant, strong, purposeful advocacy efforts. The

definition of policy advocacy, for the purpose of this article and the conceptualisation of engaged excellence, moves beyond the idea of simply communicating research findings to policymakers to a more encompassing definition:

> [T]he process of negotiating and mediating a dialogue through which influential networks, opinion leaders and ultimately decision makers take ownership of your ideas, evidence and proposals and subsequently act on them (Young and Quinn 2012: 26).

However, there are inherent tensions between the worldview and motivations of researchers and policymakers. Researchers tend to focus on more theoretical concepts, often developing recommendations which are seen as impractical to actually implement and are conveyed through academic jargon. Policymakers tend to have a more pragmatic worldview which is shaped by budget or capacity restrictions, political will and budget cycles, and are much more concerned with politics and bureaucracy (Young and Quinn 2012). 'Knowledge brokers' or those who have personal relationships with both researchers and policymakers and understand both roles can be key to knowledge translation and exchange (Mitton *et al.* 2007). Policy advocates can be effective knowledge brokers, helping to bridge this divide, translating academic findings into something grounded in the local context and useful to policymakers. In turn, researchers can decide to focus their efforts more directly to be in the service of policy advocates. Multiple case studies from a number of sectors in India seeking to bridge the research policy divide found that 'some of the best examples of success have arisen when researchers and civil society work well together' (Saxena 2005). However, these types of linkages are not always common, as a result of a poorly developed theory of change on the part of the researcher, assuming, for example, that new evidence will automatically lead to policy change. This means that researchers often fail to cultivate support from key allies and networks, who can interpret the research evidence's uses within particular political, cultural and social contexts (Klugman 2011). In the following sections, we set out how researchers in the HANCI project have attempted to develop a specific strategy of engagement with such civil society networks working in the area of nutrition.

## 2 What is the Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index (HANCI)?

'Framing of undernutrition reduction as an apolitical issue is short sighted and self-defeating. Political calculations are at the basis of effective coordination between sectors, national and subnational levels, private sector engagement, resource mobilisation, and state accountability to its citizens.'
'The Politics of Reducing Malnutrition: Building Commitment and Accelerating Progress', *The Lancet* (Gillespie *et al.* 2013)

Over the last seven years, there has been a change in framing of hunger and undernutrition, from being purely about technical solutions to framing the problem as one of political will. In 2008, the Hunger Task

Force of Irish Aid identified food insecurity as being the result of the collective failures of governments at national and international levels to prioritise eradicating hunger (Hunger Task Force 2008). In 2010, the Hunger Reduction Commitment Index (precursor to HANCI) sought to quantify governments' political will to tackle hunger (te Lintelo *et al.* 2014b). Launched in 2010, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement aims to create an enabling environment for nutrition by developing strong in-country leadership and high-level commitment to addressing undernutrition (SUN 2012). However, in order for SUN to be successful in achieving and maintaining global reductions in undernutrition, sustained political and financial commitment to effective multi-sectoral action to address undernutrition will be required (Pelletier *et al.* 2013). A review of the literature undertaken by Gillespie *et al.* (2013) on building an enabling environment for nutrition found that political will can be generated through deliberate action. However, because governments are focused on short-term gains, real change requires constant pressure and advocacy from civil society (Saxena 2005). In the context of engaged excellence, this means that research to support creating an enabling environment for fighting hunger and undernutrition must be embedded in local political contexts and used continually to support ongoing advocacy work undertaken by civil society groups.

The HANCI builds metrics of political commitment to addressing hunger and undernutrition through a package of linked products and processes. The global HANCI ranks 45 high-burden countries on their political commitment to hunger and reducing undernutrition by looking at 22 indicators across three broad categories: laws, policies and spending. These indicators can be controlled by governments, unlike outcome indicators (e.g. the number of children under five years of age that are underweight), which may be affected by many factors beyond a government's control (te Lintelo *et al.* 2013b). To complement the index, which draws on secondary data, HANCI also includes expert perception surveys, which provide a deeper, country-context-sensitive analysis of political commitment to hunger reduction, and improving nutrition (te Lintelo and Lakshman 2015). This draws on structured surveys with key stakeholders from government, academia, development partners, private sector and civil society in five countries (Bangladesh, Malawi, Nepal, Tanzania and Zambia).

Hunger and undernutrition remain major development challenges: undernutrition is an underlying cause of 45 per cent of under-five deaths, one in four children under the age of five are stunted and 795 million people are not able to consume a diet adequate for a healthy and productive life (Black *et al.* 2013; FAO 2015). In 2008, the *Lancet* series on maternal and child undernutrition brought together the evidence on preventing and treating child undernutrition, which demonstrated that nutrition interventions were some of the most cost-effective development interventions, and provided a broad consensus around what needed to be done to address undernutrition (Copenhagen Consensus Center 2008). However, while there is consensus on the technical solutions to

**Box 1 HANCI methodology**

In developing an index, decisions must be made about what indicators are included and how to weight each of these indicators. HANCI uses a theory-based approach to select indicators which adequately measure hunger, undernutrition and government commitment to tackling these, as they are imprecise concepts and require several variables to measure them adequately. Three guiding principles were used to choose indicators: (1) that the indicator covered major aspects necessary to reduce hunger and improve nutrition including food availability, food access and food utilisation; (2) that there were indicators which represented different types of nutrition interventions including nutrition-specific interventions, nutrition-sensitive interventions, and those related to measuring the enabling environment; and (3) that indicators are simple and easily understood by a wide variety of stakeholders. A total of 22 indicators spanning laws, policies and spending are included in the index.

Once indicators had been selected, they had to be normalised which ensures that specific indicators do not have a greater weight simply because of their unit of measurement. HANCI used the normalisation procedure developed by the Human Development Index of the United Nations Programme to produce values for all indicators in the [0,1] range.

Once the indicators were normalised they were aggregated in two steps: aggregation of indicators to form composite indicators around three key themes: laws, policies and spending, individually for both hunger and undernutrition, and a second level of aggregation of the thematic composite indictors (hunger and nutrition) to form an overall composite indicator that is HANCI. When aggregating, HANCI applied a theory-driven weighting scheme which gives equal weight to each of the sub-indices, hunger and nutrition; and each of the three themes: laws, policies and spending, within each of the sub-indices.

Finally, sensitivity analysis was carried out to check the robustness of the index. To do this, the index was also constructed using six different normalisation and weighting techniques. Spearman's[1] rank correlation coefficients were used to assess how similar ranks were to each other using different methods for constructing the index. A high Spearman's correlation is seen when there is a significant re-ranking using alternative index methodologies for weighting and normalisation. In all six alternative methodologies used to reconstruct HANCI the rank correlations are above 0.7, which demonstrates the robustness of the index (te Lintelo *et al.* 2013a).

combat undernutrition, global rates of stunting, a common measure of chronic undernutrition, remain stubbornly high. If the world continues on its current trajectory, international stunting targets developed by the World Health Assembly for 2025 will not be reached until 2130 (IFPRI 2016). In terms of hunger, the world produces more than enough food for everyone, but unequal access to resources prevents people from being able to access adequate food for a healthy and productive life (FAO 2012). Why is it then that despite having the technical solutions to tackle undernutrition, and enough food to feed everyone in the world, that we still have such high levels of undernutrition and hunger? One key aspect is insufficient political will, which can be demonstrated through purposeful action around legislation, public policies and public spending to tackle these challenges (te Lintelo and Lakshman 2015).

The theory of change by which HANCI aims to increase political will and support an enabling environment for nutrition is set out in the first HANCI report:

> (a) by credibly measuring commitment it will strengthen our ability to hold governments to account for their efforts in reducing undernutrition and hunger; (b) if civil society is better able to hold governments to account, it can apply pressure and ensure that hunger and undernutrition are put high on development agendas; (c) governments can hold themselves to account in their efforts to keep undernutrition high on the agenda: the index is constructed on the basis of performance in different areas (legal, policy expenditure); and (d) commitments can be linked to outcomes, to allow all to assess the 'value added' of different commitments and efforts (te Lintelo *et al*. 2013b: 1).

This article will specifically focus on how this theory of change is operationalised through the concept of engaged excellence, and how researchers have actively engaged with and supported civil society and governments to understand and use the evidence generated.

### 3 Producing high-quality research

Engaged excellence is dependent on the production of high-quality research. This is reflected in the first step in HANCI's theory of change, which identifies the need to credibly measure government commitment to addressing hunger and undernutrition. Credibility is central in getting policymakers to use research findings. 'Policy research is not conducted in an ivory tower, and the legitimacy of the researcher and his/her organisation (not to mention the advocacy campaign itself) is dependent on the foundation of a sound research project' (Young and Quinn 2012: 46). However, credibility is also bestowed by proxy, through the reputation of the research institute (Court and Young 2003). Within the context of HANCI, producing high-quality research is essential to facilitate the use of the evidence by partners and the utility of the research in supporting advocacy work. When presenting HANCI to policymakers, demonstration of its methodological rigour is essential as the methodology has to stand up to tough scrutiny (especially for countries

with low rankings in the index). This rigour is demonstrated by a strong research methodology (see Box 1) as well as publication in academic journals (e.g. te Lintelo *et al.* 2014b: 115–28). Overseas advocacy partners must also be convinced of the quality of the methodology and evidence base if they are to endorse and adopt these in their advocacy messages. They too, are closely scrutinised by governments, and poorly underpinned advocacy can have potentially serious reputational and existential consequences. Often being small organisations, advocacy partners seek to have carefully built relationships with policymakers and members of Parliament (MPs). Their ownership and say over how to present research findings is essential for sustaining such relationships.

Policy-focused research substantially benefits from an analysis of context at its start (Young *et al.* n.d.; Court and Young 2003; Young and Quinn 2012). Early engagement of policy advocacy groups helped to situate, translate and interpret global rankings within country contexts. Policy advocacy groups became knowledge intermediaries, and guided engagements with policymakers. In this respect, the expert surveys conducted by local consultants provided country-specific insights, enhancing acceptance of HANCI findings based on secondary data analysis by government officials and advocacy groups.

### 4 Co-constructing and mobilising evidence for impact
Another pillar of engaged excellence is concerned with the communication and mobilisation of co-produced evidence and knowledge. A recent World Bank study found that a third of the PDFs published on their website have never been downloaded (Doemeland and Trevino 2014). High-quality research may never be found, let alone influence policy, without explicit engagement and communication strategies. By working with advocates, who understand local political opportunities and challenges and who are able to regularly engage with policymakers over long time frames, researchers are much more likely to have their research inform policymakers. Working with advocates has the additional advantage of allowing the researcher not to become an advocate him/herself, but rather support the former to best understand and use the evidence. Engagement between researchers and those using the research can occur at differing levels of intensity, and at different stages throughout the research process, moving from a one-way communication of information to a process whereby practitioners are empowered to use information (Brandt *et al.* 2013). Moving from simple research communication to a more structured process of engagement necessitates careful planning to clarify intentions, decide who to engage with, how to engage and the best form for this engagement to take (Datta 2012).

HANCI project activities sought to achieve such engagement in various ways. In addition to the tailored programme of activities (discussed in Section 5), HANCI also included a package of communications activities, products and knowledge exchange designed to facilitate its use by policy stakeholders at national and international levels. HANCI reports were launched at strategic moments, such as before the British

government hosted the G8 and the Nutrition for Growth event in June 2013, and prior to the launch of the *Lancet Nutrition Series* in May 2013, in order to inform policy debates and attract increased media interest (te Lintelo *et al.* 2016). These launches included press releases and social media engagement, and led to significant international and local interest including televised and radio interviews (Al Jazeera, the BBC, Radio Moscow, Radio Netherlands) as well as articles in various newspapers and development blogs (see *Assessing the Policy Impact of 'Indicators': A Process-Tracing Study of the Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index* (te Lintelo *et al.* 2016) for a full list).

Court and Maxwell (2005) identified regional networks as an increasingly influential and important way to share information and promote evidence-based policy. Accordingly, the HANCI project sought and received support from the SUN Network International Civil Society Coordinators to circulate communication products throughout the global SUN Network. Some of the local policy advocates were further supported with drawing up country-specific press releases. As the SUN movement seeks to reposition nutrition as being about political will, and given that research is much more likely to be used by policymakers if it supports existing framings of the issue (Court and Young 2003), part of the utility of HANCI (and its predecessor, the Hunger Reduction Commitment Index) has been to provide a systematic evidence base to support this framing.

HANCI's communication strategy includes several best communication practices identified by a recent review by the Alliance for Useful Evidence: telling stories, using social media, creating a recognisable and respected brand and using a combination of communication channels (Breckon and Dodson 2016). For instance, a short animated film[2] was commissioned which framed hunger and nutrition as an issue of political commitment. The video invested a potentially dry and theoretical topic with emotional appeal designed to inspire and mobilise advocates for better nutrition outcomes. Additionally, consistent branding of website, and research and knowledge products such as scorecards, has strengthened the recognition of the HANCI brand. Having a strong communications strategy built into the project from the start ensured that the research was able to reach a much wider audience than would have been possible through partnership alone. Unexpected results included the government of Guatemala using its number one ranking in HANCI to highlight key achievements towards its electorate (Government of Guatemala 2015).

## 5 Co-constructing evidence-based policy advocacy messages in partnerships

The second part of HANCI's theory of change looks at the role civil society can play in holding government to account: '[I]f civil society is better able to hold governments to account, it can apply pressure and ensure that hunger and undernutrition are put high on development agendas' (te Lintelo *et al.* 2013b: 2). Co-constructing knowledge, and bringing in others to support research interpretation and translation into local contexts is a key element of engaged excellence. In order to do that, building strong partnerships with key civil society organisations

(CSOs) and federated networks working on hunger and nutrition were developed from early on in five countries: Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Bangladesh and Nepal. Multi-year collaborations allowed for personal and institutional relationships to develop between the researchers and civil society groups.

In each of the five countries, a multistage process of engagement with partners was followed. In each country,[3] an initial workshop was attended by participants from CSOs working in the area of advocacy around hunger and nutrition. It created a space where civil society could freely express different opinions, both about the index and topical and timely areas of advocacy. For instance, in Malawi, the civil society workshop provided a forum for discussing a key advocacy priority: the suggested move of the coordinating body for nutrition from the office of the president, back to the Ministry of Health, where it had previously been located. This was a critical issue for civil society groups in Malawi at the time, which was also supported by HANCI evidence which ranks Malawi highly for having a multisector, multi-stakeholder coordinating body for nutrition.

The workshops were designed to support partners and networked organisations to critically understand the index methodology, including trade-offs involved in weighting choices adopted, and in both its strengths as well as its weaknesses. The workshops further facilitated participants to construct three to four priority policy advocacy messages, supported by HANCI evidence, which would feed into an advocacy meeting with government actors the following day. At the end of each of the workshops, participants nominated someone who would present the agreed upon, evidence-based advocacy messages to a meeting with government officials.

This meeting comprised officials from all relevant ministries including health, agriculture, planning, nutrition, education and finance, etc. Here, researchers presented and explained the research and key findings, and the appointed member of civil society shared the key advocacy priorities, backed up by the research findings, which proved a powerful combination. Subsequent discussions provided opportunities for research findings to be backed up by personal testimonies, to enhance the chances of policy influencing (Stamatakis, McBride and Brownson 2010). For instance, in Malawi, which ranks second on the HANCI 2014 index, one of the highlighted areas for improvement was women's access to agricultural land. While Malawian law gives men and women equal rights, the index showed that in practice, laws are not enforced and discriminatory practices against women continue, which increases their vulnerability to hunger and undernutrition (te Lintelo *et al.* 2014a). At this meeting, a female farmer from the Coalition of Women Farmers spoke eloquently about how discriminatory practices affected her: 'The land bill should allow people to register land, but once a woman is married, the husband gets the land. I have five daughters, if my husband dies his side of the family will get all the land' (COWFA representative August 2014).[4] This combination of strong evidence, grounded in the local context, and the capability of the index to be deconstructed and cater to specific advocacy needs and

personal testimonies of partner organisations, has been essential in moving HANCI from simply a research product into an advocacy tool which can support the various ambitions and goals of partners.

For the researchers, this staged workshop process enabled the research findings to be shared in an accessible way, ensuring that any questions about the methodology or data could be answered. This reduced the likelihood that research findings were misinterpreted, oversimplified or distorted; an important challenge in translating research into effective policy messages (Court and Maxwell 2005). Researchers also had the opportunity to better understand the local context and current advocacy priorities of partners. For civil society, the workshops offered the opportunity to learn about new research findings which they could use to support their advocacy and to network with others working on similar issues. Additionally, partnering with a respected research institute provided legitimacy and enabled novel access to government officials and MPs, in part through financial support for such meetings.

The workshops also supported researchers with advice on how to best present research findings to government officials. For example, in Zambia, which occupied a low spot on the global commitment rankings, CSOs advised researchers to first present positive findings, and explain in detail all the indicators, to prevent government officials from dismissing the findings outright. Moreover, Zambian partners highlighted that government acceptance of findings would be higher if published government data was used. For instance, vitamin A supplementation coverage data from the government of Zambia would be deemed more legitimate then using others' (e.g. UNICEF) data. Zambian partners also devised a process through which government actors were informed about key findings, and given the opportunity to comment on and provide published data for the index, prior to its official release. This approach supported retaining a constructive relation with, and greater chances of influencing, the government.

