KNOWLEDGE IN TIMES OF CRISIS: TRANSFORMING RESEARCH–TO–POLICY APPROACHES

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Lessons Learned from Mobilising Research for Impact During the Covid-19 Pandemic[*]

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Abstract During the Covid-19 pandemic, research organisations have strived to be resilient. This means navigating through the technical, operational, and political challenges to achieving successful research implementation. Particularly for local policy research thinktanks, the pandemic has made these challenges even more difficult to address. From the experience of the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) in implementing large-sample research in the formal and informal sectors during the pandemic, these challenges are countered through: (1) the incorporation of a technical advisory team; (2) the adoption of a flexible resource allocation strategy; and (3) the implementation of a quality assurance system. Policy research is only impactful when the knowledge produced serves its purpose as evidence to inform policymaking and guide programme intervention. To realise this objective, CDRI implements three types of engagement activities (consultation, coordination, and validation) that provide opportunities for interaction between researchers and relevant stakeholders.

Keywords Covid-19 pandemic, policy research, local organisation, institutional readiness, policy impact, Cambodia.

1 Introduction
Over several decades, there has been growing recognition of the importance of research for informing policy and practice. Whilst this global movement had its roots in health, this phenomenon now exists in every aspect of public policy. The Covid-19 pandemic has further increased the need for evidence-based responses that value different forms of knowledge (UN 2020). Policy research institutions in developing countries have a central role in contributing to this need. Local research organisations have experienced a sudden demand for their expertise, putting their limited resilience to the test. Nevertheless, they remained the

most suitable actors for local policy research. They are far more familiar with sociocultural and political contexts and the realities of conducting research in particular environments than most foreign organisations.

A body of evidence is now emerging that describes the impact of Southern-led research during the earlier phases of the pandemic (Taylor *et al*. 2022). However, researchers and their institutions in developing countries have faced significant challenges and many lessons have been reflected from addressing such challenges. Contributing to this non-exhaustive area of knowledge, this article explores: (1) the practices that strengthen the institutional readiness of research institutions, (2) policy uptake strategy in the context of the pandemic, and (3) lessons learned for mobilising research for impact during the pandemic.

2 Background
The Covid-19 pandemic has been an integral global change-maker since the outbreak in late 2019. This unprecedented global shock has caused 137,426 infection cases in Cambodia with an approximately total confirmed deaths of 3,056 by 21 August 2022 (Our World in Data 2022). With the public health impacts, there are 2,200 policy responses from the government dating from January 2020 to December 2021, which are clustered into four main categories: (1) the suspension of domestic and international flights, (2) curfews and restrictions on business operating hours, (3) restrictions on individuals gathering, and (4) closures of schools and universities (Bunthea *et al*. 2022).

From the first until the third quarter of 2021, with the rising cases due to the community outbreak and the increasing spread of the Delta variant, different negative impacts on the economy have been captured in different sectors, which resulted in a 6.5 per cent decrease in the export of garments products, a plunging 91.5 per cent reduction in international arrivals, and 45,000 and 6 million job losses for tourism and the informal sectors respectively (Dahles 2022). Cambodia has been assessed as being successful in mitigating the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic. Thanks to high and effective vaccination rollout campaigns, death and hospitalisation rates have been lowered which has enabled the lifting of non-pharmaceutical restrictions and the reopening of the country, the path towards post-pandemic recovery (ADB 2022).

In Cambodia and the wider region, thinktanks are perceived as being crucial to helping map national strategies for resilience in the post-Covid-19 era (Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program 2021). As the pandemic caused significant socioeconomic impacts, the phenomenon has also shaped the direction of research agendas. On the beneficiaries' side, specific groups, including the underprivileged, workers in health care, women, and the elderly, were considered more in the research lens (Venkatesh 2020).

On cross-cutting issues, special consideration in understanding the roles of technology and evolvement of the pandemic impacts by specific timeframes and types of impacts became the focused agenda during the pandemic (*ibid*.). Gender-based challenges such as inequality were prevalent at different times, and the pandemic provided a spotlight on the existing concern of the unpaid care burden and unequal pay for different genders.

