Research & Evidence

RETHINKING RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS:

DISCUSSION GUIDE AND TOOLKIT

christian aid

E·S·R·C
ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
COUNCIL

The Open University

Contents

Acknowledgements

We welcome any feedback you have on the guide or reflections from your practice, as well as suggestions for new tools, additional discussion points, alternative resources and ideas. This could include photos or drawings of the tools, or creative ways of capturing your research partnership practice. Please send these to rel@christian-aid.org and we will use them to develop future resources as part of our commitment to support academic–practitioner research partnerships on evidence for international development.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a drive towards research collaboration between academics and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). These new partnerships offer exciting opportunities to improve learning and practice in international development, leading to innovation and deepened understandings of the world and, ultimately, a better impact on poverty eradication. However, they also present considerable challenges. How do organisations with different structures, goals and interests collaborate? Can they work together productively around these differences? What tensions exist and what is the impact of these? How is power distributed and which voices are amplified or lost in the process?

This guide does not seek to answer these questions, but offers a way of exploring them. It is aimed at people and organisations that are considering embarking on a research collaboration, or are already working in partnership. It introduces some of the key issues that arise when working collaboratively, and suggests tools and activities to help you to critically reflect on them. The guide is aimed at those at the forefront of these partnerships – academics, INGO staff and their respective institutions. However, the content will also be of relevance to funders and others seeking to support or encourage collaborative research approaches.

This guide is a toolkit for critical reflection, rooted in the idea that research partnerships must be entered into with care. Attention needs to be given to contexts, power relations and the different interests involved in order to successfully deliver truly collaborative knowledge generation that serves everyone's interests. The risks are real – partnerships without serious considerations of the power dynamics risk reaffirming certain interests and voices and marginalising others, particularly those already experiencing structural disadvantage, undermining the real benefit that these partnerships can bring. In addition, they can end up placing unfunded and unsupported burdens on particular individuals or organisations, and reinforce existing structures that constrain the intended learning and growth.

Why do we need to rethink research partnerships?

Research collaborations are the result of trends and new pressures which have emerged for academics and INGOs over recent years. For INGOs, there is an ever increasing expectation that they should demonstrate the impact of their interventions, and develop an evidence base for their work. Meanwhile, academics are asked to demonstrate the usefulness and wider impact of their research on real world issues and policy.

In response to these demands, research partnerships between different actors seem to be a way to produce research that is both high quality and actionable. But in reality, both sets of actors hold many different assumptions about what each brings, what role each will play and how the collaboration might work in practice. Although certain studies have highlighted the benefits of collaboration between traditional researchers and the users of research, these same studies have also helped to identify the significant challenges facing partnerships. These include different priorities, schedules and capacity; hierarchies of knowledge and uneven power relations. Ignoring these differences can obstruct ways of working and limit the transformative potential of partnerships. Creating a safe but critical space to recognise and negotiate the differences between the assumptions and different knowledge that partners bring to partnerships provides a crucial opportunity to value different knowledge and create new kinds of research processes and outputs.

The purpose of this guide is to enable and encourage partners and potential partners to critically engage in this debate, to work through the different factors and to consider to what extent their partnership could be transformative – in the way actors participate, in how knowledge is understood, valued and mobilised, and in how evidence is transformed into practice, to enable significant and sustainable change in the lives of people living in poverty. We hope that this guide will help you to develop strategies for transformative partnerships.

Where does this guide come from?

This guide is part of several outputs from an ESRC seminar series, which ran from February 2015 to March 2017, *Evidence and the Politics of Participation in Academic–INGO Research Partnerships for International Development.* The project was a research collaboration between Christian Aid and The Open University. It involved a consortium of academics and INGO staff (see **acknowledgements** for full list of institutions and individuals involved), each of whom shared their experience and analysis of a research partnership they had been involved in. The project was delivered through a series of seminars and workshops, where participants presented (in an academic–INGO pairing) their case study experiences of being in a partnership.

The series emerged from a reflection that although there had been various studies looking at partnership and work exploring 'evidence trends' within the international development sector, no one had looked at the linkages between these two bodies of work. In initiating the seminar series, we were keen to understand how the different trends impacting on INGOs and academics, and encouraging partnerships related to the ways evidence was conceptualised, valued and understood. We wanted to know how participation within partnerships impacted on evidence choices, and how the different skills and experiences, research literacies and institutional pressures that the different partners brought into a partnership process impacted on the relationships and dynamics within the partnership itself.

The group collectively discussed and drew out insights from their experiences, using a series of participatory tools to engage in discussion and analysis. The consortium members made up a core group for the seminar series. This group was kept deliberately small so as to enable those involved to build trust, feel able to share deeply, honestly and critically, and engage with the complex dynamics at play in these partnerships.

Throughout the guide, boxed examples and reflection from the real experiences of partnerships are used to help highlight different points more clearly. Examples and quotes from these cases are anonymised, which was part of the agreement with the participants to enable a free and open sharing of experiences.

Although the guide draws mainly from the learning developed in the seminar series involving UK-based partnerships, it also draws from a final project event – an international conference. This conference brought together 100 participants from across the globe, including academics and practitioners who are not focused on international development (for example, the UK community development sector).

These participants engaged with the seminar findings and drew on their insights and experience to deepen and critique the earlier analysis.

A challenge of two audiences

The guide was developed with one audience in mind – those involved in starting, developing and maintaining research partnerships. However, this is an audience made up of two groups – academics and INGO staff. During the series, we learnt that the lines between these groups are often blurry. Just as INGO staff have often been, or will be, engaged in academic research, academics may have worked or will go on to work for an INGO. Some straddle both worlds simultaneously, working part time in each arena. However, there are different ways of working, institutional structures and expectations for written outputs and writing conventions in these two worlds.

We have tried throughout this guide to pull the best of both together, and we recognise that this is not easy. We have tried to take a critical reflective approach and an applied, practical approach. We have avoided theoretical language, but maintain a deep interest in the underlying questions of how and why, of exploring the wider context and complex dynamics. We give ways to structure analysis – sometimes using text, and other times, with sticky notes and coloured pens. We hope that we have been successful in our efforts, and both types of partner will find this guide useful.

How to use the guide

The six chapters of the guide reflect the different aspects of a research partnership, in the order you might consider them within a research process. The chapters are:

- Understanding the context.
- Establishing the partnership.
- Sustaining the partnership.
- Designing and implementing research.
- Communicating and ensuring impact.
- Beyond the partnership.

Each chapter has a checklist highlighting the key points to consider. This is followed by a discussion of the issues, and questions to think about, and to ask yourselves and your partners. The chapters include tools to use or adapt to facilitate discussion and critical reflection. We have also included examples of how INGO practitioners and academics have negotiated their partnerships and their experiences.

This guide is designed to be flexible and adaptable. While you could read the guide through in order, the chapters are not intended as a single narrative to be read from cover to cover, but as a set of resources you can dip in and out of. It may be useful to read through in preparation for a new partnership or project, as a way of troubleshooting issues that have emerged in an existing partnership, a companion to see you through a collaborative project, or a means to reflect on a recently ended partnership and think through what has changed and learn for the future.

We recognise that each partnership is different, and partnership does not often run in a smooth, predictable line! As a result, the sections are often linked and cross-referenced to help you find relevant connecting points.

This guide does not cover the details of research design. There are other well-developed resources on how to undertake research and we are not seeking to duplicate them. Therefore, in the sections on implementing and communicating research, the focus is on how to work in partnership during the research and communication process to enable transformative work for development.

About the tools

The tools in the guide draw on participatory methods. We use storytelling, self-reflection and visual approaches to stimulate discussion and understanding. Although the key focus of the guide is to enable collective critical analysis and build shared understanding to work in partnership, these tools and approaches can be used in three ways:

1. **Individually:** to explore your own, and your organisation's assumptions and understandings (ahead of entering a partnership, for example).
2. **Collectively:** to build understanding between members of the partnership and explore how each sees themselves and their organisation (as part of building trust and understanding as partners).
3. **Collaboratively:** to agree how the partnership might evolve, what projects you might take on and how to work together (to actively take decisions and prioritise within a partnership).

While we have developed basic guidance to help you use the tools, there are various manuals and resources available to support work with participatory approaches. We have not repeated this material here, but hope that you will look to other sources to deepen your understanding of how to work with participatory methods (see additional resources section on page 59).

These kinds of exercises may be new, challenging and even uncomfortable for some. It is often in that discomfort that there is a space for learning and reflection. However, not all the tools may work in the context of your partnership or collaborative projects. There are several tools included in each section. You can choose which ones might work best for your situation and where you are in the partnership.

