Overseas Development Institute

Background Note

December 2011

Developing capacities for better research uptake: the experience of ODI's Research and Policy in Development programme

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Over the past decade funders have, increasingly, demanded that development and poverty reduction goals be informed by research-based evidence (Court et al., 2005). As a result, there has been a growing focus on developing the capacities of think tanks, networks, policy-makers and donors to generate such evidence (Nuyens, 2005; Blagescu and Young, 2006). In response, the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) has supported capacity-building to make better use of research in informing policies and practices. To date, little published material has assessed this work.

This Background Note aims to fill this gap and provide a candid analysis of RAPID's work to date, ahead of the programme's tenth anniversary in 2012. It draws on the experience of RAPID staff, project reviews and reports to key funders, including the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). We focus on the process, rather than impact (beyond changes among those that we have worked with directly). We provide a brief history of the RAPID programme, then outline RAPID's evolving capacity development work in four key dimensions:

- the issues or themes RAPID has worked on
- the activities through which capacity development has been delivered
- the mode in which support has been provided
- how RAPID has structured itself to deliver such support.

The final section draws lessons from RAPID's work and concludes with a set of recommendations.

RAPID: a brief history

RAPID's history in ODI dates back to Simon Maxwell's arrival as Director in 1999. He commissioned Rebecca Sutton to write a background paper on how think tanks can make use of research-based evidence to engage with policy processes more effectively (Sutton, 1999). Little more happened until John Young joined ODI's Rural Policy and Governance Group (RPGG) in 2001. With a background in action-research and policy engagement to improve public services in Africa and Asia, he rapidly developed a portfolio of work which included projects on information systems for rural livelihoods (for the Food and Agriculture Organisation, DFID and the World Bank), a knowledge demand assessment for rural transport (for the World Bank), building southern research capacity (for DFID), an information and policy engagement strategy for a project on farm biodiversity (for the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and a review of the Swiss Development Cooperation's policy documents. A substantial grant from DFID in early 2002 for work on bridging research and policy included resources for substantial literature and case-study research on the interface between research and policy, and subsequently for RAPID's early policy entrepreneur training. The RAPID programme was officially formed in mid-2002, and its first 3-year strategy identified four streams of work: improving knowledge about research–policy links; improving knowledge management and learning systems; improving research communication; and improving awareness of the importance of research.

RAPID's early research, advisory work, workshops, publications and work with policy research institutes, think tanks and non-government organisations (NGOs) in 2002-2003 was instrumental in winning a Partnership Programme Agreement (PPA) with DFID in 2004. The PPA provided funding for 5 years explicitly to enhance the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in policy processes through research, partnership-building and collaborative activities. This was led by RAPID, but was deliberately called the ODI Civil Society Partnership Programme (CSPP), because it included work within ODI on communications and knowledge management, and work to strengthen partnerships between other ODI programmes and their southern partners.

During the first couple of years the CSPP undertook a series of consultative workshops in Africa, Asia and Latin America to explore the relevance of RAPID's findings in developing countries and to identify potential partners (Chowdhury, 2006), and then carried out some collaborative and action research projects with them to identify how southern CSOs could use research-based evidence to engage with policy processes more effectively (Court et al., 2006). A high-level CSPP steering committee including the executive directors of a number of southern think tanks was established to provide strategic advice and guidance to the programme in early 2005, and annual CSPP meetings for around 25 representatives from partner organisations from Africa, Asia and Latin America were held in London in November 2005 and November 2006.

The 'evidence based policy in development network' (ebpdn) was formally established, and the ebpdn community website (www.ebpdn.org) was launched at the CSPP partners meeting in 2006. This network was envisaged as being cross-cutting, to include many organisations working with other programmes in ODI on a range of policy issues with the aim of exchanging ideas and building capacity for evidence-based policy influencing (Lewis, 2010). The ebpdn superseded the CSPP, which was formally dissolved at the same time. The initial 18 core members of ebpdn agreed to work together to support the expansion of the network, including both more core members and a wider group of individuals who would access the network's resources through the website. RAPID agreed to continue to support and facilitate the further development of the network for two years, with the idea that facilitation would move to another member of the network thereafter.

At the third ebpdn meeting in Colombo in November 2007, network partners expressed enthusiasm to continue to collaborate, with broadly the same objectives, and to develop regional sub-networks facilitated by regional core group members, with RAPID continuing to support the global network. PPA funding for the network was declining at this time however, and it was recognised that additional funding for collaborative projects would be required to maintain momentum. This was partially successful and a number of collaborative projects involving several members of the ebpdn network were established over the next few years. While the number of active core organisations has fallen to six since then, the number of people registered with the online platform has increased to 1,830 (as of December 2011).

Meanwhile, RAPID's research, advisory, communications and capacity development work on the interface between research and policy continued to expand, funded by a wide range of other donors. This included work on research communications, knowledge management, evaluation and evaluations of research communication and outreach activities, outcome mapping, a wide range of commissioned workshops, seminars and training courses, and a number of policy research and engagement programmes involving work in several countries, often undertaken in collaboration with RAPID's ebpdn partners.

