# The Alignment, Interest and Influence Matrix (AIIM)
Enrique Mendizabal, RAPID

Background

The RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA) draws from the Outcome Mapping methodology to support the planning, monitoring and evaluation of policy influencing interventions. It is used, in various forms, by ODI, DFID and a variety of other projects and organisations. The ROMA process can help develop strategies that involve a number of intervention types. At the core of the approach, as with the planning of capacity development, knowledge management, communications and networking strategies, is the identification of the intervention's audiences.
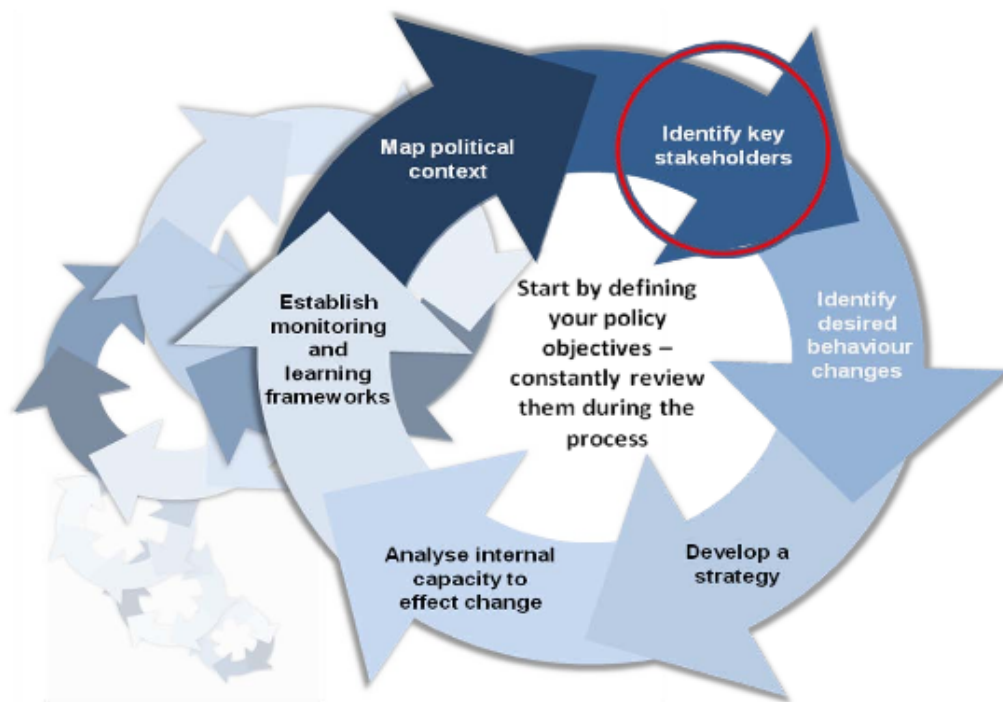
Traditionally, RAPID had used a standard Stakeholder Analysis tool to identify the audiences of research-based, policy influencing interventions. However, in 2007, on the eve of a workshop to introduce a new version of the RAPID approach to DFID policy teams, Enrique Mendizabal and Ben Ramalingam decided to look for a tool that would not only help to identify the main stakeholders, but also suggest a possible course of action towards them.

The Alignment, Interest and Influence Matrix (AIIM) was designed to do precisely that.

Using the tool

The AIIM tool is often used in a workshop setting and involves a diverse group of participants – each with insights into different actors or parts of the policy space. After defining the objectives of the intervention and carrying out some background context analysis (or in-depth research depending on the degree of complexity of the challenge), AIIM can help to clarify where some of the interventions' main policy audiences and targets stand in relation to its objectives and possible influencing approaches.

The first step of the process is to identify and list all the actors that may affect the policy outcome –if you do not have enough time then you should focus your attention on the most relevant or well-known policy actors. These may be organisations, networks, groups, departments or teams within these bodies or even individual members. The level of detail will depend, in part, on how specific the policy objective is.

