



SEPTEMBER 2021

CEDIL Methods Brief 5

Engaging stakeholders to co-design rigorous and relevant research and evaluation



Centre of
Excellence
for Development
Impact and Learning



Research and evaluation are increasingly informing policy decisions made by governments and non-governmental organisations. For this purpose, research and evaluation together cover systematic enquiry that aims to better understand problems being faced; to develop, implement and evaluate ways of addressing those problems; and to synthesise the findings from studies that share a common concern. In this Methods Brief, unless otherwise specified, the term 'research' includes 'evaluation' and applies to any of these forms of systematic inquiry.

Designing research involves building on earlier theoretical and empirical research that offers knowledge that is clearly and logically laid out. This knowledge is **generalisable** when either theoretical explanations or statistical analyses illustrate how it can be applied more widely than just the setting of the original study.

However, generalisable knowledge is not enough. Designing research also requires value judgements about which interventions it is most important to evaluate, how to recognise success or failure, how to invite participation and collect data, and what implications the findings have for the wider world. These judgements require knowledge rooted in the setting where a study will be conducted or its findings applied. This is local knowledge or **context-specific knowledge**, which comes from familiarity with local settings, cultures and politics. The challenge here is that generalisable knowledge and context-specific knowledge are often held by different sets of people.

Stakeholder engagement methods bring together these different sets of people with the aim of aligning research design with local values and everyday lives. For instance, stakeholder engagement activities can help tease out local knowledge that is relevant for developing programmes and planning studies, or that helps researchers assess the feasibility and acceptability of their procedures.

There are many methods for engaging these various stakeholders, but it is not always clear which methods suit different circumstances and contexts. Moreover, research is not undertaken in a vacuum: there is a wide range of actors who have an interest in the framing, approach or outcome of research. Navigating between and among these stakeholders requires some political awareness, as well as clarity on the application of the research.

This Methods Brief helps researchers consider the options for working with stakeholders and engaging them with the research process and each other when planning or conducting research, or interpreting research findings in order to make actionable recommendations. The brief is based on a CEDIL Methods Working Paper which developed a framework for selecting appropriate methods of engagement by synthesising an extensive literature and interviewing a range of stakeholders.

Five steps for choosing how to engage stakeholders

The framework for selecting appropriate methods of stakeholder engagement is presented here as five steps that can help people who are commissioning or conducting research or evaluations to orient themselves to their context, research purposes and, ultimately, options for stakeholder engagement.

The first steps include understanding the value of generalisable evidence (**Step 1**) and localised evidence (**Step 2**) for informing decisions. **Step 3** recognises the socio-political implications of these different ways of thinking. **Step 4** helps researchers identify a starting point by utilising a matrix that signposts various tools and methods. Choosing a starting point depends largely on the following:

- Whether the research findings are for local or general application: *Does the knowledge need to be generalisable to many different settings, or is knowledge to suit the local setting sufficient?*
- How much clarity and consensus is assumed about what is known when starting out: *Is prior knowledge that a study will build on clear and widely agreed before the work begins?*

Step 5 considers which stakeholders to engage with, and how, when planning and conducting research, depending on the circumstances.

Step 1: recognising the value of generalisable knowledge

Generalisable knowledge, in the form of key concepts or frameworks, theories and empirical research findings, can be recognised as valuable in principle, although specific ideas and specific research findings may be critiqued by stakeholders from their different standpoints, or may seem less applicable to certain settings. When contested in principle, advocates emphasise the theoretical and methodological strengths of generalisable knowledge to recommend its wider application, and sceptics emphasise the unique characteristics of a situation to deny the relevance of knowledge that has originated elsewhere. In practice, few (if any) situations are so unique that there is nothing to learn from certain studies conducted in settings that share similar features. Being open to learning from elsewhere involves first accessing generalisable knowledge, and then debating its relevance among stakeholders. For instance, developing services for very high numbers of refugees in Lebanon, where the host population relies on the state and private sector while also facing problems with poverty, might seem a uniquely challenging situation. Yet through debating the problem, decision makers and researchers have found that some countries in Africa face similar challenges, so there is value in generating and building on knowledge that is generalisable to such situations.