With the benefit of hindsight, and supporting recently published work on networking best practice (Mendizabal and Hearn, 2011), it is clear that the original core members of ebpdn were unlikely to form the basis of a strong network to work together to strengthen southern capacity to use research-based evidence to improve development policy and practice. Core members came from diverse contexts and had varying capacity levels. Reasons for this include conflicting visions for the programme – should we work with the best or help those who are weaker? – as well as different professional backgrounds of ODI staff and their historical links with the organisations involved.

Enrique Mendizabal, for example, chose to work with organisations in Latin America, given his background with research centres in Peru; while Naved Chowdhury worked with particular African and Asian organisations, reflecting his NGO-focused background. The work of RAPID and the creation of ebpdn had separate origins, but a complementary relationship developed between them and they became interrelated. Unfortunately, this created confusion with members of ebpdn, and within ODI and even RAPID. Many questioned, for instance, whether ebpdn was RAPID's network or not (which it was not intended to be), and this has created tensions with some of the network's stewards and members. Even today, RAPID tends to make most of the operational decisions and ebpdn continues to be treated as a RAPID project.

The launch of ebpdn and the development of the RAPID programme coincided with increasing pressure on research programmes from funders to improve the communication of their findings, backed by new funding. Much of the demand from the initial and prospective ebpdn members was directed to short-term solutions or capacity-building workshops on influencing strategies. As such, RAPID tried to give ebpdn members and other clients what they demanded –mostly practical 'how to' approaches and tools drawn from other industries, and new ones developed by the RAPID team.

In addition, NGOs and aid agencies have increased their focus on evidence-informed policy influence over the past five years. This has meant a surge in demand for the work of RAPID and similar initiatives with an emphasis on strategy development and monitoring and evaluation of policy influence. Inevitably, RAPID was able to develop its own research agenda and expand its team's experience at a faster rate than other network members – with the notable exception of Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento (CIPPEC) in Argentina.

This led to changes in the ebpdn. The original 18 network 'partners' were reduced to six stewards from Latin America, Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia. These were organisations that had continued to engage with the RAPID programme and the objectives of ebpdn, and were also more 'like ODI': think tanks or policy research centres.

At the same time, it was important to develop interest and capacity among organisations in developing countries to undertake work similar to ours so that practical solutions could be developed in-house. We tried to develop 'regional capacity hubs' (primarily amongst core ebpdn members), feeling that, as a London-based think tank, we were best suited to global research, networking, facilitating learning and dissemination, rather than training. We tried, therefore, to move away from providing ebpdn members with lessons and skills-building to a more realistic, critical and more productive 'sparring partner' relationship. This, however, has not developed evenly across the network.

We now focus on the approach RAPID has taken to developing capacities.

RAPID's approach to capacity development

Capacity development refers to the approaches, strategies and methodologies used to improve performance at the individual, organisational or broader system level (Bolger, 2000: 2). Earlier work on research capacity-building has focused on technical (skills) and resource (technology and funds) transfers (Kharas, 2005), but more recent analyses have adopted a broader definition, emphasising the need to differentiate between levels of capacity-building. These are commonly divided into: 1) individual – skills and abilities (Costello and Zumla, 2000); 2) institutional – structures, processes, resources, management and governance (Struyk, 2006); and 3) system-level approaches – coherent policies, strategies and effective coordination across sectors and among governmental, non-governmental and international actors (Nuyens, 2005).

While RAPID's early work on capacity development recognised the need to work at all of these levels (Blagescu, 2006), its reliance on discrete types of funding from clients and donors has tended to focus effort on the individual and institutional levels: developing the capacity of individuals and organisations who want to make better use of research in policy influencing. Capacities include a range of personal and organisational skills and capabilities: producing and using research; mapping and understanding the policy context; communicating with different audiences; networking and building communities; and monitoring, evaluation and learning.

RAPID's emerging approach to capacity-building has comprised work on eight core themes (the topic of capacity development) through six main activities (the way in which capacity development was undertaken). These did not necessarily happen by design, but through the evolution of the programme, and was influenced by our funding environment and the individuals involved in these areas of work. Nor did they evolve in a linear fashion, but there has been a general trend in the work as shown in Table 1 overleaf, with the programme's 'direction of travel' moving from research on policy entrepreneurship to advice, mentoring and networking on a range of issues including monitoring and evaluation, network development and organisational development.