The second step of the process is to map these actors onto the matrix according to their level of alignment and interest. This should be based on evidence about their current behaviours and therefore it is important to consider their discourse, attitudes, the procedures they follow, and the content of their formal and informal policy expressions.

Alignment: Do they agree with our approach? Do they agree with our assumptions? Do they want to do the same things that we think need to be done? Are they thinking what we are thinking?

Interest: Are they committing time and money to this issue? Do they want something to happen (whether it is for or against what we propose)? Are they going to events on the subject? Are they publicly speaking about this?
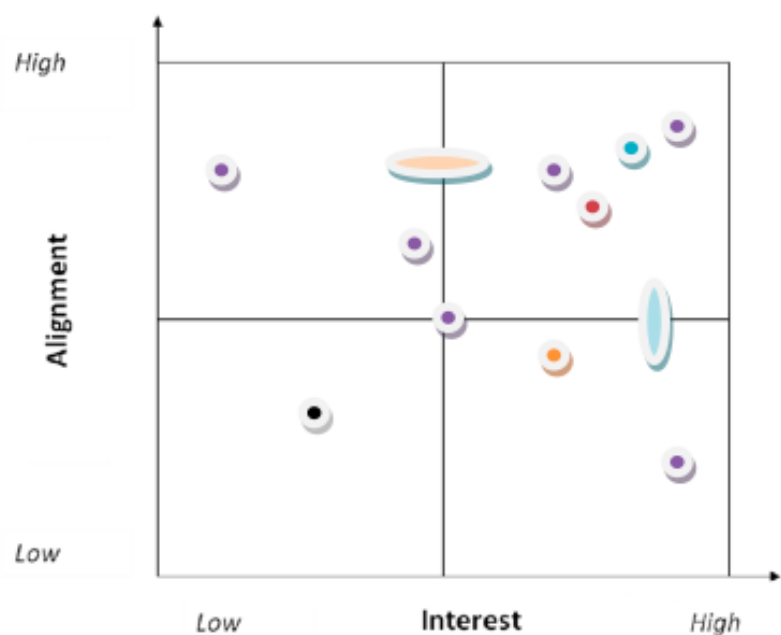

If the answers to these questions are positive then both the level of alignment and interest would be high.

You may use names or symbols to plot the actors; in some cases, shapes have been used to describe actors that may belong to more than one quadrant depending on a few contextual

issues. (More tips are described in the section below). When mapping them onto the matrix you should consider the positions of the actors in relation to others.

