



# THE DIAMOND OF INFLUENCE: A MODEL FOR EXPLORING BEHAVIOUR IN RESEARCH TO POLICY LINKAGES

**Louise Clark**

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## Introduction

This learning paper presents initial analysis of the emerging research to policy linkages within the Agricultural Policy Research in Africa (APRA) programme of the Future Agricultures Consortium, which is funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

APRA has an innovative monitoring, evaluation and learning approach known as the 'Accompanied Learning on Relevance and Effectiveness' (ALRE), which is being delivered by a small team of embedded evaluation specialists. This paper discusses how ALRE has applied the COM-B (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation and Behaviour) (Mayne 2018; Mayne 2016; Michie, van Stralen and West 2011) model of behaviour change to explore the interactions and influencing strategies between researchers and policymakers in the context of agricultural policy research in Africa. These insights have produced the Diamond of Influence, a new ALRE-adapted model, which applies each of the COM-B elements to discuss the different aspects of research to policy processes, drawing on examples of how researchers in each of the APRA focus countries (Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zimbabwe) are engaging in policy spaces. These examples emphasise stakeholder engagement as key to ensuring the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of APRA research.

The aim of this paper is to support critical thinking and to generate practical insights in order to help increase the relevance of APRA evidence in the context of local, national and regional policy priorities. The paper also reflects on the most effective mechanisms and key messages to identify, reach and influence decision-makers. This discussion of different engagement strategies seeks to generate insights for researchers as they respond to evolving policy contexts and provide a framework for analysing APRA's contribution to political discourse and decisions on pro-poor agricultural commercialisation.

### Box 1: DAC definitions of relevance and effectiveness

**Relevance** – the extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries', global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.

**Effectiveness** – the extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.

## ALRE: A mechanism to increase research relevance and effectiveness

ALRE is a developmental evaluation approach (Patton 2010), which aims to deliver accountability and learning by finding the right balance between the objectivity and rigour of external evaluation with the strong programmatic knowledge and working relationships of embedded monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) staff. ALRE has been designed to support the APRA research partnership to deliver independence, rigour and accountability with ongoing reflection on programme performance and advice to improve pathways to impact. ALRE's objectives are to:

- increase APRA's relevance, effectiveness and overall outcomes by providing an informed, independent and iterative 'critical friend' function;
- conduct robust outcome tracing to improve the rigour and quality of outcome reporting; and
- generate learning on research-evidence-policy linkages to inform future programme design.

This paper aims to provide a working definition of what relevance and effectiveness mean in the context of APRA research, and to provide a model – the Diamond of Influence – to assess progress and performance. Practical examples emerging from across APRA focal countries, discussed with reference to this analytical model, are used to reflect upon APRA teams' research and engagement strategies and consider how the different dimensions of the model relate to their experience. The evidence presented in this paper is based upon researcher presentations given at the APRA Annual Review and Planning Workshop held in Naivasha, Kenya, in December 2019, and which was validated with country teams during 2020.

The starting point for discussing relevance and effectiveness are the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (OECD 2019; 1991) evaluation criteria, which were revised in 2019. The definitions provided in Box 1 reflect the 2019 updated criteria.

These definitions provide a starting point, but need to be further developed to reflect the specific context of APRA's research and objectives. When considering relevance it is key to ask: Relevant to what? To whom? At what level? For effectiveness, the emphasis needs to be on the actual use of research evidence to influence policy, investment and behavioural change. Prioritising relevance and effectiveness is key to ensuring APRA's legacy, which has two aspects: firstly, the capacity, relationships and networks that APRA will leave behind or provide as a foundation for future initiatives; and, secondly, building awareness and ownership of APRA evidence to support the uptake and use of APRA research findings in policy processes beyond the end of the APRA programme.

The following section describes how the COM-B model has been applied to explore the different dimensions of research to policy linkages. This paper focusses specifically on emerging insights to guarantee the relevance of APRA research to policy conversations and opportunities.

### COM-B as a framework for exploring research to policy linkages

The COM-B model explores the dynamics of factors that interact and support behaviour change as a combination of 'Capabilities, Opportunities and Motivations'. The model was originally developed through Michie *et al.*'s (2011) work on the 'Behaviour Change Wheel', which explored the relationships between evidence-based practice and behaviour change in public health.

“**Capability** is defined as the individual's psychological and physical capacity to engage in the activity concerned. It includes having the necessary knowledge and skills. **Motivation** is defined as all those brain processes that energise and direct behaviour, not just goals and conscious decision-making. It includes habitual processes, emotional responding, as well as analytical decision-making. **Opportunity** is defined as all the factors that lie outside the individual that make the behaviour possible or prompt it.” (Michie *et al.* 2011: 4)

Michie *et al.* (2011) go on to identify sub-divisions for each of these components – physical and psychological capabilities; physical and social opportunities; and reflective and automatic motivations – that support the targeting of interventions. For the purpose of this paper, we will work with the COM-B principles, expanding upon the work of John Mayne (2018; 2016), which has popularised these concepts within the evaluation field, and particularly as a tool to support the development of theories of change.