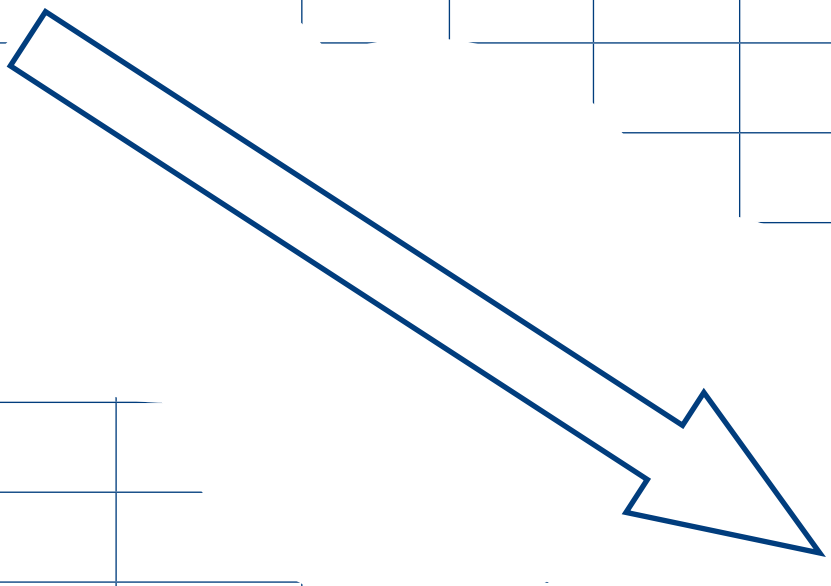
As described in more detail below, the programme has delivered this work using two main modes or business models: the partnership programme and contract-driven work, and has deliberately tried to evolve a more decentralised structure.

RAPID's themes (chronologically)

Policy entrepreneurship. RAPID's early research on on factors contributing to the uptake of research in policy (Court et al., 2005) led to the concept of policy entrepreneurs, coined by Simon Maxwell, former ODI Director. Policy entrepreneurs are people or teams who, equipped with the right 'know-how' and skills, develop and implement strategies to bring about

Table 1: The evolution of RAPID's themes and activities

Theme \ Activity	Research and systematic learning	Production of toolkits and how-to guides	Dissemination	Workshops	Advice and mentoring	Communities of practice (CoPs) and networking
Policy entrepreneurship						
Research Communications						
Knowledge management (KM) and learning						
Outcome Mapping						
RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA)						
Monitoring and Evaluation						
Network development and facilitation						
Organisational and project management						



RAPID's capacity-development approaches have consisted of eight core themes and six main activities. The arrow illustrates the 'direction of travel' moving from research on policy entrepreneurship to advice, mentoring and networking on a range of issues including monitoring and evaluation, network development and organisational development.

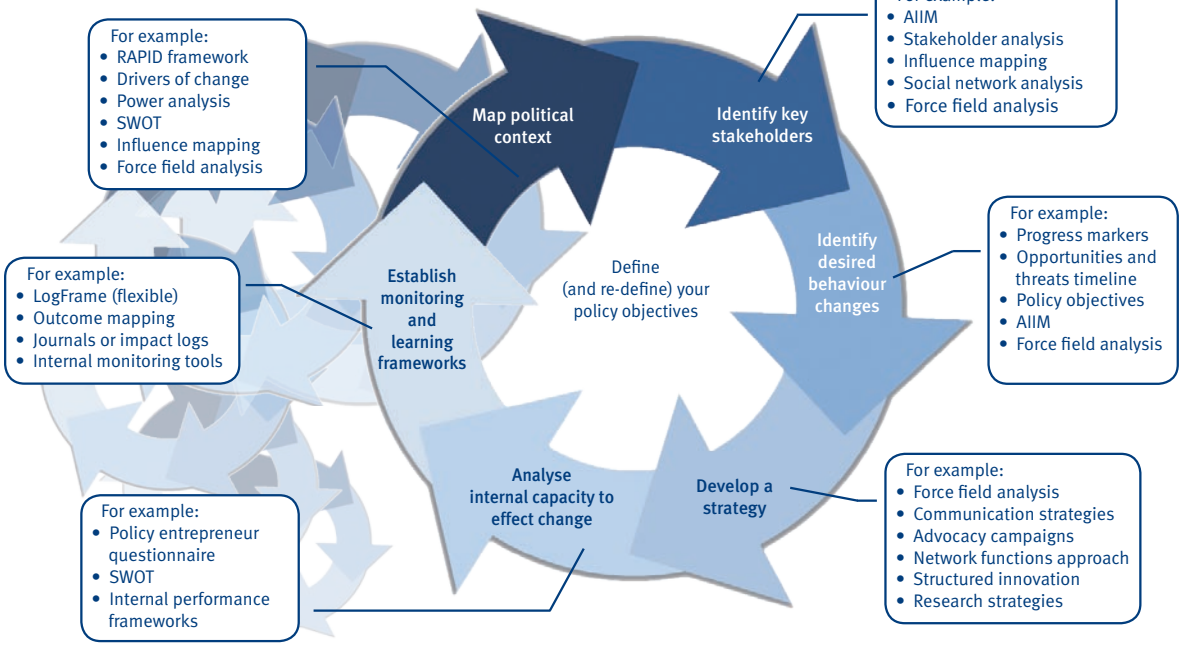
policy change. This stream of work featured the development and sharing of tools and methods to understand the political context and plan research-based policy influence strategies. John Young and Julius Court organised the first policy entrepreneurship workshops with groups of researchers and NGO practitioners in the UK in 2004 to test some tools to improve research impact which led to the production of RAPID's first toolkit *Tools for Policy Entrepreneurs* in 2004 (Start and Hovland, 2004). These early workshops formed the basis of the planning narrative that has evolved into what we now call the RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA) – outlined later.