Discovering to what extent such generalisable knowledge is already available in the research literature has become easier as systematic reviews of studies have grown in both number and coverage of policy sectors and academic disciplines. Box 1 lists well-established sources of generalisable evidence in the form of systematic reviews. Turning to systematic reviews first is more common in fields where they have a longer history; so more common in the health sector and with growing interest in other policy sectors. For instance, a systematic review of frameworks for measuring resilience has informed studies of urban flood resilience, food system resilience, livelihood resilience, household resilience to climate extremes and disasters, and many more fields.

Once found, this generalisable evidence must be judged as reliable and relevant by the research

team and other stakeholders if it is to provide a sound starting point for a new study. In this first step, effective strategies for increasing engagement with generalisable evidence include:

- **facilitating access to research evidence** (e.g. communication strategies and evidence repositories); and
- **building the research team's/ stakeholders' skills to access and make sense of evidence** (e.g. through critical appraisal training programmes), and enhancing their motivation.

Judging the reliability of research in terms of the rigour of its methods or the variability of its

findings requires technical skills and standards that are more often held by researchers but that can also be developed by other stakeholders. However, judging whether research misses important concepts, thereby making the resulting knowledge incomplete, is more subjective and benefits from discussion within groups that convene a range of perspectives, so as to notice whether important concepts are missing.

Box 1 signposts resources to support access to systematic review evidence, and skills for making sense of it. Later we consider how to engage stakeholders in discussing evidence as a group.

Box 1: Supporting stakeholders to access and make sense of systematic reviews

Systematic reviews of research can be found at the following sources:

3ie systematic reviews "Our systematic reviews appraise and synthesise the available high-quality evidence on the effectiveness of social and economic development interventions in low- and middle-income countries ... We publish the full systematic review technical reports ... and we produce summary reports and briefs tailored for decision makers and other users."

3ie evidence gap maps "An interactive online platform that allows users to explore the evidence in a particular evidence gap map, with links to user-friendly summaries and full-text articles where available."

Campbell Systematic Reviews "Campbell Systematic Reviews is an open access journal prepared under the editorial control of the Campbell Collaboration. The journal publishes systematic reviews, evidence and gap maps, and methods research papers."

Cochrane Library "A collection of databases that contain different types of high-quality, independent evidence to inform healthcare decision-making ... also available as a Spanish language version."

Epistemonikos "A collaborative, multilingual database of health evidence: the largest source of systematic reviews relevant for health-decision making, and a large source of other types of scientific evidence."

Health Systems Evidence "The world's most comprehensive, free access point for evidence to support policy makers, stakeholders and researchers interested in how to strengthen or reform health systems or in how to get cost-effective programs, services and drugs to those who need them."

International Rescue Committee Evidence Outcomes Framework "The interactive Outcomes and Evidence Framework supports humanitarian and development professionals to design effective programs. It delivers key information on outcomes related to health, safety, education, economic wellbeing, and power through theories of change, provides evidence for interventions that work or don't work to achieve the outcomes, and includes guidance on how to measure progress."

Social Systems Evidence "The world's most comprehensive, free access point for evidence about strengthening 20 government sectors and program areas, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals."

Guidance for making sense of studies can be found at:

The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme



Step 2: recognising the importance of local knowledge

While some people need to be persuaded of the value of generalisable knowledge for specific settings, others doubt the value of local knowledge for theoretically informed and methodologically sound research. However, local knowledge is indeed important: both for designing studies and for their smooth progress; referring to existing research alone is not enough to ensure that the design and processes of new studies suit their setting.

Local knowledge for designing services and research: The importance of local knowledge is illustrated by patients' responses to randomised controlled trials of tuberculosis (TB) therapy. Successful TB treatment requires patients to continue a long course of therapy, often under difficult circumstances. Ensuring their adherence by offering them incentives to attend a clinic regularly to take their medicine under supervision – directly observed therapy (DOTS) – has had limited success. For instance, the offer of a daily hot meal to coincide with treatment provided little incentive for patients who were shy about eating at the clinic or found the midday timing inconvenient.

Similarly, the choice of an experimental design for assessing the effects of a long-term treatment faced difficulties when clinic attendance was prevented by civil conflict that disrupted health services and displaced most of the local population. Although in this instance civil conflict began after the trial began, understanding situations of instability can discourage the use of longitudinal designs in some contexts.

Local knowledge for research processes: It is not only patients who may confound a study – practitioners have also upset randomisation by rationing incentives, giving more to those patients they considered most deprived and therefore most deserving. In this case, the investment in methodological rigour for assessing causal relationships was squandered by insufficient engagement of practitioners with the principles underpinning the research processes.