Within APRA, theories of change have been developed at the country and regional level using a Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis (PIPA) approach (Alvarez *et al.* 2010), which uses participatory approaches to develop a vision of change and identify potential pathways to impact placing particular emphasis on identifying influential stakeholders and strategies for engagement. The Diamond of Influence was developed to encourage researchers to reflect upon their engagement plans and think about how specific research messages responded to the opportunities and incentives in their national and regional policy contexts. This gave researchers an additional perspective to reflect on their progress against impact pathways, and provided a framework for ALRE to capture and share lessons learnt between country teams and generate insights to support country teams to prioritise and focus engagement activities moving into the final stages of APRA.



## The Diamond of Influence: a model for policy engagement

The Diamond of Influence model emerged from consideration of how the COM-B concepts could be applied to deepen reflection around the specific questions that enhance relevance and effectiveness of APRA research. One of the key strengths of the COM-B model is that its four core elements are sufficiently broad that they have universal applications across fields and disciplines, including the research-policy interface. The Diamond of Influence also draws upon Georgalakis and Rose's (2019) framework which outlines three key qualities of research-policy partnerships in international development: adapting research evidence to policy priorities; collaborating towards a shared agenda; and sustained interaction and engagement to build trust.

**Capabilities** are linked to developing knowledge and skills. These two elements are at the core of the APRA programme, which works to deliver research that generates **evidence and knowledge** of the pathways to inclusive commercialisation in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), whilst supporting **capacity and skills** of partner researchers and research institutions. As such, in APRA, building capabilities – in terms of evidence and skills – is strongly linked to research activities and outputs. Professional and robust research that

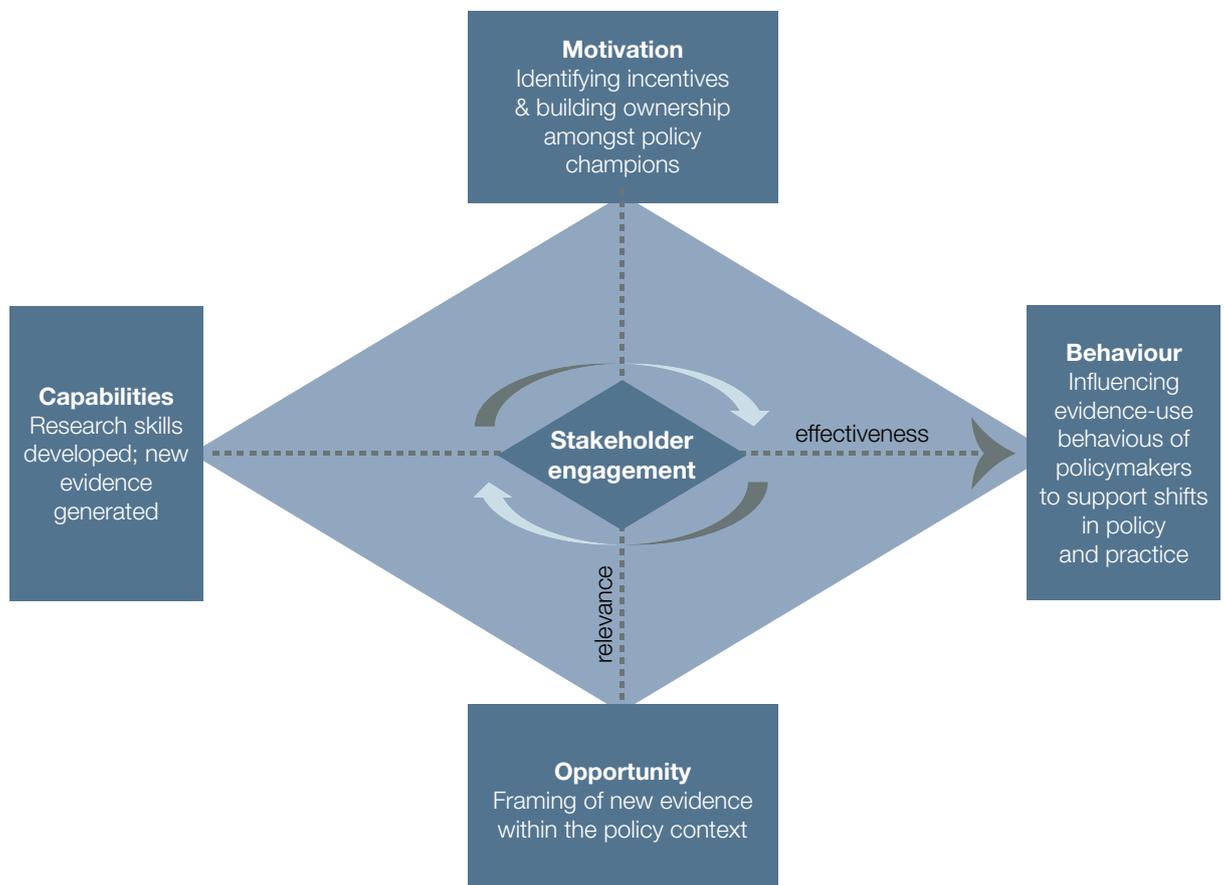
generates quality evidence provides a starting point for policy conversations and influencing but does not necessarily ensure either the relevance or effectiveness of this research from a policy perspective.