Research communications. Some of John Young's work, before the RAPID programme was established, focused on improving research communication and policy engagement strategies by researchers and action-research projects. A literature review on research communication by Ingie Hovland formed the basis of the second RAPID Toolkit, on research communications (Hovland, 2005) and this work, along with evaluations of the communication aspects of a number of research programmes, informed a series of early research communication workshops. Building on this work and expanding on ROMA, RAPID subsequently worked with ODI's Communications Team to develop a clear link between strategic planning for influence and the development of communication strategies as a way to influence change. More recent research communication workshops include new ideas, based on the experiences of ODI's Communications Team, including on media engagement (Leah Kreitzman and later Caroline Cassidy), online communications (Nick Scott) and writing briefing papers (Jeff Knezovich and later Angela Hawke).

Knowledge management. John Young's initial advisory work on knowledge management was strengthened through research on the knowledge management strategies of international development agencies by Ben Ramalingam (2005) which led to the development of a series of tools and presentations for NGOs and research programmes interested in capturing, storing and sharing knowledge for lessons learning. Demand for these, however, was limited, and RAPID's capacity to deliver support in this area diminished when Ben left the programme.

Outcome Mapping. In 2005, Enrique Mendizabal and Ben Ramalingam introduced Outcome Mapping

Figure 1: The RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA)



(OM) to the RAPID programme, partly through developing the (IDRC-funded) Outcome Mapping Learning Community (OMLC). This community provided a platform for 'international development' practitioners to share learning and good practice in the use of OM, a methodology for planning, monitoring and evaluating development initiatives that aim to bring about social change. The process, which helps a project team or programme specify the actors it targets, the changes it expects and the strategies it employs (Smutylo, 2005), underpins most of RAPID's policy entrepreneurship tools.

RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA) (see Figure 1 above). This emerged in 2007 from RAPID's policy entrepreneurship work and OM. RAPID staff applied OM concepts and tools, such as boundary partners, progress markers and monitoring journals, to policy entrepreneurship. This emphasised the identification of target audiences and the mapping of how research evidence could be used to change their behaviours. This new approach was first tested by Enrique Mendizabal with DFID policy teams and improved through workshops with various research programmes (Young and Mendizabal, 2009). New tools emerged from this process, namely the Alignment, Interest and Influence Matrix (AIIM) developed by Enrique Mendizabal and Ben Ramalingam (Mendizabal, 2010).

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Evaluations of DFID and IDRC policy research programmes by Julius Court and John Young in the first few years of the programme informed much of RAPID's early work on M&E and tested the applicability of some of RAPID's research tools including case studies and episode studies for research evaluation. In 2006 Ingie Hovland researched a wider range of approaches and tools and developed a framework for the systematic M&E of research activities (Hovland, 2007). Ben Ramalingam's work since 2005 has focused more on the uptake of evaluation-based evidence from the perspective of important policy actors such as DFID, which commissioned Enrique Mendizabal and Jeremy Clarke (an ODI Research Associate) with the help of Harry Jones (see Jones, 2011) to develop a practical manual for its staff. These lessons have been incorporated into the ROMA narrative by Enrique Mendizabal, Ajoy Datta and Simon Hearn.

Network development and facilitation. With an increasing focus, particularly by donors, on the role of networks, coalitions and communities of practice (CoPs) in promoting policy change, RAPID undertook research on the role of networks. Inspired by Stephen Yeo's typology of functions (Yeo, 2004), Enrique Mendizabal developed the Network Functions Approach (NFA) for policy research networks (Mendizabal, 2006). This was elaborated and operationalised in the context of humanitarian networks as well as networks in the private sector by Ben Ramalingam (Ramalingam and Mendizabal, 2008). The NFA has been used to plan, review and evaluate a range of different networks. Demand has focused on practical support to network facilitators and managers and Simon Hearn, OMLC Facilitator, took the lead to develop new practical tools and advice on this issue.

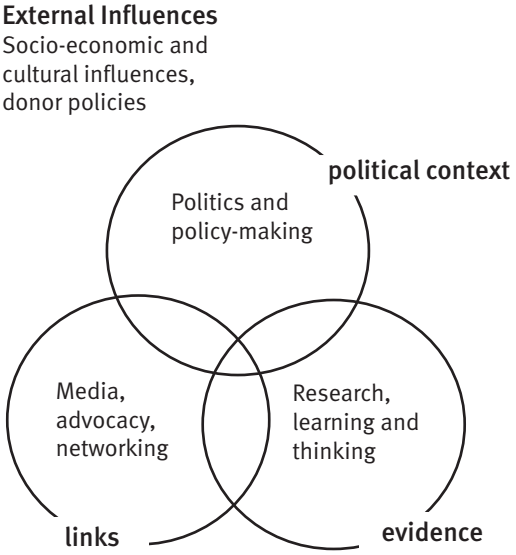
Organisational and project management. As RAPID's work progressed we realised that the organisations and programmes requesting our support needed advice, not only on systems and structures to make them more policy focused, but also on basic programme and project management. ODI has considerable experience as it has undertaken a series of investments in this area over the past decade. RAPID has already transferred some of this learning (often from ODI's own failures) to CSOs abroad and job descriptions for various staff and organograms have been shared with others including the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), and Grupo Faro in Ecuador. RAPID has begun to apply the principles embedded within PRINCE2 (Project in Controlled Environments) to its own large and potentially complex projects (such as three years of capacity-building support to VASS and the evaluation of 19 Wellcome Trust-funded public engagement projects) with mixed results. While PRINCE2 offers some useful principles, applying them prescriptively is unlikely to work, particularly in resource poor settings. A new stream of research on how policy research organisations manage and structure themselves may, we hope, provide a more robust basis for the development of this work.