Influencing policy is a complex, and time-consuming process, involving understanding, and using, a range of advocacy tools and processes and developing a long-term policy-influencing strategy, which researchers have neither the time, nor expertise nor the mandate to carry out by themselves (Morton, Shaxson and Greenland 2012). However, partners who were both research users and interpreters of evidence were well placed, with support from researchers, to identify which evidence had strategic value to their advocacy goals. This approach is markedly different to a 'research uptake' model where researchers are expected to package research for non-academic audiences which allows knowledge brokers and policymakers to cherry-pick the evidence that appears to support an existing position. Accordingly, CSO partnerships, an essential element of enabling engaged excellence, were critical for interpreting the value and significance of HANCI evidence within country-specific cultural, political and economic contexts, to enhance the likelihood of achieving policy impact (Court and Young 2003).

**6 Using advocacy partnerships to effectively engage policy elites**

The third part of the HANCI theory of change looks at how governments can hold themselves to account in their efforts to keep undernutrition high on the agenda (te Lintelo *et al*. 2013b). This section looks at the interplay between civil society, governments and researchers and how the index has been used by civil society to engage policy elites, to generate a dialogue around hunger and nutrition, inspiring policy elites to take action. This is where the multiple elements of engaged excellence come together, with rigorous research methodology and effective communications convincing policy advocates and others to use the research evidence in their advocacy, building upon existing relationships with the political elite.

In Zambia and Tanzania, policy advocacy groups and researchers worked with MPs to advocate on key nutrition issues.

In Tanzania, four HANCI-inspired advocacy messages were developed, which were presented by the Tanzanian partner (the Partnership for Nutrition in Tanzania, PANITA) to the Parliamentary Group (PG) on Nutrition, Food Security and Child Rights in November 2013. This informal caucus was formed in 2011 specifically to promote nutrition within Parliament (Seballos, te Lintelo and Pittore 2015). The advocacy message that resonated the most with the PG was the finding from the expert surveys which showed that nutrition and hunger did not feature in political party manifestos, which are influential in guiding future government policy. As a general election was due in October 2015, MPs recognised an opportunity to campaign for nutrition. PANITA secured funds to commission an independent consultant to develop a set of politically neutral nutrition recommendations, which were commented on by key development partners, before being reviewed by the PG. The nutrition recommendations were presented in the shape of a booklet, to inform political parties' electoral manifestos. The booklet was launched in Parliament in February 2015 and subsequently promoted by PG members to key party members, including MPs in various parliamentary committees and members of manifesto drafting committees (Seballos *et al*. 2015).

In Zambia, researchers joined the Civil Society Alliance for Nutrition in Zambia (CSO-SUN Zambia) to meet a group of parliamentarians who shared an interest in nutrition issues. Discussions at the meeting, held in August 2014, illustrate how an index can stimulate a debate within government, especially when faced with less favourable rankings than countries that they see as similar to themselves. One MP remarked: 'How are we doing worse than Ethiopia? Or Rwanda?', sparking a heated discussion, in which another MP defended the efforts of Rwanda, which was doing remarkably well even with almost half the budget for a similar-sized population (Zambian MP, August 2014).[5]

The process of partnership, involving the sharing of research findings with partners, debating the various indicators and carefully sharing

**Box 2 Reflections from the Partnership for Nutrition in Tanzania (PANITA)**

The Executive Director of PANITA, Tumaini Mikindo, reflects on the value of its partnership with IDS over the last four years. Mr Mikindo identifies four key areas where the collaboration with IDS has supported PANITA's work, both on specific projects as well as its development as an organisation.

1  **Primary data collection to increase the acceptability of results for government:** The 2014 HANCI expert perception surveys data were gathered by a leading expert from the Sokoine University of Agriculture. The use of a local expert to collect primary data had two advantages: it reduced the perception that issues of hunger and undernutrition were donor-driven; and the expert perception survey increased the validity and credibility of the HANCI results for Tanzanian government officials.

2  **Providing additional evidence and research capacity:** Many CSOs that conduct nutrition advocacy in Tanzania are quite new and have limited capacity to conduct rigorous research. HANCI evidence helped fill this research gap and also provided evidence and support that was essential for PANITA to have credible and meaningful collaborations with MPs, which has been essential for PANITA's long-term strategy.

3  **Resource mobilisation:** The engagement between IDS and PANITA was important in terms of resource mobilisation, as PANITA had limited resources and would not have been able to carry out as full a programme of strategic advocacy with key decision-makers without financial support from IDS. The funding from IDS was important beyond assisting with specific activities as it also supported PANITA's growth as an organisation, allowing it to demonstrate its ability to manage finances, thus increasing the organisation's chances of attracting future funding.

4  **A mutually supportive relationship was key for working to get nutrition recommendations included in political manifestos.** Without this collaboration with IDS, PANITA would not have been able to take a leading role in developing the set of nutrition manifesto recommendations and engaging MPs to encourage them to include these recommendations in their parties' manifestos.

findings that were potentially inflammatory, helped to improve the research acceptance. Multiple reviews have shown the importance of personal relationships (developed over time) in getting research evidence used by policymakers (Innvær *et al.* 2002; Mitton *et al.* 2007). In this way, in-country partners are critical knowledge brokers, conveying HANCI evidence to decision-makers.

## 7 Conclusion

Research for international development, which explicitly aims to reduce inequalities, accelerate sustainability, and build more inclusive and safe societies, can gain from active engagement with policy advocates. It is a false dichotomy to separate out research from research for advocacy, and there is much to be gained from such a collaboration. Nevertheless, these types of linkages are not always common, with researchers assuming that a narrow 'research dissemination' model, focusing on sharing findings at the end of research, will bring about policy change and eventual impact, and avoiding engagement with advocates or advocacy processes. Research can inform policy, but this usually takes long-term engagement by policy advocates who understand the context, the politics and have relationships with key stakeholders.

Far from compromising on the objectivity of the research, researcher–advocacy partnership can stress-test the research methodology, ensuring that it can stand up to and persuade vocal critics in policy environments about its value. Engaging with advocates and advocacy groups in a structured way may eliminate some of the tensions for researchers, such as perceptions that they are no longer objective. They are able to leave the job of more applied 'advocacy' which aims to ultimately bring about changes in policy and practice to civil society advocates, who are well grounded in the local realities, and have the expertise, relationships and mandate to carry out such a role. Having a structured process for sharing, discussing, debating and ultimately using the evidence for policy advocacy may also reduce researcher fears that evidence is being used incorrectly and can provide support to CSOs who may not have the capacity to carry out research on their own.

The HANCI case study demonstrates how engaged excellence, delivering high-quality research which is co-constructed by partners, and delivered in a way that ensures research findings are communicated and mobilised effectively, can operate in practice. In marked contrast to other international indexes, from the outset, HANCI researchers sought to move beyond simply producing an index to supporting potential uses of the index to understand the evidence, debate the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence and decide if, and how, to use the evidence in their advocacy work (te Lintelo *et al.* 2016). Working with partners over multiple years, and guided by their own advocacy strategies and objectives, ensured that the research was grounded in local realities, to support longer-term goals of partners, such as advocating to include nutrition in political manifestos in Tanzania.

Development research, which is aiming to achieve change in people's lives, can legitimately and fruitfully influence policy processes, and must be allowed to do so, unimpeded by regulations such as the anti-advocacy clause which may reduce the use of evidence in policy. Research alone, without a strong emphasis on policy engagement and communication, and translation of that research into local contexts and for local audiences (including communities and policymakers), and a sensitivity to the complexity of the policy process is likely to have a slimmer chance of effecting change. HANCI presents an example of how this type of engagement can work, how this can benefit both the research and the advocates, without compromising on the social science standards of 'objective' research, and ultimately improving the quality of the research to policy process.

**Notes**

1 Spearman's rank is a non-parametric measure of rank-correlation between two variables which is the statistical dependence/ association between the rankings of the two variables. Spearman's rank correlation between two variables is high if they are similarly ranked (if the two are identically ranked they will have a Spearman's rank correlation of 1). If the two variables are differently ranked Spearman's rank correlation will be low (or -1 if exactly opposite).
2 www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKv6G0Zw4UI.
3 Except Bangladesh, which followed a different process based on the partner's own priorities.
4 Workshop notes.
5 Workshop notes.

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# Indigenous Technical Knowledge: Analysis, Implications and Issues

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**Abstract** This review of the discussions of a workshop analyses indigenous technical knowledge (ITK), examines its potential for rural development, and outlines implications and issues. ITK is compared with institutionally organised science and technology. It can be seen in terms of stock and process: a rich but underutilised stock of knowledge; and the potential of processes through which knowledge can be generated, assimilated, and transmitted. Implications include the use of new methods for eliciting ITK, changes in the values and reward systems of professionals and officials concerned with rural development, and the need for further research and analysis.

This paper is a selective review and summary of arguments put and points made at the workshop on indigenous technical knowledge1 for which some of the other papers in this *Bulletin* were originally written. As such, it draws together some of the points made elsewhere in this issue. In attempting to report the gist of the workshop discussions we are not necessarily presenting our views.

### What is indigenous technical knowledge (ITK)?
To define the field, it is useful to start by asking in what respects indigenous technical knowledge (ITK) corresponds to and contrasts with institutionally organised science and technology.

Those who have looked at the world from the viewpoint of organised science or of the culture of which it is a part, have conventionally regarded the knowledge of other cultures as 'pre-logical' or 'irrational', and in so doing have either dismissed or greatly played down its validity. In seeking to redress the balance, many proponents of ITK have argued that it is eminently practical and utilitarian. Whilst in some senses true, this statement could also imply that ITK differed from science in that it *only* encompassed areas of direct practical value.

Levi-Strauss (1966) argued forcefully against such a distinction on the grounds that human societies could not, for example, possibly have acquired the skills to make water-tight pots without a genuinely scientific attitude and a desire for knowledge for its own sake. ITK, like scientific knowledge should, therefore, be regarded in the first instance as something which became possible as a result of a more general intellectual process of creating order out of disorder, and not simply as a response to 'practical' human needs such as sustenance and health. Some of the knowledge arising in this way would of course have direct practical applications, and equally new knowledge about the way in which the world worked might arise as the result of a process of inquiry triggered initially by the wish to solve a problem of a 'practical' kind. An appreciation of this underlying similarity between ITK and science is important if the full potential of ITK is to be realised.

An important difference between science and ITK lies in the way in which phenomena are observed and ordered. The scientific mode of thought is characterised by a greater ability to break down data presented to the senses and to reassemble it in different ways. The mode of ITK, on the other hand, is 'concrete' and relies almost exclusively on intuition and evidence directly available to the senses.

A second distinction derives from the way practitioners of the two modes of thought represent to themselves the nature of the enterprise in which they are engaged. Science is an open system whose adherents are always aware of the possibility of alternative perspectives to those adopted at any particular point of time. ITK, on the other hand, as a closed system, is characterised by a lack of awareness that there may be other ways of regarding the world. This is not to say that ITK does not change, but rather that those changes which occur are in nearly all instances comparable to the achievements of what Kuhn (1962) termed 'normal science', or to the detailed working out of relatively minor 'puzzles' within an established 'paradigm' of thought. Science, in contrast, constantly carries with it the possibility of 'revolutionary change' in which one paradigm would be destroyed and replaced by another.

Put slightly differently, science and ITK can be contrasted and evaluated according to three criteria:

– as systems of classification;

– as systems of explanation and prediction;

– in terms of speed of accumulation.

While ITK and science are comparable on the first criterion, science is generally superior on the second and markedly superior on the third.

ITK can itself be classified in various ways, including:

- in terms of the idioms and conceptual tools through which ITK becomes possible. This can be separated into two clusters – the propensity to classify and the propensity to quantify;

- in terms of the objects towards which thought is directed. Possible subdivisions here include: physical/inanimate (e.g. soils, water, climate); biological (e.g. crops, weeds, pests, domestic and other animals, insects); medical; and energy related;

- in terms of knowledge about fabrication and use of artifacts;

- in terms of knowledge of the operation of the social and economic structures within which production is embedded.

This final category is arguably only admissible under a broad definition of ITK. It includes readily articulate knowledge about such things as markets and co-operatives. It may also include mechanisms of ecological adaptation bound up in rituals such as the intermittent slaughtering of pigs in parts of New Guinea. This raises the question whether people themselves conceive of production activities as separable from social and economic relations.

Regarding the concept of ITK, there are reservations on two grounds. First, it can imply an old/new distinction which is not helpful, since at any time the knowledge available to people is the outcome of processes of transmission and generation which have occurred both within and beyond the local environment. Assimilation of 'outside' knowledge, and synthesis and hybridisation with existing knowledge, are continuing processes. Second, it may over-emphasise the static notion of a stock of knowledge available to be tapped to the neglect of knowledge-generation as a dynamic process.

### Changes in ITK

The idea of knowledge as process is useful in showing that ITK cannot be understood independently of the ways in which it changes. Apart from assimilation and synthesis or hybridisation, the basic process of accumulation is, as with scientific knowledge, through experiment. In addition to the examples given in Howes' paper, two further instances of indigenous experimentation can be cited. In one case, in Nigeria, people experimented with cassava when it was first introduced. As cassava can be poisonous, it was important to establish the conditions in which it could safely be eaten. The procedure adopted was to feed it first to goats and dogs. In another case, also in Nigeria, a scientist believed he had made a breakthrough when he found a way of breeding yams from seed, propagation normally being vegetative. A farmer was casually encountered, however, who had not only himself succeeded in doing this, but had also discovered that whereas the first generation of tubers were abnormally small, the second and subsequent generations were of normal size. The scientist reportedly exclaimed "Thank God these farmers don't write scientific papers". It was also noted, in support of the prevalence of experimentation by farmers, that there is a Yoruba word for 'experiment'.

The rate at which new knowledge can be acquired through such forms of experiment is, however, slow compared with science. Stress can trigger innovation; and the development of the bamboo tubewell in India is a recent example of this. But this process can work in reverse, as in the case of the Dogon who abandoned their elaborate system of water use when moving from densely populated upland areas on to the plains. It should also be noted that in general ITK lacks means for systematic and rapid R and D.

The most significant changes in ITK come with the assimilation of small-scale societies to national and international systems. Some of these changes involve uncontroversial adoption of new knowledge. In Botswana, for example, farmers are said to have abandoned traditional categories for classifying cattle in favour of those used in marketing meat. Elsewhere, especially in medicine, there have been cases of synthesis between ITK and science-based knowledge.

But generally, it seems that when ITK and scientific stocks of knowledge come together, synthesis does not occur. One of two things tends to happen: either the two sets of knowledge are isolated from each other (as with the head of an agricultural research station who tried to persuade farmers to adopt monocropping while still intercropping on his own land); or ITK is ignored and squeezed out as inferior. This squeezing out is more common and can lead to loss of confidence among the possessors of ITK as well as to irreversible loss of knowledge.

At the root of the problem lies the fact that officials – agricultural extension staff, planners, research workers, 'experts' and others – depend on scientific knowledge to legitimise their superior status. They thus have a vested interest in devaluing ITK and in imposing a sense of dependence on the part of their rural clients. This suggests that change may only be brought about through an assault at the level of ideology, and through a reorientation of reward systems.

The problem, however, is not just one of stocks of ITK, but of undermining the foundations for indigenous participation in the process of generating new technical knowledge. Thus Mali pastoralists are said to have accepted the dependent status which has been thrust upon them, and now believe that their major hope for salvation lies with the World Bank; and more generally, rural people tend to lack the confidence or inclination to engage in self-help activities in spheres where they have past experience of external assistance. In principle, there is no reason why this process should not be made to operate in reverse – with people gaining confidence and acquiring knowledge as a result of being drawn into the processes of generating technology – but in practice, there is little evidence that this happens.

### How to elicit ITK
Some conventional approaches to research have serious limitations for eliciting ITK and finding out how it is organised. Questionnaires impose the compiler's categories upon the respondent and do violence

to the latter's meaning system. This may not always be immediately apparent since respondents often adapt to the logical framework implied by their questioner. Difficulties arise where, for example, an extension agent asks for information on yields per acre from a farmer who is more concerned with yields per unit of labour. Problems are compounded when the questioner has a different native tongue from the respondent. The boundaries delineating colours, for example, vary between languages, but these variations may not be recognised; and culturally specific concepts are often hard to translate. Full-scale anthropological methods of observer-participation can overcome these difficulties but they are time-consuming and probably rarely cost-effective. Methods of investigation are needed which are open-ended, quick, and reliable.

One such approach is to take part with informants in their work. While this may not enable the observer fully to see the world through the informants' eyes, a high degree of empathy can be achieved by working together, and information and insights may be provided which informants would not otherwise have thought to mention. Another approach is to observe and learn the games people play since these are often how important skills are acquired and practised. It is also often particularly useful to find out about indigenous systems of quantification and to calibrate these against formal scientific measures.

Other ways of eliciting ITK can simultaneously stimulate the creativity of informants. These approaches include the use and adaptation of games as described by Barker and Richards *(infra)*.

### Uses of the stock of ITK
Can the stock of ITK be used either to economise on the use of scarce trained scientific manpower or to extend the range of observations upon which science can draw?

Instances where this has happened are few, but suggest a considerable potential. Pastoralists, for example, have detailed genealogical knowledge of their animals which can quickly be translated to give a picture of fertility and age-specific mortality. Similarly, work on the variegated grasshopper *(Zonocerus Variegatus)* in Nigeria, which drew on indigenous perceptions, provides a useful basis for determining the seriousness of the problems which they generated, and hence the priority to be attached to remedial action (Barker *et al.* 1977 and *infra).*

Other ways can be suggested in which indigenous observers might – in theory at least – act as 'the eyes and ears of science'. Knowledge of micro-environmental conditions could be used in the preparation of soil maps; local people could be consulted to determine the milk yields of animals under 'real' conditions where scientific testing had not been carried out; indigenous observers might be encouraged to report back on changes in the species composition of pasture as an early warning system for environmental deterioration; farmers could be used in crop reporting system instead of extension personnel; and so on.