**Opportunities** are the external factors that support change. In the context of policy research, this can be interpreted as the **framing** of evidence in terms of how it contributes new insights to the broader policy context and responds to emerging issues that can create new opportunities to apply research evidence. Framing new evidence within existing policy conversations, or in response to emerging issues, is key to ensuring the policy relevance and effectiveness of research. This can be understood as policy adaptability that supports the use of research evidence in different policy spaces and for different audiences (Georgalakis and Rose 2019).

**Motivation** is about the internal cognitive processes that support decision-making and inform the lens through which decision-makers view research. It is therefore valuable to understand key stakeholders' **incentives** and the perspectives from which they will approach evidence. Identifying **policy champions** and finding mechanisms to increase their **ownership or co-ownership** of evidence and key findings and messages is therefore key to ensuring relevance and effectiveness. This aligns with Georgalakis

**Figure 1 The Diamond of Influence**

Applying COM-B to the research-policy interface



Source: Author's own



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and Rose's (2019) concept of bounded mutuality, which emphasises the importance of a common understanding of a policy problem, building of a common agenda and co-construction of research questions to effectively connect the supply and demand of evidence and work across organisational cultures towards actionable policy recommendations.

**Behaviour change:** Applying the COM-B model to the context of policy research assumes that shifts in policy discourse and instrumental changes at the policy level are the result of changing evidence-use behaviours of key decision-makers and influential stakeholder groups. This shift in behaviours can include the types of evidence that policymakers engage with and how they act upon evidence. Shifting policy, practice or even discourse can involve challenging established understanding or status quo and may require a shift in thinking or perspective amongst decision-makers and influential stakeholders, which is supported by this combination of strong evidence, relevant framing and clear incentives.

**Stakeholder engagement:** At the heart of the COM-B model is stakeholder engagement that emphasises the importance of people and social processes to build trust and drive behavioural and social change. Georgalakis and Rose's (2019) concept of sustained interactivity highlights the benefit of building relationships as early as possible in the research process as well as frequent iteration with policy audiences. Building multi-stakeholder platforms is an established approach for many researchers (Clark and Goodier 2019) but also has a high cost, both in terms of time and financial investments so they need to be well facilitated and used strategically. In the COVID-reality, research and policy communities are having to adapt to restrictions on face-to-face interactions. Despite the current challenges, these conversations and connections remain as critical

as ever to support evidence-informed policymaking and engagement mechanisms are therefore evolving to enable coordination across diverse stakeholders at different levels to support construction of shared agendas and responsiveness to policy opportunities. Consequently, a variety of virtual engagements through webinars, social media platforms and hybrid models of engagement have emerged.

### COM-B and ALRE

Interpreting the elements of COM-B, as described above, provides us with a continuum, starting with research activities that build research skills and generate evidence (creating capabilities) on the left and shifts in policy and practice (new behaviours) on the right. Framing research evidence to create new policy insights (opportunities) and building ownership of champions (motivation) are key to ensuring the **relevance** of research outputs and processes.

**Effectiveness** can be understood as the extent to which research moves left to right along this pathway to policy impact. The diamond configuration resonates with APRA's emphasis on identifying evidence 'nuggets', which recognises that not all research results will have policy implications and highlights the importance of identifying the specific findings and messages that will resonate in the policy space. Research teams' presentations of their 'nuggets' at the APRA Annual Review in Naivasha, and subsequent conversations around relevance and effectiveness, are the basis of the analysis below.

The following section will explore a range of examples of how APRA research teams are generating new knowledge and engaging relevant stakeholder groups in order to frame their research within the policy context and build ownership of emerging research findings.

### Identifying and responding to policy opportunities

#### Framing of research to development discourse and agendas

Framing new evidence emerging from research processes as a policy opportunity is about finding a hook that demonstrates how research findings contribute to existing or emerging conversations and policy priorities. Getting the framing right is essential to answer the question: Relevant to what?