Researchers wishing to conduct high-quality research are required to combine their methodological expertise with knowledge held by stakeholders who are familiar with the site or the topic of the research. In each of these examples, the investment in methodological rigour for assessing causal relationships was squandered by overlooking local knowledge about what procedures would either suit or disturb local individuals and communities.



Step 3: recognising different ways of thinking

Ways of conducting research and engaging stakeholders tend to favour either generalisable evidence or context-specific evidence, including local data and tacit knowledge. The most inclusive approaches have tended to overlook generalisable evidence (which is largely embedded in research structures and formalised procedures), while approaches emphasising generalisable evidence have tended to overlook the knowledge held by civil society (particularly the less organised parts of civil society).

This makes engaging with stakeholders inherently political. Power analyses are increasingly seen as pre-requisites for development programmes, but less so for studies that are firmly embedded in research methodology. When policy organisations, development organisations, academics and wider society work in fundamentally different ways, working together requires serious investment in relationships that take these differences into account constructively.

Political power and social norms work at all scales. At the global level, there is the risk of imposing worldviews, conceptual frameworks, timescales and methods from the Global North because it is often the source of funding. Local knowledge is more readily revealed and put to good use when Southern partners are equitable

partners, influencing what research is done and how rather than being limited to collecting the data.

Typical research programmes with their narrow and precise focus spanning years (or decades at best) are a particularly poor fit for indigenous nations or people whose worldviews take into account past influences and future potential on the scale of generations. Environmental sustainability and grand infrastructure projects, in particular, benefit from long term ‘cathedral thinking’. Addressing cultural, language barriers and power differentials is helped by joint leadership; joint agenda setting; ongoing relationships and sharing of ideas; and a discursive space that allows new paradigms to emerge, rather than indigenous knowledge being an add-on to Western science, or vice versa.

At the local level, even community-based participatory research with its inclusive principles, may be more or less successful in terms of instigating change depending on who is wielding most influence. For instance, projects with African American and/or Latino communities in the United States, when initiated by community or public sector agencies have more often led to action than those led by academics.

Step 4: recognising the starting point

The variation in studies, in terms of whether they are intended to produce findings that will be either locally or widely useful, and whether the knowledge they are building on is clear and agreed among stakeholders, is illustrated by the two-by-two matrix (Figure 1). Each cell in this matrix delineates a different starting point, which has implications for the appropriate choice of study designs and approaches to stakeholder engagement. These study designs and approaches are subsequently described in Step 5.

When the focus of interest is clear and agreed in advance (the top row of the matrix), the purpose of engaging stakeholders is to improve recruitment and data collection to suit those conducting the research and those invited to participate. Because there is consensus on the need and focus of the research, engagement methods can rely on working with small numbers of stakeholders drawn from key organisations (e.g. committee membership, key informant interviews, or partnering stakeholder organisations). Stakeholders may be found