You should also ensure that the positions are backed up by evidence –which may come from background studies, interviews, direct knowledge of the actors, observation, etc. (opinions should be corroborated as soon as possible). You should note the reasons for the location, for instance:
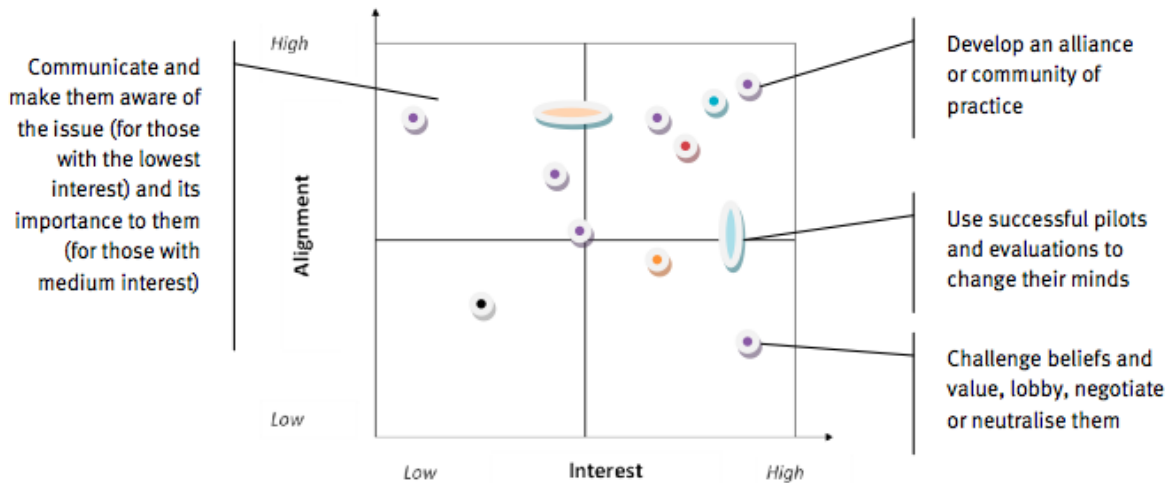
The third step is to start to consider what to do. This initial analysis should provide you with an idea about what to do. For example, in the figure below:
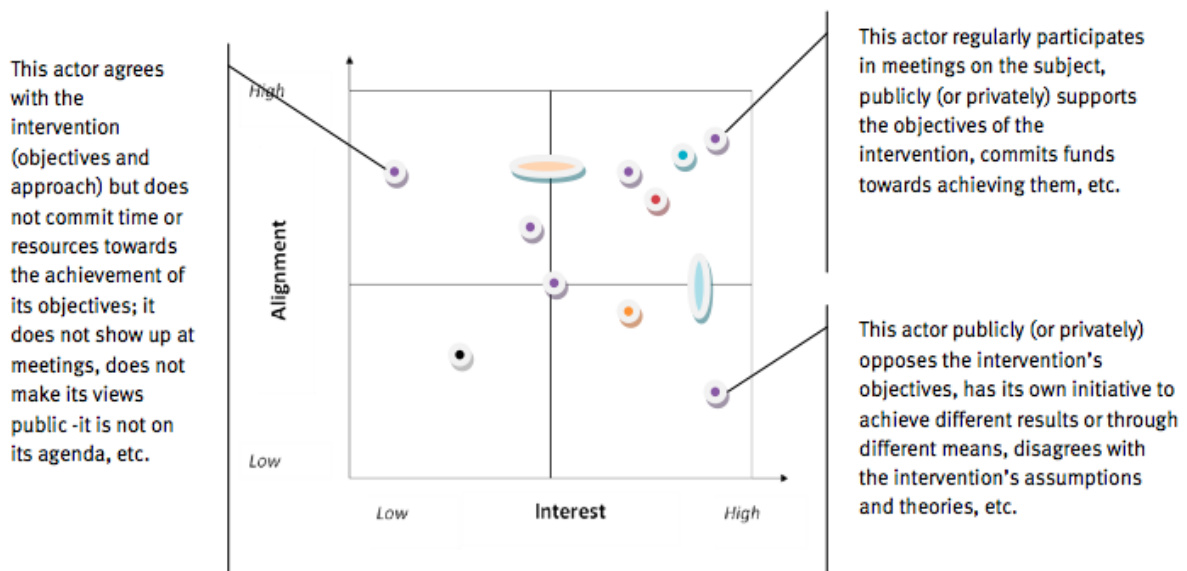
In some cases, this decision-making process may be affected by the presence of too many relevant actors. Therefore, the fourth step is to prioritise and consider which of the actors identified are the most influential on the policy process. This additional dimension can be noted by marking the main actors with a circle or maybe a star, as shown in the figure below –in this case using red circles.

In a few cases, this will not be enough and it will be necessary to identify those actors with which the organisation or intervention has a direct relationship, much like the concept of boundary partners, proposed by Outcome Mapping. In the figure below, this direct relationship has been represented by using a green circle.

The diagram on the right then suggests that the main effort should be focused on the two actors which are both influential and accessible to the intervention's team.

However, this is not the only course of action. You mind find it entirely relevant to focus on non-influential but highly accessible actors (green circle only); or to allocate all of your resources to tackle the 'opposing' actor (red circle only). This tool is intended to support this type of decision-making process where arguments for and against particular courses of action can be developed.

A fifth step involves the development of a pathway of change for your target audiences. This step can be supported by other steps of the ROMA process, but in essence it involves suggesting the trajectory that you expect and hope that each actor will follow. Each point along this context-sensitive pathway must describe a specific change in behaviour.