When engaging with multilateral organisations, framing requires demonstrating how new evidence contributes new perspectives or solutions that respond to existing mandates, agendas and processes. This framing requires a strong understanding of the political discourse and priorities of influential institutions in order to talk to relevant staff in their own organisational language to make it clear how research findings speak to their specific

mandate. For example, APRA is a FCDO investment in inclusive agricultural commercialisation, which responds to FCDO agendas of poverty alleviation, food security, increasing resilience, gender equality and commitment to<sup>1</sup> the United Nation's 'Leave No One Behind' agenda.<sup>2</sup> For the African Union, the policy framing needs to link to its 2063 Agenda<sup>3</sup> and awareness of the specific priorities<sup>4</sup> within this; for example, the prioritisation of rice as a key strategic agricultural commodity and related efforts to incentivise dynamism.

At the national level, demonstrating how evidence contributes new insights to specific policy processes can demonstrate how research responds to specific policy questions or concerns and to create opportunities to influence policy conversations. APRA Ethiopia, for example, has used the opportunity of the National Rice Dialogue to present a unique framing of their research to resonate with policy audiences.

In **Ethiopia**, APRA researchers have worked with the National Rice Research and Development Task Force, the National Rice Research and Training Center of the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR) and the Ministry of Agriculture. This has created an opportunity to contribute APRA findings as evidence to the National Rice Dialogue as an opportunity to influence the *National Rice Research and Development Strategy (2020-2030)*. The strategy covers suggested interventions in the area of input supply and utilisation, agronomic practices, pre-harvest, harvest and post-harvest management, and rice marketing, along with support services related to finance, investment, infrastructure and overall governance of the rice sector. The strategy

is expected to guide the research and development processes for the next decade.

The APRA Ethiopia team framed the issue of rice commercialisation in the context of foreign exchange and economic self-sufficiency supported by APRA findings that, despite an increase in domestic rice production, self-sufficiency in rice has declined from 76% to 28% over the last 10 years. Stronger investment in rice production and its commercialisation are recommended by APRA as an option for reducing the burden of rice imports on the foreign currency reserve. This has resulted in the consideration of rice as a strategic commodity along with wheat, soya and oil crops in a new agricultural import substitution strategic initiative to be implemented from 2020-2025. Expanding this discourse to include trade issues is being explored by the team as an additional angle to increase state interest in APRA research.

This framing for rice commercialisation was further supported by research presented to the Ethiopia National Rice Platform Workshop in March 2020, which highlighted the perspectives of rice processors in relation to the lack of incentives to modernise in order to compete with imports. This national platform also provided a space to discuss the potential of rice to dynamise local labour and land markets and incentivise local enterprise to call for stronger market regulations and interventions to strengthen relationships between farmers and processors.

### Linking evidence to different policy levels

Policy happens at different levels – regional, national or state and district. Understanding how priorities at different levels intersect with each other can be useful to link evidence generated with specific communities or geographies to the macro discourse. This requires demonstrating how evidence generated at the micro-level, with a particular demographic or community in a specific context, has broader resonance with national policy questions and potential for replication and expansion. In some instances, using the framing of national policy discourse may provide leverage for policy conversations at the state or district level, providing locally-developed solutions to national priorities and problems. In other instances, it may be possible to link context-specific evidence to broader national conversations by piggybacking on other processes or aligning with parallel research initiatives that validate or complement specific findings.

In **Tanzania**, APRA findings on low sunflower yields and relatively high costs of seeds in Singida were presented

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1 <https://bit.ly/2Tc8cz6>  
2 <https://bit.ly/3dHYWw5>  
3 <https://bit.ly/37oTqxe>  
4 <https://bit.ly/37oTwoA>



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to Iramba and Mkalama districts in Singida region, including processor associations (CEZOSOPA TASUPA), business associations (FAIDAMALI), sunflower seed dealers and the Ministry of Agriculture at the national level. The APRA findings were framed by national policy decisions on incentives to produce edible oils, including import tariffs, seed development, and removal of VAT on processing. The research findings indicate that improving sunflower processing technology efficiency is necessary and the government should incentivise processors to upgrade their technology by exempting import duty on processing machinery. Greater emphasis is also needed on the use of improved seed varieties to ensure the supply of high yield sunflower varieties. At the local government level, improving warehouse and storage facilities should be a priority to ensure most farmers are selling sunflower off-season at a competitive price. APRA Tanzania is working with the advocacy group ANSAF (the Agricultural Non-State Actors Forum) to share their findings using simple briefs to capture key findings and policy messages that resonate at both national and district level and bring a unique perspective of how national policies are experienced at the local and household level.