During the pandemic, the urge from researchers and policymakers to understand inequalities was echoed louder than ever to ensure that any response measures would not be gender-blinded to mitigate the impacts on different genders (Vijayasingham *et al*. 2022). In the Asia-Pacific, significant financial resources were dedicated to stimulus packages for immediate intervention to mitigate the impact on the vulnerable population including women and informal groups (Elbehri *et al*. 2022). Thinktanks are expected to respond to this switch and contribute to Covid-19 response efforts. However, local expertise and technical capacity was not sufficient in terms of preparation to study the multidimensional impacts of a health crisis of this magnitude.

Another common challenge faced by development institutions was having to navigate through technical and operational uncertainties, considering the financial and operational limitations resulting from the implementation of Covid-19-related policy (Ramalingham and Prabhu 2020). The pandemic, and in particular lockdowns, created serious constraints on local thinktanks' institutional operation. For the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), as a policy research institution, producing quality knowledge for policy impact is our main mission. For developing countries, this can be challenging due to four main reasons: troubled political contexts, problems with research supply, external interference, and the emergence of civil society as a key player (Young 2005). In addition to these challenges, the research institution had to overcome the hurdles posed by the pandemic. Therefore, timely measures and responses are necessary to strengthen the institutional capacity to respond to these challenges and continue to operate through a transformed process.

Reflecting critically on CDRI's experience of delivering the project 'The Impact of Covid-19 on Inclusive Development and Governance: Rapid and Post-Pandemic Assessment in the CLMV',[2] this article explains how CDRI addressed the above-mentioned challenges by benefiting from the support provided by the technical advisory team, the adoption of a flexible resource allocation strategy, and the implementation of a quality assurance system. These factors fundamentally enhanced CDRI's capacity during the pandemic to carry out its mission of producing relevant knowledge for policymaking. Lastly, this article explains policy uptake strategies implemented to achieve policy impact and reflects on the lessons learned from mobilising research for impact.

3 Research institutional readiness to maintain research operation
To effectively respond to the pandemic, resilience has been the key strategy contributing to institutional readiness. Resilience is diversely defined and rooted in various fields of disciplines. Awareness and adaptive capacity are the two dimensions of resilience (Rahi 2019). Awareness is the ability to comprehend the changes by reflecting on its capacity and surrounding environment; for instance, having an awareness of the internal structure, resources, and network that would affect an institution's response to the crisis (*ibid*.; McManus 2008; Chen, Xie and Liu 2021). Adaptive capacity, on the other hand, establishes a strong ground for institutional readiness by allowing the mobilisation of prompt and responsive measures to adapt to the changes in the external environment (*ibid*.).

In this manner, resilience derived from awareness and adaptive capacity can enable a research institution to sustain the operation even with the existence of a global shock such as the pandemic. Reflecting on the modern history of the country whereby scholars are undermined and the political system is driven by patronage networks, the lack of financial support and research infrastructures, the unfamiliarity of research culture, and limited space for research to influence policies have long been considered as structural constraints for Cambodian researchers (Eng 2014). Thus, building such resilience has always been a work in progress for Cambodian researchers to respond to these long-standing barriers, and the pandemic is an additional powerful reminder for local research institutions to keep working on their institutional resilience in the face of uncertain global challenges. The rest of this section elaborates on how the three main practices adopted by our research institution have contributed to strengthened readiness in responding to the pandemic.

3.1 Incorporate a technical advisory team into the research team
The sudden emergence of the pandemic created fundamental constraints on the ability to conduct research, especially on less structured areas such as the informal sector. Thus, by establishing a technical advisory team, it helps the institution to prepare better and seek effective organisational measures that would enable us to operate, given the compromised ability. By recognising this challenge early on, a technical advisory team was incorporated as a part of the research consortium. The advisory team consists of a gender expert, an economic expert, and a gender and macroeconomic expert.

The contribution of the technical advisory team was evident in the research conceptualisation stage, where the research team received substantial technical advice on ways to incorporate gender-sensitive analysis into the research design and how to develop a suitable research methodology to study the impact of the crisis. They guided the team on the crucial technical details, such as the incorporation of indicators that allow for the

understanding of gendered impacts such as unpaid care work, mental wellbeing, and access to social supports.

For the study on the formal sector, the team benefited from well-rounded information about how the sector has been holding up and the significant attention it has received based on the policy responses and intervention programmes. Under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, the employment status of garment workers is updated regularly as a part of the mechanism for organising cash assistance to the affected workers.