Many such possibilities might be opened up with little technical difficulty: often all that is required is standardisation of systems of measurement. However, one should not simply think in terms of how ITK can be used in isolation, but rather consider ways in which it can be brought into creative synthesis with science. In the environmental sphere, for example, the ideal form of monitoring might well involve a combination of sophisticated satellite technology with observers operating at the local level.

In attempting to mount such an exercise it is also important to recognise that ITK is not distributed evenly among the members of a society. It is likely to be controlled and manipulated by certain groups and classes in the pursuit of their own interests. Sometimes particular types of knowledge are the preserve of 'caste-like' groups such as Twareg smiths; in other cases religious groups like the Marabuts in West Africa are paid and respected as repositories of knowledge. Such interest groups may provide a basis for collaboration, but equally they may stand in the way of change. Elsewhere, variable access to knowledge can arise out of the differentiation of a society into economic classes. In all societies systematic variations in knowledge are likely to be associated with sex and age. In addition, individuals always differ in ability and aptitude.

There are further important practical questions about the way in which knowledge is transmitted between individuals and generations. An understanding of established learning processes might provide a useful starting point for seeing how people could 'draw-down' on scientific knowledge more effectively.

**Implications for R and D**
How can ITK contribute to the generation and exploitation of technology to benefit rural populations? This can be seen as a question of finding an optimum mix and balance between indigenous participation and scientific participation in R and D processes rather than a choice of either one or the other. What mix is optimal will vary.

It can be argued that formal R and D systems are efficient for generating new knowledge quickly. Whatever the merits of ITK and of R and D activities which involve rural people themselves, the means and methods of scientific research can, in many fields, achieve far more far faster than would ever be possible through reliance on indigenous experimentation. In this view, the urgency of rural development is such that rapid advance to major breakthroughs is essential, and some at least of these have to come primarily through the formal R and D system.

On the other hand, rural people already take the final and crucial decision whether to adopt a new technique. In addition, they often adapt the standard packages with which they are presented to fit their particular needs and conditions. However, it may be only certain people, notably the relatively powerful and wealthy, who normally take part in such decisions.

Certain aspects of knowledge-generation will always have to be centralised and formally organised. Opinions differ, however, about the extent to which this is desirable. Much formal R and D has three phases: problems; a period of development and testing removed from that environment – on a research station or in a laboratory; and a period of re-entry and testing, during which the innovation is brought into the rural environment. For any technology, the question is what balance is optimal between these three. For mechanical and engineering technology, the case appears strong for much more work in the rural environment and with rural people. With seed-breeding programmes, in contrast, a phase in the controlled conditions of a research station is desirable for efficiency. Similarly, in developing a vaccine for cattle, some work in a well-equipped laboratory may be essential. Although opinions differ, it may be generally more efficient, in terms of ultimate benefits to rural people, for much more R and D to be conducted in rural environments and with rural people than is current practice.

Substantial efforts have been made in this direction. Before any radical proposals are put forward, attention should be paid to the experience gained by the International Agricultural Research Centres and by national research institutions. At the same time, there is scope for making these formal systems more responsive to the views and needs of those whom they are supposed to serve. Formal R and D is still struggling to get to grips with the variability of tropical environments, and with the accordant need to decentralise research to involve local people more actively in it. A further general failing is the tendency to see the end product of a research programme as a report or an article rather than a proper evaluation of adoption, benefits and lessons. Also, research activities still tend to carve up reality in a manner which hinders a holistic view of local-level conditions.

To overcome or reduce these problems, six proposals seem worth considering:

### (1) Rural exposure for extension and research staff
Extension and research staff could be confronted more directly than is usual with the realities to which their work relates. This could be done both during initial training and at intervals thereafter. The repertory grid method (see Richards, *infra)* might serve as a starting point for enabling professional personnel to appreciate the difference between their way of looking at the world and that of the people who were supposed to benefit from their work.

### (2) Checklists
Checklists could be used to draw attention to factors which might otherwise not be considered in determining research priorities or extension advice. Some examples of factors that may be overlooked with an innovation are implications for women, profitability, effectiveness and efficiency, availability and access to inputs and complementary items, whether a farmer can afford an innovation,

risk, social significance and acceptability, lightness for carrying and 'mendability', labour requirements, and effects on diet and on the variety and timeliness of food supply. Checklists have their uses but can be criticised for the implicit assumption that decisions will be made by a small group of people who will determine what is good for others.

### (3) Local-level influence on research priorities

To improve the criteria chosen in research and then to see they are acted on, producers could sit on the boards of agricultural research stations, following the model of the Kenyan commodity boards. Further, priorities could be set by national research committees which consulted at the local level, although there would be a danger that this would merely reinforce elite preconceptions.

### (4) A cafeteria system

Farmers could be offered different packages and left to decide for themselves which they would adopt. In Sri Lanka, for example, farmers were provided with 'mini-kits' of different seed varieties, with which they could experiment on their own farms.

### (5) Starting with indigenous practice

A more radical proposal is that research should take existing indigenous practice as its starting point, seeking to refine this in various ways and then to feed results back into the system. This would go hand in hand with the actual and metaphorical removal of the 'fences' surrounding research institutions so that no aspect of the process of knowledge-generation fell beyond the purview of those whose livelihoods would ultimately be affected. An objection here, however, is that indigenous practice, as with intercropping, growing two or more types of crops together, may be so complex as to be laborious and difficult to test under controlled research conditions.

### (6) Experimental work in rural conditions

The process might be taken a stage further, perhaps through full-blown experimental work on farmers' fields and with farmers' collaboration. In general, people are more likely to operate and exploit a new technology successfully if they have themselves taken part in its creation.

The validity of this sixth proposal is supported by the extent to which important technical change has taken place and can take place outside formal R and D systems. It turns part of the earlier discussion on its head; instead of asking how experts and scientists can better understand the potential of ITK, the question now is how rural people themselves can assess and utilise the potential of science. To pursue this approach, more has to be known about the way in which knowledge is generated and hybridised and about the potential for different modes of participation. A further need is to see whether ITK can in some way help to stimulate demand which will make R and D respond to the needs of neglected groups and classes.

One objection to this sixth proposal is the earlier arguments in favour of formal science with its implied centralisation. Another is that people can and often do use and benefit from techniques without understanding the technology underlying them. Opinions differ on these points, suggesting a need for research to identify optimal and feasible degrees of decentralisation and modes of participation according to type of technology and social conditions.

**Values and rewards**

Proposals for using the stock of ITK and for local involvement in R and D can only be adopted easily when lack of awareness is the only constraint. In practice this is rarely the case. In situations where change seems desirable, deep-rooted structural impediments will frequently be encountered. Junior field extension staff, for example, being low in the government service, have a vested interest in exaggerating differences between themselves and local people; and the distinction between 'superior' scientific and 'inferior' indigenous knowledge protects and legitimates their status. In addition most of the proposals presuppose flexibility and initiative at the lower levels in the bureaucracy, but this conflicts with bureaucratic norms. There are also likely to be problems among more senior staff engaged in R and D. Established professional values dictate that rewards should be given to those who make original contributions to knowledge, achieve breakthroughs at the level of theory, and publish their findings in internationally reputable journals; but offer relatively little incentive to individuals to go out on a limb with approaches involving ITK. Changes in values and reward systems are necessary preconditions of progress.

Such changes can be sought directly and indirectly. Possible direct approaches include the award of Nobel prizes and of other international and national medals and distinctions for outstanding work with ITK and for exceptional local-level breakthroughs. For their part, academics can encourage research related to ITK and publish the results in international and national journals. A system of rewards for villages, perhaps along the lines of the former 'village of the year' competition in Uganda, might promote self-confidence and creativity and be linked with ITK. Finally, R and D staff might be rewarded according to the practical result of their work, possibly through an assessment by local people themselves; but in the case of agricultural research, at least, this would prove difficult in practice.

Less direct approaches might involve an attack on prevailing ideology. Initiatives through education can be suggested. Primary school teachers with extensive ITK could be accorded high status and encouraged to communicate their knowledge through the formal educational process. Knowledgable local people could also teach in schools. Third world universities could be encouraged to extend fieldwork for students, on the lines of the useful studies already carried out by Makerere University, the University of Dar es Salaam, and the University of Nairobi. Such exercises need only small research budgets.

Research workers in the richer countries also have an important role to play. By studying and recording ITK and making it academically respectable, they can counteract the ideologies in the name of which it is being destroyed. By encouraging students – particularly those from third world countries – also to adopt this perspective, the effect can be multiplied.

**Some outstanding questions**

Questions which remain unresolved and questions which may deserve further research include the following:

**ITK**

1   Do rural people conceive production systems separately from the social and economic structures in which they are embedded? In other words, to what extent, or in what senses, are they aware of their technical knowledge as technical knowledge?

2   How is established knowledge transmitted between generations and individuals? What implications, if any, do such processes have for the appraisal and acquisition of scientific and other knowledge?

3   What are the strengths and weaknesses of different categories of the stock of ITK and what are their potential contributions to rural development?

4   Why does the meeting of ITK and science sometimes lead to constructive synthesis (as sometimes in medicine) but more frequently to the subjugation of ITK by science? How are ITK and scientific knowledge synthesised, and how might that synthesis be improved?

**R and D and the generation of knowledge**

1   How is ITK generated?

2   In developing scientific R and D programmes how useful is it to start with ITK and with current rural practices?

3   How useful are checklists?

4   What degree of decentralisation and of work with rural people in rural environments is optimal, by type of technology, by phase of R and D, and by social conditions? In particular, how important and feasible is active participation in R and D by the ultimate users of the technology?

5   What demands are exerted or might be exerted by rural people upon formal knowledge-creation systems, and through what modes of participation?

6   To what extent and how successfully have the International Agricultural Research Centres and national research organisations adapted their programmes to take account of ITK, of local environmental conditions, and of particular social groups, and what can be learnt from their experiences?

**Professional training and values**

In modifying professional values and behaviour, what is the potential of:

1 New reward systems?

2 Games played with farmers and others as part of the training of staff?

3 Research on ITK required to be carried out by extension and research workers, and by their trainers?

**Notes**

1 Workshop on the Use of Indigenous Technical Knowledge held at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, 13–14 April 1978. Acknowledgment is due to the members of the workshop for contributions to the discussion and conclusions. They were Mahmadul Alam, Enrique Bautista, Martin Bell, Deryke Belshaw, Ian Carruthers, Robert Chambers, Donald Curtis, Michael Howes, Richard Longhurst, Paul Richards, Sumit Roy, N. Somasekhara, Jeremy Swift and Tony Zahlan.

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# Introduction: Information, Knowledge and Power[1]

## Susanna Davies

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**Abstract** The idea that 'knowledge itself is power' is not new; but at the global level, this dictum is now truer than ever, as a result of rapid advances in information technology in the North. Increasingly, knowledge (including the capacity to create it) is becoming a key economic input which, at the extreme, supersedes land, capital and labour in importance. The revolution in information technology and communications has direct implications for the South and for development studies: not only in obvious ways (e.g. in the generation of statistics and satellite images); but also in less predictable ways, notably the emergence of participatory methods for data collection and analysis. Participatory techniques, just like changes in more conventional sources of information, are in part a result of – and dependent on – the international communications revolution. Innovation in information is not intrinsically bad, but it is driven by the North and by northern agendas. Drawing together work carried out at IDS and elsewhere, this Bulletin explores the implications of this change for development. It focuses on the ways in which information is – or is not – used in decision-making which affects development policy, planning and practice.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The idea that 'knowledge itself is power'[2] is not new; but at the global level, this dictum is now truer than ever, as a result of rapid advances in information technology in the North. Increasingly, knowledge (including the capacity to create it) is becoming a key economic input which, at the extreme, supersedes land, capital and labour in importance. The revolution in information technology and communications has direct implications for the South and for development studies: not only in obvious ways (e.g. in the generation of statistics and satellite images); but also in less predictable ways, notably the emergence of participatory methods for data collection and analysis. Participatory techniques, just like changes in more conventional sources of information, are in part a result of – and dependent on – the international communications revolution.

Innovation in information is not intrinsically bad, but it is driven by the North and by northern agendas. Drawing together work carried out at IDS and elsewhere, this Bulletin explores the implications of this change for development. It focuses on the ways in which information is – or is not – used in decision-making which affects development policy, planning and practice. Progress in information **provision** is what informs the emphasis of this Bulletin on the use to which the product of this growth industry is put. Our concern is with a sub-set of information: that is, with information **collected by and available to 'us' about poor people in developing countries**. Most such information is in the public domain and is intended primarily to inform public action. Outsiders' (development agencies, practitioners, researchers) access to and command over such information has greatly increased in recent years, as has that of states in developing countries (albeit often to a lesser extent). But it does not follow that the use to which information is put leads to more effective public action.

Three connected sets of issues are explored in this Bulletin: conceptual questions about the relationship between information, knowledge and power; case studies of the use, misuse and abuse of information in the public sphere in a range of development contexts; and a tentative exploration of how barriers to effective information use might be broken down.

This Introduction sets the scene by examining current attitudes towards the generation and use of information in public policy making for development, as well as recent attempts to use more participatory, process-driven approaches informed by a desire to close the gap between 'them' and 'us'. It then argues that information use is determined by the underlying political economy within which development policy and public action take place. Each actor generates and uses information in a self-interested way within this context. These actors include: bilateral and international donor agencies, non-governmental organizations, researchers and other development professionals and private sector agents. Sometimes, but often not, they operate in collaboration with Southern governments and professionals. When it is Northerners who are using information about Southern 'beneficiaries', the relationship is essentially hierarchical. This process is repeated within developing countries between powerful elites and weaker groups. It is therefore very difficult to understand how and why information is generated and used in the public domain of development without an appreciation of the political and economic context within which it is happening. Issues about how information is collected, how good its quality is or how much of it exists, do not alter the fundamental hierarchical relationship between 'them' and 'us', although as several of the articles in this Bulletin argue, attempts are being made to overturn it.

Relevant theory and literature on the use of information are disparate and span many disciplines. Simply taking the example of contributions to this Bulletin, it is clear that those concerned with issues of information

use approach it from many different starting points and so perceive it in a multiplicity of ways. Decisions about development policy, planning and practice are taken in a range of institutional, political, social and economic contexts. The types of information which feed these decision-making processes cover a wide spectrum: from very specific detail about how households or communities behave; to broad assessments of changes in global phenomena. Some of the information discussed is accurate, some is highly imperfect either due to incompleteness or because the truth has consciously been distorted. Some is collected to inform policy-making, in other cases the objective is to check or control what people are doing. Identifying common issues in this broad area is not easy, but as the articles in this Bulletin show, there are a number of recurring themes which characterize the use of information by 'us' to inform public action which will affect 'them'. The most important of these are as follows:

- The **production of information has sky-rocketed** in recent years, both as a consequence of advances in information technology and its greater accessibility and as a result of the development of participatory techniques for data collection. Hi-tech information generation can, however, lead to excessively complex and costly (and inappropriate and impractical) methodologies for data collection. Equally, participatory methodologies may generate information that is no more usable than that derived from conventional techniques.

- The **ability to produce information** which is potentially useful to decision-makers **has far outstripped their capacity to use it**. Increasingly, the problem is less that we do not know what is happening, than that available information is not acted on or used in a manner that appears consistent with stated policy objectives.

- The **quantity of information available is rarely deemed adequate**. The adequacy of information for policy and political purposes is itself a highly contested and political issue, involving multiple and conflicting interests. The 'inadequate data' argument is used to delay decisions, but on the other hand, there are numerous development professionals who make their livings from generating and processing information and who will always argue that what is available is insufficient.

- The **quality of information** – often described in terms of accuracy – is **a central barrier to its use**, although 'accuracy' masks a variety of reasons for failure to exploit it: inappropriate and poorly implemented methodologies for collection; credibility; and the fabrication of lies and propaganda.

- **Information has chameleon-like qualities and is infinitely malleable**, meaning different things to different user groups and being exploited in a multiplicity of ways. Objectivity is hard – perhaps impossible – to achieve, despite the attention paid to its pursuit; alternatively, objectivity is not genuinely sought.

- Related to this is the tendency for **information to mirror the perceptions of those who collect and use it**. It reflects inherent biases and prevailing power structures, unless these are explicitly and successfully tackled in techniques for collection and use. This is rarely achieved.

- **What the 'value' of information means**, how it is measured and its role in society **is increasingly questioned**. What kind of information, based on what assumptions, is legitimate? And who's reality counts?

- Underlying these quality issues is the question of **who owns information**. Ownership of information confers a sense of impartiality or reflected interests in the eyes of the owner; whereas information which belongs to others (even though it may be publicly available) is frequently assumed to be biased and therefore unusable.

- **Access to information is highly uneven and control over knowledge is a source of power**. The transmission of knowledge 'is not based on simple communication channels, conduits or linkages, it involves human agency and occurs within socially and politically constituted networks of different actors, organizations and institutions' (Scoones and Thompson 1993: 12).

Underlying these themes is the relationship between information, knowledge and power. Before turning to this, it is useful to consider why information generation for development has increased so dramatically in recent years and the implications of this growth for its use.