In **Ghana**, decentralisation creates an opportunity for influence at the district level. Engaging at the national level is seen to be more challenging as the Ministry of Food and Agriculture does not send decision-makers to meetings. It is more feasible to access the Executive Director of the District Assembly, and create spaces at this level to discuss APRA findings of how farmers respond to market incentives, particularly as this finding challenges national perceptions. APRA research into oil palm highlighted how access to processing facilities increased the resilience of producers to price fluctuations. APRA research also highlighted the gender dynamics of oil palm processing with a strong role for women in artisanal processing but dominance of men linked to the use of machinery.

This issue of scaling can also apply to how national level policy solutions respond to the regional priorities of multilaterals. Establishing how research evidence provides new insights to existing or parallel research at national and regional levels may create potential avenues of influence that can demonstrate the relevance of key findings to inform decision-making and investments at different levels. Engaging with different policy priorities across different levels requires strong understanding of the dynamics and drivers at each level and agility to create connections that demonstrate how local experiences and insights contribute to national level conversations, as well as how regional priorities influence decisions at national levels and their impact on local level decision-making.

In **Nigeria**, national policy has prioritised diversification of the economy to reduce dependence on oil revenue, increasing the importance of cocoa production as an export crop. However cocoa production levels are down. APRA researchers are engaging at the national level with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources to discuss the need to build resilient value chains in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement. APRA researchers are also working at the community and local level in Nigeria, bringing together local-level associations with state-level actors in the value chain to understand the different drivers, challenges and behaviours of different stakeholders. Land tenure has been identified as key to promoting investment but farmers are unwilling to invest as they can be moved off their land after seven years and land security is being negatively affected by gold prospecting and extractivism. Bringing together stakeholders across different levels creates opportunities to build a shared vision of change and shared understanding of problems and first-hand consideration of potential solutions. For example, APRA researchers held meetings with regional police to resolve immediate



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miner-cocoa farmer issues within a local government authority.

### **Practical solutions as policy opportunities**

Another option to frame research findings is to emphasise how research evidence provides solutions or insights to improve implementation in response to an existing problem. Policymakers can fall into the trap of making policy without first identifying clear delivery and implementation mechanisms and anticipating potential issues and challenges, so there is a need for research that provides evidence of how policy is applied in practice. Policy audiences are less interested in analysis of a problem than they are in finding solutions and want evidence and examples of what works, clear messages on delivery and guidance on implementation mechanisms and best practices.

An emphasis on practical solutions requires finding the right balance between the crisp clear messages needed to get policymakers' attention and the more detailed practical information and practical guidelines of interest to the technical staff who implement policy. Generating evidence of successful solutions will likely require involvement of a broader stakeholder group, which implies investment in coordination and convening conversations, but can generate a more compelling case for the value of the solutions identified.

In **Ghana**, APRA researchers coordinated a series of interactive sessions with farmers, cocoa researchers and extension services to understand why farmers are not adopting hybrids. These conversations identified the issue of community-level capital as a key gap and

the need for credit and financial support suggesting a strong potential role for cocoa processing companies. This presented the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the National Cocoa Board with a solution rather than a problem.

Within **Kenya**, APRA is engaging with the Agricultural Sector Network (ASNET) by sharing APRA findings through participation in ASNET's agricultural committee and preparing ASNET-relevant blogs.<sup>5</sup> ASNET is preparing a strategic plan on how to bring fragmented private sector actors together. There is a tendency to think of the private sector as coherent and speaking with a common voice however, in reality, the private sector has multiple actors that have no common mechanism through which policy proposals can be interrogated and harmonised and policy inputs generated. So the government needs to know who to talk to, in this case ASNET. APRA research could have a role to help provide evidence<sup>6</sup> on how agricultural policy relates to politics of priority setting and public investment in the agriculture sector. This engagement has potential to help to shift the political discourse towards innovative financing mechanisms, in particular public-private partnerships – with government-backed guarantee funds.