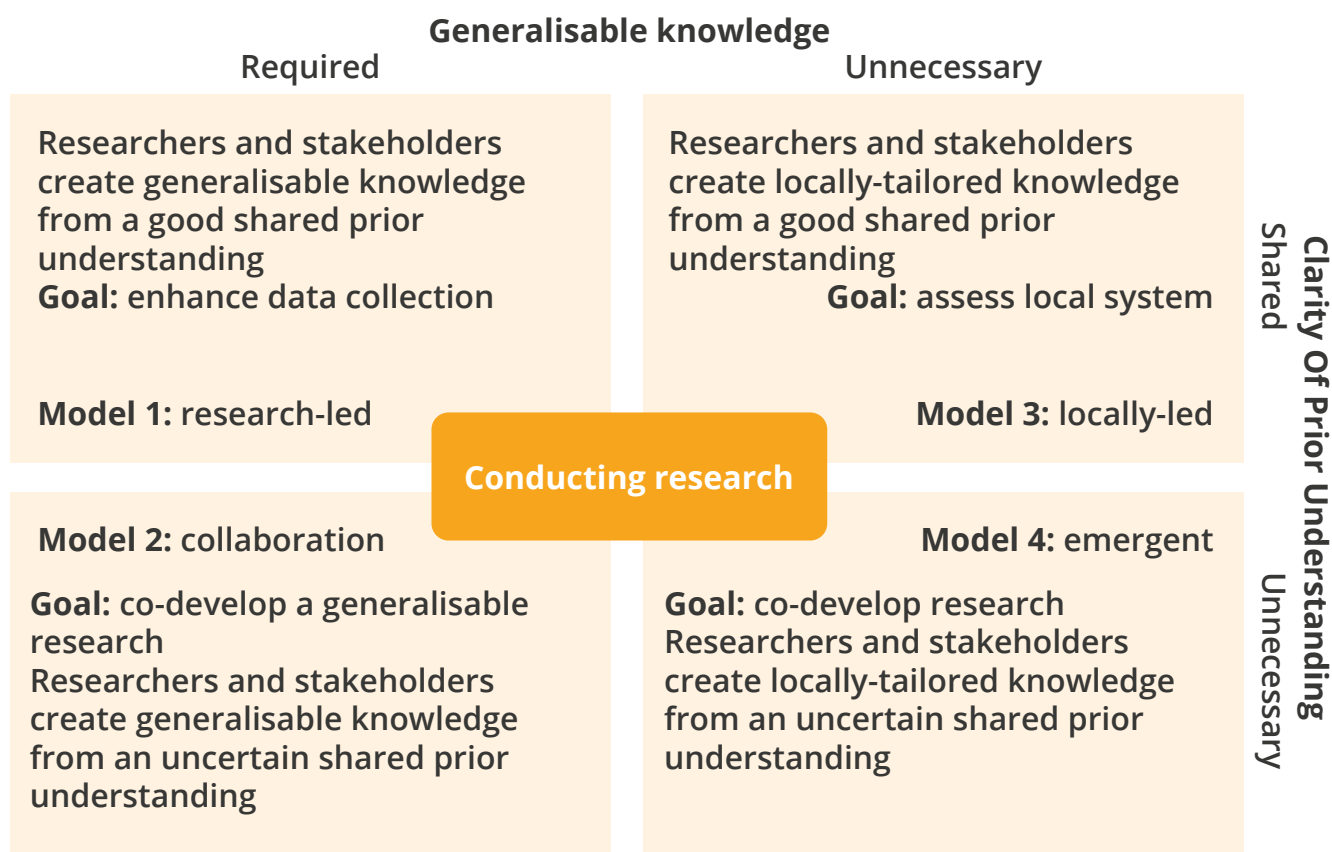
locally or further afield, depending on where the study will be conducted or the findings applied.

In contrast, if the focus of interest is unclear, variable or contested (the bottom row of the matrix), additional effort is required when designing the research to understand the issues being addressed from a variety of standpoints. In these circumstances, engagement methods of choice involve large numbers of stakeholders, selected for their diversity (e.g. widespread consultations, or facilitating large group discussion and deliberation). Again, stakeholders may be found locally or further afield, depending on the aims of the study.

So, who makes these judgements? When planning a study or evaluation, how can a research team know whether prior understanding is clear and widely agreed in advance, whether other stakeholders share their views on what is important, and whether all the important concepts are included in their study design?

Making such value judgements is not a task for individuals, or for small groups of people who all bring similar experience.

Figure 1: Conducting evaluation or research to produce generalisable or locally tailored knowledge





When seeking stakeholders who bring a diversity of experience, the choice is between engaging a small number of representative stakeholders acting as advocates for their organisation or network, or engaging with larger numbers of individual stakeholders speaking for themselves and their immediate family, friends and community.

Small numbers of representative stakeholders suit situations where the existing knowledge that a new study will build on is generally clear and agreed among stakeholders. Large numbers of individual stakeholders suit situations where there is little shared understanding. However, the degree to which understanding is clear and agreed may not be apparent when work is just beginning but only after considerable discussion. Moreover, there are trade-offs to these decisions. Important concepts missing from study designs, or contextual factors that might influence study outcomes, either locally or more widely, are more likely to be noticed by larger numbers of

diverse groups with a stake in the study or subsequent decisions. However, investing in larger-scale efforts takes more time and may lead to important deadlines being missed. Therefore, much depends on early and accurate decisions about the degree of consensus.

Judging the degree of shared understanding involves first seeking a diversity of perspectives, to reveal contentious issues. An initial indication of the degree of consensus, or dissent, may come from a quick scan of documents from different sources. The key issues covered and the language used may vary across academic papers from different disciplines, and across policy papers from government or non-governmental organisations at national or local level. Controversial issues may well be highlighted by civil society organisations, mass media or social media. Consulting individuals across this range of groups should bring to light differences in understanding and priorities.