In the diagram to the right we have removed the influence and access circles (for clarity) but added arrows suggesting desired change pathways for key actors.

To reflect the decisions of the previous step, the pathways which this particular intervention will attempt to influence are presented in green. The proposed pathway for the highly influential but out-of-reach actor in the lower right quadrant suggests that the intervention expects it to either remain in its place (circle) or lose interest (arrow). As it is deemed in this example, to be too difficult to tackle, the intervention will, for the time being, only monitor its position. If it changed to become more influential and actively opposed then the team might have to develop an explicit strategy towards it. Again, the matrix, with the possible pathways of change for the key target audiences, can help to decide the most appropriate course of action (your influencing actions) for each actor.

4
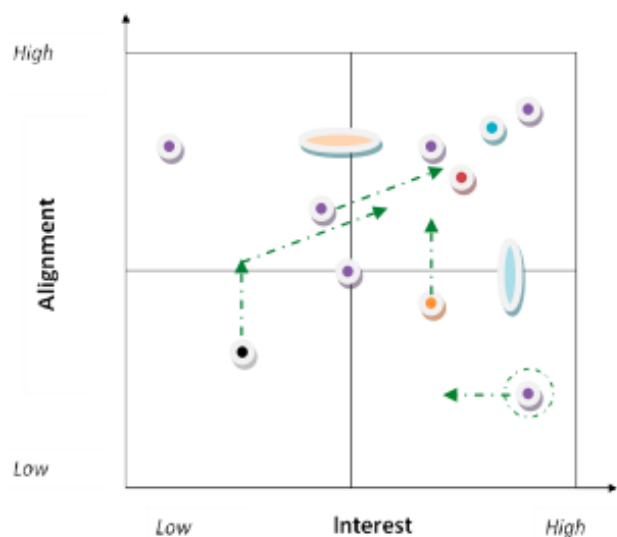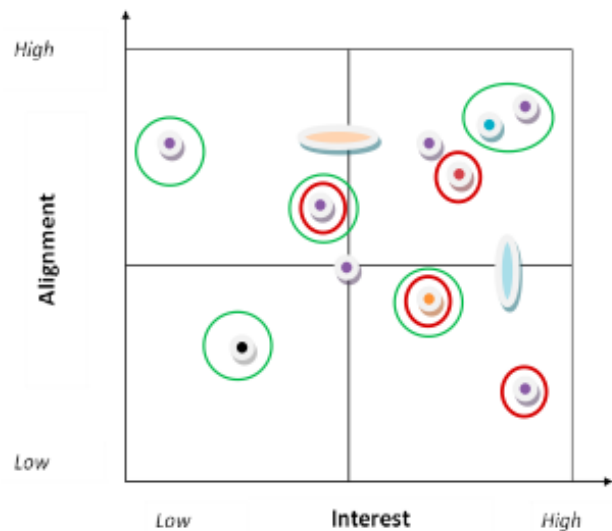
Using AIIM for Monitoring and Adapting

This tool, like others included in the ROMA process, can also be useful for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Having defined the proposed direction of travel and the influencing actions for the intervention for a smaller set of priority actors, it should be possible to track progress using this tool.
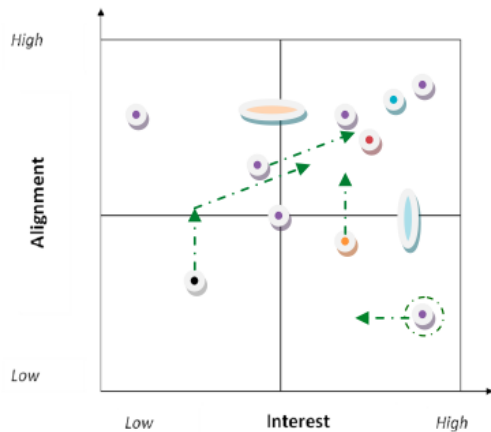