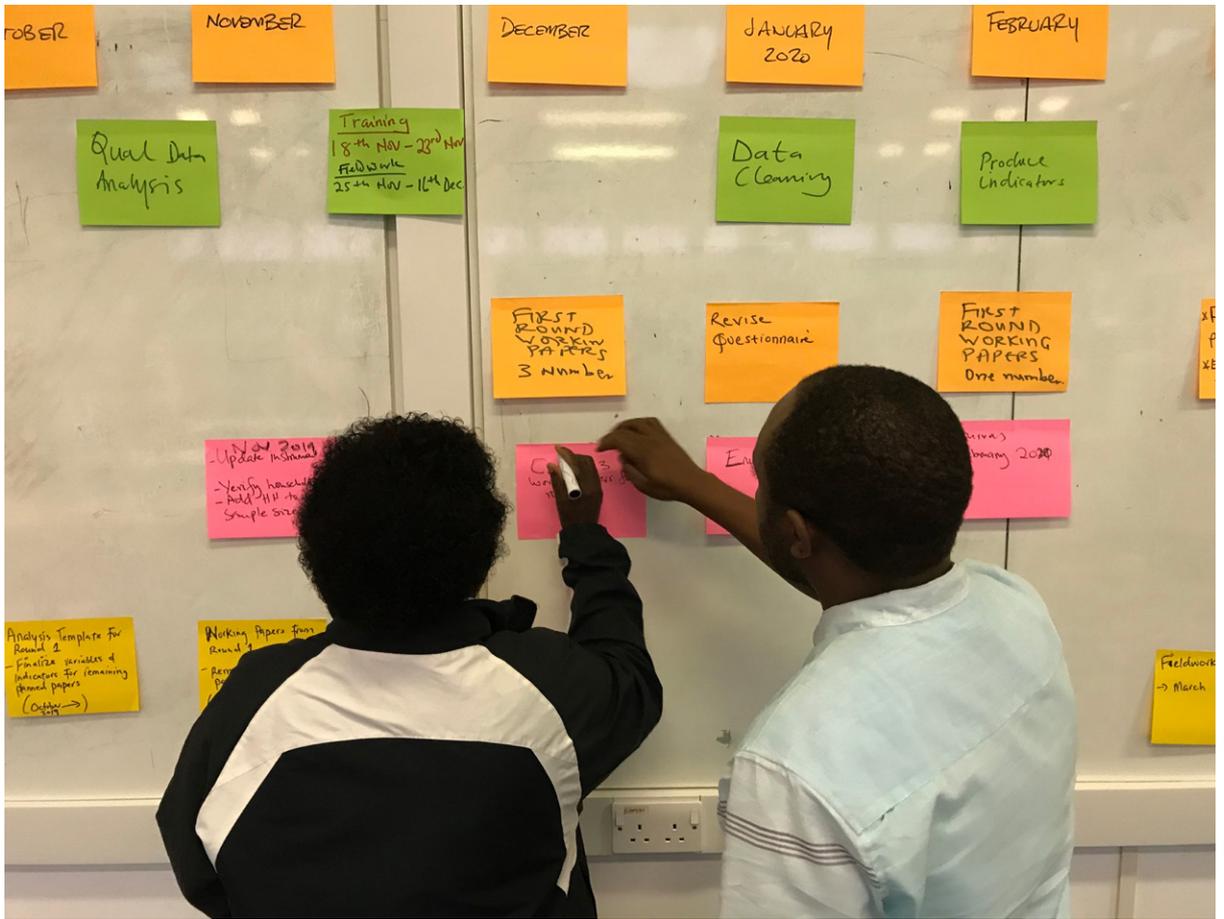
### **Creating motivation: understanding incentives and building ownership**

#### **Identifying policy champions and building ownership**

The policy relevance of evidence and findings is enhanced by identifying potential policy champions and involving them throughout the research process to

5 i) Public-private policy dialogue (<https://bit.ly/3gtr9rv>); ii) Leveraging on innovation and technology for inclusive growth in Kenya (<https://bit.ly/2UAdGVv>); and iii) Essentialist vs interconnected (<https://bit.ly/3cxl3CW>).

6 See, for example, APRA Working Paper 33, *Agribusiness Investment in Agricultural Commercialisation: Rethinking Policy Incentives in Africa*: <https://bit.ly/34bPY7m>.



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build their ownership of eventual results. This ongoing engagement builds policy audiences' awareness of research processes and provides them with an opportunity to advise and shape the focus and framing of research to respond to their specific needs and priorities, which can help overcome the challenge of closed ears if evidence challenges the existing status quo and vested interests of potential policy champions. Early engagement can help to bring champions on board, in order to anticipate and understand their incentives and disincentives to respond to emerging evidence and recommendations, and build relationships that have potential to increase their ownership and endorsement of evidence and promote emerging policy recommendations.

In **Nigeria**, one particular APRA team convened an Advisory Board that brings together influential civil servants and business leaders to provide guidance on how to translate APRA evidence into policy action. The Advisory Board meets bi-annually, supported by ongoing communication through a WhatsApp group, and the Board is tasked with assignments to identify mechanisms to translate APRA evidence on the potential role of medium-scale farms in enhancing the process of agricultural commercialisation and smallholder transformation into actionable recommendations. APRA's evidence suggests that, while the transition from small-scale to medium-scale farming has been occurring at a slow pace, encouraging growth of medium-scale farms provides an important pathway to increased agricultural commercialisation and thus

policy should focus on accelerating the process. Increased labour and land productivity is found to be associated with increasing scale of operation; consequently, the growth of medium-scale farms could bring about improved livelihoods of farming households through increasing wages and returns to family labour. Findings also suggest that the growth of medium-scale farms could significantly impact smallholder input use decisions, output yields and sales prices through positive knowledge spill-over and coordination effects. The relationship between APRA researchers and the Advisory Board has opened up new opportunities and led to invitations to participate in other policy spaces.