## 2 INFORMING DEVELOPMENT OR DEVELOPING INFORMATION?

Belief that lack of information has been an obstacle to development planning is widespread, an idea fuelled by new doctrines requiring new types of information. This has led to an ever-increasing demand for more information. Promoting environmental sustainability requires information about natural resource degradation; famine prevention needs early warning systems; 'Health for All by the Year 2000' demands indicators of safe water and food availability, as well as of more standard health issues; and participatory development needs local people's views to fulfil its mandate. There have been three responses to this perceived information gap. The first has been to improve the supply of data and the efficiency and scope of its conversion into information and its subsequent dissemination. The second has been to implicitly approach information 'as if it were a "silver bullet" [and to treat it] as useful in and by itself, in disregard of the processes for collection, analysis and feedback that determine its effectiveness in planning and implementation.' (de Kadt 1989: 504). The third has been to use lack of information as a justification for inaction: decisions cannot be made because not enough is known.

On the data supply side, greatest energies have been directed towards developing more appropriate (i.e. participatory, interdisciplinary, accurate and rapid) techniques for data collection. Recent innovations in data

collection for development purposes have been characterized by the rise of participatory techniques and the demise of the formal survey, and of the dominance of Cartesian reductionism, or 'the practice of breaking a problem down into discrete components, analysing these separate parts in isolation from each other, and then reconstructing the system from the interpretation of the parts' (Kloppenburg 1991: 16). Taking a more holistic approach to data collection and the generation of information should make it more useful to decision-makers operating in the real world, because critical linkages between the component parts of complex problems and the relationships between different actors involved will be included in the analysis. Involving the same people in the generation of information that will inform decisions affecting their livelihoods should make the use of that information more practical. But all too often, more appropriate information has not resulted in greater use of it.

Information technology has revolutionized data processing and analysis, the rapidity with which information can be disseminated to almost any corner of the world, and hence who has access to it. As Richards argues in this Bulletin, there are many hidden spin-offs – some positive, some negative – from the infiltration of information technology into remote parts of the developing world, including the use of violent western 'entertainment' videos to provide role models for child soldiers in Africa. Better and faster information flows should facilitate the exploitation of information in decision-making. But there are many obstacles to this process, which echo some of those blocking the use of knowledge derived from participatory data collection methodologies. It is these which undermine the ability of information to act as a silver bullet: in other words, not only to be self-targeted towards the right place at the right time; but also to have an intrinsic value.

First amongst these barriers is the tendency to generate information for its own sake – or the 'more-information-is-good syndrome' (Gow and Morss 1985: 176) – precisely because it can now be done much more rapidly than in the past. The generation of too much information can be as unusable as too little, especially if it is not explicitly tied to specific decision-making tasks. Linked to this is the idea of methodological fetishism, seeking – via ever more sophisticated techniques for data collection and schemes for combining and weighting different kinds of data – to resolve conflicts inherent in the use of information. While new methodologies may produce better information, they cannot resolve the power play which determines how it will be used. Methodological advances should not, however, be overstated. Many remain inappropriate to the task at hand and to the resources available. As Eele argues in this Bulletin, the methodologies used in government statistical departments in many African countries are frequently inappropriate and unworkable.

Second, is the danger of creating the illusion of knowledge: if data have been extensively analysed and attractively presented in novel ways, information can appear more truthful and less incomplete than it is. Information generated both by information technology and by

participatory methodologies can fall into this trap. The use of statistics to lie is well-known. As Hulme, for example, shows in his article in this Bulletin, the incidence and severity of a particular drought can be greatly distorted according to the reference period chosen. Less accepted is how newer, apparently more multi-dimensional forms of information, generated via participatory methodologies can fall (or be put) into the same trap. Vulnerability maps, for example, can be misleading because they are visually easy to understand, despite the fact that they mask huge complexities (e.g. seasonal and intra-community differences); and show only what is known – at worst, what is not known thus ceases to exist.

Third, as more data and information are generated, technological barriers to entry rise. In the case of computers, it is obvious that those who do not have access to the necessary hardware (or indeed to a power supply), or who are not computer literate, are excluded. Less obviously, participatory methodologies can also be highly skill intensive, requiring expert facilitators and, crucially, people who can interpret the data generated for use by decision-makers and feed them into a planning process which is usually geared to quantitative and aggregated information. Although villagers themselves may potentially be the best facilitators in participatory exercises, the critical transmission of the knowledge gained invariably requires access to those who can 'translate' local knowledge into a language or form that decision-makers will respond to.

Fourth, insufficient information can become an 'escape hatch' for public decision-makers. They can avoid responsibility for inaction, especially if those who make policy choices (on the basis of information) are institutionally separate from those who implement policy (Clay and Schaffer 1984). Thus, in the case of food emergencies, Cutler (1985: 15) argues that: 'the establishment or strengthening of food crisis information systems becomes an escape route – agencies argue that they cannot act decisively until they have more and better information. Without being carefully linked to a defined and mandated response system, the early warning information systems become ends in themselves.' Yet as Buchanan-Smith, Davies and Petty show in their article in this Bulletin, even defined and mandated response systems which exist on paper, and at times even in practice, can fail to trigger timely response if there are political gains to be had from delay. Apparently institutional barriers are not always the result of inadequate institutional capacity, but sometimes of vested interests in the misuse of information.

## 3 THE PROVISION AND USE OF DATA, INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

As a starting point in understanding the failure to use information to inform public action, it is helpful to distinguish between terms which tend to be employed interchangeably – data, information and knowledge – and the uses to which they are put:

- **data** refer to raw (unanalysed) material (facts and figures), at times collected by an information system;

- **information** refers to analysed data, often presented in a form that is specifically designed for a given decision-making task, and transmitted to/received by decision-makers;

- **knowledge** refers to the subsequent absorption (often, but not always, by reading), assimilation, understanding and appreciation of that information;

- **use of data** refers to the process of transformation of raw data into information;

- **use of information** refers to the process of transmission and reception of information;

- **use of knowledge** refers to acting on the contents of the information received (or actively deciding not to).

This categorization builds on Machlup's (1979) distinction between the use of information ('the process of transmission and reception') and knowledge ('the object or contents delivered'). The key distinction for our purposes is between the use of information and the use of knowledge. The latter only occurs once the process of acting on the contents of the information received is underway.

There is, of course, an assumption of linearity in such a distinction and in real life, the transition from data to information to knowledge is a much more circuitous and iterative process. The distinction is nevertheless a useful initial means of differentiating between the generation of information and what happens to it once it becomes absorbed into the decision-making process. Using information alone is not synonymous with that information having an impact on a decision that is reached. A clear example emerges from the article in this Bulletin by Buchanan-Smith, Davies and Petty on famine early warning systems. Dramatic improvements in both the generation of data and the use of information have made it possible to **predict** many drought-induced famines. A failure to use the knowledge provided in famine early warning reports means that famines are not **prevented**.

What data and information are about, and what kind of decision-making task knowledge is to be used for, are of central importance in exploring the reasons why information is not used. Types of information used by 'us' about 'them' to inform public action are increasingly varied, as the articles in this Bulletin indicate. The predominance of quantitative information is being reduced by acceptance of the validity of qualitative data. The tyranny of the written word is to some extent being undermined by the use of visual media and oral dissemination.

Linked to these changes in the type of information we have access to are changing perceptions about the nature of the systems being examined

and the problems which arise from their operation. Positivism in social science and empiricism in natural science presuppose that 'the systems under scrutiny are, or at least can be, perfectly described' (Mearns 1991: 26). Increasing evidence shows that, in contrast, most systems are highly complex and variable, characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability. 'Reductionist science is not an appropriate method for dealing with every kind of problem. It is useful for 'tame' problems that can be effectively bounded, and about which adequate and unambiguous information is available. These problems can be thought of as closed systems.' (Miller 1985, cited in Mearns 1993: 29) Most of these closed systems are artificially constructed or perceived as such and can be illustrated by the example of activities which take place within a building, into and out of which all movements and other communications are control-led. ' "Wicked" problems, by contrast, represent open systems: they are complex, ill-defined and difficult to bound, and information about them is commonly incomplete and ambiguous' *(ibid.)*. Most of the problems confronting development planners in the public domain are of a wicked nature. Thus farming or livelihood systems are not buildings to which access is controlled, but are critically influenced by a myriad of external and invading factors. Such systems, in turn, mean that information needs are complex and knowledge about them will of necessity be incomplete. Whether information is part of a stable or unstable, closed or open and simple or complex system or environment determines the ways in which it is used. The reflexivity or circularity of social knowledge further exacerbates the tendencies of unstable, open and/or complex systems: 'new knowledge … does not simply render the social world more transparent, but alters its nature, spinning it off in novel directions' (Giddens 1990: 153). In other words, our 'scientific' interpretation of the social world at any one moment influences the way people see the world and thus actually changes it. This change can occur whether or not the initial knowledge is correct.

Data and information used to inform public development policy and practice are usually generated either by formal information systems or by one-off exercises and, increasingly, via more informal (often participatory) channels. Although some of the articles in this Bulletin discuss less structured ways of generating information, formal information systems – however imperfect – remain a major source of information used by developing country governments and donors. These systems are at once **processes** (the provision of information for use in decision-making) and **organizations** (the actual structure and operation of a system which collects information about a given set of issues).

Modelling information systems necessitates over-simplification of the complex flows and relations which determine information provision and use of knowledge. Such models can be useful tools for separating out organizational characteristics of systems and for an initial ordering of process functions undertaken by it. They cannot, however, replicate the dynamic nature of open systems. As Lucas argues in this Bulletin, information systems tend to be designed according

to what information is needed for rational decision-making. In fact, a much more appropriate question is what the real nature of the decision-making process is and at what point information might have an actual impact on decisions taken. This presupposes a much more flexible type of information system, given that it is very hard to design a (closed) information system that is appropriate to a moving (open) target. The stability or instability of the institutional context within which information systems operate is central to whether and how information and knowledge are used. Further, as de Kadt argues in this Bulletin, no matter at what level information systems operate, they tend to be arranged to meet the requirements and capacities of the most central authority involved. This conflicts with the growing recognition that information needs to be flexible enough to reflect and be relevant to local differences; and that appropriate use is likely to occur at a decentralized level.

In information systems analysis, use of information tends to be considered either in a narrowly economistic manner, or in terms of the institutional framework within which information is used. Whilst recognizing the presence of 'politicization' as an obstacle to effective operation of that system, such analyses tend to marginalize the role of political factors as peripheral and distorting variables, which – it is held – can often be corrected by more sophisticated methodologies for data collection and analysis or by minor institutional adjustments. The conversion of information into knowledge is generally regarded as an expected outcome of the proper functioning of the information system.

## 4 KNOWLEDGE, DECISION-MAKING AND POWER IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

### 4.1 What do 'we' mean by knowledge about 'them'?

Western perceptions of what constitutes real knowledge have evolved in modern (post-Renaissance) history from a positivist or rationalist approach, based on the assumption that it is possible to be certain of what is known and that only one reality exists; towards a realist approach which shifted the emphasis towards an appreciation that things exist independently of our ability to perceive or measure them. The assumptions of positivist, western scientific approaches to knowledge have been widely criticized (see Scoones and Thompson 1993 and Pretty in this Bulletin). The essence of the critique is the rejection of the positivist assumption 'that sees knowledge as a tangible stock, body or store to be tapped, extracted and documented … [and suggests that] the process of knowing should be seen as interactive, value-bound and context-determined, rather than detached, value-free and independent of context' *(ibid.: 9)*.

Whereas modernist approaches to knowledge sought to 'get a better grip on a complex, but nevertheless singular reality', post-modernism has moved one step further, recognizing 'how different, fragmentary realities may actually coexist' (Mearns 1991: 2). This has led to the gradual – and as yet incomplete – emergence of more participatory

'learning paradigms' which challenge rationalist and modernist thought drawing on a diverse range of disciplines and areas of inquiry. In so doing, they affirm individuals and their differences, and the necessary coexistence of multiple perspectives; are pluralist in that they allow individuals and groups to participate in decision-making; recognize knowledge to be contextual in time and location, and thus as having limited transferability; and see the future as being uncertain and indeterminate, dependent on current contextual decisions (Pretty and Chambers 1993).

There are at least three distinct schools within participatory approaches to knowledge advocated for use in development planning. The first of these is the 'transfer of technology' approach, proponents of which 'emphasize the rational nature and sophistication of rural people's knowledge and believe that knowledge can be blended with or incorporated into formal scientific knowledge systems' (Scoones and Thompson 1993: 3). The second, 'farmer first' approach has built on the earlier one to incorporate cultural as well as technical local knowledge, although it is recognized that if such knowledge is removed from its context and forced into existing foreign and scientific categories, it runs serious risks of misinterpretation. The third, emerging 'beyond farmer first' approach argues that 'knowledge, which emerges as a product of the discontinuous, inequitable, discursive and non-discursive interactions between different "actors" and "networks" through which different types of information are communicated and legitimated, and between which there is often serious lack of understanding, is seen as being fragmentary and diffuse' *(ibid.:* 6). Pretty in this Bulletin identifies five crucial differences between these emerging paradigms and positivism, in the context of sustainable agriculture. In many respects, such approaches are not new and long have been the concern of anthropologists and sociologists in particular. What is new is the emerging legitimacy of the information they provide, although it is still questioned by many. Yet, as Pretty argues in this Bulletin, the trustworthiness of information generated by a learning approach can be as great as – indeed greater than – that of information derived from positivist assumptions.

Realists, less singular in their view of knowledge than positivists, are nevertheless sceptical about the scope of such paradigms. They continue to judge what knowledge means according to whether it more or less fits with their perception of reality, without presupposing that such reality is as narrow as positivism would have us believe. Furthermore, it is of crucial importance to recognize that people will actively seek to hide and distort information in pursuit of self-interest. Realists criticize the 'beyond farmer first' approach on the grounds that it amounts to little more than an 'anything goes' view of knowledge and is naive about the ways in which people manipulate information.

Yet participatory learning and realist approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, they cannot be in the context of using knowledge to inform public action. Realists can accept the premises of

advocates of the 'beyond farmer first' approach (or of 'post-modernism for development'), but argue that if the knowledge generated by methodologies based on such assumptions is to be of use to those making public policy, encouraging participation has a clear (if at times hidden) agenda. It only serves a purpose if those participating can (eventually) **agree** on what happens in the real world. If all continue to believe in individual and conflicting realities, no consensus can be reached, rendering the use of all these differing sources of knowledge in decision-making impossible.

Furthermore, it is not always the case that subjective perceptions are the most appropriate in the sphere of public decision-making and action. As Greeley argues in this Bulletin, a single objective income-based indicator can promote a policy focus on the material needs of the poorest which, according to almost all theories of human need, have primacy over other aspects of well-being. Use of an absolute and objective poverty measure allows comparability and empowers through appeal to a rights-based analysis of the distributional impact of public policy, whereas subjective indicators of well-being may be much less influential or persuasive. Asserting the invalidity of convential poverty-line based measures of poverty because they fail to encapsulate subjective perceptions of well-being misses the essential point that raising incomes is instrumental in poverty reduction.

Despite the apparently unbounded potential of a learning paradigm approach, there is a danger that precisely because it claims infinite capacity to accommodate differing realities and contexts, it can be a new religion, claiming to answer all needs but failing practically to meet many of them. As Kloppenburg (1991: 540) warns, replacing one orthodoxy – however all-encompassing – with another is not the answer: 'The problem … [is one] of creating the conditions in which these separate realities can inform each other'. Practicality dictates that all generation and use of information in the public domain necessitates some ordering of priorities, some acceptance of the relative worth of different information and some recognition that not all realities are of equal stature. In order to create the conditions in which separate realities inform each other, participation has to be exercised: not simply to generate information; but critically to try and implement the reversals in the status quo implicit in new learning (and doing) paradigms.

These differing approaches to what constitutes knowledge have direct implications for the relationship between knowledge and power. Thus, 'the criteria of what constitutes knowledge, what is to be excluded and who is designated as qualified to know involve acts of power' (Foucault 1971, cited in Scoones and Thompson, 1993: 9). The value ascribed to particular types of knowledge tends to reflect prevailing hierarchies and power structures, although within these there are opportunities for the powerless to exercise influence; and for the powerful to have incomplete control. Nevertheless, even within participatory approaches, it is still 'us' deciding which is the preferred mode of knowledge. No amount

of sophisticated techniques for generating information can change this. Moreover, it is very hard for 'us' in the North to cope with the idea that our current ideology of what constitutes knowledge is not the correct one for both North and South. As Goetz, for example, argues in this Bulletin, there is a tendency to assign superiority to the knowledge western women produce about women in development, thus projecting their privileged identity as a reference point for the rest of the world in culturally destructive ways.

### 4.2 How 'we' use knowledge about 'them' to inform public decision-making

The central difficulty in assessing the use of knowledge in development policy is a lack of understanding about how 'we' take public decisions which will affect 'their' lives. What information is (as opposed to should be) used for in the public domain is rarely explored in any depth in this context. Decisions about public policy are critically influenced by resource availability, the pursuit of (institutional and individual) self-interest and the need to minimize the adverse consequences of other actors' actions on the outcome of a decision taken. Knowledge is therefore but one of the elements used to take decisions.