Step 5: recognising the options for stakeholder engagement

Choosing who to involve, and how, when producing new studies and evaluations typically depends on the experience of the team. More appropriate would be matching the engagement methods to the purpose of the work (to produce knowledge for local use or for a wider use) and the clarity and consensus about the concepts that will frame the work. This approach locates the starting point for any study in one of four cells in the matrix (Step 4/ Figure 1), which in turn indicates appropriate models for stakeholder engagement.

The approach to engaging stakeholders begins with trying to locate the starting point, while acknowledging that the boundaries between the four cells in the matrix are fuzzy, being aware that the situation may change during the course of an initiative, and accepting that there are trade-offs for the different approaches.

A research-led model (1): producing generalisable knowledge when concepts are clear and agreed in advance

When researchers aim to produce generalisable knowledge by building on a good shared understanding of what is already known, their work can be guided by committees of stakeholders to deliver research that is well aligned with existing priorities, methodological standards and governance frameworks.

This research-led approach suits studies that are designed to test hypotheses or monitor change with validated indicators. These studies are framed by concepts that are clearly defined in advance and that remain unchanged, to ensure the integrity of the study.

When key concepts are widely agreed in advance, a small number of stakeholders can offer guidance on behalf of their organisations or networks about recruitment, consent and data collection procedures. Stakeholders may even take a more hands-on approach, hosting a study, collecting data from hard-to-reach groups or from multiple sites. Good performance in a study depends on stakeholders understanding and working in line with agreed procedures – avoiding flaws in, for instance, recruitment, randomisation or data collection.

Having developed research procedures and tools with guidance from well-informed stakeholders, they may be piloted with individual stakeholders who are similar to those who will be eligible to participate in the study. Once in progress, fidelity to study procedures can be monitored by consulting individual stakeholders who have a role in delivering a study, or who participate in it by contributing their own data. In this research-led model, whether offering advice or doing some of the work, the stakeholders improve the delivery of a study by enhancing the data collection under the direction of the research team.

Box 2: Engaging stakeholders to enhance researcher-led studies

Committees to ensure good governance

Studies of scientific advisory committees conclude that there is a need for the following: enough members to bring diversity and credibility, but not so many as to risk quieter members conforming rather than participating (six to 12 members is recommended); clear protocols; training and support.

Consultation to enhance the research procedures

Engaging patients or the wider public has become commonplace in trials, as illustrated by HIV research, where good practice guidelines were developed early and refined to respect and protect men who have sex with men as study participants in rights-constrained environments. Community advisory boards or individual consultations focus mainly on study procedures, such as recruitment, participation, ethics and refining research tools for prevention trials in high- or middle-income countries. Individuals delivering a study, or participating in one, may be consulted to check the fidelity with a study's design and procedures.

Citizen science to enhance data collection

Citizen science projects are generally designed by scientists who invite members of the public to contribute data. This model, also known as citizen science, is typically adopted to facilitate widescale data collection for robust environmental studies. It has also been used to support genome research and has contributed to research addressing the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly the goals for Life on Land, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Good Health and Wellbeing, and Clean Water and Sanitation.

Limitations: This linear, scientifically driven approach faces challenges when key concepts underpinning studies turn out to be unclear or contested.

A collaborative model (2): producing generalisable knowledge when concepts are open to interpretation and amendment

Checking fidelity is important for any model, but collaborative research (model 2), locally led research (model 3) and emergent research (model 4) face additional challenges.

Researchers and evaluators invite more collaborative involvement when they recognise that stakeholders may offer insights regarding where researchers should pay most attention to (for instance, which choice of indicators or measures to use), or how the social setting of a study or choice of incentives for participation may affect the findings and their application.

In the field of HIV research, more inclusive approaches grew out of controversies that occurred when concerns expressed by local communities and organisations about care and ethics were first ignored, followed by some trials being halted or not approved. The field then moved on by developing guidelines for respectful studies, as mentioned above – although some still see research in this field as slow to embrace collaborative relationships with communities.

Collaborative models are becoming common, particularly when research has been commissioned for policy decisions or evidence-informed guidance (see Box 3).

Box 3: Engaging stakeholders in collaborative research design and conduct

Collaborative research involves joint efforts, mutual learning and collective reflection in a mixed group that shows respect for different cultures and organisations, where roles and responsibilities are clear and contributions are encouraged and debated in constructive ways, even when there is disagreement.