Meanwhile, for the research in the informal sector, very little information is known, making it difficult to understand how the pandemic has been affecting the actors in the cassava value chain. When working with the informal sector, encountering this challenge is not new due to the nature of this sector, but the issue is compounded by insufficient statistical capabilities during the pandemic (OECD 2021). Thus, a short training on qualitative research was organised to inform researchers about the consortium of case study research methodology. This short capacity-building training advised our researchers on a way to better understand the social issues through an in-depth analysis using qualitative methods. The technical training was helpful for the researcher to conduct qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with relevant stakeholders before the data collection. These sessions allowed the researchers to dwell deeper on the important areas for research and the contextual knowledge required for survey operation.

3.2 Adopting a flexible resource allocation strategy

Funding is another concern experienced by civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) around the region. Eighty-four per cent of surveyed organisations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia voiced loss of funding as the main threat to their future operation (AFEW International 2020). Thus, a flexible resource allocation strategy is necessary to increase institutional readiness in response to the pandemic. In India, the main focus of capacity programmes provided to NGOs and CSOs to support their operation during the crisis are those related to monitoring and evaluation, and financial sustainability (Bandyopadhyay and Aravind 2021). Adopting a flexible resource allocation strategy in terms of communication methods and survey operation helps the institution to become more adaptive to the changes in the external environment.

Digital communication methods were a switch that played a big role in this strategy. Working collaboratively on cloud files, online meetings through Zoom, and doing interviews through phone calls were the transformation that proved effective to sustain the research operation. These practices were institutionalised

into a standard operating procedure during the pandemic. For these transformations to happen, budget reallocation witnessed a significant change. For instance, resources allocated for transportation were used for telephone bills and subscriptions for virtual meeting platforms, which are more cost-efficient. This change provided an opportunity to allocate more budget for realising a more ideal sampling methodology; for example, a larger sample size. This is particularly important for policy researchers, as it increases the credibility of the research finding as inputs for policymaking.

For the survey with garment workers, the implementation of a new resource allocation strategy was not as challenging as in the informal sector. Sufficient available information has made the budget and workplan estimation more accurate and easier to adapt, whereas research with farmers is more demanding in terms of time and resources. Switching to phone surveys has meant constructing our own sampling frame of cassava farmers from the targeted geographical location. Three months alone were spent on communication to obtain household contact information from five targeted provinces and phone survey data collection.

Despite the differences and the existence of the pandemic, fieldwork supervision was particularly challenging due to the fact that both surveys involved large-sample research. However, movement restrictions and difficulty in reaching out to survey respondents through their phone numbers also made it worse. One example is when enumerators face technical problems with their data collection tool and physical assistance to help them cannot be provided, thus causing disruption and delay in the data collection process. Since respondents in both the formal and informal sectors usually work during weekdays, it is difficult to reach out to them for an interview during working hours. The interview schedule has to be flexible based on the availability and convenience of the respondent. Hence, a phone survey protocol has been developed to assist the fieldwork supervision. The protocol covers a step-by-step interview process and a technical and administrative manual on operating the survey tool. In addition, more enumerators need to be employed to complete the survey on time. This also means more financial resources and time to spend on questionnaire training.

3.3 Implementing a quality assurance system in the research process

As a local-born policy research institution, CDRI's mission is to produce high-quality, influential, and impactful development knowledge. By upholding this organisational vision, it contributes to strengthening adaptive capacity for institutional resilience (McManus 2008). In that vein, the last measure taken is quality assurance, which is a crucial factor that helps CDRI to be ready in fulfilling its mission. Such practice is already embedded in our

system. But for this project, the technical advisory team plays a part in this process. At the research conceptualisation stage, a part of the quality assurance was done by the technical advisory team, through a back-and-forth process of review and revision, to ensure that the research design is relevant to the current demand for knowledge. During the stage of research implementation, fieldwork supervision is the main quality assurance mechanism. Finally, at the stage of output production, the quality assurance mainly lies within researchers' expertise to provide empirical inference from the data collected to benefit policymaking and intervention and programme design.

However, it should be noted that quality assurance from one step to another is interconnected and has an equivalent effect on each other if not implemented correctly. The knowledge that is appealing to policymakers for policymaking should be relevant, credible, and solutions-oriented (Court and Young 2003). Hence, the methodology used for analysis is crucial to achieving this. Policymaking demands rigorous evidence produced through rigorous evaluations using experimental methods such as randomised controlled trials and well-designed quasi-experimental studies (Evidence-Based Policymaking Collaborative 2016). Knowledge of this kind would provide a more credible overview of the estimated outcome of the subject of the study and is suitable to support a notion in policymaking or implementation.

