Engaged excellence: our approach to knowledge mobilisation and influence

We believe that:

> … research results are outputs that only become outcomes and impacts in practice, by means of transmission of knowledge. The extent to which knowledge is ultimately channelled into action depends not only on how the knowledge transfer is organised, but also on how the research results are received and taken up in specific contexts.
> (11 Principles 2016)

IDS has developed a distinctive approach to constructing and sharing knowledge for development, engaged excellence (IDS 2015), which is embedded across all our research, teaching and learning, and communications and impact work. Engaged excellence means that the high quality of our work (excellence) is dependent upon it linking to and involving those who can help bring about progressive change. The approach is articulated in a recent *IDS Bulletin* issue (Leach, Gaventa and Oswald 2017).

In our knowledge mobilisation and partnership activities we move away from conventional approaches to research communication (i.e. the pure act of communicating research results in the form of outputs) to ensure that the way we do research and share its findings makes a transformational impact, empowering ourselves and all stakeholders throughout the process.

In a turbulent world where progressive and regressive forces are shaping the challenges and contestations of gender and sexuality, our approach to knowledge mobilisation not only enables research processes to respond to unforeseen change but is designed with agility in mind. This opens up opportunities, ensures our work is relevant and timely, and mitigates against threats.

We embrace the opportunities new digital tools and settings offer, work in and across multiple language contexts, adopt innovative methodologies, and mutually build capacity with our partners in ways that reflect differentials in power. This makes it easier to reach our intended audiences and makes it more engaging for others. By involving organisations, policymakers, donors and academics as well as less commonly represented stakeholders (such as human rights defenders, social entrepreneurs or media professionals) from the start, they are able to help inform and shape our work and ultimately affect social change. These include policymakers at national levels (e.g. in political forums, commissions, or institutional mechanisms for gender justice) and at the international level (e.g. UN Women, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'like-minded' governments in the OECD, women's rights organisations, other social movements, and private sector actors).

" Our approach to knowledge mobilisation is designed with agility in mind. "

Our approach means we can better reflect our values and principles around the way we work; a process whereby knowledge is generated, processed, articulated and shared by multiple stakeholders as part of a broader and interconnected research programme.

Our approach thus incorporates the following elements:

1. **We situate:** the effectiveness of our work is dependent on it speaking to the context in which our stakeholders are located, and involving those who are at the heart of the change we wish to see.

2. **We co-construct:** knowledge is produced together: it is built, shaped and carried through jointly with partners and driven by the perspectives, capacities and needs of stakeholders at the different stages of the research process.

3. **We share:** the findings are packaged using multiple formats and media, produced using different methodologies, and distributed via multiple communication channels and to destinations where our audiences are present.

4. **We learn:** the learning from the process of undertaking the research and knowledge mobilisation is as important as the findings generated. We seek to consistently test assumptions and power relations, evaluate outcomes and impact at different levels and at all stages – before, during and after research activities are completed.

Figure 1 (on page 29) details this distinctive approach and its improved outcomes, as rippling out from a diverse set of activities through examples of platforms and means of sharing the knowledge generated.

A range of examples are linked in to the diagram and include:

EMERGE: Engendering Men: Evidence on Routes to Gender Equality
http://menandboys.ids.ac.uk

GrOW: Growth and Equal Opportunities for Women
http://interactions.eldis.org/economic-empowerment

Sexuality and Social Justice Toolkit
www.spl.ids.ac.uk/toolkit

Love Matters music awards
http://spl.ids.ac.uk/blog/winners-love-matters-music-awards-announced-kenya

Transgender peoples and livelihood options in Vietnam
www.ids.ac.uk/publication/transgender-at-work-livelihoods-for-transgender-people-in-vietnam

Gender Hub e-learning
http://masculinities.genderhub.org

Interactions health e-discussion
http://interactions.eldis.org/sites/interactions.eldis.org/files/attachments/Urbanisation,%20gender%20and%20health%20online%20discussion%20briefing%20note.doc