**Bringing diverse voices together to build consensus**

Influencing policy conversations often involves bringing diverse voices together and identifying a common vision around a specific issue. If the key stakeholders are united around the value of a specific approach, then this creates a strong mandate to influence policy audiences. Mobilising and feeding research into multiple nodes of influence outside the state can amplify the voices and pressure to increase receptivity to policy recommendations amongst key decision-makers. Bringing together multiple constituents across the state, private sector, academia and civil society can create a strong advocacy movement but also requires domesticating ideas and language to different audiences.

In **Malawi**, APRA has worked with the Civil Society Agricultural Network, to identify activities and

opportunities as they happen. This broad engagement resulted in media engagement and presentation of APRA evidence, which led to a request to share APRA evidence with the Strategic Agricultural Plan.

The APRA Malawi team also strengthened their relationship with media through a workshop with print and online journalists, which introduced journalists to a political-economy perspective to support them in communicating Malawi's experience of agricultural commercialisation to their readers in order to extend the reach of the research and systematically communicate findings to both farmers and policymakers. This increased visibility led to invitations for APRA Malawi to attend national policy dialogue forums.

APRA Malawi's participation at a State Agricultural Fair organised by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) helped to raise awareness of the commercialisation challenges faced by farmers' organisations and the need to help re-strategise to gain access to markets.

In **Zimbabwe**, APRA researchers recognised the need to engage with different audiences with different messages. In particular, this work emphasised the need to engage with banks through the Bankers Association to address their reluctance to extend credit. In addition, the changing forms of farm labour relations and the diverse ways in which farmers eke out a livelihood present new labour supply and wage demand challenges. Engaging with farmers' organisations and farmworker associations with targeted messages was seen as crucial in this regard. The Zimbabwe team

also used a participatory approach to work on climate change, which resulted in much stronger engagement of farmers in the research process and stronger learning and evaluation of the processes. Agricultural extension officers who attended focus group discussions appreciated emerging climate vulnerability and resilience dilemmas, prompting the need to develop new messages for government policymaking audiences. Broader stakeholder participation led to stronger ownership amongst farmers' groups, which was beneficial in crafting key messages for policymakers. APRA researchers are engaging with national policy framework alongside key stakeholders in government and FAO.

### **Building momentum around research evidence**

An additional dimension to incentivise the use and uptake of research findings or methods is to build momentum through horizontal sharing of evidence of peers in academia or research. Whilst many academic conferences focus on sharing specialist knowledge and technical expertise, which can have limited interest to policymakers, there are also instances in which this exchange and uptake by peers in academia and research can act as a validation of a new idea or approach. Building momentum around ideas through collaborating with other research institutes can elevate the profile of new evidence and generate broader interest that has stronger potential to capture policymakers' attention and interest.