The aim of these tools is to provide a practical route into discussing concepts that might at first seem theoretical and abstract, but have a strong impact on the way we understand and do things within research collaborations. Through framing discussion in this way, we intend to bring theory into practice, and also to enable a practical and applied response to this theory – so that analysis can inform action and strengthen practice.

Box 1: Terms and terminology

Many of the words and concepts used in this guide have multiple definitions. We have provided brief definitions of certain terms and shared reflections on the tensions and politics associated with certain contested concepts.

Definitions

- **Academics:** People conducting research within an institution of higher education (generally a university). Academic research tends to include a theoretical component and is linked to the teaching and learning functions of the institution.
- **International non-governmental organisations (INGOs):** Voluntary sector organisations working in the field of international development. These organisations come in many shapes and sizes, and work in different ways. Some focus on direct delivery of services and others work through national civil society partner organisations, with government at different levels, or in research, policy, advocacy and campaigning work.
- **Practitioners**: People working within a practice-based setting. Within the seminar series and in this guide, we refer to all those working in an INGO or national/local civil society organisation as practitioners, even if they are holding a research role.
- **Universities**: An institution where higher education is delivered, research is carried out and theory developed. There are many sorts of universities, some with close links to practice/social justice agendas.

Contested terms

For these concepts we do not offer an explicit definition, but acknowledge the important tensions that exist.

- **Evidence**: The term was chosen as it is used so extensively within the INGO sector. INGOs are expected to evidence their work and make evidence-based decisions, using evidence to inform policy and practice. Understandings about what evidence is, and what makes it valid, valuable and useful are complex and differ from person to person. We believe that 'good evidence' is linked to how knowledge is produced, made sense of and shared, whether into research, policy and/or practice.
- **Participation/participatory methods**: The guide takes a participatory approach and details participatory tools and methods. The term participation is used in many different ways. For us, the term is inherently political and bound up with power relations. This underpins our analytical approach to partnership: we ask who is included or excluded, when, how and why? The tools are designed to encourage you to think about power and participation, and to provide the space and structure for such critical reflective (and participatory) analysis.
- **Partners/partnerships**: Partners exist in many ways at different levels and can involve a range of distinct relationships – from close collaborations to being a 'sleeping partner', for example, as a funder. We used it (critically) within the seminar series as it is a popular term in both the academic and INGO sectors, and used by funders and policy makers, often to suggest something 'neutral' or 'objectively good'. For us, it is important to be aware of the power relationships involved – responding to the wider context and the internal partnership dynamics.
- **Research**: Definitions vary, but broadly research is understood here as systematically gathering and analysing data to answer a question and to deepen and extend knowledge. The relationship between research and evaluation was understood differently by participants in the series and was never fully resolved. For some, the two dimensions were closely integrated. For others, the two were distinct and completely different endeavours. Likewise, the link between research and teaching/learning differed substantially from person to person. We concluded that good research involves coherence between purpose, process and products – though research purposes can vary significantly.

Box 2. Tips for using the tools

A few basic tips to help you make the most of the tools in this guide.

Ensure you have a facilitator. This is likely to be one of the partners, but if the situation is more challenging, it may help to bring in an external facilitator.

Capture the outputs. Either store the resulting papers or take photos to share. Having a record of what was thought about or agreed can help with troubleshooting later. It can also be useful if you want to explore how understandings have changed as a partnership progresses.

Adapt the tools to suit your needs. The way we have presented the tools here is intended only as a guide to discussion. We hope that you will change, adapt and use them in a way that makes sense for you. We have presented different types of tools (trees, rivers, matrices, etc) only once or twice, but most could be adapted for different areas of the discussion guide.

The materials you need. All of the exercises require basic materials. At a minimum, you will need pens in several colours, sticky notes and large sheets of paper (eg, flipchart paper). See Box 3 for how they can be adapted to an online environment.

Box 3. Adapting the tools for online use

The seminar series and tools presented in the guide were primarily developed as face-to-face discussions and activities. However, many of them can be used with teleconferencing tools, if partners are globally dispersed and to reduce carbon footprint.

Many online facilities offer the potential to share a visual interactive space and this can be used to build a matrix or map. You can use preselected images and add labels as part of the session. The ease of taking and sharing photos of hand-drawn pictures means individual activities can still be shared and used as the basis of the discussion. If using these tools online, ensure people are familiar with the technology and prepared to participate, and have a quiet space to engage with the session.
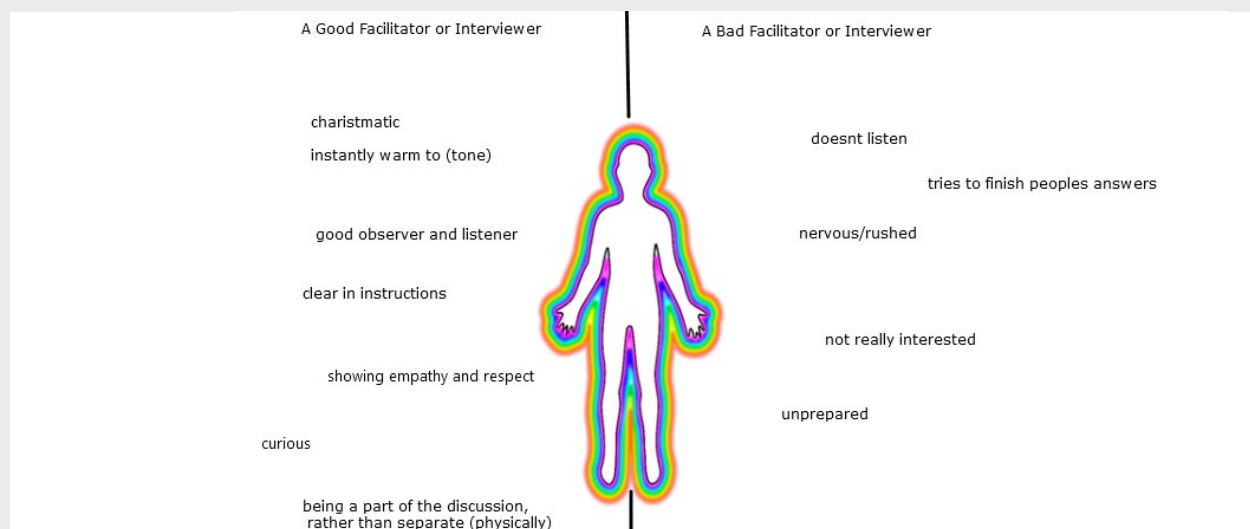
Example of an online mind map, using the Skype for Business Whiteboard function, created by a group of eight people in different countries. Despite being geographically remote, they were able to work collaboratively to produce this list.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

Checklist

By the time you have worked through this section, we hope you will have:

☑ A mapping of the current context, including the key actors and relevant trends impacting upon universities and INGOs.

☑ An awareness how evidence is understood within and across the different sectors.

☑ An appreciation of the key institutional pressures that influence how evidence is understood.

☑ An analysis of the drivers that are encouraging research collaborations.

☑ An understanding of the power relations at play in this context, and the potential to shift or transform them.

Themes

Mapping the actors
🔧 **Tool 1: Actor maps**
✎ Insight 1: Shifting demands on academics
✎ Insight 2: Different pressures and their effects

Understanding research and evidence
🔧 **Tool 2: Evidence trees**
✎ Insight 3: Recognising different research priorities

Evidence vocabularies
🔧 **Tool 3: Media check**
✎ Insight 4: Evidence-based policy

Introduction

Research partnerships are, of course, always formed in a context; they unfold in a specific time and place. They are impacted by international and national politics, by social and cultural trends, by institutional structures and processes, and by the wider environment and infrastructure. This landscape heavily influences the how and why of partnership – including what counts as evidence. This also affects the purpose and approach of the research project, the funding potential, the types of skills that are valued, the ways in which roles and responsibilities are distributed between partners, and the types of impact a partnership can have.

Ensuring that all parties can develop and maintain a shared understanding of the context for their partnership, the roles of key players and the power relations that are at play is the key for a successful partnership – something many of the participants in the seminar series discovered, often when encountering challenges.

Although a good context analysis is important at the start of any partnership, contexts are dynamic and likely to change as the partnership evolves. Therefore, the ideas shared in this chapter can be revisited at any point during a research partnership: to explore the starting context and its potential influence on the partnership and/or to reflect on what has changed or developed during the partnership's lifetime.

This chapter focuses on building understanding of the wider context, and the ways the partnership relates to that context. Just as the wider context shapes research partnerships and influences their power dynamics, research partnerships can also influence the wider context and can shift or transform power relations. Research partnerships can challenge or change assumptions about what counts as research or evidence and the roles different actors play.