Unpaid Care Work animation
http://interactions.eldis.org/unpaid-care-work
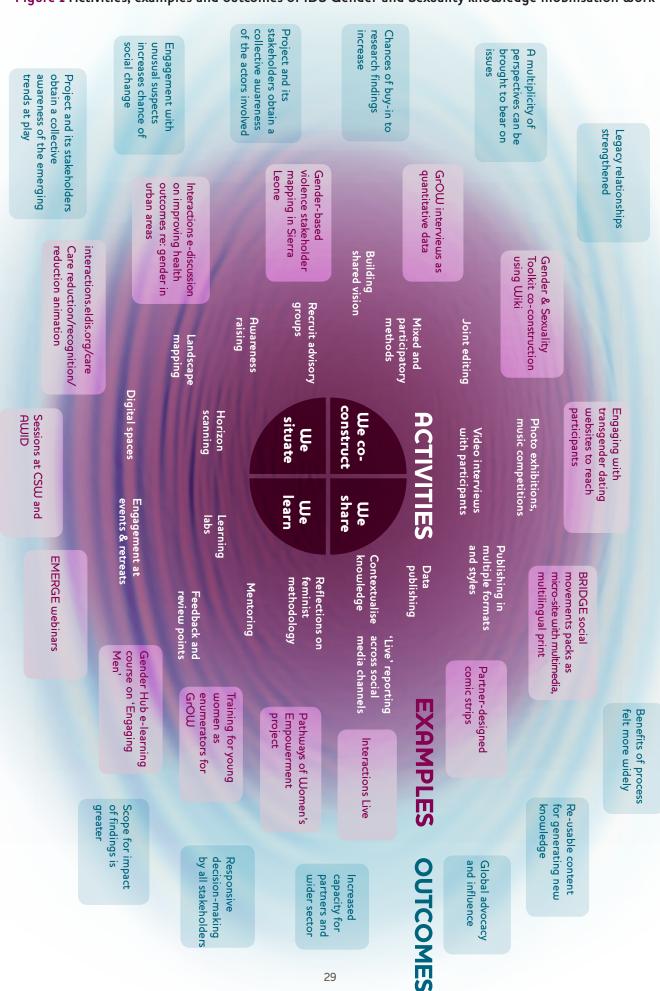
Interactions Live
http://interactions.eldis.org/global-events

GBV in Sierra Leone
www.ids.ac.uk/publication/engaging-men-and-boys-to-end-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-in-sierra-leone-a-stakeholder-mapping-report-june-2014

> **By involving a range of stakeholders from the start, they help to shape our work and ultimately affect social change.**

Figure 1 Activities, examples and outcomes of IDS Gender and Sexuality knowledge mobilisation work

ACTIVITIES

We situate · We co-construct · We learn · We share

Horizon scanning · Landscape mapping · Digital spaces · Awareness raising · Recruit advisory groups · Building shared vision · Mixed and participatory methods · Joint editing · Learning labs · Mentoring · Feedback and review points · Reflections on feminist methodology · Contextualise knowledge · Data publishing · Engagement at events & retreats

EXAMPLES

Gender & Sexuality Toolkit co-construction using Wiki · GrOW interviews as quantitative data · Gender-based violence stakeholder mapping in Sierra Leone · Interactions e-discussion on improving health outcomes re: gender in urban areas · interactions.eldis.org/care · Care reduction/recognition/reduction animation · Sessions at CSW and AWID · EMERGE webinars · Gender Hub e-learning course on 'Engaging Men' · Training for young women as enumerators for GrOW · Pathways of Women's Empowerment project · Interactions Live · 'Live' reporting across social media channels · Partner-designed comic strips · BRIDGE social movements packs as micro-site with multimedia, multilingual print · Publishing in multiple formats and styles · Video interviews with participants · Photo exhibitions, music competitions · Engaging with transgender dating websites to reach participants

OUTCOMES

Legacy relationships strengthened · A multiplicity of perspectives can be brought to bear on issues · Chances of buy-in to research findings increase · Project and its stakeholders obtain a collective awareness of the actors involved · Engagement with unusual suspects increases chance of social change · Project and its stakeholders obtain a collective awareness of the emerging trends at play · Scope for impact of findings is greater · Responsive decision-making by all stakeholders · Increased capacity for partners and wider sector · Global advocacy and influence · Re-usable content for generating new knowledge · Benefits of process felt more widely