RAPID's capacity development activities

Research and systematic learning. We were explicit from the start that our approach to developing capacities to improve research uptake should itself be based on evidence. RAPID's large research programme on 'bridging research and policy' in 2002-2003 in collaboration with the Global Development Network (GDN) included literature reviews, surveys, case studies and workshops. This contributed to the development of the RAPID analytical framework (Figure 2) for understanding research–policy links, an approach to how it could be improved (Crewe and Young, 2002) and further case studies to test the approach. This work informed our capacity development work (see below) and continues to do so. Research on communication, knowledge management and capacity development underpins capacity development activities on those issues. More recent research on complexity sciences (Ramalingam et al., 2008) and on the political economy of research uptake (Mendizabal and Sample, 2009) have improved our narratives on planning and on M&E for policy influencing interventions. A new wave of studies is underway focusing on think tanks, networks and the challenge of evaluating policy influencing interventions.

Reviews of and lessons from our capacity development work have informed our research questions and/or the design and management of future activities.

Figure 2: The RAPID Framework



Work with the Centre for Analysis and Forecast (CAF) in Viet Nam resulted in demand for research on the role of legislators at the knowledge–policy interface (Datta and Jones, 2011). Recent work providing policy influencing support to IDRC's Acacia partners was informed by a review following a similar project with IDRC's Globalisation, Growth and Poverty Reduction (GGP) partners in 2009. Furthermore, our capacity development work is always underpinned by needs assessments and continuous learning.

RAPID's research has informed, helped to popularise, and added credibility to our own capacity development narratives, recommendations and materials. The strong feedback loops that link our research, learning and capacity development work help to foster a strong culture of continuous improvement within the programme. Learning in partnership has been possible where other organisations, such as CIPPEC in Argentina, have adopted a similar approach. Where no research attempts were made, there has been little or no learning.

Toolkits, 'how to' guides and manuals. Initially, RAPID produced a series of toolkits, combining existing and new tools targeting a variety of policy actors on several issues: mapping the political context; policy engagement; achieving policy impact; effective communication; knowledge management; and measuring the impact of policy research. These remain very popular and are among the most frequently downloaded documents on ODI's website. Of late, the programme has produced (often in collaboration with clients) tailored guidance notes, rooted in the political and organisational context of our clients. A guide for DFID staff on evaluating policy dialogue initiatives, one

for researchers at VASS on communicating research and another for World Vision national office staff on developing advocacy strategies are three examples. RAPID is documenting ROMA in the form of a manual to be published in 2012, and has already developed a shorter version for DFID.

Disseminating our research and advice. RAPID has communicated its research and learning actively through ODI's channels, including the publication of annotated bibliographies, literature reviews, working papers, background notes, briefing papers, project briefs, opinions, blogs and more. Outputs, including presentations from workshops and conferences, have also been disseminated via online platforms such as ebpdn and OMLC. Presentations, in particular, have been uploaded into the 'cloud' onto websites such as Slideshare where content is user generated. In the early years this boosted interest in RAPID's work and, in later years, to a surge in both demand for our work and competition with other players.

Workshops. RAPID delivered workshops first on policy entrepreneurship, then ROMA and more recently on research communications, ranging from a few hours to five days, depending on clients' needs. They have been participatory, acknowledging and building on the experiences and lessons of participants. Workshops have usually shared an approach, methodology and/or a set of tools, given participants opportunities to use the tools and enabled them to explore if and how the approach could be applied in their own context. 'Surgeries' or 'clinics' have been piloted successfully during OM workshops and then for research communications, with time set aside at the end of the workshop to allow participants to revisit issues with presenters and expert guests through one-to-one or peer support. At the time of writing, the first OM 'lab' was due to take place, with participants leading the agenda, and showcasing success and failures in applying OM to managing development projects.

Workshops and seminars are RAPID's main communication media: they have allowed us to get immediate feedback and test new hypotheses and ideas with an engaged and interested audience. Unlike any other approach, they allow us to calibrate our messages to very specific audience needs and interests.

Advice and mentoring. Since 2008, RAPID has worked with programmes and teams in a new way, with a workshop or seminar providing the initial narrative for longer-term engagement. RAPID engages with clients (often specific individuals) during each step of the process, enabling them to gather information to help them produce outputs (such as plans and strategies), and build capacities incrementally. For instance, RAPID advised the Zambia Land Alliance's (ZLA) research team on how to draw key messages from longer research reports. Mentoring and advice has been the main approach to capacity development on networking and knowledge management (KM) with support often given during the planning and/or implementation stages of larger joint or consortium projects directly to those responsible for KM or network facilitation. RAPID has also advised other ODI programmes and projects that have started to use online communities as a collaboration tool.