Such engagement requires a change in power relationships between researchers and other stakeholders. Research teams may voluntarily share power with other stakeholders, as in participatory action research. Alternatively, they may be obliged to share power when decisions about the scope and depth of the research are decided by those funding the work. Clear examples include the development of evidence-informed guidelines at the World Health Organization (WHO), or systematic reviews commissioned by government departments (e.g. the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office), or organisations conducting systematic reviews to inform their own activities (e.g. the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)).

Typical methods are face-to-face meetings for small numbers of participants, where roles can include co-author (if there are very few stakeholders) or members of a steering group (if there are two to 10 stakeholders) or participants in meetings or focus groups. Larger numbers can be accommodated by multiple focus groups, or in conferences (if there are 20–400 stakeholders).

To be effective, committees involving members who bring different perspectives should be small (six to 12 members) and well-facilitated, and there should be time to share and debate relevant evidence, making the most of constructive conflict.

Limitations: These collaborative models for stakeholder engagement typically involve small numbers of participants bringing knowledge from academic or policy organisations. However, working with smaller numbers may result in a lack of important local information if unfamiliarity with the setting leads to some voices being missed. For instance, engaging community leaders to draw in local knowledge may result in gathering more knowledge from men than from women about their work and concerns.

A locally led model (3): producing local knowledge when concepts are clear and agreed in advanced

A locally led model allows for stakeholder engagement not only to adapt research-led procedures to the local setting but also to focus the design of the research, the interpretation of the findings and the ensuing recommendations to suit local concerns.

Producing local knowledge provides an opportunity to take generalisable knowledge concepts that are clear and agreed, and to build on them to suit the local context. This requires learning from local stakeholders to understand the local context. Small numbers drawn from local organisations or key figures can bring to discussions about the research their knowledge about the local living and working conditions, public services and markets, ethnicities and social norms.

A local focus suits face-to-face involvement, where feasible, in local committees, possibly supported by a knowledge broker to help the research team and local stakeholders to understand each other. While knowledge brokers are well known for their work in supporting decision makers to use evidence, they are also valuable for establishing networks and working relationships between policy makers and researchers, and for helping researchers understand the information needs of decision makers.

Box 4: Engaging stakeholders to tailor clear and agreed concepts to generate locally relevant knowledge

Even when key concepts are clear and agreed in advance, existing generalisable knowledge may not address the precise questions that are of local interest. Nevertheless, local studies can apply or adapt frameworks from elsewhere to suit local needs. This approach for applied policy research is called framework analysis; when reviewing existing studies it is called framework synthesis. The framework approach combines existing knowledge with stakeholder involvement, often through visualisation to support discussion, to tailor the research to local needs. Stakeholder engagement in these circumstances is possible with small numbers of individuals, drawn from key organisations (e.g. Committee membership, key informant interviews, partnering stakeholder organisations) who can inform research processes from local perspectives. The framework approach suits rapid teamwork but the local focus may limit generalisability and doing it well also requires having the skills to facilitate discussion among stakeholders.

Emergent model (4): producing knowledge where both initial concepts and contexts are unclear

Where initial concepts are unclear, even in regard to producing local knowledge, the starting point is tacit knowledge or insights held by local populations. Researchers can engage stakeholders about their living and working conditions, to understand how they cope.

Listening to stakeholders can involve focusing on understanding the context in which they live and work, and gradually designing better research based on this; this is known as human-centred design. Alternatively, listening to stakeholders can involve focusing on what influences their lives in order to recognise examples of exceptional coping capabilities in challenging circumstances (which are known as cases of positive deviance). Positive deviance inquiry collects insights through local interviews, focus groups and observation, or via big data collected from mobile phone records, social media, and remote sensing data. See Box 5 for examples of how these approaches have been applied.

Box 5: Engaging stakeholders to building on their tacit knowledge

A study incorporating human-centred design revealed the variation in health record-keeping across three countries in Africa. It collated context-specific evidence from more than 30 health care facilities, including over 90 stakeholders. Local knowledge came through health worker interviews, workshops and non-participant observation, and from analysing routine data, forms, registers, tally sheets and monthly reports used at primary health care facilities as part of their paper-based health information systems. This constitutes human-centred design on a large scale.