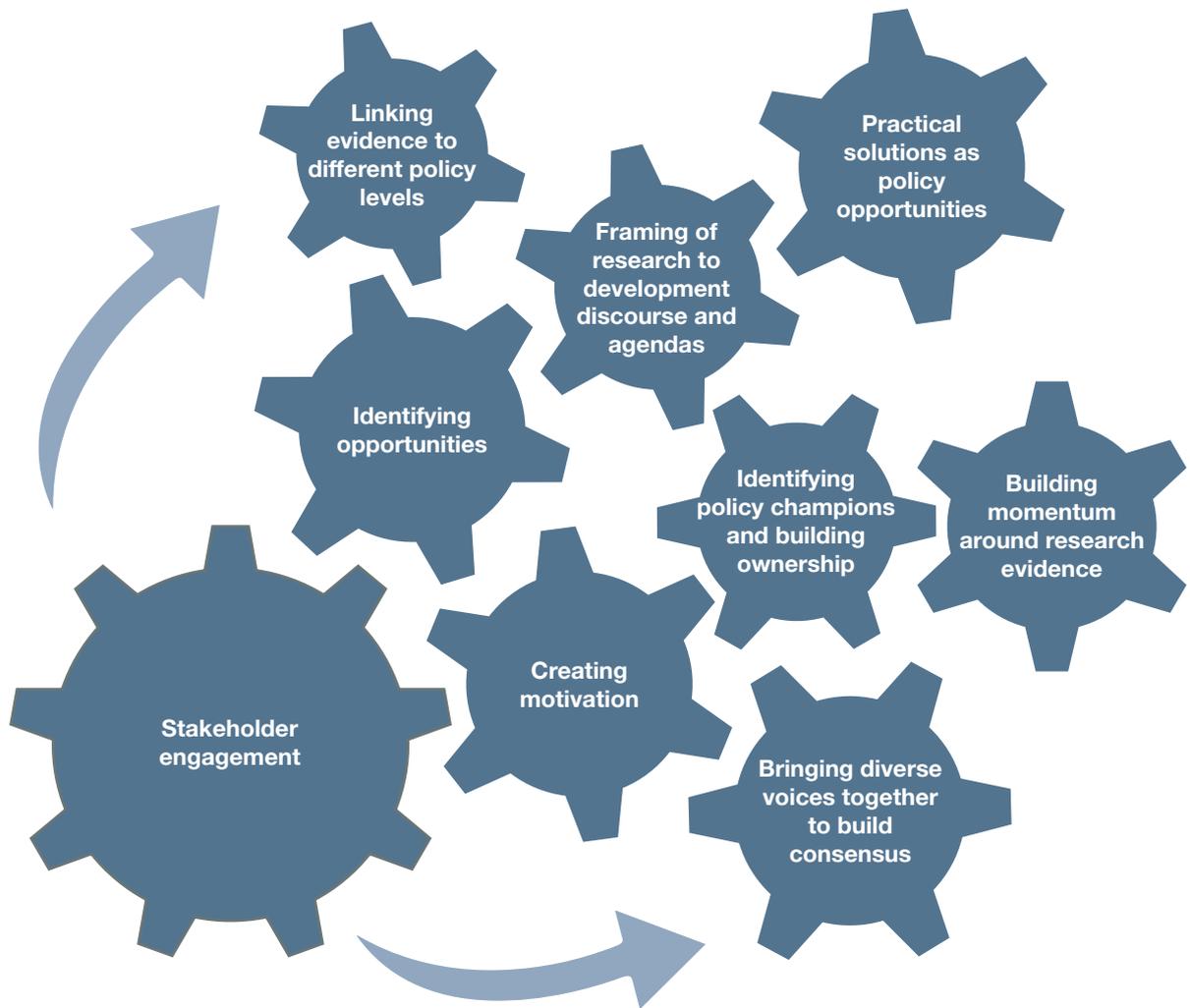
**APRA research** has been adopted and adapted by EIAR, which used APRA survey tools on rice commercialisation in Ethiopia. APRA is also working in collaboration with other research institutes including the International Rice Research Institute, the Coalition for African Rice Development, and the Japan International Cooperation Agency-funded EthioRice project to plan a Regional Rice Conference. Due to COVID-19, this has been postponed to 2021. However, this collaboration has already generated strong donor and policymaker interest and will create an opportunity to highlight the key policy messages, explore synergies and develop new ideas as well as collectively explore practical solutions emerging from across these research programmes.

### **Stakeholder engagement to increase relevance and effectiveness of APRA research**

In reality, there is very much a symbiotic relationship between understanding the motivation and incentives of policymakers and framing research in a way that responds to their priorities and building ownership. The common thread which links these approaches to policy influencing is stakeholder engagement, which connects all of the different strategies to identify opportunities and create motivation in order to increase the relevance of



**Figure 2 Stakeholder engagement drives opportunities and motivation**



Source: Author's own

research outlined above as illustrated in Figure 2. These strategies are mutually reinforcing and can support researchers to think beyond the research process and place greater emphasis on the use and uptake of the evidence generated to support policy outcomes.

Stakeholder engagement requires investment in time and resources, as well as developing strong facilitation and communication skills to capture and maintain the attention of different actors with a stake in research findings. Research programmes that are successful in building skills and generating new knowledge can create capabilities, but the impacts will be limited unless this evidence is supported by a strong engagement strategy that seeks to build lasting relationships and bring different voices to the table. Understanding the motivation and incentives of different stakeholder groups and identifying potential policy champions, as well as framing emerging findings in the context of existing and emerging policy opportunities, are critical with regards to the relevance of research findings to respond to policy priorities and questions. Investing energy and resources in achieving this is essential to ensure the most effective use of research evidence to change stakeholders' perspectives and behaviours towards a shift in policy and programmatic discourse and delivery.

APRA researchers are applying these different strategies and approaches as they build relationships and refine their research messages to resonate with policy opportunities at different levels of government. Continuous reflection and iteration of impact pathways, particularly in response to COVID-19, places strong emphasis on adjusting research plans, key messages and engagement strategies to current country realities to ensure ongoing relevance of APRA evidence and communications approaches. Prioritising relevance will provide strong sign posts to support future ALRE work to evaluate the effectiveness of APRA research to influence policies to promote inclusive agricultural commercialisation in Africa.

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