Communities of practice (CoPs) and networking. RAPID has had a strong role in facilitating two global CoPs, ebpdn (www.ebpdn.org.uk) on research-based policy influencing, and OMLC (www.outcomemapping.ca) on OM. The early history of ebpdn is described above. More recently ebpdn has followed OMLC's lead in selecting 'stewards' to help Cecilia Oppenheim, the RAPID Facilitator, drive the network. Stewards were chosen for their level of interest and expertise on the issue. Those in OMLC are mainly M&E specialists working in organisations or independently, and outcome mapping is a major part of their day-to-day work. They work with Simon Hearn the OMLC Facilitator to promote and carry out online debates, identify and share useful resources, undertake new research and analysis on OM and related issues and promote a market place of experts that continues to fuel interest.

Stewards in ebpdn have a similar role, but with a regional focus: facilitating regional sub-communities (in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia). Unlike those in the OMLC, their work on the interface between research and policy is often a very minor part of their main role and their commitment to ebpdn has been, at best, patchy and often conditioned by the availability of funds to undertake research or other activities. OMLC provides an online space where workshop participants can take unanswered questions and receive further support and its capacity-building role, therefore, has been easy to track – with several examples of workshops and discussions organised and facilitated by members. In general, ebpdn has served as an email list and library of relevant documents for interested members. Slowly however, ebpdn facilitators in Latin America, Southeast Asia and South Asia have started using their regional networks as a platform for a broader range of capacity development interventions.

RAPID's mode of working

Beyond the PPA, most of RAPID's work has been funded through contracted work to deliver a range of specific outputs: including KM systems or frameworks; advice on implementing OM; workshops on ROMA and more. So while RAPID has been commit-

ted to the principles of partnership, collaboration and equity since its first strategy in 2003, RAPID has often had to respond to donor-driven demand as well as the needs of its final clients. But our research has given us the arguments needed to 'resist' some demands and to provide independent advice on what may or may not be in the client's best interests.

In its early days, supported by the PPA funds, ebpdn provided a series of grants to southern CSOs and to other ODI staff for small collaborative projects. These gave southern and ODI researchers a chance to work and learn together and for ODI a chance to encourage and support more issue-specific research on links between research and policy. These projects were, however, difficult to manage, very diverse and few included learning components.

Another approach featured larger collaborative projects to influence regional or global policy spaces. The Forum on the Future of Aid (FFA) was one example that aimed to influence international aid debates through the production and communication of southern research. The forum thrived for a time (with online activity and a planning workshop in 2008), but failed to promote the adoption of RAPID-related issues as part of members' research agendas.

More recently, RAPID has undertaken collaborative research with some ebpdn members. However, with some exceptions, this has been limited to specific inputs ranging from text-boxes to case studies and has often been constrained by RAPID's contractual obligations to the donor. Collaboration on specific issues has taken place in the context of joint work under the auspices of specific externally-funded projects and programmes such as the Comercio y Pobreza en Latinoamérica (COPLA) programme, with partners under the DFID-funded Accountability in Tanzania (AcT) project and with some ebpdn members in an EC-funded project on food security.

RAPID has also collaborated with a range of donors such as DFID, IDRC, the Canadian and Swedish international development agencies to promote research design that allows and encourages greater policy engagement. RAPID has made additional efforts to collaborate with DFID – in particular with its International Directors Office (IDO), its research uptake team and its evaluation department. Collaboration with IDO, for instance, involved Enrique Mendizabal providing ongoing support to DFID staff members enabling them to facilitate ROMA workshops with DFID policy teams. Collaboration has often involved and led to contract work: DFID's evaluation team contracted RAPID to study how DFID uses evaluations and research to make decisions (Jones and Mendizabal, 2010).

Successful collaboration has taken place in Latin America where a strong regional ebpdn facilitator, CIPPEC, led by Vanesa Weyrauch, mobilised additional funds from GDNet (the Global Development Network) to pursue a research and capacity-building agenda. CIPPEC and RAPID have collaborated to bring in new researchers and organisations interested in the study and promotion of better linkages between research and policy, transforming this into what Norma Correa from Peru called 'a researchable subject'. This has increased demand from these researchers and organisations for more practical approaches and tools.

RAPID's structures in delivering support

For the most part, RAPID team members have delivered capacity development support from ODI's London office, travelling when necessary and relying heavily on clients or collaborators to help them understand the context in which they work. There is only so much that can be learnt during a short – often two or three day – workshop. As described above, early attempts to build the ebpdn into an independent network of partners who can provide RAPID-like services in developing countries have not been very successful. RAPID's approach since 2006 has been to try to locate team members in the south, though since ODI does not have a policy or mechanism to officially post staff outside the UK this has only been possible where staff have a personal reason or wish to be based overseas.

Nevertheless RAPID team members (now including 'associates' or 'collaborators' not employed directly by ODI) have over the last few years been based in Malawi, Peru, Vietnam, the Philippines, Nepal and Sierra Leone. This more 'decentralised' structure enables team members to develop a better understanding of the context, tap into local funding opportunities and provide more direct and tailored support. For instance, identifying huge demand for capacity development on research communication, Norma Correa , a RAPID associate in Peru working with Latin American ebpdn members, organised and delivered an over-subscribed three-day training workshop in Lima in 2010.