Positive deviance inquiry is useful when engaging with stakeholders beyond formal organisations. In one example, decision makers whose goal was for children to eat healthily at home, particularly those living in poverty, were considering a context of which they had little understanding and where they had little influence (the bottom right part of the matrix). They thus needed to turn to the people holding the relevant knowledge: those feeding their children. Here the engagement method of choice was to learn from the families whose children were well nourished despite living in poverty, and to share that learning with families whose children were less well nourished.

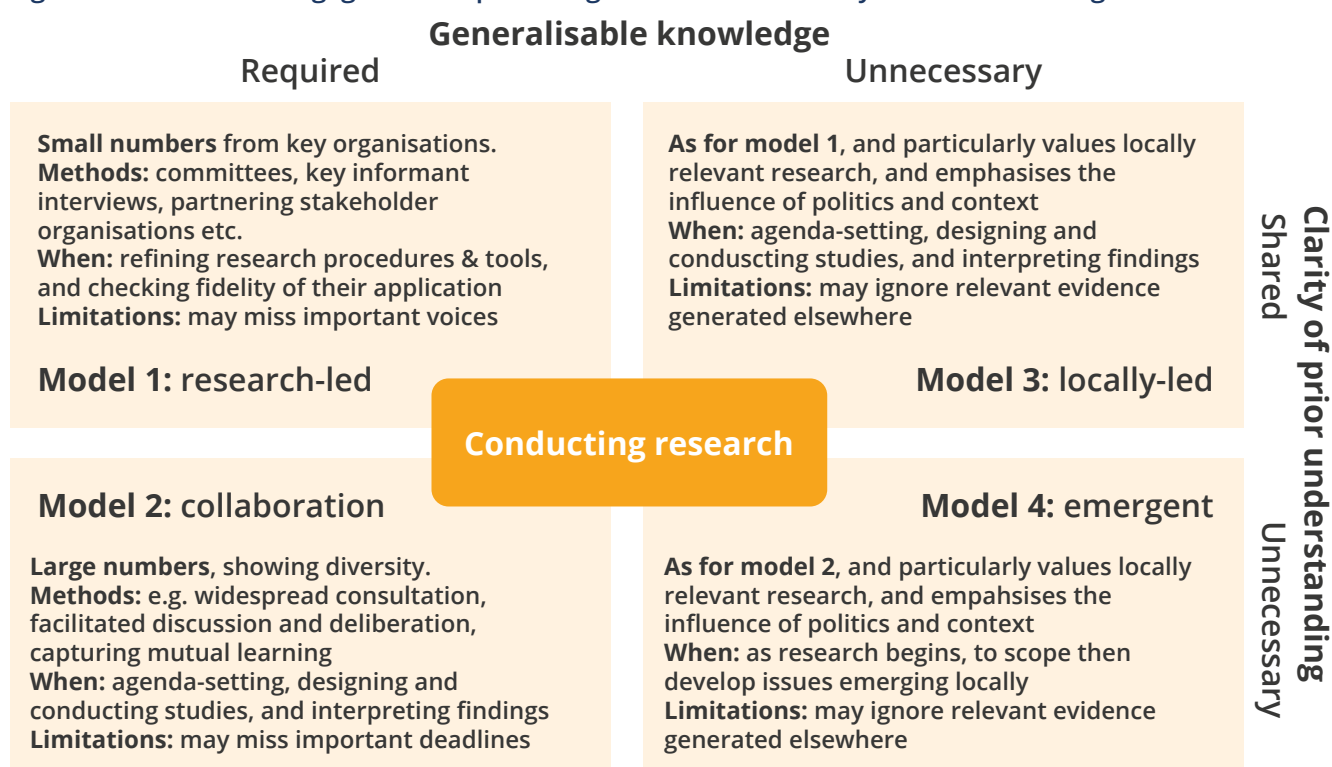
For both positive deviance inquiry and human-centred design, knowledge emerges from multiple understandings held by stakeholders selected for their diversity of viewpoints (e.g. widespread consultation, facilitating discussion and deliberation, capturing mutual learning).

Limitations: Working with larger numbers can be time-consuming so action may be delayed. Working with smaller numbers may result in a lack of important local information because sampling to capture a broad range of experience in an unfamiliar setting may be difficult.

Summary of the distinctive features of the different models

Although the precise details in regard to engaging stakeholders may vary, Figure 2 illustrates the key distinctive features of the different models.