Mapping the actors

Understanding the context in which research takes place involves thinking through the wider networks that shape how evidence is produced and the power dynamics, including funding, in which they take place. It is important to understand these networks, actors and power relations, and the constraints and opportunities they create for the different partners. They can determine what kinds of evidence are supported and incentivised, and which are limited or constrained. At the beginning of a partnership, mapping out these actors can help to identify the different pressures partners may be under; and at later stages can help to make visible any differences in understanding or context between members of a partnership.

Start by asking: in the context of your partnership, who are the key actors that influence the wider 'evidence for development landscape'? This might include individuals, groups or organisations, and will lead to secondary questions including:

- What are they? For example, are they individuals or institutions? What sectors do they sit in? For example, are they part of a government, the public or private sector, or are they people living in poverty?
- How do they relate to each other?
- What are the key agendas and interests of these different actors?

It is not just about mapping who the actors are and how they relate, but being aware and making visible the different flows of power in the relationships. Power relations are not static, and they are experienced differently from different points within a system, dependent on specific contexts and individual positions. In relation to these actors, it is useful to determine:

- What influence do they have over the way different types of evidence is valued?
- What gives them this influence? (For example, money, expertise, relationships, etc.)

Consider what gives them the influence and why. Is it about connections to political structures, expertise or funding streams? What is the impact of this influence or perceived influence?

Additional maps could also trace the influence of or the relationships between policies (or legislation) – both national and international – and knowledge (or evidence) resources (including funding streams and guidance and advice about what 'good evidence' looks like).

You could ask which policies and resources are particularly powerful and how these shape standards for the evidence expectations of partnerships.

🔧 Tool 1: Actor maps

This tool can help make visible the different actors in the 'evidence for development landscape' and how they interact. Taking it further, you can start to map out where the power flows are, which may help in thinking through where to challenge or disrupt them. Using cards or sticky notes means that the map can be rearranged as it develops and different relationships are traced.

How

Together, think about the key actors in in your 'evidence for development landscape'. These might be individuals, organisations or institutions that are involved in generating, using, regulating or influencing evidence for development. It is helpful to be quite specific. Write the names of actors or organisations on index cards or sticky notes, using different colours for different sectors if possible. Next, draw arrows on cards or sticky notes – draw a mix of thick and thin arrows.

Arrange the actors and arrows into a diagram, using the arrows to show the relationships between the different actors, activities, and each other. The thickness of the arrow could illustrate the strength of the relationship, and the direction of the arrow could show which way the power flows.

Once you have created your initial map, think about the types of power in the connections. List the different kinds of power (money, connections, expertise, etc). Using a different colour for each power, circle actors or use coloured stickers to show where their power comes from.

Reflect on the resulting map of actors. What do you notice emerging from the mapping? Are there any obvious groupings or clusters of actors? Which actors are least connected? Are there any actors that are not linked?

What does the map say about who influences how evidence is understood and what types of evidence are valued? Are you happy with this picture? Is there anything you want to change, and what do you need to do to change it? Is there anything that you think will impact you as you implement your research? Is there anything you think you should be doing now, given what you have identified in this picture?

It is worth reflecting that we often see ourselves as less powerful and others as more powerful, because we are used to our own restrictions. If you are creating the map with another partner, do you agree on relative power flows? Are there any tensions, opportunities or different understandings?

A simplified illustration

Legend:
- Influence from expertise
- Influence from connections
- Influence from money
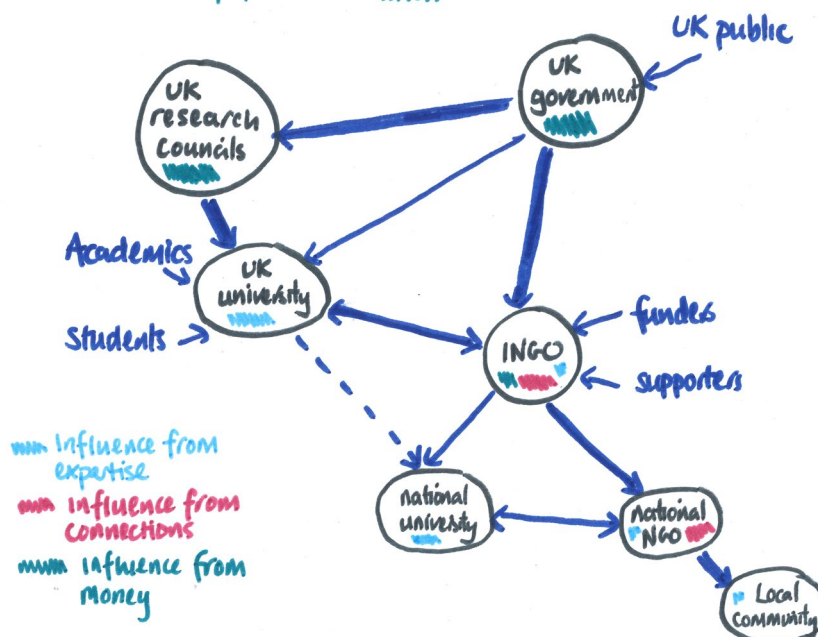
Insight 1: Shifting demands on academics

During the project, it became clear that for the academic partners there was an increased pressure to focus on more applied work – ie, to show that their research was having an impact – and this was influencing how they designed and understood research.

For example, one academic partner observed that several big partnership projects had 'brought in significant revenue to the school [and] have slowly contributed to a change in perception and a greater acceptance of NGOs as legitimate research partners'. This was not just about funding streams, but also shifts in the ways of evaluating academic performance within higher education in the UK.

Another academic partner noted: 'Donors more and more ask for "policy impact". Last year [2014], the Research Excellence Framework (REF), on which the research at UK universities is assessed and funded, included "impact" as an explicit component of assessment – and the next REF will be increasing its weighting. Suddenly, the onus is on academic institutions to move into the territory traditionally seen as that of NGOs – namely achieving policy and programme change. In this context, the partnership with NGOs who have on the ground programmes and who influence global as well as national policy, takes on a very much greater significance.'

Insight 2: Different pressures and their effects

The wider context can impact on both the day to day functioning of a partnership, in addition to the impact of the research itself.

One lesson learnt in the workshop series was around the various goals and pressures on different partners; these were sometimes shared, but at other points were experienced very differently.

For example, one contributor, reflecting on their large-scale, multi-site, and well-funded project, observed the ways that the partners and stakeholders in the project engaged to 'get things done, get things rigorous, and get things discussed'. Different partners and stakeholders – academic, INGO, national implementing partners, donors – used these strategies differently at different times, sometimes using one more than others. The contributor noted that it was not always the expected actors pushing to 'get things done' or 'get things rigorous' as different partners juggled their institutional pressures. While everyone in the partnership was open to 'getting things discussed', this way of engaging was most squeezed by time and resource pressures.

The importance of context was also a factor influencing the impact of research in the global South.

For example, one INGO practitioner reflected: 'In a recent discussion group in Kyrgyzstan, local actors noted an absence of spaces for collaboration between academics and NGOs in the region. The same obstacles to collaboration that we see in the UK and beyond were present – lack of funding, different world views, unclear motivations for collaboration, incompatible timeframes and bureaucracies, lack of mutual respect for the research produced, etc. As a consequence, there is a risk that findings are not shared with local academics, thus limiting the potential for further research or the translation of research findings into policy and practice.'

Understanding research and evidence

There are two concepts that are vital to explore before a research partnership begins – research and evidence. Different sectors, individuals and organisations have different assumptions about these terms, and ascribe different meanings to them, and have different ideas of what it means to do good research, or generate evidence for action.

For example, in one of our research seminars, one academic explained how the research approach was limited by the funds available. When probed further, it turned out that there was £6 million available for the research. While the INGO staff's jaws dropped open in surprise, it was easier for the academics to see how that level of funding would limit the way in which a particular research area could be investigated.

Assumptions around the meaning of research, and the funding needs for rigour versus the funding needs for 'saving lives' (as the INGO put it) create potential for misunderstandings when entering a research partnership. It is important to spend some time exploring your assumptions and the resulting implications.

Questions you might want to ask are:

- What do you and your organisation understand by the term research?
- What evidence preferences exist in your sector?
- What types of research practice or outputs have you previously found useful to deepen understanding or contribute to meaningful change? How do these different types of outcomes impact on the types of practice that is seen as useful?
- What previous experience have you had in research and partnerships? What are you bringing into this discussion based on that experience?

These questions should prompt reflection on the different approaches to evidence and research that contribute to the context of the partnership.