At the RAPID Team Retreat in 2011 a decision was made to seek to strengthen this decentralisation process by looking for more opportunities for RAPID staff to be based overseas and partner staff to spend time with RAPID in the UK, and for RAPID to actively seek out opportunities for collaborative consortium-based projects and bid for them with core partners.

Lessons and recommendations

Lessons

Our experiences have taught us several lessons and challenged some of our assumptions.

Research capacity. We assumed that research capacity more generally, and specifically on the link between research and policy, existed, or that others were developing this capacity successfully, and so it would be possible to generate high quality research on these issues in developing countries. However, we have found that research capacity itself is very limited in some contexts, and especially capacity to research the interface between research and policy. Organisations often struggle to access long-term funding to invest in a future cadre of researchers and long-term research programmes to do this, or have little incentives to do so.

CSOs' interest in the study of research uptake. We also assumed that organisations in developing countries would respond to our initial work and communications efforts by investing in their own research on understanding and promoting research uptake and to develop the capacity of others in their own countries or regions; thus becoming 'regional capacity hubs' for RAPID-type issues. However, most of them work in specific policy areas, and have not been interested in working on the interface between research and policy, which can seem to be a procedural and somewhat abstract subject. Collaborators have however been more interested in working on a topic in which they had a deep interest such as complementary trade policies under the COPLA Programme, Japan's aid policies ahead of its hosting of the G8 summit and TICAD in 2008, or the assessment of stimulus packages in Southeast Asia after the financial crisis. But demand from most organisations has been limited to workshops, manuals and tools rather than on developing the capacity to replicate or substitute RAPID.

In our experience, organisations operating in donor-rich contexts such as parts of sub-Saharan Africa (with little resulting competition over funds) have tended to find the competencies and skills offered by RAPID and ebpdn less appealing than those working in more competitive funding environments such as Latin America and Southeast Asia. Demand for RAPID-type work in sub-Saharan Africa has tended to come from donors (like GDN or IDRC) on behalf of their grantees or from NGOs wishing to develop their evidence-based advocacy skills.

Interest has developed in a number of cases in Latin America – largely as a result of CIPPEC's own interest and agency – where a growing number of researchers and organisations are participating in research and debate on the subject.

No clear audiences. Some of the problems we encountered may have been avoided had we paid more attention to the programme's audiences. Our capacity development work was not sufficiently targeted and, in the context of ODI's consultancy-driven think tank model, we inevitably worked for whoever was willing and interested. This meant that, on occasion, we worked with organisations whose research and analysis capacity (and therefore their capacity to communicate research-based arguments) was very limited. And, in general, this also meant that the time we could dedicate to specific audiences was limited to the life-time of the contracts.

Capacity development activities. High demand for more visible approaches to capacity development such as workshops and presentations continues. And workshops have become more attractive as the approaches presented have stronger research to back them up and practical tools for participants to take home. The six lessons and eight steps of ROMA, with suggested tools and handouts, is a good example. Workshops are good for raising awareness about an issue but transformative changes only take place when individuals and organisations have the space to test and reflect on tools, methods and approaches. Moreover, workshops rarely include the other personnel in an organisation who contribute to its 'outreach function', including project officers, communicators and senior managers, making the job of researchers in putting theory into practice more difficult.

Establishing CoPs and providing advice and mentoring are, therefore, more effective for this (including exchanges and secondments), but are more difficult to 'sell' even when the opportunities to learn are higher, possibly because of perceived high transaction costs. We have found, however, that the quality and regularity of mentorship suffered unless it was structured. For example, in a project to support World Vision staff to develop an advocacy function, nobody was allocated responsibility to receive advice from RAPID, no timetable was drawn up and the precise nature of advice was not specified. As a result mentorship was weak and ad hoc.

Developing or supporting the development of 'local guides' such as DFID's How to Notes provides excellent opportunities to present and discuss methods and tools on issues such as planning policy engagement and/or M&E.

Collaboration opportunities within large multi-partner and multi-country programmes are increasing. Learning-by-doing is, then, an effective way to develop knowledge, competencies or skills. This, however, presents a real challenge as high quality outputs and impact are demanded 'from the word go'. There has also often been confusion about who is responsible for the delivery of 'outputs' – are we supporting others to do the work, or do we do it for them? Funders are usually keen for us to facilitate

organisational capacity improvements. But, on occasion, individuals and organisations have lacked the incentives to do the work themselves (for instance, developing communication plans or writing policy briefs), leaving RAPID to undertake the work themselves.

Building relations between ODI and CSOs. We assumed that the PPA would allow RAPID and other ODI staff to collaborate with CSOs in small- and medium-sized projects that could help us learn about each other – and that these lessons would inform the development of more formal relations. In hindsight though, we failed to recognise how difficult it is to work across an organisation like ODI (where each programme has different markets). This meant that the initial contacts made with ebpdn stewards rarely led to collaboration with other ODI programmes with whom they may have had more in common. The discourse of partnership promoted by RAPID was not necessarily prioritised by others (as understandably their priorities were to deliver project outputs, not to develop partnerships).