There are few case studies of information use in development which have sought simply to plot what happens to that information once it enters a decision-making cycle, in order to see what is used and how. It is often taken as given that if **information** exists, it will automatically feed the decision-making process. Actual use of **knowledge** in decision-making about development policy is invariably explained deductively and retrospectively: the information existed which enabled the decision-taker to convert it into knowledge and make a given choice. It is implicitly presumed that the derived knowledge will be used in a manner consistent with stated policy objectives. As many of the articles in this Bulletin show, this is often not the case. Several of the case studies resonate with the conceptual rejection of decision-making in large, complex (public) bureaucracies as being essentially rational and means-ends related. Critics of this rationalist view argue instead that decision-taking and policy making have very little order at all: it is a matter of actors coping with an impossible overload of information and (latent) choices, by dealing with what they are forced to in such a way as to minimize immediate effort and problems. In this 'garbage can' view of decision-making processes 'intention is lost in context-dependent flows of problems, solutions, people and choice opportunities' (March and Olsen 1989: 14). In contrast, Röling in his article in this Bulletin, identifies a much more co-operative kind of decision-making process in which social actors who hold a stake in the management of a given resource or system can coalesce around shared interests, forming a platform for integral decision-making.

Making public policy decisions can be conceptualized as a continuous cycle of identifying problems, formulating alternative solutions, analysing options, deciding, implementing decisions, observing the results, evaluating the situation, and then continuing to deal with new or existing

problems. Both information and knowledge are potentially useful at all stages of this cycle, and the process is iterative in that some stages may be repeated based on information and knowledge gained at a later stage (FAO 1986). This cycle can be analysed as a purely technical process, which is implicit in much information systems analysis; as a psychological process (referred to in Chambers' article in this Bulletin); as an economic process; or as an essentially political process either within institutions (as Edwards', Goetz' and de Kadt's articles describe) or within a wider context (Leach and Fairhead's article).

There is an extensive economic literature on the market value of information in decision-making, in which information systems are broadly similar to a production process. Like any production process, an information system is justified in terms of the **use** to which its product (information) is put, although estimating the net benefit of information collection and use is more of an art than a science (see Lucas' article in this Bulletin). The most important use is reducing the uncertainty implicit in decision-making (Riemenschnieder and Bonnen 1979). Information in the public domain is not normally associated with such market values although, as Eele in this Bulletin argues, developing country governments are frequently expected to bear the costs of providing information – to both the private sector and to donor agencies.

Many of the articles in this Bulletin show that differential access to 'public' information between actors involved in policy-making means that not all are able to use that information optimally. Thinking within the new institutional economics helps to explain this: as Baland and Platteau (1993: 15) have argued, 'a major revolution occurred in recent economic thinking when economists questioned their standard assumption that information is public and perfectly (symmetrically) distributed amongst agents'. Within this new institutional economics framework, information is viewed as part of transactions costs 'that is, supervision and policy costs arising from asymmetric information' *(ibid.:* 14). And as a result, 'information, now understood as a private good, becomes part of the agents' private endowment and an important source and instrument of power in economic transactions: for their own benefits, agents seek to influence the others' decision by hiding, partially revealing, distorting or manipulating the pieces of information relevant to them' *(ibid.:* 16). Decision-makers therefore need to use the knowledge provided in order to reduce transactions costs, including those incurred in generating the information. They may also seek to exclude others from having access to that information if free-riding on available information reduces the bargaining position of the actor who has paid for the information in the first place.

People working in information systems in developing countries are generally all too aware of the political manipulation of the information they provide. Yet the political dimension of information use is inadequately addressed both in conventional models of information systems and in economic explanations of the value of information

in decision-making. At worst, it is ignored; at best, it is added as an asystemic, inconvenient afterthought. In evaluations of actual systems, political considerations are frequently sidelined, or seen as necessary but uncontrollable evils, which institutional fixes struggle to overcome. Alternatively, methodological and data fetishism take over: more and more comprehensive data, collected in more appropriate ways, can somehow cancel out the political value of information. In fact, the reverse is almost certainly true: as data become more comprehensive and accessible, so conflicts of interest intensify over the messages they relay and the uses to which they are put. This, in turn, implies the need for institutional arrangements which allow and encourage the discussion of and negotiation over information and knowledge.

Information can be conceptualized as a political tool, both reflecting existing hierarchies and playing a critical role in the allocation of resources between competing interest groups. As such, it is a means of exercising power. Thus, as Leach and Fairhead argue in this Bulletin, the perpetuation of a hundred year myth of environmental degradation in West Africa's forest-savannah transition zone is explained, in part at least, by the attempts of powerful groups to maximize 'green' investment (the objectives of which have been set by colonial powers and post-colonial donors) into the area.

Political theories of decision-making developed in the context of international relations make a useful distinction between three schools. The first of these is the realist or power politics school in which decisions are made to narrowly optimize self-interest and power within an essentially anarchic system. The second is a behaviourist school in which decisions are taken as a result of systematic interactions between human actors in the system. These can (theoretically) be measured and modelled. The third, structuralist school is based on the assumption that all actors in a system are subject to a set of systemic rules or laws which determine how they will take decisions. Behaviour is thus not the result of human action but of systemic patterns and controls. A further 'decision-making approach' has the potential to combine elements of all three schools, beginning with a decisional outcome and then analysing retrospectively the multiple variables which contributed to it (e.g. context and time constraints; the organization of actors; the process of how decisions were made, the actual outcome and its value implications). Such an analysis retrospective and, in stark contrast to economic decision-theory, emphasizes outcomes not predictive capacities (see, for example, Smith 1987).

If information has a political value, it does so in the context of what White (1993: 2) has called a broad 'power-based' view of political analysis, as opposed to a narrower 'state-based' view limited to the state and the formal political system. A power-based approach defines ' "political" analysis in terms of the nature, distribution and exercise of power in society as a whole' and refers to 'the process whereby power is mobilized and exercised to achieve individual, institutional

or collective goals by means of cooperation, conflict, domination, exploitation, coercion and the like' *(ibid.)*. Actors exercise power via the use of knowledge in both a behavioural sense (gaining as much as possible from use of a piece of knowledge, possibly to the detriment of other actors); but also in a structural sense (using knowledge in a way that is possible given their underlying position of dominance or subordination relative to other actors). As Goetz in this Bulletin shows, both behavioural and structural gender biases determine the kind of information which bureaucrats will use and the ways in which they do so. Conventional measures of worth, for example, cannot take adequate account of the diversity of women's value and so information about this is marginalized due to a preference for information that is more consistent with prevailing ideologies.

Another manifestation of the political value of information is via the idea of the self-deceiving state (Chambers 1992), in which the information systems and flows set up by the state tend to perpetuate self-deception by those in power. This is often conveniently inadvertent, but then frequently tacitly connived in. Thus Chambers argues in this Bulletin that power and self-deception are causally linked, with the result that the powerful (be they countries, institutions or individuals) are always better able to use knowledge to reinforce their position of dominance over the weak, albeit via a self-sustaining system of self-deception and mis-information. This self-deception does not, therefore, conflict with self-interest. Rather, there is no need for the powerful – in pursuing their interests – to understand what the poor experience. Instead, information needs to come up from the bottom which justifies existing policies.

Participatory methodologies have raised a number of questions which implicitly – but rarely explicitly – address the structural and behavioural dimensions of political power relations underlying the use of knowledge, including: whose reality counts, who owns and who controls information? Yet advocates of participatory methodologies are largely silent about the political implications for those who **benefit** from the status quo, whether in terms of their reality counting, of their current ownership of and control over information, or ultimately of their loss of control via the empowerment of weak groups through participatory information generation and participatory use of knowledge. If a power-based approach to the value of information is adopted in seeking to answer the question 'whose reality counts?', the response is implicit in the idea that users of knowledge exercise power to maximize their own self-interest. It is a self-serving reality that counts, whether or not this is at variance with the reality of the intended beneficiaries of the decision to be taken.

Case studies which explicitly address the political use of knowledge are to be found in the disciplines of political anthropology and sociology, as well as in 'state-based' (as opposed to 'power-based') political analyses. Various articles in this Bulletin explore the use of information both in a 'state-based' way and in a 'power-based' way.

## 5 BARRIERS TO THE USE OF KNOWLEDGE

Failure to use information in decision-making is generally attributed either to an inability to convert relevant, accurate data into information in time for decision-makers to use it (e.g. in the case of lengthy statistical surveys); or to an under-estimation of the resource implications of the conversion process, resulting in it not being done at all. It is also argued that those who receive information first in decision-making structures (generally members lower down the hierarchy), have the task of selecting information to pass up, so as to avoid decision-makers from being swamped with too much information. If this selection process is inadequate, decision-makers do not receive the information they need. Alternatively, a much more chaotic system prevails, as described above.

Failure to use knowledge, on the other hand, is explained either by the information provided being inappropriate to decision-makers' needs (there is no useful knowledge that can be gleaned from it); or by institutional arrangements which are inadequate for the optimal exploitation of information (decision-makers are prevented from deriving knowledge from potentially useful information).

These obstacles mask a complex web of barriers to the use of information and knowledge. What is meant by appropriateness of information (its potential for conversion into usable and useful knowledge) depends on the user concerned. The issue of appropriateness for what purpose is important. Public information is not gathered simply for its intrinsic value, but also as a means of controlling, checking on and monitoring others. Typically, censuses and other formal state surveys in developing countries are perceived (often correctly) by people as being a means of control. Each actor's definition of appropriateness will vary depending on the interests use of knowledge seeks to protect or pursue. Furthermore, there may be differing perceptions of appropriateness between providers and users of information, which exacerbate the inappropriateness of knowledge. Although both are concerned with accuracy, for example, the user of knowledge may be prepared to sacrifice some accuracy for the sake of timeliness; whereas the producer of information might tend to do the reverse.

Much public information used for development planning and policy is inappropriate because of the form in which it is presented and the ways in which it is – or is not – disseminated. The printed word and accompanying statistics are still perceived by the North to be the most influential form of information (i.e. the most likely to be converted into knowledge and then used) in the development process. Other forms have, of course, always predominated in much of the developing world, especially in cultures which are primarily oral. The revolution in communication technology has fuelled oral culture especially via radio and, to a lesser but significant extent, television. But most information systems persist in promoting written cultures, however irrelevant they may be. This irrelevance has direct implications for the use of information: if written information is not culturally regarded as

being influential, it will be marginalized in institutions, unless explicit steps are taken to reverse the 'default' mode of the culture in question. Furthermore, research results produced by 'us' about 'them' are all too often unavailable in places where they can have access to them so the option of using knowledge does not even present itself.

The appropriateness of information for conversion into useful knowledge is frequently questioned only once knowledge has **not** been used. Lack of appropriateness becomes a means of justifying retrospectively the failure to use knowledge. To tackle the reasons why knowledge is not used, the question of what is appropriate and to whom needs to be posed at the outset (i.e. before data are collected). This necessitates a rejection of the idea that information is somehow objective and infinitely exploitable by multiple users. Instead, it needs to be defined in terms of the interests which its exploitation will serve or undermine.

Institutional barriers are of central importance in explaining to the failure to use knowledge; although they can, at times, refer implicitly to the exercise of power by competing groups in decision-making. As de Kadt argues in this Bulletin, action resulting from the use of knowledge does not occur because information systems are not properly embedded in necessary institutional arrangements. Ascribing **all** obstacles to the lack of political will or the exercise of political power risks diverting attention away from real institutional and technical issues. A balance needs to be struck between all three types of obstacle: presently, too much emphasis is certainly placed on technical issues, and too little on power issues. Attention to institutional questions falls somewhere in between.

The starting point for tackling institutional barriers to the use of knowledge is that information collection needs to be integrated into other institutional structures in order to bring about better development practice. A strategy of integration – and the implied aim of meeting multiple objectives – does, however, run the risk of failing to serve any one of these objectives perfectly. One way to minimize this is to decentralize the generation and use of information so that the task is more manageable than a national, integrated approach implies. As de Kadt argues in this Bulletin, it is highly likely that decentralization is a necessary prerequisite for knowledge to be used in ways that are locally sensitive and appropriate. Some institutions (Edwards in this Bulletin cites the case of non-governmental organizations), may have institutional cultures which are apparently more appropriate to forging the information-knowledge-action link. And there are ways of fostering more appropriate institutional climates. Yet it is clear that there are major barriers to information use even when prevailing cultures seem to be conducive to optimally exploiting knowledge. These relate to issues of hidden dominant cultures, institutional structure and organizational blockages, question marks over legitimacy and representativity, the need to appeal to a multiplicity of audiences, and difficulty in linking micro to macro levels.

Related to institutional barriers to information use is the question of accountability for the failure to use knowledge. Lack of accountability in use of knowledge in public policy is due, in part, to the separation of decision-makers from intended beneficiaries. Unlike the example of private sector information networks – the optimal use of which has direct implications for the profitability of the firm in question – in the public domain, interests are far more diffuse and the gains to be had from realising them much harder to identify. It is not possible in an objective sense to ascribe responsibility to particular actors for not using information that is in the public domain.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

Explanations of why knowledge is not used in development policy, planning and practice do not adequately address the exercise of power between different actors. Neither information, the use to which it is put (its conversion into knowledge), nor the exploitation of that knowledge is ever neutral, however objective the data on which it is based may be. The neutrality of knowledge is undermined by the political context within which data are generated and information is analysed, transmitted to and used by decision-makers. The pursuit of different interests in the exploitation of knowledge by various actors who are party to it, or excluded from it, and conflicts between these interests is an outcome of these forces. Obstacles arising from inappropriateness or institutional arrangements are mitigating factors in this power play. Thus it is less the case that knowledge is power, than that **the use of that knowledge is an expression of power**.

Conversely, the inability to use knowledge is an expression of impotence. Thus, it cannot be assumed that those who receive information are able to respond. Suggestions that information should be made available to local people, for example, often take insufficient account of the fact that they may be unable to use the information for want of resources. They are impotent in converting information into knowledge. Government and donor agency decision-makers may also be impotent if resources are unavailable or may misuse knowledge in the pursuit of self-interest. Thus 'information is power only to the extent that it is **potentially** enabling' (de Kadt 1989: 507). Information and knowledge may also be powerful when used to disable others. The impotence of being unable to use knowledge is distinct from the active choice not to act on information received, which is the misuse of knowledge. The abuse of knowledge, in contrast, is the active conscious distortion of information in pursuit of particular interests.

There are many innovative and exciting changes taking place in the sphere of information generation to inform public action in developing countries. Most of this is occurring in the context of 'us' finding out about 'them'. This Bulletin addresses both constraints to the use of knowledge derived from that information and suggests ways of over-coming them, or at least minimizing some of their costs; as well as recognizing why the failure to use knowledge serves the interests of certain groups. In this debate, the following issues are central to improved use of knowledge:

- **The limits to methodological fetishism**: no amount of improvement in methodologies for data collection and information generation – whether hi- or low-tech – can overcome barriers to the use of knowledge, in isolation from attempts to tackle the underlying power issues which determine how knowledge is used. Methodologies need to focus on use of knowledge **before** addressing questions of data collection and information generation.

- **How is knowledge used, misused and abused in decision-making**: until we have a clearer idea of how decisions are made and the potential or actual roles (both positive and negative) that knowledge can play in that process for different types of actors in different socio-political, bureaucratic and institutional contexts, it is unlikely that issues of appropriateness can be tackled.

- **The exercise of power through the use and misuse of knowledge**: far greater attention needs to be paid to how knowledge is used as a means of exercising power in public policy-making in developing countries. Seeking to bury the exercise of power under institutional explanations will not resolve the question. Issues of whether and how hierarchies can be broken down and systemic change be promoted need to be explored.

- **Specific institutional arrangements may facilitate the optimal use of knowledge**. These include: decentralization; integration; shared responsibility; greater accessibility; optimal specialization; and using information technology to reduce rather than build up barriers.

- As information and knowledge become increasingly complex and accessible, there is an **urgent need to foster institutions and other fora in which ideas can be discussed and negotiated over**, in order to maximize their utility to decision-makers in the public domain.

**NOTES**

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2  Francis Bacon, Religious Meditations, Of Heresies.

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# Introduction: Changing Perspectives on Forests: Science/Policy Processes in Wider Society

## Melissa Leach and James Fairhead

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**Abstract** This *Bulletin* attempts to link two sets of pressing contemporary concerns. On the one hand, it addresses changing relationships between science, policy and society in the context of internationalisation and public challenges to formal expertise; concerns currently under hot debate in European settings as much as in developing countries. On the other hand, it engages with issues around rural landscape and livelihoods in low-income countries, particularly in West Africa and the Caribbean. Tropical forests provide a linking focus, strongly implicated as they are both in local livelihoods and struggles for resource control, and in scientific and policy debates extending from local settings to highly charged global arenas – not least in the lead-up to the 'Rio Plus 10' Conference on Environment and Development in Johannesburg, 2002. The *Bulletin* reviews important advances in the science of forest dynamics, which in turn suggest ways that forest policies could become more 'pro-poor'. At the same time, it analyses the science/policy processes and power/knowledge relations, which must be addressed if such changes are to come about. We hope that this *Bulletin* will be of interest not only to researchers, policy-makers and practitioners working in the forestry, environment and development fields, but also to those interested in science and policy more broadly, illustrating how issues often examined in 'northern', hi-tech industrial settings, could work out in very different contexts in the 'south'.

## 1 Introduction

Critical scrutiny of 'science' and its place in governance has never been more pressing. Attempts to shape social, economic and environmental processes have always been inseparable from how those processes are understood. Yet at the start of the twenty-first century, this is ever more complex and globally interlinked, especially in the field of environmental science and policy. International governance regimes are proliferating, and with them emerging roles for science: in the determination of key questions, analytical frameworks, negotiating

stances and the monitoring of compliance. Regional and national policies and the politics and inquiries informing them, must be shaped in articulation with global debate.