Tool 2: Evidence trees

A tree has roots, a trunk, branches, leaves and fruit, and exists in a climate, often alongside other trees. Using the idea that the roots inform how a tree grows, a tree can be a useful tool for analysing causes and symptoms, or the impact of certain ways of thinking or doing things. In this case, we are using the metaphor to begin a process of mapping out how different participants understand the factors that contribute to how evidence is understood.

How
In groups or as individuals, introduce the idea of an evidence tree. Explain that the different elements of a tree can represent different aspects of evidence. These can be outlined as follows:

- Roots (the rationale for evidence):
  - The agendas, incentives and motivations that drive the production of evidence.
  - The values, principles and politics that frame production of evidence.
- Trunk (processes of evidence production):
  - The ways in which evidence is generated or collected (the methods, principles and ethics).
  - The resources that support collection of evidence.
- Branches and fruit (evidence outputs):
  - Forms that the evidence takes.
  - How evidence is disseminated.
  - Reach or influence of evidence.
- Climate (the other factors that nurture or challenge the tree)
  - The conditions which support or hinder the production of evidence.
  - Ways in which evidence interacts with other elements.

Ask the groups to draw and label their own evidence trees. Give the groups or individuals a set time to come up with their trees, before bringing everyone back together to reflect.

Compare the evidence trees, and identify and consider any differences or similarities. What do the differences tell you about each of the elements? Ask people what has surprised them or to reflect on anything difficult or challenging that came up in drawing the trees.

Example

In the seminar series, this exercise was done with INGO staff and academics who were split into two groups.

One of the INGO participants reflected at the end of the exercise: 'We eyed each other's trees, trying to guess which was an NGO tree and which was an academic tree, and it wasn't all that difficult. NGO trees were splattered with sticky notes and doubt; the academic trees were much more – and I hesitate to use the word – theoretical, but find it best describes one of the trees that was a model of how things work, complex and interlinked, but with a clear direction and rationale.'

Another participant observed different dynamics, commenting that the INGO staff drew a very neat and orderly tree, while the academic tree was messier and more complex.

An INGO evidence tree.

Two academic evidence trees.

Insight 3: Recognising different research priorities

One of the INGO participants in the series referred to the increasing demands from their donors as an era of 'evidence-based everything'. Many INGO staff reflected that particular kinds of evidence and research traditions are seen as more desirable – and the focus is often on the type of evidence produced, rather than a consideration of how the particular question investigated is framed. Recently, the trend has been focus on experimental methods and quantitative data; whereas participatory methods were de rigueur previously. Academic participants tended to have discipline specialisms. They value projects that are novel, will contribute to the current literature and will provide the opportunity for publication.

In one partnership case study, this played out in a tension around how to incorporate more critical reflections on the wider issues in the aid system coming from academic partners and students. The INGO was implementing a specific project that caused the academic partner to become concerned that the project was reinforcing a negative systemic trend. Those working in an applied INGO programme had little time for, or indeed interest, in the critical questions which it was not feasible for them to address within the scope of their projects. In reflecting on this, the partners agreed that the question of how to address broader systemic questions within an academic–INGO collaboration was still open and ongoing.

A different partnership concluded that: 'Some of our priorities and interests are not the same – but we have each managed to advance some of our interests through our collaboration. And we have learned a lot by doing so.'

Evidence vocabularies

It can be helpful to think about the social and cultural forces that help to shape evidence in the wider social landscape. The world of research and evidence involves a lot of trends, jargon, buzzwords and nuance in both INGO and academic settings. However, these trends may not be the same.

These vocabularies shape how people see or engage with the idea of evidence. A word may be used very differently by different partners. Empty jargon in one partner's sector might be an important concept in another. Words such as impact, gender, participation, inclusion and empowerment can have multiple understandings or implications. If you are working in multilingual environments, this adds a layer of complexity in thinking about how key terms and concepts translate.

In one case study, a partner reflected how different understandings of key concepts affected the research design. In this case, understandings of 'gender equality' varied considerably between the individuals, countries and institutions involved. Considering this language context early on can help develop shared vocabularies – or at least highlight differences that may need to be bridged later.

The accepted vocabularies for expressing ideas and words are also infused with power. Using the 'right' words might mean being seen as more credible or authoritative, and they may enable access to policy makers or funders. As well as ensuring you have a shared vocabulary, explore why particular terms are chosen, and who is included or excluded by using them.

Evidence vocabularies are also influenced by assumptions around what good or strong evidence looks like. Questions to reflect on include:

- What are the core common terms and concepts that shape the research and evidence context for your partnership? Think about the latest buzzwords. Are they the same for both partners? What are the pressures for using them?
- What assumptions are held about what strong evidence looks like to each partner?
- What does strong evidence or research look or sound like? What forms does it take, eg, reports, presentations, press or publications? What level of authority is attached to those different forms?
- Are there opportunities to use language to shift or challenge power relations?

If you are used to using particular words or ideas and being understood, it can be can be hard to spot your own institutional or sector norms and culture, and reflecting together as partners or potential partners might produce interesting learning. Communication issues are explored in more depth in **chapter 5**.

Further information
For further details about the seminar upon which this chapter is based, see **https:// rethinkingresearchpartnerships.com/seminar-1/**

Insight 4: Evidence-based policy

Some of the terms that raised discussion and debate in the seminar series are core to understanding the wider evidence landscape. One of the participants in the series was sceptical of the repeated use of the term 'evidence-based policy' in both sectors, and the way that it obscured the complex and less linear ways in which policy, decision making and evidence relate.

The participant commented: 'The whole idea of "evidence-based policy" is, at best, deeply problematic. Much policy is based on little or no evidence, or it is based on poor evidence. In some cases, evidence actively contradicts prevailing policy for sustained periods of time without this being recognised – let alone inducing policy change. None of this means that research and evidence should be seen as irrelevant or unimportant – quite the reverse – but it does mean that simplistic and idealised notions of "rational" relationships between research, evidence and policy and practice need to be rejected.' In essence, little of this was that new, but nonetheless a lot of the implicit thinking of researchers and NGOs seemed strongly – and curiously! – connected to such simplistic and idealised notions.

Tool 3: Media check

This is a quick exercise that can be built into an initial meeting to explore different assumptions about evidence and authority or rigour. It is particularly useful for different partners to carry out this exercise in a joint meeting. It uses media sources (digital or print media and magazines) to identify and discuss contextual ideas about evidence and authority, and how these are judged.

How
Before a meeting of partners, ask everyone to bring two examples of media reporting depicting evidence related to your area of work – one that they think shows high authority, and one that they identify as lower quality or unreliable. Give people a bit of notice and a reminder.

In the meeting, discuss the different examples and use them to identify differences in the group. Did people choose similar styles of reporting? Are they all easy to read and engage with? What language is used? What makes something 'authoritative'?

An alternative could be to use institutional sources – from a university or an INGO – and discuss how evidence is used in these documents.

2. ESTABLISHING THE PARTNERSHIP

Checklist

By the time you have worked through this section, we hope you will have:

☑ A shared sense of the purpose and motivation for the partnership and an understanding of each other's aspirations.

☑ An analysis of assumptions around roles within research partnerships and agreement as to what roles each will play within your specific partnership.

☑ A clear understanding of the institutional structures of the partners, and the professional roles and incentives of the key players in the partnership.

☑ A mapping of the current skills, experience and knowledge that each member of the partnership has, as well as the areas they would like to develop and the institutional resources and systems available to support this.

☑ An agreement on how you will work together over the course of the partnership.

Themes

Clarifying your partnership's purposes and motivations
🔧 **Tool 4: Checking your assumptions**

Understanding ourselves and each other
🔧 **Tool 5: Research rivers**
✎ Insight 5: Different organisational structures and histories

Taking stock of the resources we bring
🔧 **Tool 6: Metaphors of partnerships**
✎ Insight 6: People and institutions

Establishing roles, responsibilities and ways of working
🔧 **Tool 7: Actors and influence matrix**
✎ Insight 7: The importance of spaces

Introduction

Potential partners thinking of entering into a research collaboration will have motivations for doing so – but these might not always be that clear, particularly if different expectations and professional environments are involved. For example, institutional pressures to publish research, improve practice, apply for further funding, demonstrate impact and engage policy makers may be shared by partners, but might look very different from different institutional settings.

A partnership indicates overlap in the partners' goals, but it is likely that there may not be complete alignment of interests and motivations. This has the potential for issues to arise. How are these differences brought to the surface and dealt with? How can partners work with (or better still, take inspiration from) any tensions that arise?