Yet it should be noted that producing this kind of knowledge requires strong technical capacity, which is still a struggle in many developing countries. Generally, adopting an experimental research method is challenging as it is, considering the resources and technical knowledge that it requires. In the formal sector, the experimental research method is more feasible; as mentioned, this is due to sufficient and available information on this sector. Meanwhile, for the informal sector, this is more difficult.

4 Policy uptake strategies

Each country has its own policy formulation process. Nonetheless, four interrelated factors can be identified to determine whether the evidence from research is likely to be used in the policymaking process: (1) the political context, (2) the evidence, (3) the links between policy and research communities, and (4) external influences (Court and Young 2006). Hence, benefiting from the contextual knowledge and its well-established network with both governmental and non-governmental actors, CDRI has been able to work through these conditions more comfortably, compared to external organisations, in its effort for policy uptake. The contextual knowledge has been accumulated from policy research conducted over 30 years covering five main research themes: economics, agriculture, governance, education, and environment. During this time, CDRI has also engaged closely with governmental actors in both formal and informal ways.

These engagements have enabled CDRI to gain the trust and interest of policymakers in our research.

Thus, regardless of the shock of the pandemic, CDRI already has an advantage in terms of linkage to the policy formulation sphere. Consultation, coordination, and validation are the three main consistent mechanisms that CDRI has adopted to maintain this momentum. However, these mechanisms were not as easy to implement during the pandemic, when policymakers' minds were overwhelmed with its multifaceted impacts and the restricted environment for holding physical events and gatherings. The rest of this section details experiences of how CDRI dealt with these challenges and maintained its consistent practice of policy uptake mechanisms.

4.1 Consultation

In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, partnerships, engagement, and contextualisation are recognised as the key characteristics that make policy research uptake efficient (Dumitriu 2018). Through consultation, a direct engagement between the relevant stakeholders and researchers is achieved. Such an engagement creates mutual gain for the relevant stakeholders and researchers. Consultation is normally organised before research implementation to seek input and feedback on the research initiative. Through consulting with the relevant stakeholders, researchers get the opportunity to improve the quality of the research design and to ensure that the research implemented will be a relevant input for the audience of concern. This also alleviates the difficulty in obtaining the diverse contextual knowledge possessed by the actors working on the same issue from different perspectives.

Vice versa, through this opportunity, the relevant stakeholder can develop expectations regarding the research project, as they are well-informed about it, and their input is reciprocated in the research study. For this particular research project, CDRI conducted a public online webinar joined by both governmental and non-governmental actors. From this webinar, CDRI was able to learn more deeply about the thematic area of the proposed research and its priority and relevance for the respective stakeholders. Following this were separate, informal closed-door one-on-one sessions with technical personnel and practitioners from relevant ministries and CSOs. The separate session allowed for a more comfortable environment to discuss the topic of concern and interests.

CDRI has existing Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with various ministries. These MoUs create a concrete basis for cooperation and collaboration for CDRI's research projects when necessary. In this case, CDRI consulted with officials from the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training. Indeed, it was an opportunity for researchers to obtain information that was

not obtainable elsewhere. CDRI received insight into how the pandemic was affecting workers in the garment industry and government intervention to address those issues. The input was also provided for constructing a representative sampling method. The consultation session with CSOs was conducted with senior practitioners who work directly in the garment sector. An additional conference call focus group discussion with garment workers was also facilitated with assistance from these CSOs.

These engagements enabled researchers to gain deeper insight into sensitive aspects of the discussed topic; for instance, gender-based violence. Our questionnaire design benefited greatly from their detailed micro-inputs on these aspects, whereas, for the informal sector, identifying relevant stakeholders was very challenging. We only talked with a few commune councils to receive their input in finding the best possible way to construct the sampling frame and the sampling methodology. Their input was sufficient to provide a contextual background on the status of cassava farming after the pandemic hit and their guidance on how we could compile the list of cassava farmers using the distance communication method was also useful.

From these experiences, it is clear that consultation is a good interactive approach to realising policy influence at the early stage of the research process, in times of crisis or without. This approach would definitely not be effective without the foundational relationship and the years of experience that CDRI has in working with local authorities. Sharing the same language and customs as these local actors is a critical factor for trust building, in which only a local research institution such as CDRI has a comparative advantage relative to foreign researchers (Eng 2014). Thus, this crucial element of a sustained local network with key governmental and non-governmental actors has placed local thinktanks in an effective position for rapid mobilisation and engagement of research in times of crisis.