The original AIIM can be used to develop the strategy for the entire intervention – this is made up of the individual change pathways (in green) and the

proposed actions to contribute towards this change.
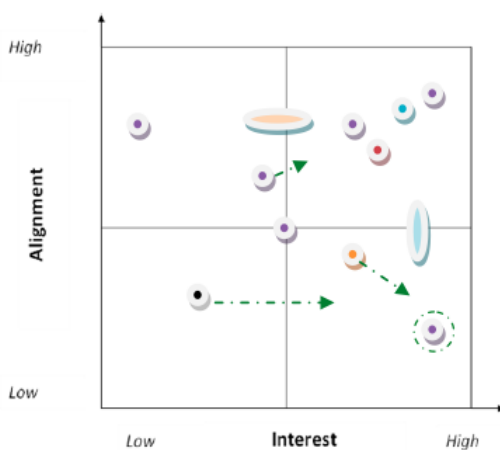
A follow up AIIM, may be developed during a review meeting, an After Action Review (AAR), or as part of preparing a back to office report (BTOR), and can show progress in relation to these pathways.

In the diagram on the left, for example, only one of the actors seems to be moving in the expected direction, one remains unchanged and two have become more antagonistic to the intervention's objectives.
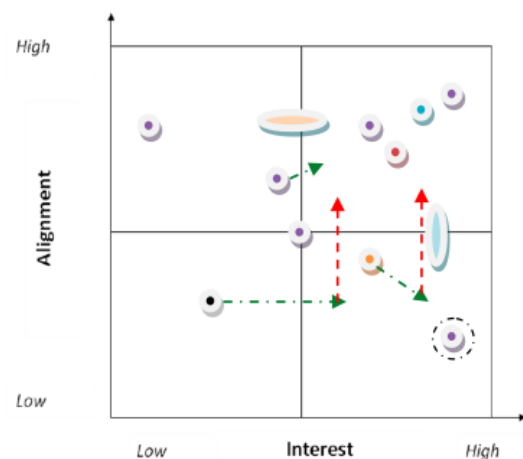
This review can now be used to rethink the change pathways for these actors and the strategy for the intervention.

It is possible that the original analysis made some mistakes, or was based on unreliable evidence about the actors' actual behaviours, or that unexpected changes in the context have precipitated unexpected behaviour changes.

In the diagram on the left the red arrows suggest the new change pathways for two of the actors.

Some practical advice and tips

The tool has been designed to support decision-making, but it can also facilitate discussions and communication with internal and external audiences. Since it was developed in 2007, users have added innovations that we present here:

- Always attempt to state the policy objective or policy issue being addressed before listing and plotting the actors –it will make the process more manageable and give a clear and tangible reference against which the axes can be defined.

- Always make sure that the two main axes (alignment and interest) are clearly understood by all those involved in the process.

- If when plotting a particular actor you find it difficult to find a position that all the participants can agree with, try to break it down into smaller parts (maybe into the divisions of an organisation or even individual policy-makers) and see where different teams or people can be plotted –it is possible that a donor or government department does not always behave as a whole. If this does not work, it is possible that the policy objective is still too broad and general.

- If you do not have enough evidence about a particular actor's current behaviour do not forget about it, plot it outside of the matrix to remind yourself and others that you may need to find out about them.

- Try to add direction of travel arrows to illustrate an actor's own agency –remember that they are not static and are, just like you, trying to influence policy outcomes:

- Make sure that subsequent steps in the ROMA process follow from the AIIM analysis – or that, if contradictory findings emerge, you revise the matrix accordingly.

- If you use the matrix in a workshop, use post-its on a flip-chart sheet to plot the actors (they can be moved) –write the name of the actor on the front and evidence of its behaviour on the back.

- In a workshop it is best to brainstorm the actors on the flip-chart and then discuss the evidence for their suggested positions rather than spend too much time listing them or talking about them in a group. Once the actors are plotted you will be able to challenge positions or identify gaps more easily.

- Consider how some actors might be related to others. It is possible that targeting an actor that you have significant influence over (but who is not very influential on the policy process) might have an influence over another influential –yet inaccessible– actor.