One INGO-based relationship broker observed: 'From my experience, I know academic and INGO partnerships can change how INGOs generate and use evidence; and change how academics engage in the pathway to impact. But before we get to these important outcomes, it has been important to focus on the history, politics and varying natures of these two different types of organisation.'

This section explores how partnerships are initiated, and sets the groundwork for sustaining relationships explored in **chapter 3**. It focuses on clarifying agendas and understanding ourselves and each other as individuals and institutions as we go into forming a partnership.

There are different ways of arranging a research partnership, so this section shares some of the available models to help you think about which one makes sense in your research context and serves your research purposes.

When entering into a partnership and making decisions as to how you will work together, it is always important to consider how the partnership will end. For example, are you coming together for a discrete, time-bound project, or is this the start of a long-term collaboration? The answers to these questions may not be immediately clear, and may shift over time, but it is important to spend some time reflecting on them as you make decisions in this phase of partnering. We encourage you to look at the tools in **chapter 6** and bear these discussion areas in mind as you establish your partnership.

Clarifying your partnership's purposes and motivations

Every partnership is likely to include multiple agendas for doing the research and working together. Questions to discuss include:

- What are the key motivations for partners in coming together?
- What do the individuals involved want?
- What do the respective organisations (and sub-units within them) want or expect? Crucially, what are the differences between these motivations?

You will also need to think through how external stakeholders, such as local partners, community members or funders, fit into the partnership and the extent to which they should be involved in the establishing partnership discussions. You should consider what assumptions are underpinning the motivations for establishing a partnership, and what roles people expect each other to fulfil.

It is likely that there will be challenges arising from these questions. If so, you will need to consider how best to manage these within the parameters of the partnership. You might also want to consider whether there is scope for some wants, needs or expectations to be met outside the partnership.

The answers to these questions will depend on the expectations, assumptions, opportunities and constraints provided by the wider context. Many of the tools shared in **chapter 1** can be revisited and adapted to help you answer the questions in relation to your specific partnership.

🔧 Tool 4: Checking your assumptions

In the workshops, partners from different institutions often had assumptions about each other and the roles they might play in the partnership. Sometimes these were based on previous experience, generalisations or stereotypes. This exercise helps make those assumptions visible, and to reflect on how they might impact on or be challenged by your partnership.

How

As a group, try to generate as many assumptions about research partners and partnerships you can. You could ask other colleagues to feed into this beforehand. Some of our examples are listed in the example box.

Once you have generated the list, pick a few of the most relevant statements to reflect on in more depth. Find a space and mark one end as

agree and the other disagree. For each of the statements, ask people to arrange themselves on the line between agree and disagree, depending on how accurate they think the statement is. Ask a few people to share with the group about why they chose where to stand.

You could develop the discussion further by asking:

- Are these assumptions justified and fair?
- What impact might they have on our partnership?
- Do we want to address any of these assumptions in how we design our partnership?

Example

To get you started, here is a short selection of assumptions that were generated in the seminar series.

- Academics are ego driven, INGO staff collaborative.
- Academics and INGO practitioners are fundamentally different, with clear boundaries.
- INGOs are closer to people on the ground, and understand local people and their context, whereas academics are distant and detached.

- Theory is academic and abstract, it is separate from practice and does not emerge through or from practice; it is an absolute.
- INGOs care about social change, academics only care about the research question.
- Academics are so slow, INGOs are just go, go, go.
- Institutions in the global North have a stronger academic discipline than similar institutions in the global South.
- INGOs provide the data and universities the theory.

Understanding ourselves and each other

A foundational issue for agreeing ways of working in partnership is developing a common understanding of the individuals involved and their institutions. This includes understanding how the individuals are located within their organisational structures. Questions include:

- Who are we? How would we describe our professional identities, and are there important aspects of our personal and social identities that should also be incorporated?
- How does my institution work and where am I located within it? What departments exist and how do they relate to each other?

- Who else interacts with the partnership (or contributes to setting the context of the partnership) and what are their agendas/understandings of evidence?
- What are the risks and opportunities associated with the different actors in the partnership? For example, staff turnover.
- What is my own or my organisation's experience with research?
- How does my organisation understand and value different types of evidence?

Insight 5: Different organisational structures and histories

It is particularly important to recognise the institutional differences between academic institutions and INGOs, and the ways this might play out in how the partnerships develop and progress. There is no set structure for universities or INGOs, and both sectors are undergoing changes in response to shifting economic environments, but these two organisational forms – and, therefore, the dynamics they create – are quite different.

One participant noted: 'The nature of the organisations themselves are very different. Academic institutions are truly professional organisations, relying heavily on the standardisation of skills rather than processes to get things done. This allows academics large autonomy to achieve results.

NGOs are more divisionalised organisations, where a standardisation of outputs is far more important than a standardisation of skills. This means that NGO staff are more dependent on each other, and particularly on the senior managers leading at the top of their organisation.

'Ultimately, this means INGO structures, systems and organisational cultures are very different to academic institutions. These differences invariably lead to tensions in the partnership. In my role as a partnership broker of academic and INGO partnerships, I have observed that it is often in the face of these tensions that we learn the most.'

🔧 Tool 5: Research rivers

This exercise uses the metaphor of a river to trace a journey taken over a period of time, as a way of recording particular milestones, and reflecting on their nature, and the impact they might have on the overall journey, and how they fit and relate to each other. Rivers have plenty of features – wide and narrow parts, bends and rapids, supportive banks and places where the banks are crumbling, and bridges, rocks and animals. These features can all be used to explore previous experiences.

It can be useful for each of the partners to draw their own research river – for their department, team, research centre or whole organisation. Later in a partnership, you could create a joint river to reflect on the partnership's course.

How

Start with a moment of individual reflection. What do you think the key moments were in the research history of your institution, team or partnership? Note previous projects and partnerships, the types of evidence they have generated, and how that evidence has been used. Alternatively, you might want to start by thinking about a key moment – for example, when your organisation first start considering academic–INGO partnerships – and then work out from that question, thinking about what was going on in the environment at the time and the event or conversations that led to it.

Leading on from this, you could start thinking about other events. When did they happen, what was their significance, and what kind of river features do they resemble? Think about when the river was widest and narrowest. Were there any obstacles, dams, pools or streams that have broken off along the way? Start drawing your river as you continue to reflect and discuss.

Once you have produced the river, discuss the past challenges encountered by your institution and how these were or might have been resolved. How does that affect how you feel about embarking on a new journey now? What assumptions are you bringing into this partnership? What do you need to put in place to ensure you are learning from your previous experience?
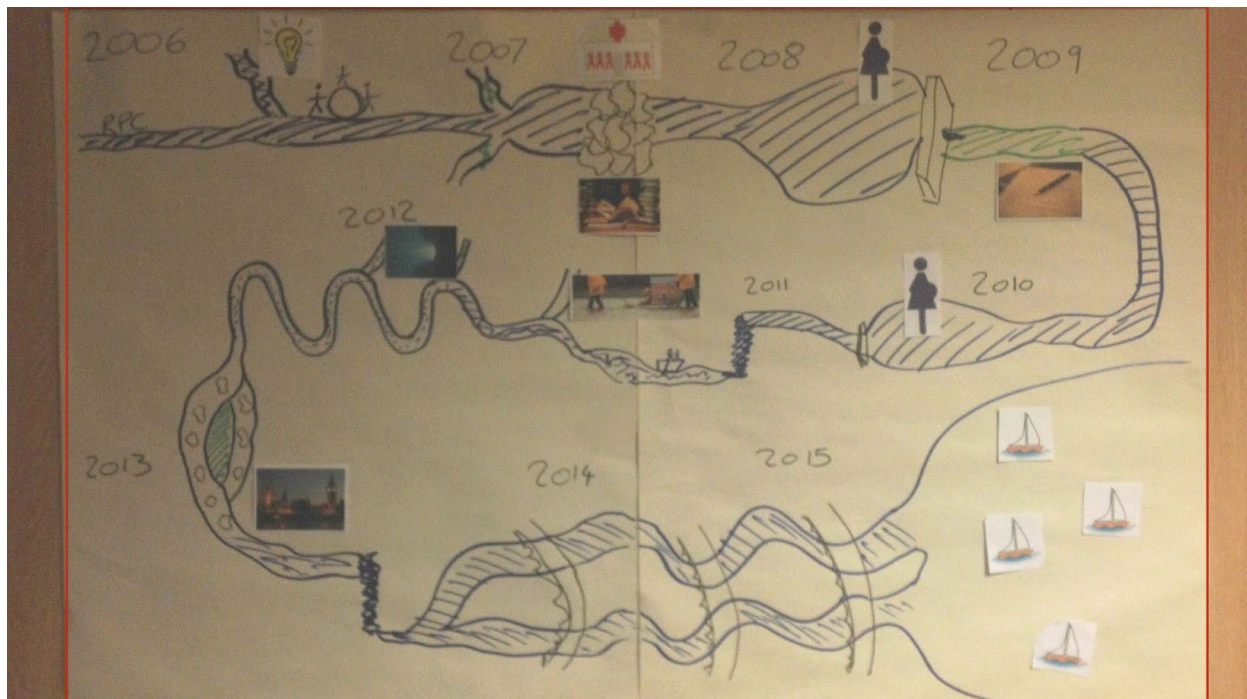
Taking stock of the resources we bring

It is important to take stock of the resources that individuals and their organisations bring to the partnership – the capacities, skill sets, organisational resources and funding. Identifying and recognising the full range of capacities each individual and organisation brings means using them to the best advantage. This could include:

- Individual attributes, including social/emotional skills, experience, knowledge and expertise.
- Formal research training and qualifications.
- Institutional capacity. This includes administrative support and other support systems, such as HR, infrastructure, access to research technologies, resources, training and security protocols. It also includes communication skills and the different institutional or sector-based networks that exist.