4.2 Coordination

Engaging relevant stakeholders in our research implementation remains an approach that we take throughout the data collection process. This engagement happens through coordination. Before conducting primary data collection for every project, CDRI makes a formal request for permission from the relevant ministries or local authorities. Only when the formal request is accepted is the operation started. This is one way to gain trust and legitimacy among the concerned stakeholders. In doing research in the formal sector, not much coordination work is needed, as most of the support is only necessary before the research implementation. For instance, in our project, we received tremendous support from the Ministry in the provision of data for constructing the sampling frame. Such support was more than sufficient for us to successfully conclude the data collection process.

For the informal sector, coordination from the relevant authorities is the most crucial factor determining the success of data collection. The engagement of relevant authorities creates legitimacy for the research project and acts as a main contributing factor in establishing trust between researchers and research participants. In developing countries, troubled political contexts, diminishing democracy, and a volatile political environment have created an unfavourable environment for bridging the gap between research and policy (Sutcliffe and Court 2005). This is also applicable in the case of Cambodia, where reluctance to participate in research activities, particularly those containing political sensitivity, is evident (Pou *et al.* 2016). By involving local authorities in this process, it legitimises the research project and creates a sense of familiarity and community among the research participants.

On the other hand, it may be argued that by doing so, it also affects the credibility of the data collected, due to any unwarranted pressure respondents may feel with the presence of local authorities. To minimise this concern, CDRI adheres strictly to the confidentiality and consent principle. Third parties including the local authority are not allowed to be present with the interviewee unless requested or under exceptional circumstances.

Our research with cassava farmers benefited significantly from the engagement of the commune and village chief in the process of the sample listing and phone survey. We approached around 100 local authorities across the five provinces that have the largest land size for cassava farming. Certainly, this was not without its challenges. Most of the commune and village chiefs we contacted had difficulty understanding the objective and purpose of our research as well as the extent of their involvement in the research process. Their limited awareness of digital communication made it even more difficult for us to communicate. Notwithstanding these constraints, we were still able to communicate effectively with them on the research project before they became involved in research coordination. Their support has made a sampling strategy for empirical analysis feasible. Throughout their coordination, the stakeholders stayed engaged in the research implementation process and have simultaneously been informed about the research findings.

4.3 Validation
When the research findings are translated into research outputs, then comes the most crucial stage in policy influence. As part of the effort to engage stakeholders in the output production process, a validation workshop is organised to seek input and feedback on the research findings. The relevant stakeholders participate in the event, including those who were not involved in the research process. Policymakers and implementers are the prioritised audiences in such events. They might be representatives from ministries, technical committees, or the

officials engaged in specific programme implementation. The invitation is not only extended to high-level officials, who directly participate in the policy formulation process and implementation guideline, but also to mid-level bureaucrats who are responsible for specific technical matters. Most often, the latter groups are involved more intensively in policy implementation and engage closely with development partners during this process. They also tend to be a group of people who we seek consultation from.

Prioritisation is then extended to development partners such as international organisations, NGOs, civil society, and the private sector. Although targeted audiences may vary depending on the topic of the research, governmental actors stay on the list of our priorities. This is part of CDRI's effort to maintain its established relationship with the government. The structure of the validation workshop is normally done in a formal manner. However, if an interactive engagement is expected, the format of the workshop can be altered to achieve that purpose.

During the pandemic, event organisation was not an option. Instead, we opted for an online workshop on an invite-only basis. In addition to self-organised platforms, participation in externally organised events is also pursued. Preferable platforms may include policy dialogue, academic conferences, and technical panel discussions. Such interactive platforms allow for more favourable opportunities for researchers to present their work and appeal to a targeted audience using the research outputs.

Instead of a validation workshop, a dissemination workshop may be organised. This is usually done to publicise the final product of the research outputs, which could be policy briefs, reports, or any other analytical paper of a similar nature. Under the circumstance of tight time constraints, preliminary findings are the subject of focus. Researchers prepare a presentation to the audience highlighting the significant and relevant findings. This is followed by a question and answer session to clarify the questions that relevant stakeholders may have and their input on how the research output could be improved to meet their expectations or demand.