Contradictory tendencies appear to run counter to this increasing internationalisation. The presence of non-governmental organisations, public pressure groups and 'indigenous people' in the streets, on the television and at times in the negotiation chambers of international deliberations defies simplistic pictures of nation states and their scientists forging international orders. Various forms of social movement and citizen action stake claims and protests on the basis of very different knowledges and perspectives. National and international policy institutions alike make attempts to access and include 'local voice' through a host of 'participatory' and 'stakeholder-inclusive' procedures. Yet important questions arise about the extent to which the power and resources entwined with dominant perspectives circumscribe the emergence and influence of alternative views.

Public engagement with science has never been a simple enchantment. The killing of scientists in Mao's China, and the suppression of genetic science to politics in the former Soviet Union or to fundamentalist religions in the USA, underscore the extent to which the conduct of science is part of social and moral struggle: struggles to shape society in particular ways. Several commentators have, however, discerned a new moment of heightened moral concern and transformed public engagement with science. The public are seen to be more distrustful of 'expert' institutions and their knowledges, questioning the values, risks and uncertainties they embody, and demanding new sorts of dialogue (e.g. Beck 1992; Lash *et al.* 1996; Adam *et al.* 2000). This contemporary writing on science and society (and the examples used: biotechnologies, industrial food hazards, nuclear physics and so on) has a strong focus on the 'high tech' of Europe and North America, and the uncertainties generated by rapid technological change. In the very different context of rural settings in low-income countries, are these science-society debates not also relevant? Might they carry different, and in many ways more pressing, implications, shaping the poverties and destinies of those who depend on rural resources for their livelihoods?

Research during the last 10 years of the twentieth century on rural environmental issues revealed that there are frequently major gulfs in analysis as well as aspiration between the perspectives of local land users and those underlying and driving policy. In Africa, for example, and whether concerning rangelands, population-environment relations, soil erosion or forests, prevailing science/policy perspectives frequently blame local populations for environmental destruction. These have provided a justification for removing resource control from land users in favour of control by national and international administrations, frequently contributing to further impoverishment. Alternative perspectives, emerging from different strands of scientific debate and from land users themselves, have suggested different patterns of

environmental change, and different resource control imperatives (see, e.g. Tiffen *et al*. 1994; Fairhead and Leach 1996, Scoones 1995, Leach and Mearns 1996). Such findings have provoked a new generation of research on environment and development, which looks much more critically at how problems and solutions come to be defined, by whom, and with what effects. And it asks particularly about the implications for local land users, especially the poorest.

This *Bulletin* extends this approach particularly in relation to forests in Africa and the Caribbean, where it thus explores contemporary relationships between science, policy and society as they affect the rural poor. Tropical forest issues provide a revealing lens to do this, since they are deeply implicated in both local livelihoods and political economies, and in a set of globalised debates around biodiversity, climate change, etc. in which the political and financial stakes are high.

The contributions address two sets of issues: (1) How are 'scientific' perspectives on forest ecology and dynamics changing and how are these altering the ways that forest landscapes and societies might be understood? (2) What is the nature of contemporary science/policy processes in the forestry and conservation field? In particular, how and why do particular perspectives come to influence policy; or are persistently excluded from them? This second set of articles challenges any notion that science and research feed into 'policy' in a linear fashion. Instead, they reveal multiple ways in which international, national and local forest knowledges are entwined with institutional struggles for authority and resources, and the broader social and political relations in which these are embedded. In this context, exerting change in perspectives on forests is not straightforward, but comes to require a broader set of transformations in the ways that science/policy processes operate.

## 2 Changing perspectives on forests

While tropical forests may lack the sense of rapid technological advance and associated risks, which preoccupy contemporary science and society debates, forest ecology has, for a number of years, been on the cusp of major reconceptualisation in its core assumptions. Forests have long been analysed as if they were stable and equilibrial: as vegetation communities specific to climatic and other conditions which reproduced themselves, and if disturbed within limits, would eventually revert to their original form. Models for applied management from colonial times onwards were based on these assumptions, and hence on the view that vegetation succession could be directed for economic or environmental ends. These views have also underlain images of forest vegetation as existing in a 'natural' equilibrial state until converted to cropland, fallow or, in drier areas, savanna, in one-way processes of human-induced 'degradation'. Certain images of society follow: minimal populations growing only recently, and people degrading the resources they depend on through irresponsibility, poverty or population pressure, with destruction sometimes augmented by external logging or plantation interests. Policy responses have frequently turned on excluding users from forest reserves,

groves and parks, even where these are to be managed with local 'participation', community involvement or compensation.

While such core assumptions of stability always had their dissenters, during the latter decades of the twentieth century they became more thoroughly challenged by research in several disciplines. Articles in the first section of this *Bulletin* review some of these challenges, especially as emerging in three main areas:

● Analyses of climate and vegetation history now suggest major fluctuations in forest cover and quality over recent centuries and millennia. As Jean Maley reviews for Central and West Africa, drawing on his own and others' path-breaking research in paleo-ecology, many forest areas are now understood to constitute regrowth, following a dry phase ending only several centuries ago. On the forest margins, the forests are still expanding into savanna. These vegetation and climate dynamics devastate conventional views of a stable forest 'nature'.

● Recent work in forest ecology underscores these more dynamic views. In line with perspectives in what has been termed the 'new ecology' more broadly (see, e.g. Botkin 1990), many forest ecologists now suggest the importance of disturbance events and path dependency to forest dynamics, quality and species distributions (e.g. Hawthorne 1996, Sprugel 1991). Van Rompaey, in his article, outlines how these shifts in perspective are leading to redefinitions in the status of West African forests, drawing attention, particularly, to the contrast between the high species diversity of the wet evergreen zone and the low species diversity of the moist semi-deciduous zone. As Hawthorne (1996) puts it in related work, much of the latter (which had been considered as a natural vegetation type) may be 'scar tissue, a recently-assembled group of mainly widespread, well-dispersed species, covering up after some immense disruption of this area' (1996: 138).

● Studies in social anthropology and history show the long-term shaping, in some circumstances enrichment, of vegetation through local practices, and highlight the relationships between landscape, memory and resource claims (e.g. Amanor 1994, Fairhead and Leach 1996, 1998, Balée 1998). The articles by Gérard Chouin and Paul Sarfo-Mensah both illustrate elements of such work, and its implications, for different regions of Ghana. Chouin reconceptualises 'sacred groves' in humid coastal areas in relation to the path-dependent products of socio-political dynamics, drawing attention to diverse, and social processes of forest creation and usage. Sarfo-Mensah shows how complex forest-savanna dynamics are (in local interpretation) part of a social landscape, shaped by the shifting powers of elders and youth, and changing perspectives on a variety of spiritual forces.

While much of this work has proceeded in parallel, within the confines of different disciplinary debates and institutions, drawing it together suggests some strong convergences. Vegetation patterns come to reflect

the real historical legacy of many interacting influences, human, ecological and other, over many, overlapping timescales: what one might term a 'dynamic landscape perspective' on forests. At the same time, assessing forest cover, quality and dynamics becomes subject to far greater uncertainty. Forest dynamics are both inherently unpredictable given the multiple (sometimes chaotic) influences on them, and open to multiple interpretations and values as, for instance, different local users, timber companies, ecotourists and those promoting global biodiversity conservation all have different perspectives on what a desirable forest would be like. Karen Biesbrouck, in her article, reflects on some of the policy challenges which arise when forest degradation or sustainability can no longer be measured against 'natural' (and moral) baselines, but comes to involve, as she puts it, 'choosing one dynamic equilibrium over others'. As she suggests, this undermines the grounds for removing resource control from local communities, while strengthening arguments for their inclusion in strategic deliberations over forest futures. As she illustrates for Cameroon, such a model departs quite strongly from the tokenistic involvement, which has characterised many so-called forest 'co-management' approaches, although it also encounters challenges given the social differences and dynamics that pervade and cross-cut 'communities' in such African settings. Other works have outlined further policy approaches which might flow logically from such a dynamic landscape perspective. These include a shift from 'blueprint' to more flexible, adaptive management approaches to sustainable timber production, conservation, etc. (see McNeely 1999, Fairhead and Leach forthcoming) and a reconsideration of assumed separations between people and 'nature', to assess how diverse forestry and conservation objectives might be pursued in lived-in-landscapes.

However, this *Bulletin's* 'story' cannot stop at suggesting the specific implications for policy and practice suggested by new perspectives on forest landscapes. To do so would assume an unproblematic, linear relationship between research and policy. It would assume that to change policy, new findings simply need to be assembled with sufficient clarity and critical mass, and 'disseminated' to policy-makers. Instead, as the second set of articles illustrates, scientific and policy processes as they relate to forest issues in Africa and the Caribbean are far more complex, and socially, politically and historically embedded. In different ways, each article draws on and contributes to a growing body of focused work on policy processes and their interrelationships with science, to examine the evolution of science/policy debates and their framing. Each traces patterns of authority and exclusion and their material effects, and discerns how specific interactions between local, national and international processes influence this.

### 3 Forest science/policy processes
Thus, the second set of articles in this *Bulletin* explores science/policy processes as they operate in, and in relation to, West Africa and the Caribbean. They focus on different areas of forest policy debate, ranging from biodiversity conservation and sustainable

timber production, to fire and watershed management. While each treats engagements of science and policy as involving interactions of local, national and international processes, they vary in their level of focus. The first three articles of Part II (by Kojo Sebastian Amanor, James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, and Thackwray Driver) address engagements between local forest users, administrations, politicians and scientists within local and national settings. They are followed by three (by Ruth Malleson, Fairhead and Leach, and Sally Jeanrenaud), which cast their gaze primarily on global discourses and debates, and the ways in which these articulate with more localised processes.

Thus in a national/local West African case, Kojo Amanor explores the interactions of research and policy processes around fire management in Ghana. He shows how powerful discourse coalitions have formed which draw researchers, administrators, NGOs and certain local leaders together around common storylines, such as the view that fire is inevitably a problem. In the process, many other issues, including farmer's own fire use practices and the dynamics of fire ecology, are left unaddressed, excluded from research and policy attention. One outcome is the extension of particular, and pervasive forms of environmental managerialism, which are in many respects damaging to local livelihoods.

The two national/local Caribbean cases both focus on the island of Trinidad within the twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Here, James Fairhead and Melissa Leach take a 'science/policy as practice' approach to the evolution of sustainable timber production. Certain research and policy practices have become central to the identity and resource control of particular state institutions, so that inter-institutional struggles for authority and 'turf' are fought partly through science. Playing into these struggles, with varying success, are the perspectives of artisanal timber workers and field-level forest officers, which have developed through different forms of knowledge and experience, and are linked to very different claims over territory and resources. In particular, the article explores how the co-production of science and management and its importance to the national Forestry Division serve to maintain an image of forest stability in the face of a range of ecological and socio-economic uncertainties, and to exclude non-equilibrial alternatives from being seriously countenanced. Thackwray Driver focuses on Trinidad's Northern Range mountains, exploring how a longstanding, powerful discourse about the nefarious effects of 'squatting' has framed (and been reproduced through) subsequent science/policy initiatives to develop and protect the area's watersheds. The objectification of the category of 'the squatter' through these processes, linked to media and wider popular discourse, has served to exclude attention to the wide variety of tenure arrangements under which people farm in the Northern Range, and their highly varied effects on landscape.

The three more internationally-pitched cases begin with Ruth Malleson's reflections on the Korup forest in Cameroon. This has become an icon in vociferous international debates over approaches

to conservation, pitching those in favour of 'integrated conservation with development' and 'participation' against arguments (e.g. from conservation biologists) in favour of strict nature protection. Claims that integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs) such as Korup have 'failed' fuel these debates. Yet as Malleson argues, neither side has fully acknowledged the ecological and socio-political dynamics which actually explain what is seen as failure, and which suggest that current international models of best conservation practice may be more fundamentally misconceived for West African settings.

Fairhead and Leach explore how concepts and obligations linked to the international Convention on Biodiversity have articulated with existing science/policy practices in the Republic of Guinea. A range of longer-established research traditions (e.g. around medicinal plants and non-timber forest products) has been revitalised amidst new funding and epistemic support, but transformed in meaning, now cast within a global frame. In the process, the perspectives and interests of farmers and certain Guinean researchers in biodiversity as part of lived-in-landscapes have been further suppressed.

In some important respects, Sally Jeanrenaud's article helps contextualise these two West African conservation cases. She reflects on the apparent 'paradigm shift' amongst international conservation agencies towards participatory, people-oriented approaches. Focusing on the case of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Jeanrenaud suggests that there are a number of structural reasons why this remains either largely rhetorical, or unable to move beyond stereotypical images and tokenistic involvement of forest dwellers. These include funding structures and the need to appeal to 'northern' publics through crisis narratives, and persistent contest from powerful 'protectionist' lobbies both within and outside the organisations. The article underlines that international organisations are far from homogeneous, but contain diverse communities of interest, promoting sometimes conflicting perspectives. It also draws attention to the importance of the mass-media in mediating relations between science, policy and society.

## 4 Forest science, policy and society: towards pro-poor agendas
A recurring, and disturbing, theme across all the cases is that current configurations of science and policy around forests are antithetical to the interests of the poor. This is despite both policy moves to 'participation', and certain creative local responses to and uses of powerful global discourses. Not only are forest users, and especially the poorest and least powerful among them, frequently losing access to material resources which are critical for their livelihoods, but they are frequently labelled and categorised in pejorative ways which has a far wider bearing on processes of governance and social change.

In the concluding article, David Kaimowitz makes the case for a 'pro-poor forest science'. He suggests that the ingredients are already there (not least in the rural people's knowledges and dynamic landscape

perspectives outlined in certain articles in this *Bulletin*) and asks what it would require for these to become more fully established in policy. Kaimowitz's main conclusion is that researchers need to communicate 'new' perspectives to policy-makers and international publics in much clearer and more compelling ways. Detailed, place-specific findings, he rightly argues, tend to carry little weight against the powerful, simplified narratives on which national and global policy organisations rely, and which are perpetuated in globalised media. While emphasising communication, however, Kaimowitz also acknowledges that, as the case studies in this *Bulletin* illustrate, science/policy processes are embedded in broader power relations, and that promoting 'pro-poor forest science' will involve challenges to these.

How might such challenges proceed? What types of process, institution or new relationships could help ensure that forest user's perspectives and interests genuinely shape forestry agendas, in more than rhetoric, in an increasingly globalised science/policy world? Taking a lead from the structures and processes documented in the cases, a first set of practical implications concerns strengthening citizen participation in science/policy processes. Given the way policy problematics and their interaction with science come to embody social values, issues of participation and inclusion of diverse perspectives need to be considered in relation to science as well as policy. This suggests the need for participatory research strategies in which poorer forest users help to set agendas and questions. Direct forms of citizen participation and consultation in science and in policy-making processes around specific forest issues could valuably be expanded through the growing repertoire of deliberative and inclusionary procedures (DIPs), including citizen's juries, consensus conferences, multi-criteria mapping exercises and others. These help to expose the values and assumptions behind particular social categories deployed in environmental policy-making, and to promote negotiation between diverse perspectives. However, these are unlikely to produce open dialogue and mutual understanding unless there is particular attention to the inclusion of the social groups which dominant environmental problem framings delegitimise; the 'hosting' of DIPs by disempowered groups, and opening up the process to a greater diversity of problem-framings.

More broadly, the articles suggest the importance of building citizens' platforms for expression of interests, demands and perspectives on policy on their own terms, and of promoting aspects of political and legal culture which enable critique. This also extends to broadening participation in scientific culture: building forest user's scientific confidence and skills, and making space for citizen science to inform broader debates, and shape or dictate their terms. Media strategies could be directed to making explicit the evidence, values, and uncertainties underlying particular scientific and policy positions, enhancing and empowering public capacity to critique and engage in science/policy debate. This might include promoting exposition of multiple perspectives on landscape, history and forest dynamics in national media and education, helping to break down stereotypic stigmatisation.

To balance the dependence and shaping of national research and local research by international agendas and values, support for independent and critical research within national institutions is needed. This could focus on enhancing the capacity of social and natural science to respond to and engage with land users' agendas. It could also build up the constituencies interested in more dynamic, adaptive approaches to forest ecology and landscapes, perhaps involving coalitions of ecological and social scientists, citizens and policy/NGO groups.

To complement and assist these approaches, building better-informed and more reflexive national and international processes is important. In particular, to address the somewhat biased and self-referential nature of international science/policy debates over forest issues, new procedures will be needed in these which allow perspectives from local settings to feed upwards into and shape terms of debate. This may, however, run counter to perspectives seeking to harmonise local and global analytics and the forms of managerialism they strive for and promote: a managerialism illustrated strongly by several of the *Bulletin* cases.

### 5 Understanding science/policy processes

Before turning to the cases, we want first to sketch out a variety of theoretical traditions which inform analysis of science/policy processes, to contextualise and introduce some of the key concepts employed by the authors of the science/policy articles here. This subject has become something of a research fashion. Disciplines and sub-disciplines for which this has been a longstanding concern, such as political science, or history, which has long studied the policy processes of colonial and post colonial states, for example, have been joined by others, forwarding their own emphases and concepts.

Many anthropologists coming to a specific interest in policy, for instance, emphasise links between power and knowledge. Some draw on the work of Michel Foucault, who in many works traced historically how particular problems have come to be constituted as an object of certain forms of knowledge and a target of certain institutional practices, and how together this shapes social and material inequality. His approach considers how modern science is constitutively interdependent with the evolution of practices for the surveillance, discipline, administration and formation of populations. To capture this co-evolution, he uses the shorthand *pouvoir-savoir* (power/knowledge), which resembles, in some respects, 'science/policy' as used in this *Bulletin*. To capture the singularity of the field of inquiry he refers to it as 'discourse'. Discourse need not merely act on individuals but can produce its subjects, through a combination of external 'subjection' and internal 'subjectification' (Shore and Wright 1997).