As well as capturing and making an inventory of existing resources, partners should consider the capacities and skills that they hope to develop over the course of the project, both at an individual and organisational level.

For example, academics are asked to consider impact, and INGOs are asked to strengthen the rigour of their evidence, so it might be that each actor would like to develop their skills and understanding in areas that have not traditionally been included in their remit. The partnership could include specific opportunities for this type of learning exchange.

Insight 6: People and institutions

In the seminar series, it was recognised that partnerships are often driven by individuals, but these people exist within their institutions. The idea of three approaches to how we respond to the institutions in which we exist emerged, captured in the centre of the drawing at right. People either:

- Work within the confines of their institutions.
- Work outside the confines of the institution.

- Bend the norms inside their institutions to make it happen.

Each of these options has a different impact on the partnerships and research projects. Which of these options are open to individuals rests on their position within their respective institutions, and how they are perceived, as well as the rigidity of the institutions themselves and the characteristics of the individuals.

Three approaches are portrayed here: working within, working outside and bending the norms.

Tool 6: Metaphors of partnerships

This is a quick exercise that can be added into a partnership meeting to explore different ideas about the role or function of the partnership.

Engaging people to think visually or using tactile objects can spark a conversation about the ways of relating. It works well as an icebreaker and to get people into a more reflective place.

How

Before a meeting of partners, ask everyone attending to bring a picture or an object that represents the partners and the partnership for them.

At the meeting, ask people to talk about their picture or object and why they chose it. Ask people to reflect on where they see themselves and others in the partnership.

Reflect together on what the different objects say about what each partner brings to the partnership and how these relate. Is it a meeting of equals? Is one partner bigger or contributing more? Are the partners represented by the same kinds of objects or characters or are they different? Are there any disagreements on how the partnership is characterised?

Example

In the series, versions of this exercise resulted in some very different responses. Three are shared below. One is a detailed drawn image of two hands, each representing a partner. Rings, bracelets, fingers and money all represented different parts of the partnership, and the individuals, policies and resources each contributed to the partnership. The second image is more abstract, showing interwoven strands heading in different directions. Here, each partner felt that there had been a period of intense collaboration and closeness that influenced both partners, but they were now taking that learning in different directions. In the final image, the reference is to the cartoon family in *The Simpsons*. The partners felt that their relationship had been messy and chaotic, but that they had pulled together in the end.
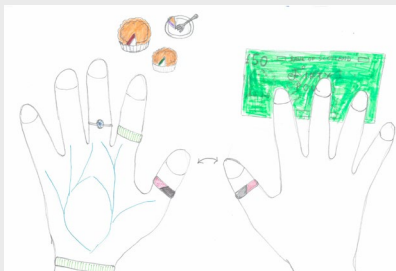
Establishing roles, responsibilities and ways of working

The issues and questions raised so far in this chapter should help partners to map out the internal context of the partnership and develop a common understanding of the histories, interests, assumptions, agendas and resources that the partners bring to the research.

The next step is to carefully allocate roles and responsibilities so that all partners are clear about the expectations for their participation. Roles and responsibilities may vary at different stages of the partnership, so you might want to revisit these questions when thinking about research design, implementation and communication.

While it may seem reasonable that partners are allocated roles based on their experience and expertise, there may also be the possibility of developing skills and capacity over the course of the research. In fact, this could be a key objective of the partnership.

Guiding questions include:

- What are the key work tasks required by the partnership?
- Who is responsible for these tasks?
- Who has the necessary knowledge or experience for particular roles or tasks? What types of professional development might be needed to support people to undertake specific tasks?
- What additional institutional support is required?
- What risks are there (eg, staff turnover) and how can they be mitigated?
- Who is responsible for project management and oversight and how can they be supported?

Other issues to be discussed include ways of working and focused on the process of the partnership, such as:

- Codes of practice and ethical guidance.
- Common language and terminology (this might evolve over the course of the project).
- Places and spaces to check in with each other.

Insight 7: The importance of spaces

The availability of spaces (specific times and places) to check in, discuss and work through any issues arising was important in many of the case studies. This was often worked into the structures of successful partnerships, or emerged out of necessity in others.

In one of the cases, the need to have 'neutral space' came up, ie, a space that was not curated by either of the partners. In this case, tension had built up between two partners based in different countries. When they met at a conference, being in this neutral space enabled a different kind of conversation.

Thinking about space might not be just about formal negotiation and discussion between members, but also about thinking through the role that other physical and virtual spaces might play to create positive conditions for partnership.

🔧 Tool 7: Actors and influence matrix

This tool helps you think about who takes on what roles within the partnership, and how influential they are in the decision making at each stage. This can be done to reflect on a partnership already underway, or in preparation for allocating roles and responsibilities.

How

Start by collectively making a list of the key actors involved in your research partnership. This might include several institutions and the different individuals or teams within them. This list will go along the top of your matrix. Then think about the different stages of your partnership or research project and write these down the side of your matrix.

To complete the matrix, work as a group and think about who had most power, or influence at each moment of the process. In the example, a five-point scale is used, with 1 indicating the most power or influence and 5 the least. You could use a different scale, colours, or small star or dot stickers to make a more visual tally.

Reflect on the matrix. Did any actors have more influence or power than others? What does it mean for an actor to be very powerful at one moment, but less so at another? Did you agree on the power allocations? If different actors had been present when you did the exercise, how might it have affected the outcome?

When the group completed this exercise, they came up with different types of decision making power – enabling (power to make something happen) and restricting (power to prevent something happening). If there is time, you could use colours to highlight the different kinds of power on the matrix. This could include aspects such as financial power, or power because of relationships or expertise etc.

Who influences when?	INGO			National	UK university		National University	Donor
	Manage-ment	HQ	Country Office	NGO	Manage-ment	Academic	University	institutional
Establishing partnership	3	3	·	1	3	3	1	2
Proposal Development	2	4	1		2	4		3
Research Design		2	1	1		5		
Data Collection			2	4			4	
Data Analysis		2	1			4	1	
Monitoring & Evaluation		4	4	2				2
Article writing		1	1	1		5	1	
Event (research findings)	3	5			1	1		2

Further information
For further details about the seminar upon which this chapter is based, see **https://rethinkingresearchpartnerships.com/seminar-2/**

3. SUSTAINING THE PARTNERSHIP

Checklist

By the time you have worked through this section, we hope you will have:

- ☑ An agreement as to the type of partnership you are pursuing.
- ☑ A set of commitments regarding how you will communicate internally with project partners and associates.
- ☑ An understanding of the dynamics of your partnership, and identification of the key people responsible for maintaining the partnership.
- ☑ An analysis of how funding influences your partnership, and strategies to work with the funders.

Themes

Types of partnership
🔧 **Tool 8: What is your partnership like?**
  ✎ Insight 8: Evolving partnerships
  ✎ Insight 9: The Rethinking Research
       Partnerships partnership

Way of communicating within the partnership

Monitoring and evaluating the partnership
🔧 **Tool 9: Mapping the project path**

The internal partnership broker
🔧 **Tool 10: Body mapping**

The influence of funding on the partnership
  ✎ Insight 10: Learning from a large-scale
       partnership

Introduction

Taking care in establishing the partnership sets up the groundwork for successful working relationships. However, the seminar series repeatedly highlighted the need for ongoing work to maintain close working relationships across two different organisations. In this chapter, we explore ways of reflecting on an ongoing partnership and sustaining it throughout a specific project or the wider lifetime of the partnership.