5 Lessons learned from mobilising research for impact during the pandemic
The contribution of strengthened research capacity to the increased ability in producing demanded knowledge
The pandemic has unveiled new and increasing priority for research. The emerging themes within the sphere of the social sciences are dominated by topics such as psychological issues, economics, and quality of life (Roychowdhury, Bhanja and Biswas 2022). The United Nations (UN) also identified social protection and economic response and recovery programmes among the top three pillars underpinning the research roadmap for Covid-19 recovery (UN 2020). Thus, strengthening the research capacity,

for instance through the incorporation of the technical advisory team, contributes to enhancing researchers' ability in producing relevant and timely knowledge for policy demand.

The importance of contextual knowledge on policy demand and ways to obtain such knowledge effectively

In times of crisis, policymakers tend to value the salient logic of knowledge – the provision of timely and relevant scientific information. This was evidenced in the context of Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, where the salience of knowledge for policy formulation is medium to high (Hadorn *et al.* 2022). The pandemic has created a dynamic environment for policy priorities. Thus, by adopting the consultative approach in the early stage of the research process, researchers are informed in a timely manner of the research priorities for real policy needs.

Moreover, CSOs are also important actors in the provision of contextual knowledge. Their contribution to responses aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic at the community level has proven more crucial than ever. Hence, they are well-informed of the reality. Their input is an asset in shaping research design for knowledge production which can create a real impact. It is further observed that a closed-door setting is a better approach to extracting relevant information about such contextual knowledge.

The utilisation of digital technology for institutional readiness and effective engagement with relevant stakeholders during a crisis

The pandemic can be considered an accelerator for the adoption of digital communication. However, as the pandemic has forced adaptation to it, the digital divide is glaringly observed to be a fundamental barrier, not only for institutional readiness but also regarding its impact on the institution's ability to engage effectively with the external world. This was evident in our operation, particularly in the data collection process and in our engagement with local authorities in the provinces. The research institution needs to be anticipative of such challenges and take them into consideration when constructing the research design as well as its policy uptake strategy.

Institutional readiness would benefit from an efficient policy uptake strategy and vice versa

Engagements in the form of consultation, coordination, and validation may be implemented to bridge the gap between research and policymaking, but they also contribute substantively to the resilience of the policy research institution. They enable researchers to effectively perform their role in using professional knowledge to translate the produced scientific knowledge to inform policymakers and the relevant stakeholders in policymaking and programme intervention (Nugroho, Carden and Antlov 2018). In turn, the enhanced capacity of research institutions during times of crisis, driven by their readiness, would

also allow researchers to achieve an efficient policy uptake strategy for impact.

Local context matters and therefore the organisation that is well-positioned in that context

Especially in times of crisis, local organisations should be empowered and entrusted to mobilise rapid research and policy engagement. This is not to disregard the engagement of external or foreign actors, but rather is an acknowledgement of the ongoing effort of local organisations dedicated to establishing trust and networks to create a favourable environment for a participatory approach. Local organisations can identify better with local actors, making them an efficient means for reaching the grass roots and a strong bridge to connect with the top whose work serves development at the foundation.

6 Conclusion

The lessons learned from implementing the large-sample research projects in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic have contributed greatly to the institutional readiness of our research institutions. Despite all efforts implemented to achieve this readiness, there are times when different actors could contribute to making it more reachable. Local thinktanks, especially those in developing countries, should institutionalise regular capacity development mechanisms to expand researchers' skills and expertise. There should also be a standard operating procedure for times of crisis to increase preparedness and minimise operational constraints.

Maintaining relationships with stakeholders should remain a priority to ensure connectivity and continuous effort in increasing the impact of research. For national and international donors, providing capacity development for researchers should be on the agenda of every financial proposal. In addition, the ability to demonstrate impact in policymaking should be one of the main criteria in grant provision. Likewise, donors should also assist and empower local institutions on building such ability where demanded. This would not only foster the culture of evidence-based policymaking but also contribute to resilience against future health and economic crises. Finally, those concerned stakeholders who will benefit from knowledge production need to remain open to cooperation to allow opportunities for the exchange and utilisation of information.

Notes

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2 This article mainly uses experience learned from implementing a research project that is a part of the regional project examining the impact of Covid-19 on inclusive development and governance in the CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam). From this project, CDRI is conducting research on the garment sector (formal) and cassava agriculture production (informal). The project is funded by IDRC, Canada. Views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of either CDRI or the funder. The authors take full responsibility for unintentional errors.

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