Power and equality in relations. Originally ebpdn was conceived by RAPID as a space where all core members, including ODI, would be equal. But in all collaboration activities to develop or strengthen new partnership relations, ODI, through RAPID, was still the donor or client. Where the project demanded collaboration, RAPID remained accountable to the client or donor. We have always known that true partnership cannot exist where one partner funds the other – this is nothing new. However, there were few alternatives (unless DFID granted money directly to RAPID's collaborators) to this in the absence of 'partners' willing to invest their own funds or mobilise funds from their own funders. In an attempt to make relations between RAPID and its collaborators more equitable (considering the resource imbalance), we gave collaborators more space in decision-making through what was, ironically, a sub-contracting arrangement. As a result, both collaborators and some in ODI argued that we were too lenient and flexible on issues relating to procedural and financial accountability. Nevertheless, we have been most successful where we have had 'buy in' from directorial level in the organisations with which we have worked (CIPPEC, for example); which has translated in important investments on their part. Individuals in organisations without 'buy in' have sometimes struggled to justify work on something that is difficult to put a value on.

Interactions between ebpdn members. Although there was some interaction between ebpdn members in the first few years of the programme through collaborative work and annual partners meetings, maintaining the level of member-to-member interaction necessary to ensure an exchange of capacity and approaches (despite a reduction in the number of ebpdn stewards) has been difficult since the end of PPA funding. Limited funding and RAPID's own project-led business model made it difficult to plan effectively for such exchanges. However, on one occasion the Director of the Economic and Social Research Foundation in Tanzania was funded to attend a CIPPEC workshop in Argentina, but there was little or no contact between the organisations after that. And although there is limited evidence of this, online communication between ebpdn members seems to be channelled through the ODI-based coordinator.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations arise for individuals and organisations pursuing capacity development for better uptake of research. We split these into two categories: 1) capacity development interventions and 2) relations with those whose capacities are being 'developed'.

On capacity development:

- Be clear about the objective of every capacity-building initiative and, when possible, separate this from other objectives, such as research, communications and networking.
- Work together over a long period of time as a way to share expertise – one-off workshops are unlikely to work. Identify and bid for, or develop, collaborative research-based policy initiatives as a way to create opportunities for capacity development and support. This can ensure that clients or collaborators apply skills and competencies to a real-time issue like the COPLA programme (which focused on trade and policy).
- If workshops are unavoidable, combine them with other means of longer-term engagement including the development of online or face-to-face spaces (or use existing ones) to promote peer support or feedback opportunities.
- Workshops need to be accompanied, whenever possible, with exercises, support materials and background research (and based on local contexts). Cheap one or two day interventions are false economies.
- Establish very clear terms of reference for mentoring approaches. This might seem contradictory but, in fact, the more flexible and informal the approach the more important it is to establish clear guidelines to steer the process through both quiet and busy periods; and avoid misunderstandings. Above all, mentoring demands commitment from

senior staff and leaders in all the organisations involved.
- Embed experts or host key staff from the organisation being supported. This is an excellent way to develop capacity in a new area of research and practice. Frequent interaction aids learning not only about the tools, methods and approaches but also about the research behind them and how to address RAPID-type situations in a different way. It can also help build researchers and communicators' confidence as it provides them with an opportunity to see some of the recommendations made by programmes like RAPID in action.
- In the case of research organisations, the best approach is to convince researchers of the importance of undertaking their own research on the challenges of research uptake. The findings from their own studies are more likely to be adopted by fellow researchers and constitute an evidence base for any organisational change processes that are required. Making this a 'researchable' subject has been successful in the Latin American context. Moreover, it provides the organisations with important and relevant knowledge and a new area of expertise that may become a source of income in the future.

On relations with 'collaborators':
- In genuinely collaborative work, avoid significant differences between 'collaborators' or ensure that any differences reflect comparative advantages that benefit all members of the network or partnership.
- Be explicit about the type of relationship between organisations. Not all relations should be labelled in the same way (such as partners). Sub-contractors, collaborators, allies or project-partners may be more appropriate terms. In each case ensure that the rights and responsibilities of the various parties in the relationship are clear to all.
- Be explicit about the objectives of the relationship and agree on how to get there – including what support and advice you, and them, will provide.
- Again, avoid mixing capacity development with partnership-building, unless there are clear two-way capacity development opportunities.
- Avoid basing a partnership relationship on a sub-contract relationship, where one organisation has control and responsibility for accounting for all the funds and outputs of a project.
- Consider what you will do if a partner, collaborator or sub-contractor is not delivering the expected outcomes. This is, potentially, a very sensitive situation and it would be a mistake not to be ready for it.

Overall, effective capacity development for better research uptake is best achieved through real-time application of theoretical concepts, the setting of clear objectives and approaches, a range of multi-layered interventions and the clarification of relationships between 'collaborators'. These lessons and recommendations have been the result of a journey down a long and winding road towards capacity development for better research uptake. We hope that funders and research centres in both north and south find these interesting and useful. We will endeavour to see that these recommendations inform RAPID's own future capacity development work and that we continue to learn from and improve the quality of our approaches.

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