Partnerships can take on different forms. How they are funded, what roles the partners play and how the partners work together vary considerably. It is important to understand the type of partnership you have established and are sustaining. The configuration of your partnership impacts on how best to support it throughout its lifetime.

Establishing how you will communicate as partners, and with other internal stakeholders, sets up the partnership to run smoothly, pre-empting any problems and ensuring ways of working them out when they do arise. These can be quite practical aspects. This also involves setting up systems or processes for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the partnership. Ensure that there are regular moments to come together to reflect on the process and any unintended effects of working together, as well as the progress towards or achievement of planned goals.

A key part of a strong internal communications set-up is recognising the role of particular individuals who often act as translators or interpreters between different contexts and institutions, and who facilitate the partnership process. We have called them **brokers** in this guide.

There is no denying the impact that funding has on sustaining a successful partnership, and it is important to explore how this relates to your ways of working, including responsibilities for managing funding relationships and reporting requirements.

Many of the themes in this section are important to consider early in the partnership to set up an enabling environment for success.

Types of partnership

There are as many different types of research partnership as there are any other types of partnerships. However, different factors will lead to particular advantages and challenges. Some of the key points to consider are:

- **Scale.** How big is the partnership? Is it between whole institutions, or sub-divisions, teams or individuals? How many partners are involved?
- **Timing and duration.** How long is the partnership? Is it attached to a one-off project or is it ongoing? What are the schedules of the different research components?
- **Funding.** How is the partnership or research funded? How involved are the funders and how rigid are the funding protocols? Does the project depend on follow-on funding?
- **Formality.** How institutionalised is the partnership? Is it an informal relationship between individuals or a formal agreement with a contract?
- **Focus.** Are you focused on a specific question or theme or is it a wider interest in collaboration or exploration?

Insight 8: Evolving partnerships

Some research partnerships are tied closely to a discrete piece of research and funded to deliver that research, while others are more organic and evolve. Within the seminar series, we discussed partnerships that were formal and involved large-scale funding; and ones that were more emergent and relationship based. Both these types of partnership had pros and cons, and brought up different issues. In several of the cases covered in the series, an emergent, loose partnership evolved to later bid for funding to pursue a larger one-off project. One partnership remarked that the pre-existing relationship before a big funded study enabled them to 'hit the ground running'.

Another participant reflected:
'This partnership is not sustained because of a particular project, or through an institutional arrangement, but through a series of mutually beneficial collaborations, between one university-based leader (who has brought in some colleagues from time to time), and a number of leaders at the INGO working in a collaborative way. The partnership does not have its own project objectives. Rather, it is a means for each of us to advance our respective priorities through points of contact, disruption and surprise. When the partnership works well, it encapsulates characteristics of an effective collaborative partnership. For example, an ability to respect each other's technical competency, being comfortable with taking risks, being able to act positively together in spite of ambiguity and ongoing change, and – particularly on the side of the university – have the political skills to manoeuvre in the complicated INGO environment.'

This is not to say that being effective in partnership working is easy. Effective partnership working requires us to engage people and/or institutions outside of our own control, to apply experience, interpersonal skills and good listening to each situation, and to work towards a common interest or goal despite differences in organisational cultural values and operating norms.

Insight 9: The Rethinking Research Partnerships partnership

In the final conference for the rethinking research partnerships seminar series, the co-conveners – Kate from Christian Aid and Jude from The Open University – started the event by sharing the story of their evolving partnership. They first met while both were on maternity leave, and the partnership began with their personal relationship and interest in similar issues.

When the funding opportunity arose, this was a moment to cement and focus the partnership – it opened up opportunities to bring in more actors into the relationship, thus broadening the partnership. This extended its transformative potential – and the funding enabled open, emergent discussion and critical engagement with the issues. However, it also brought a series of expectations – to produce outputs, to arrange events and to contribute to specific streams of knowledge. The partnership was sustained through the seminar series due to personal perseverance, through a maternity leave, a shift in role and institution, and other diverse external pressures. This was due to a strength of relationship and commitment to the initial vision. Moving beyond the partnership, Kate and Jude are now exploring avenues for future institutional collaboration. The picture below represents their feelings and relationship in partnership.
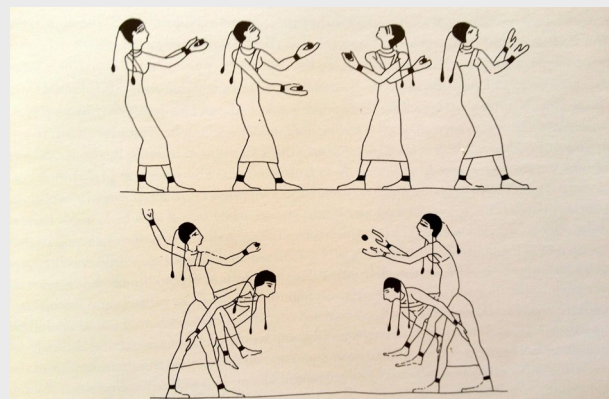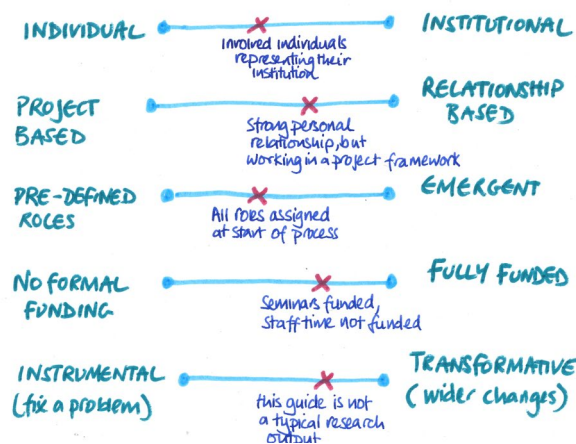
Tool 8: What is your partnership like?

This exercise is designed to get you thinking about the different ways you could structure or arrange your partnership, and the different models available.

How

This tool could be used individually or in groups, or both. Participants simply mark on the scale where they think they are between the two poles. You could use your scale markings as a basis of discussion about how to structure your partnership, or to reflect on how it is going. Are there any aspects you want to change or adapt? What are the impacts of being at one end of the pole or another? You can adapt the tool, to add or change the different categories of the scales.

EXAMPLE OF THE RETHINKING RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

INDIVIDUAL ●———✗———● INSTITUTIONAL
Involved individuals representing their institution

PROJECT BASED ●———✗———● RELATIONSHIP BASED
Strong personal relationship, but working in a project framework

PRE-DEFINED ROLES ●———✗———● EMERGENT
All roles assigned at start of process

NO FORMAL FUNDING ●———✗———● FULLY FUNDED
Seminars funded, staff time not funded

INSTRUMENTAL (fix a problem) ●———✗———● TRANSFORMATIVE (wider changes)
this guide is not a typical research output

Ways of communicating within the partnership

Discussions about internal communications came out very strongly in the seminar series. Guiding questions to enable you to make decisions around communication include the following:

- Who is responsible for internal communication and continual brokering of the partnership? How can project partners ensure that they are not overburdened?
- How can partners facilitate new ways of talking and thinking to allow partners and participants with different interests, agendas and languages to discuss the research effectively?
- Who needs to be included in the internal communication? Who needs to know what within the partnership? How are decisions made?

As in any piece of collaborative work, tensions can arise and differences of opinion may occur. Considering how project partners will allow grievances to be aired and disagreements discussed without derailing the research project is a necessary part of the process of sustaining partnerships over their course. Partners need to be aware of the power dynamics and hierarchies within the project, and consider early on how these might be mitigated.

Discussions and tools from the previous two sections may help in making decisions about internal communication. This should involve agreement on the roles and responsibilities of the different research participants and the extent that they should be involved in and/or updated on key decisions and actions. This also includes considering how findings should be shared with those who participated in the research, and what expectations they should have for involvement in the analysis or communication of research.

Additional questions include:

- How can the research partners best be informed about developments in the research? What methods and modes of communication make most sense?
- When are the key moments for internal stocktaking? Should this be at regular intervals or at key moments and milestones in the project? How can internal communication best respond to the unexpected?

Monitoring and evaluating the partnership

Formal evaluations are often planned for the end of a project to assess the extent to which the initial aims and objectives have been delivered. However, for learning to take place, and for a partnership to respond to this learning, it is important to put in place a process of regular review. An ongoing monitoring system is a helpful means of reflecting on, capturing and changing elements of the process that might not be included in the project outcomes and outputs.