Figure 2: Stakeholder engagement to produce generalisable or locally tailored knowledge



Applying the five steps

These five steps are well illustrated in a study of paper-based health information systems in three African countries. This study was informed by both a synthesis of the global evidence (Step 1) and local evidence gathered by interviewing and observing diverse stakeholders working with health information systems (Step 2). Recognising the importance of both, the international research team established a formal partnership with the government health sector to ensure political relevance (Step 3) before embarking on a collaborative research model, involving working with frontline health workers and health services managers (Step 5). Stakeholder engagement models varied as the research progressed. Work began by seeking to understand the nature of paper-based records, tools and processes in use across three African countries, by interviewing and observing many diverse stakeholders. Once the various tools and processes in use were well understood, a much smaller advisory group of stakeholders oversaw the design of an enhanced paper-based health information system and the evaluation of its effects on the quality and use of data and, ultimately, on patient and public health.

The history of cookstove research offers an example that shows the achievements and limitations of research adopting different starting points and engaging different stakeholders (Step 4). To consider the harm from cooking on open fires, and potential solutions with safer alternatives, WHO initially collated evidence that was based on clear concepts and measures available for solid fuel use, indoor pollution, morbidity and mortality (Step 1). With these concepts and contexts clear and understood, a research-led model with a few stakeholders from practice, policy, donor, academic and business networks led to a recommendation for better stoves and cleaner fuels. However, when it came to the next step of widespread implementation, the clear concepts, measures and data available were insufficient to understand how social contexts varied and influenced the uptake of new technologies around the world. This required a better conceptual understanding of barriers to sustained uptake across various contexts. WHO concluded that involving users, particularly women, is crucial if cooks are to adopt, use or maintain equipment provided in intervention programmes (Step 2). More recently, a more radical collaborative solution has been developed to inform not only the implementation of cleaner cookstoves by

drawing on women's views, but (more radically) to inform their design (Step 5). Progress is not always linear. Recognising that development research and programmes do not happen in a vacuum, a more politically aware approach (Step 3) takes into account the influence of social norms that hinder women from participating in energy markets in personal, technical or leadership roles. Taking the complexity of social norms as the starting point (Step 4) calls for industry associations, civil society forums and consumers, particularly women, to work together to innovate and evaluate business models that are more suited to women and to the poorest households (Step 5).

Conclusions

Researchers are encouraged to be open-minded regarding the possibility that other stakeholders do not share their understanding of existing knowledge or the context where a study is to be conducted. Judgements about shared understanding need to take into account both the core concepts of any study, and the socio-political context that will influence how a study is valued or how well it can be conducted. Overconfidence about the consensus of understanding may lead to disappointing research findings.

About this brief

Oliver, S., Conroy, K., Umayam, H., Maugham, C., Roche, C., Langer, L., Nduku, P., Bradley, T., Bangpan, M., Kneale, D. 2021. Engaging stakeholders to co-design rigorous and relevant research and evaluation. *CEDIL Methods Brief 5*. Oxford and London: CEDIL. <https://doi.org/10.51744/CMB5>

This brief is based on:

Oliver, S., Langer, L., Nduku, P., Umayam, H., Conroy, K., Maugham, C., Bradley, T., Bangpan, M., Kneale, D., Roche, C. 2021. [Engaging stakeholders with evidence and uncertainty: Developing a toolkit](#). *CEDIL Methods Working Paper 4*. Oxford and London: CEDIL. <https://doi.org/10.51744/CMWP4>

A toolkit that signposts systematic review evidence and tools developed from this work is publicly available [here](https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/EvidenceAndUncertaintyToolkit/Engaging_stakeholders_with_evidence_and_uncertainty.html): https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/EvidenceAndUncertaintyToolkit/Engaging_stakeholders_with_evidence_and_uncertainty.html

Photo credits

p.2: UN Women, p.5: World Fish, p.6: PINGO's Forum, p.8: World Bank, p.9: Lagos Techie.

 @CEDILProgramme Centre of Excellence for Development Impact

About CEDIL

The Centre of Excellence for Development Impact and Learning (CEDIL) is an academic consortium supported by the UK Government through UKaid. The mission of the centre is to test innovative methodologies in evaluation and evidence synthesis and to promote evidence-informed development. CEDIL-supported projects fall into three programmes of work: evaluating complex interventions, enhancing evidence transferability, and increasing evidence use.

For more information on CEDIL, contact us at cedil@opml.co.uk or visit our website www.cedilprogramme.org