The notion of discourse draws attention to the ways in which the apparently technical language of policy and 'Science' may conceal highly political interests. In this vein, writers such as Ferguson (1994) and Escobar (1995) have argued that development policy discourse emanates

from and reproduces the power of the state and its international sponsors. Such work is focused on the effects of policy, not its formulation, with Ferguson tracing the extension of bureaucratic intervention in rural areas, often at the expense of local resource control to development discourse.

Some have explored narratives as a feature of discourses (see Biesbrouck and Jeanrenaud, *infra*.). Simplified stories (e.g. of environmental change and its causes) describe problems, identify and label their perpetrators, and justify proposed solutions. Such narratives are, it is argued, an integral facet of policy-making, regardless of what particular policy-makers might actually understand or think about the world. Policy necessarily acts on a simplified version of 'reality' and requires a clear cultural script for action.

Work in the sociology of science has also problematised the ways that social and political values inform the setting of scientific agendas, the way scientists work, and the ways they reach their conclusions. Scientific knowledge 'embodies implicit models or assumptions about the social world' (Irwin and Wynne 1996: 3). One can trace at least two motivating forces within the sociology of science. The first comes from the history and philosophy of science itself, which endlessly illustrates the temporary truth claims of scientific ideas. A second set of motivations stem from the frustrations with science felt by those whose own concerns, or the concerns of those for whom they speak, are marginalised, misconstrued, delegitimised or silenced, along with economic and political claims relating to them. This is the case, for instance, for feminist critiques of science and social science (Haraway 1988, Harding 1991), as well as Marxist and anti-colonialist critiques of science going back to the 1930s. Indeed this has motivated our own interest in the subject; in the ways dominant forest science has silenced the perspectives and interests of African and Caribbean farmers and land users (a motivation shared by a number of the contributors to this *Bulletin*). Such scepticism with its origins in political experience is easily transformed into a methodological scepticism towards all science. Scientific knowledge is created by people and institutions with particular situated and partial perspectives. Official ideologies about objectivity and scientific method may be bad guides to how scientific knowledge is actually made (Haraway 1991).

Certain analytical traditions in science and technology studies explicitly consider international dimensions to science. Reviewing these, Schrum and Shenhav (1995) distinguish works rooted in theories of modernisation, theories of dependency and theories of power, knowledge and institutions. Modernisation theory considers how science and technology leads to (or even constitutes) progress and development. Dependency theory sketches out the inverse: how 'western science' is another mechanism of domination, producing the technological means for the subjugation of the masses, and acting as an ideological force and inappropriate development model. Institutional theory, in contrast, explains the adoption of structurally similar forms of science

throughout the world, and assumptions concerning the universality of science, and its necessity for modernisation. It considers the processes through which scientific institutions and beliefs are prescribed and diffused as a key component of the modern world system. While such institutional alignment might promote comparability, it does not promote solutions to local problems (see Amanor and Fairhead and Leach, *infra.*). Although apparently developing in tandem with them, this focus on the institutionalisation of particular forms of knowledge strongly resembles analyses in anthropology and history rooted in the Foucaultian tradition.

For all their differences, these analytical traditions are rooted in structurally-focused analysis. Aware of the limitations this places on understanding science/policy processes, most of the case study authors in this *Bulletin* have therefore sought to combine them with other concepts and approaches.

Even a cursory look at different people engaged in producing, experiencing and implementing science/policy reveals problems in a monolithic or homogeneous view of 'policy' or 'development' discourse and its narrative components. As Grillo (1997) has argued, and as several more recent ethnographies demonstrate, development is conceived of in multiple, sometimes contradictory, ways by the actors and institutions involved in it (e.g. Harrison 1995, Pigg 1992, Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 1998). While different theoretical positions partly reflect methodology, with approaches exploring science–policy–development across countries and over long timescales perhaps more likely to observe structural regularity and to essentialise 'monolithic discourse' than those using fine-grained ethnography to reconstruct interpersonal interactions, the differences go beyond methodological artefact. Casting discourse as monolithic has the effect of absolving those involved of reflective consciousness, agency, and responsibility, and of obscuring their multiple axes of identity. At the very least, it obscures the everyday dilemmas and situations of interaction faced by scientists and administrators, and the ways they respond to them. This leads to a third limitation: the reduction of interactions between administrations and local populations to a confrontation of discourses, falsely casting their interaction as one of assimilation or resistance to singular processes (Long and Long 1992, Grillo 1997, Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 1998).

A large and rather eclectic variety of theoretical positions place more emphasis on the multiplicity of people and perspectives implicated in science/policy processes. Each seeks to retain an analytic which can account for structuring whilst not losing sight of agency (see Giddens 1984). In the sociology of development, a tradition of 'actor-oriented' approaches has emerged which emphasises the intentionality of conscious subjects, their interpersonal interactions, and the ways people actively strategise to represent issues in certain ways and forge alliances in promoting them (e.g. Long and van der Ploeg 1989, Long and Long 1992). A major analytical focus has been on the actions of local representatives of state and NGO bureaucracies, such as

forestry extension officers, their lifeworlds, and the ways they relate with both policy 'beneficiaries' and with other actors in state and development agencies (see Fairhead and Leach *infra.*). By disaggregating bureaucracies and seeing them as embedded in social and political processes, the divide between 'state' and 'community' or 'citizen' becomes much less clear; instead sets of social relations and institutions cross-cut and dissolve such boundaries. 'Structure' in such accounts comes to be seen as the cumulative product of multiple actions and interactions, which in turn influences subsequent courses of events (Long and van der Ploeg 1994).

Similar perspectives are apparent among certain political scientists and analysts of public administration. Grindle and Thomas (1991), for example, emphasise the strategising behaviour of 'policy entrepreneurs' who take advantage of the opening of policy spaces to effect change. Political science research which focuses on what bureaucrats and state agents actually do has also shown how local level implementers such as extension agents (whom Lipsky 1979 calls generically 'street level bureaucrats') can exert considerable agency in the policy process. This is in the ways they interpret directives, deal with contradictory instructions and ideas, take initiative and exercise discretion. Joshi (1997) provides an example in the forestry field, showing that forest extension workers were in fact the prime-movers in a major policy shift from state-controlled to devolved forms of forest governance in the case of Joint Forest Management in West Bengal.

This work fits broadly within a longstanding perspective on policy as the outcome of contests between different political interests (e.g. Dahl 1961, Truman 1951). Yet traditional divisions between 'state-centred', 'society centred' or even 'organisation centred' perspectives have been undercut by work showing how policy communities, networks and advocacy coalitions link shared interests across divisions within governments, pressure groups, business interests and so on (e.g. in the works of Jordan 1990, Coleman *et al.* 1997, Sabatier 1988). In this respect, Haas gives analytical weight to trans-institutional networks of people who share common analytical perspectives (epistemic communities), and their strategising, in bringing about international agreements (1990, 1992). The notion of epistemic communities is used productively here in Jeanrenaud's analysis of international conservation.

Hajer (1995) qualifies this work in an approach that influenced Amanor's article (*infra.*) in particular, arguing that:

> … in the struggle for discursive hegemony, coalitions are formed among actors (that might perceive their position and interest according to widely different discourses) that, for various reasons, are attracted to a specific set of story-lines… *Discourse coalitions* are formed if previously independent practices are being actively related to one another, if a common discourse is created in which several practices get meaning in a common political project. (Hajer 1995:65, our emphasis)

Turning to science and technology studies, similarly, ethnographic approaches have also developed since the 1980s, which eschew any notion of a monolithic 'science' or 'scientific community', instead studying science in its practice (what scientists actually do), and attending to the action, agency and culture of particular scientists (Pickering 1992:2). Actor-network theory, for instance, scrutinises the practices by which scientists create facts through closing controversies, boxing-off ('black-boxing') uncertainties and assumptions away from further scrutiny, and extending the reach of locally-specific knowledge (i.e. derived from particular field sites or laboratory experiments) through enrolling actors and institutions in broader, even globalised, knowledge networks (Latour 1987). Only in this way can scientific findings proceed outwards, from local settings to more universal claims.

While these approaches foreground the agentive aspects of making knowledge, they attend to structure in at least two ways. One is in a notion of scientific culture as a field of resources that practice operates in and on, which in turn is reconfigured through practice. The other is in the way that the networks formed of actors and their practices themselves come to operate as structures, themselves influencing subsequent courses of action. Some (e.g. Knorr-Cetina 1999) consider that the attention to structure does not go far enough, however; her work on 'epistemic cultures' thus reflects on the broader 'orientations and preferences that inform whole sequences of action, the structures built from combinations of such sequences' (Knorr-Cetina 1999:9), including particular framings of the problem, research technologies, social configurations and networks of scientists, funding contexts and laboratory settings.

In a similar approach (e.g. in Fairhead and Leach *infra*. and forthcoming), we have endeavoured to treat 'science' and 'policy' as constellations of component practices and procedures as enacted by people and institutions, but also as structuring their choices. Ideally, this perspective allows each practice (each workshop, meeting, report, legislative decision, funding flow, etc.) to have its own biography and sedimentation of meanings, which at once contributes to 'policy' without conforming to any particular totalising narrative of its evolution, enactment, or meaning. Practices that are 'scientific' also have their own specificity (reviewing species lists, characterising ecological zones, listing the forces leading to degradation), and need not conform to any totalising narrative of scientific method and scientific advance. Specific practices, viewed in this way, become linked within institutional and interpersonal networks, whether intentionally-forged or more circumstantial, coming to frame problems and approaches to them in certain ways.

Many of these processes, problem framings, funding contexts, etc., are also highlighted in literature on the co-production of science with policy (see Jasanoff and Wynne 1997). Scientists contribute to the framing of policy issues by defining what evidence can be produced and its policy significance. Reciprocally, those working in policy also frame scientific enquiry by defining areas of relevance, and pertinent

questions for investigation. Thus emerges a field of mutual construction or 'co-production' which can become self sustaining, as is argued to have happened, for example, in the reliance on general circulation models in climate change research (Shackley and Wynne 1995). Many other processes also contribute to the 'framing' of science by policy and vice versa. Frequently it is in policy contexts or for policy reasons that the meetings and conventions in which scientists come together are held; the framing of those policy meetings is in turn the context in which scientific debate is conducted and which shapes its focal issues. Such co-production also occurs at a second level; participation in policy lends credence to calling practices (such as listing species) 'scientific', and political action based on science gains credibility to be called 'policy'. In these processes of mutual construction, other possibilities, e.g. other types of scientific inquiry, interrelated with other policy options, are curtailed.

Equally obscured in the mutual construction of science and policy may be areas of uncertainty or unresolved debate within science. As Wynne (1992) and Keeley and Scoones (1999) argue, uncertainties may be well known but conveniently ignored. On other occasions caveats may be present in scientific papers, but become obscured through the processes of generating science/policy, creating a false sense of certainty (Keeley and Scoones 1999). At other times, scientific methods and models that hold true under certain conditions (e.g. in laboratories) may be caught out in real life situations by unanticipated variables (see Wynne 1992). Or there may be fundamental indeterminacies in nature, as are recognised, for instance, in non-equilibrial scientific perspectives on forest ecology. Wynne (1992) suggests that in the process of mutual construction, indeterminacies (unresolvable by science), when not ignored altogether in policy, are frequently presented as deterministic uncertainties which can be known with further work. This both justifies continuing scientific business as usual, and retains the hope of prediction, management and control.

In general, work on co-production underlines the inadequacy of analysis couched in terms of distinct 'research communities' and 'policy communities', and how the interface between them might be improved.

The analytical approaches that we have reviewed here, albeit briefly, construe the conduct of science and of policy as the subject of ethnographic enquiry, which must focus on particular practices, contexts and histories. However, the theoretical takes differ in how they conceptualise practice, agency and structure, and this strongly influences the depiction of context. Thus some do not problematise agency or draw on simple notions of personal or social interest; some see agency as discursively constituted subjectivity, and some see it as a hybrid of nature/technology/culture. Others treat science/policy in ways which echo Foucault's power/knowledge, although tempered by the need to acknowledge these issues of agency; of human agency with all its ambiguities and possibilities for and disputes over attribution, and the agency of realities (including ecological ones) that do not obey their social constructors. In theorising agency differently, the approaches,

and the articles in this *Bulletin* which variously draw on them, suggest different points of leverage for any transformation in science/policy.

Finally, and as the *Bulletin* articles make clear, scientific and policy processes are not confined to the interplay of people and institutions directly involved in their making and doing. They are also central to broader political and cultural processes, shaping and shaped by the wider social and cultural relations in which they are embedded. Such wider contextualisation draws attention to, e.g. issues concerning ordinary peoples' relationships with experts as part of the politics of knowledge. Important issues also concern how science/policy processes interplay with wider society through representations in media, education and popular culture, and how these create and reproduce social and moral categories that come to have wider salience in society. And scientific and policy processes also interplay with national (and global) politics, political economy and political histories, and the place of (forest) resource control in these.

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# Whose Knowledge Counts? Development Studies Institutions and Power Relations in a Globalised World

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**Abstract** Development studies is an uneasy discipline. It has a relatively short history that is linked particularly to decolonisation and the rise of overseas aid. It is associated almost exclusively with certain geographical locations and a political economy of resource transfer, rather than with a particular body of knowledge or theory. It is thus founded on the very dichotomies it seeks to overcome – of North and South and the massive imbalances in access to resources that produce 'haves' and 'have-nots' in the knowledge economy. This article draws on discussions at the IDS40 Roundtables and conference to outline the key elements of a vision for the future role of development studies institutions which would begin to address these inequities and challenges.

## 1 Introduction

Development studies is an uneasy discipline. Relative to other disciplinary areas, it has a short history that is linked particularly to decolonisation and the rise of overseas aid. It is associated almost exclusively with certain geographical locations and a political economy of resource transfer, rather than with a particular body of knowledge or theory. Development studies is thus founded on the very dichotomies that it seeks to overcome – of North and South and the massive imbalances in access to resources that produce 'haves' and 'have-nots' in the knowledge economy.

Given this imbalance, it is unsurprising that the notion and practice of 'capacity building', or as it is increasingly commonly termed 'capacity development', is strongly linked with development studies. Currently, around one-quarter of all overseas development assistance is allocated to capacity development (Whyte 2005), and this is concerned not only with strengthening physical capital, but also with developing human

capabilities (Sen 1999) and strengthening institutions and organisations (Morgan 1998; James 2002). Assumptions about capacity building in development research and practice are rooted in the notion of a flow from North to South and institutional structures reflect this. For example, many institutes and university departments in the North have established clones of themselves in the South. Northern institutions may offer or even insist on their own capacity to build that of others. At the same time, support for capacity development has been and remains one of the key requests from Southern institutions to their Northern counterparts, although this image of a knowledgeable, expert Northern institution dispensing wisdom both about the South and to the South is being challenged increasingly, particularly from the South (Samuel 2000; Klouda 2004).

As an institution, IDS works with partners in the South who have considerable expertise in both development research and capacity development. This raises questions about the disciplinary practice of development studies and about the roles of institutions located in both 'North' and 'South'. In both IDS40 Roundtables and at the anniversary conference, these questions provoked a great deal of discussion.

There was a strong sense that the current development studies paradigm needs to shift, and in particular that there is a need to recognise the changing power relations that determine a more complex and nuanced understanding of development research and capacity development. What then are the implications for institutions in both South and North? These themes are explored further below, drawing on the contributions of Roundtable and conference participants.

## 2 Whose knowledge counts?

Any attempt to examine the role of development studies institutions, either globally or within specific local contexts, must take account of the changing nature of the global knowledge economy, as this has implications for *what* is studied as development studies, and for *how* institutions position themselves to survive and flourish. With the advent of globalisation and intensified international competition, knowledge has become an increasingly important determinant of the wealth of nations and consequently, access to knowledge and the ability to disseminate it has become a major source of competitive advantage. In some quarters, knowledge itself is being seen as the most powerful driver of social and economic progress in the world today (World Bank 2002). In this vision, tertiary education is seen as 'necessary for the effective creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge and for building technical and professional capacity' (World Bank 2002: xix). Universities, it is argued, should become more innovative and responsive 'to the needs of a globally competitive knowledge economy and to the changing labour market requirements for advanced human capital' (World Bank 2002). Knowledge itself becomes critical to the idea of development as achievement of 'good change', not just in terms of availability, but also in terms of how we use knowledge to understand knowledge.

Knowledge is at times conflated, perhaps dangerously, with information (Taylor and Angeles 2006). Information may be understood as data or sensory inputs that maintain or improve our understanding of the world (Röling and Engel 1991), while knowledge may be considered as the sense people make of information. The process by which this sense is made, and the ways in which knowledge is validated, prioritised and legitimised socially, is a vital consideration and has long been a preoccupation of many writers and thinkers. The distinction between knowledge and information is important, since people throughout the world today are faced by an explosion of information in an ever-increasing range of forms but often with little guidance on how to interpret, use and value it in a critical way (Brookfield 2005). This heightened availability of information gave rise to the notion of the post-industrial 'information society', with a heavy emphasis on the power of new and evolving information and communication technologies. The recent emergence of the idea of the 'knowledge society' (Stehr 1994; Castells 1996; Delanty 2001), which seeks to engage with a broader view of knowledge and information production, sharing and use, offers opportunities to build bridges between the global and the local, a key aim of many institutions and individuals engaged in development studies.

The implications for research and education of these trends in information and knowledge are enormous. From a knowledge society perspective, education will play a vital role in the sharing, application and creation of knowledge (UNESCO 2005). Higher education and universities in particular will, it is claimed, 'fuel the driving forces of the transformation towards a global knowledge society' and have 'a certain capacity to steer and eventually to correct the direction of trends within globalisation' (Van Damme 2002: 4).

But there are other ways of looking at the relationship between research, higher education, knowledge and society. Research and higher education institutions can also be perceived as purveyors of information and generators and propagators of knowledge that fit within paradigms, which themselves have become unreliable and open to question. Universities, whose existence is justified in terms of their contribution to learning, may become weighed down by inertia, unable to learn themselves, or to support the learning of others (Taylor and Fransman 2004). Independent research institutes can be captured by the interests of the clients that fund them and can find it difficult to preserve a space for research that is reflective or challenges the *status quo*. The global knowledge economy has also served to exacerbate concern that some research and academic institutions may be contributing to an *undemocratisation* of society, by discouraging questioning or shoring up assumptions which constrain or block open and reflective dialogue. Additionally, as higher education institutions play a particular role in training educators and developing and updating educational curricula, their increasing orientation towards the global knowledge market may influence the values of basic and critical education, having a much greater impact on development and society in the longer term.

A clearer understanding of how knowledge creation and access to knowledge are changing and where knowledge is being produced is therefore essential. We may note some of the critical elements:

- The combination of an increasingly integrated global knowledge economy with huge disparities in access to knowledge in some respects reinforces (as in the case of the so-called digital divide) and in some respect cuts across North–South distinctions

- New technologies are having a far-reaching impact on how knowledge is delivered and accessed. For example, in the 1990s, more teachers graduated through the Nigerian National Teachers Institute's distance-learning programme than all other programmes in the country combined

- There is a need to understand where ownership of knowledge resources is diversifying, where it is changing institutional form, and where it is concentrating. The current decline of publicly funded higher education institutions, particularly in the South, alongside the rapid rise of private universities and colleges, is a major change. Private universities in the South are often offshoots or franchises of 'public' ones in the North, resulting in unclear distinctions between public and private. For instance, Bangladesh now has over 50 private universities, dwarfing the number in the public sector; between 1995–9, China established 500 new higher education institutions; and much of development-related research and development (R&D) is now carried out by private companies and consultancy firms

- There has been a rise of new institutions in the 'South' which have a comparative, regional and global remit (e.g. BRAC, which started as a national NGO in Bangladesh and now has operations in Afghanistan, East Africa and the UK). This underlines the fact that 'authoritative' development knowledge is no longer the monopoly of a few elite institutions in the North

- There have been major changes in the way that knowledge is used, and by whom. At the national and local levels, there is an increasingly complex interrelationship between local and global knowledge. These include clashes around rights to knowledge, such as debates about 'indigenous knowledge rights' vs. those of multinational pharmaceuticals. But various Roundtable discussions pointed out that sources of knowledge for development problems often come from national sources, rather than international ones.

### 3 Development studies in the 'South' and 'North'

How are some of these trends affecting Southern and Northern institutions and what do they imply for their respective roles and the relations between them? Many participants in the IDS40 Roundtable discussions commented that research and higher education institutions in the South are perceived differently from those in the North, in terms of their role and contribution to development and in ways that are often contradictory. For instance, they may be seen as:

- 'insiders' or 'outsiders' by different stakeholders engaged in change and development processes

- resource 'sinks' (for funds, materials, bureaucracy) or resource contributors (of knowledge, people, skills and attitudes, networks and partnerships)

- self-serving and self-perpetuating of their own interests (or of other dominant institutions), or as co-learners, collaborators and partners coming together to address common goals and concerns

- contributors to a predefined knowledge agenda, or agents of change and transformation in their own right.

In practice, these are not either/or situations. Research organisations in both North and South will find themselves at different points on such scales, sometimes at several points simultaneously.

Research organisations in the South were also seen to face other difficulties compared with organisations in the North:

- 'Resource starvation' (due in part to shifts in donor funding patterns), which has resulted in shortages of funds, people and information, and has limited the chance for institutes to set their own agenda and use their own approaches to suit their own needs in their own contexts, as well as their capacity to carry out and communicate their work effectively

- A lack of clarity about who they are accountable to, and who is accountable to them

- Problems of staff recruitment and retention, especially as Northern organisations attempt to diversify their staff and international organisations based in national capitals pay higher salaries which draw academics away

- A real and growing asymmetry in the capacity of research and higher education institutions to fulfil their role in society due to structural differences which include power relations with organisations and new academic elites in countries such as India and China as well as with the established elites in the North.

The term 'roadside research' was used in the Kampala Roundtable to describe elite research undertaken by 'favoured' Southern institutions that is seen to simply replicate dominant research agendas. In another Roundtable, the term 'development research darlings' was used to describe those Southern organisations that receive special attention from Northern partners, leading to neglect of others. Such colourful imagery was typical of the depth and intensity of the conversations stimulated by issues of knowledge, power and capacity of research and higher education organisations in both North and South.

Southern researchers also face many of the same issues as researchers in the North. These include the pressures of income generation (deriving from meagre salaries in the South and an increasing move away from core funding towards 'soft money' financing through one-off project grants in the North, the pressure to publish in international journals (deriving from a desire to influence the international agenda in the South and for prestige and funding reasons in North and South), and the difficulty of securing travel funds. There are strong pressures on Southern researchers to publish and travel internationally, regardless of whether they consider this a priority. Universities in South Africa, for example, have been questioning the form of excellence towards which they should strive. As one IDS40 conference participant asked, is it excellence 'in relation to academic standards in the world or to local needs?' Should researchers in the South be striving to publish in Northern-based journals, where currently the voices of Northern-based researchers dominate? And if so, how can they increase their access to these spaces? To what extent does the global domination of a small group of languages, especially English, limit the expression of knowledge by speakers of other languages through international fora?

Who pays for research, and the extent to which this determines political and ideological agendas is a troubling issue for us all. Development studies would wither substantially without the continuing support of bilateral and multilateral agencies but it comes at some price to intellectual and institutional autonomy. One participant asked provocatively whether researchers in the South have become 'agenda-setters or lapdogs'. Linked to this is the issue of transparency, and a reasonable concern that constituencies that fund research can expect greater accountability. But if research agendas in the South are set by funders in the North who tend to privilege Northern institutions and scholars and thus perpetuate asymmetrical power relations, a disconnection between 'donors' and 'beneficiaries' is almost guaranteed.

Increasing privatisation of higher education in many countries is a driving force towards massive expansion of the sector which has positive impacts, but there may be adverse impacts on quality and access as a result. For example, research and teaching are becoming increasingly disconnected (partly for funding reasons). And access to development studies courses in both Southern and Northern universities may become limited to those individuals who can afford to pay through private means, as financial support from traditional funders dries up. Paradoxically, those who wish to study development but come from less affluent backgrounds, indeed from those contexts where struggles for social change are most urgent, may be denied access to the education that could support their efforts to bring about change.

What of development research and teaching institutions located in the North, such as IDS? Does location matter and in what ways, especially in an increasingly electronically connected world? There have been significant shifts of direction over the last decade. One has been the

move from predominantly individual researcher-based projects to much larger partnership programmes involving increasing numbers of organisations in different regions, many of which are not research centres but are engaged in policy, implementation and advocacy and with whom appropriate partnership models are having to be invented. This has been accompanied by efforts to diversify funding sources. A further shift is the rise in importance of providing information services to a global audience. This has, at least temporarily, increased the interdependence between some Northern and Southern institutions.

But institutions in the North will be increasingly challenged to identify their place in the global division of knowledge labour and to justify funding for their operations. One possible scenario is an intensification of efforts to support Southern institutions to acquire the resources and skills they need, and for national institutions to become international players – levelling out the playing field of competition for global resources. Another is a more segmented approach to knowledge partnerships in which institutions in both North and South develop their complementary comparative strengths. And another would be innovative forms of mergers across geographical boundaries where staff, students, and programme managers move either actually or virtually between locations. These are not mutually exclusive options.

These IDS40 discussions signal some key concerns. First, as well as the huge imbalance between North and South, the resources (and hence power to influence) available to research and higher education institutions in the South are also very unequally distributed (often concentrated in capital cities for example). Second, those resources may not be used to generate learning and knowledge that benefits society locally as well as globally, but rather to further the agenda, beliefs and paradigms of institutions situated elsewhere. This view is reinforced by a growing perception that the forces of globalisation are channelling the voices of the world's citizens into ever narrower spaces. Many feel that the influence of increasingly powerful economic, cultural, social and political ideologies is becoming the mainstream.

Those who think and see the world differently are finding it harder to make their voices heard except in alternative fora such as 'blogs' (Taylor *et al*. 2007; Taylor and Angeles 2006). Third, this is reinforced by the dependence of development studies in both North and South on short-term funding and from agencies which drive the agenda, however well-intentioned they may be. Finally, the raison d'etre and role of development studies institutions based in the North is under scrutiny as institutions in the South challenge them on the same terrain and take an increasing share of global funding.

### 4 Towards a different vision: beyond the North–South paradigm?
The issues raised above have far-reaching institutional as well as epistemological consequences, and may well be shared more widely beyond those who engaged in the IDS40 conversations. Development

professionals and practitioners who participated shared a deep concern for creating capacity to undertake what is most needed within a local context, as well as contributing to global knowledge on key development issues. Drawing on the different sources outlined in this article, the following seem to be key elements of a vision for the role of development studies institutions which would begin to address the many inequities and challenges we have raised above.

Realising this vision poses challenges for institutions and organisations in both North and South. Challenges encompass the changing nature of the global political economy of knowledge, the type of knowledge that is generated, the extent of autonomy of knowledge production and the way knowledge is delivered.

● In a globalised world, we need to pay attention both to the globally integrated nature of current development issues (migration, structural determinants of poverty, the rise of major non-OECD players, etc.) and to geographical and contextual differences and the local solutions that respond to these. We therefore need comparative development research, rather than Northern institutes focused on the South or even Southern institutes focused on the South

● The highest priority must go to redressing the huge imbalances in access to knowledge resources of all kinds. This means intensified efforts to identify capacity gaps and develop strategies for addressing them

● Capacity development is a mutual process. Transfers of learning are required in multiple directions and both 'inside' and 'outside' knowledge have a critical role to play. This means recasting one of the dominant frameworks of development research as the valuable (and valued) perspective of the outsider rather than the (unequal) perspective of the Northerner on the South

● In a highly commoditised knowledge economy, institutions must be able to create and preserve autonomous spaces for work which challenges orthodoxies – wherever they originate.

There are enormous complexities in achieving any of this and there are no quick fixes or ready-made solutions. We conclude with some thoughts on the major challenges and opportunities ahead, particularly for the creation of new institutional forms and partnerships for development studies.

### 4.1 What institutional arrangements would reduce inequalities in knowledge production and access?

As we have noted, there has been a shift towards larger, multi-partner programmes and ways of working. This is encouraging but current modes still substantially reflect leadership from the North and 'partners' in the South. These may be seen as a transitional phase but we need to pay increased attention to how partnerships are being shaped and

transformed by research needs, the rise of Southern institutions with regional and international capacity, and trends in funding. Because they are intrinsically outward-facing, development studies institutions are in a particularly advantageous position to innovate in terms of partnerships and organisational arrangements.

### 4.2 Re-orienting the subject matter of development to a comparative perspective

There is a long tradition of comparative research which has crossed the North–South divide but it has been a subordinated one in a context where 'development' and 'South' have been yoked together.[1] And it has even more rarely involved the comparative perspective of researchers from the South engaged in research on the North (except informally as students on courses) or doing comparative work in other parts of the South.

Resource and funding constraints have militated against this but theoretical boundaries have also contributed to marginalising these other perspectives. This is beginning to change – organisations such as BRAC are turning their attention to generalising the learning from poverty reduction in Bangladesh to other parts of the world. But it will require a concerted effort to change the current structure of incentives in institutional remits, financing, careers and dissemination to encourage a more widespread shift. On the part of institutions this will also entail reviewing and renewal of intellectual traditions that are valuable to understanding the world. On the part of funders, it requires an imaginative shift in thinking and is perhaps a role best played by a major foundation. At the same time, such a shift should not devalue the importance of national and regional perspectives and the role of institutions which can articulate them.

### 4.3 What should Northern and Southern institutions do similarly or jointly and what should they do separately?

Addressing this requires a candid assessment of where interests coincide and where they diverge. In practice, both competition and cooperation will delineate relationships and this is probably all to the good provided the uneven terrain in which they presently operate can be changed. Common interests certainly include shared intellectual perspectives and exchange, as well as opportunities to learn from different 'insider' and 'outsider' understandings.

While one possible scenario is that Northern institutions disappear eventually as capacity in the South renders much of what they do redundant, the value of development studies expertise in all countries should be insisted upon. In the medium term, it will remain important to retain independent institutional voices in the OECD countries on national and regional policies and programmes which affect 'developing' countries. And in the longer term, a renewed tradition of development studies 'beyond the North–South paradigm' will be needed more and more to tackle the complexities of our fractious, interconnected world.

**Note**

1 Exceptional examples at IDS include Naila Kabeer's research comparing Bangladeshi women garment workers in Dhaka and in London; Linda Waldman's comparative study of asbestosis-affected workers in South Africa and the UK, and a study comparing parents' understandings and concerns about immunisation in the UK and Africa by Melissa Leach *et al*.

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# Glossary of terms, including abbreviations

**Affective engagement** A person-centred conceptual approach that focuses on the role of emotions and affection for understanding rational thoughts, preferences and choices.

**Co-construction** A collaborative approach to research that supports multiple actors to bring their knowledge and experience to bear on shaping research agendas and processes.

**Decolonisation** In its political form refers to the breaking of political ties with former colonial powers. When decolonisation is used in reference to knowledge, it refers to the process of breaking or going beyond the dominance of what is referred to as the Western canon or the dominance of Eurocentric ways of knowing, to recognise the vast multiplicity of epistemologies or knowledge systems.

**Engaged excellence** IDS' distinct approach to constructing and mobilising knowledge, and to teaching and mutual learning for development. Engaged excellence means that the high quality of our work (excellence) is dependent upon it linking to and involving those who are at the heart of the change we wish to see (engaged).

**Participatory research** An approach to research that involves the people who are the subjects of research as partners in the process of the enquiry.

**Pathways** The particular directions in which interacting social, technological and environmental systems and their contexts co-evolve over time.

**Transformative knowledge network(s)** This is the name given to the three international networks of researchers funded under the ISSC 'Transformations to Sustainability' programme (www.worldsocialscience.org/ activities/transformations/ transformative-knowledge-networks-2), of which the 'Pathways' network described by Ely and Marin in this *IDS Bulletin* is one.

**Transformative pathway(s)** Pathways that entail deep, structural reconfigurations of social–technological–environmental systems, often through emergent and unruly (rather than 'top-down') processes.

**AWID** Association for Women's Rights in Development
**CBPR** community-based participatory research
**CBR** community-based research
**CCRI** Community Conservation Resilience Initiative
**CE** community engagement
**CEIDRA** Center for Studies and Research of Rural Law and Agrarian Reform [Paraguay]
**CENIT** Centro de Investigaciones para la Transformación [Centre for Research on Transformation, Argentina]
**CERI** Centro de Estudios Rurales Interdisciplinarios [Center for Interdisciplinary Rural Studies, Asunción, Paraguay]

**CHSJ** Centre for Health and Social Justice [India]
**CONICET** National Scientific and Technical Research Council [Argentina]
**CSO** civil society organisation
**CUPP** Community University Partnership Programme
**CURP** Community University Research Partnership
**DFID** Department for International Development
**ESRC** Economic and Social Research Council
**FAO** Food and Agriculture Organization
**GFC** Global Forest Coalition
**GPS** Gender, Power and Sexuality
**HANCI** Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index
**HEI** higher education institution
**IAASTD** International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development
**IDS** Institute of Development Studies
**IFAD** International Fund for Agricultural Development
**IFPRI** International Food Policy Research Institute
**IK** indigenous knowledge
**INGO** international non-governmental organisation
**ISSC** International Social Science Council
**IUCN-NL** IUCN National Committee of the Netherlands
**LGBTI** lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
**MEGEN** Men for Gender Equality Now [Kenya]
**MOHRAU** Men of Hope Refugee Association Uganda
**MoU** memorandum of understanding
**ODI** Overseas Development Institute
**ORAM** Organization for Refuge, Asylum and Migration
**PADEAP** Pan African Development, Education and Advocacy Programme
**PANITA** Partnership for Nutrition in Tanzania
**PAR** participatory action research
**PG** Parliamentary Group
**PRA** participatory rural appraisal
**PRIA** Participatory Research in Asia
**PV** participatory video
**RLP** Refugee Law Project
**SDC** Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
**SDG** Sustainable Development Goal
**SGBV** sexual and gender-based violence
**Sida** Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
**SPRU** Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex
**SSHRC** Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council [Canada]
**STEPS** Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability
**STS** science and technology studies
**SUN** Scaling Up Nutrition
**UNAIDS** Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
**UNESCO** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**UNFCCC** United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
**UNFPA** United Nations Population Fund
**UNHCR** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
**UNICEF** United Nations Children's Fund
**UPOV International** Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants
**WFP** World Food Programme
**WSSR** *World Social Science Report*

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IDS Institute of Development Studies

# Engaged Excellence

Editors **Melissa Leach, John Gaventa and Katy Oswald**

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**Transforming Development Knowledge**

'High-quality research will need to be based on the co-construction of knowledge, it will need to mobilise impact-orientated evidence, and be based on enduring partnerships – in other words it will need to be engaged with society, not detached from it.'