This system might involve carving out formal spaces for critical reflection at different levels in your partnership. You could adapt and use many of the tools included in this guide for this process. The spaces created could also include an opportunity to revisit the initial motivations and agendas given the likelihood of shifting contexts and institutional realities. You could combine this reflective monitoring and evaluative approach with a more formal evaluation of the research itself.

Tool 9: Mapping the project path

This is a straightforward tool to generate a time line for how and when formal reflective spaces should be integrated, and what tools for reflection can be included.

How

Start by thinking together about the key milestones of the project. On sticky notes, write any initiation workshops, deadlines for proposals or pieces of work, field visits, key conferences, etc. On a large piece of paper draw a path – this could be a winding path or a straight line. You may find it helpful to work from one corner to another or top to bottom. It may also be helpful to mark out fixed dates – months, seasons or years – on the path, depending on the project's length. Long projects may need more than one sheet of paper. Arrange the sticky note milestones on the path, leaving spaces where it seems logical.

When you have the basic path mapped out, reflect on it together. Are there any obvious points to add group meetings or time for shared analysis? Add these to the path using different colour sticky notes or pens.

It might also be that you want to set aside specific times to reflect on different aspects of the partnership. For example, to revisit the initial conversations you had about motivations, or check in on the different roles you are playing, or use some of the tools to explore how power relations are operating in the partnership. All these dimensions could be added to your project path to ensure that you make space to be more analytical about your partnership; alongside the more formal requirements you might have for monitoring progress in relation to the research itself.
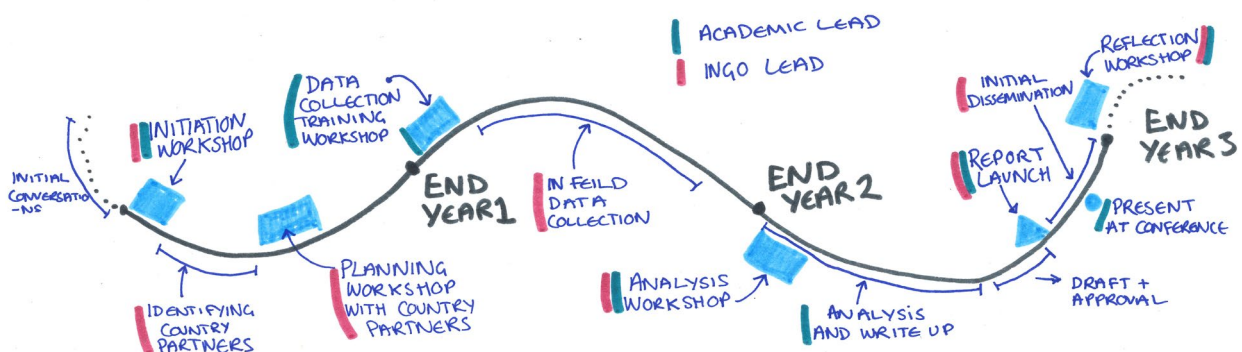
The internal partnership broker

Throughout the seminar series, the roles of particular individuals who can act as 'brokers' between the institutions was highlighted as key to success. These were identified as individuals who are often hybrids – understanding both institutional worlds, but usually situated in one organisation. Brokering here means enabling the partner to engage with the rest of the institution through continual translation, capacity development and technical support. In some instances, the brokering role may be more limited and only include the initial introduction.

In some projects, the broker emerged organically, with the role taken on by an individual who had the capacity to facilitate the partnership through their own interests and expertise. In other partnerships this was formalised, with a specific person recruited or assigned to manage the relationship, often splitting time between both institutions. A third pattern was a close tie between two individuals from each organisation, driving the relationship with a strong understanding and trust in each other. Either way, the presence of a person with a highly developed social skill set – able to understand both institutional cultures, communication, translation and facilitate conversations effectively – was seen as key.

The influence of funding on the partnership

One of the most influential resources in a research partnership is often the funding (and extensive budgets can be a mixed blessing). Whether a piece of research is funded by an external donor, internally by one of the partner organisations, or self-funded by the individuals involved, it is important to consider the implications of the source of this funding and who manages it. Questions to guide this include the following:

- What is the nature of the project funding?
- How rigid are the funders' requirements?
- How involved are the funders in the governance of the project?
- Does or will the partnership pre-date or exist beyond the funding?
- What are the implications for the wider partnership?
- What are the funders' expectations of partnership and of evidence?
- What are the opportunities or implications for follow-on funding?

Tool 10: Body mapping

This tool helps to identify the skills and practices of brokers in the partnership. Using the analogy of a body and its different parts can help you to think through the attributes needed for a partnership broker, or the person (or people) responsible for maintaining the partnership.

How
Using a large sheet of paper, draw around a member of the team to create an outline of a body, or draw a smaller outline on a piece of paper. Together, use different parts of the body to think about different practices or traits of an ideal broker might have. For example, draw a mouth and ask people to reflect about

communication styles, or add the feet and consider movement.

The associations may vary, depending on the participants' experience and culture, so make sure to leave space for people to suggest their own connections of practice and body.

Reflecting further, you can ask about ideal versus essential qualities. You could consider how these different skills and practices might be spread across different people and roles.

See tool 14, page 43, for another example of a body map.

Insight 10: Learning from a large-scale partnership

In a large-scale funded research partnership ($15m over five years) involving one academic and two INGO partners, the funding made the project 'too big to fail'. Yet even though large amounts of money were involved, the same tensions emerged. These included the different partners' priorities, high institutional overheads for the academic partner, and a low priority placed on administration and finance support. Various learning points emerged from the discussion:

- It was easier to get agreement between partners when developing the funding applications, rather than when they secured the money and were allocating the 'real' money. It was at this point that real decisions needed to be made and tensions emerged.
- One of the INGOs managed the funding contract and one of the INGOs collected data, but the research was entirely designed and managed by the research partner. This meant that the monitoring and evaluation data collected by the INGO in relation to programme implementation was not integrated with or linked to the research. It was seen as entirely separate,

which was a missed opportunity for further learning.
- Although individual relationships can be crucially important for partnerships to work, shifting the personnel can also open new opportunities, and help move through the tensions that may have emerged.
- The way the institutions 'owned' the research was different. While the INGO saw the research as owned by the whole organisation (with an ensuing commitment at senior level to support the initiative), the academic institution offered little institutional or administrative support to the process, which rested on the shoulders of the individual researcher. This was particularly problematic when she went on maternity leave.
- The size of the funding meant the partnership was too big to be allowed to fail. This led to both partners investing effort in making the partnership work. Equally important was the recognition that when the institutional partnership was going well, individual relationships worked better, suggesting an important interaction between individual and institutional relationships.

Further information
For further details about the seminar upon which this chapter is based, see
https://rethinkingresearchpartnerships.com/seminar-2/

4. DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING RESEARCH

Checklist

By the time you have worked through this section,
we hope you will have:

- ☑ Agreed the purpose of the research and the
  research question you are trying to answer.
- ☑ Decided the types of evidence you will be using
  and producing in the research and why.
- ☑ Agreed the research approach and methods.
- ☑ Considered the ethical implications of the research,
  how data will be stored and who will have control
  and ownership of it.
- ☑ Agreed a time scale for the research.
- ☑ Assessed the roles of each organisation
  and individual in the research.

Themes

Research questions and purpose
✎ Insight 11: Different perspectives
on what constitutes a
research question

Different approaches to research design
✎ Insight 12: Different design approaches

Mapping evidence preferences
🔧 **Tool 11: The evidence practices flower**

Who is implementing the research?
🔧 **Tool 12: Agreeing responsibilities**
🔧 **Tool 13: The spider web**

Research ethics
✎ Insight 13: Ethics and data

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the nuts and bolts of research – the questions, conceptual framings methods and management. However, as this is **not** a guide for research methods, the focus is on who plays which roles, what knowledge is valued and valid, and how power relations operate in the research process, rather than the detail of designing research. There are many other resources that can support these research choices.

In many academic–INGO partnerships, assumptions are made about the different expertise individuals bring to the relationship, and therefore the different roles the partners will play in the research. This can mean that the academic dominates in all design decisions and the INGO merely provides the data set, ie, the links to the people and processes that will be researched. Throughout the seminar series, we reflected on the effects of these traditional roles in terms of how research is conceived and understood, and what implications this has for whose knowledge counts and what types of evidence are produced.

This section explores how the processes surrounding research design and implementation can be opened up further and be more collaborative. It suggests questions and ideas for challenging the default relationships in research, and it argues that through thinking differently we can produce different types of knowledge and evidence. However, it also emphasises the importance of robust research design, key research skills and internally coherent and valid processes, recognising that these elements are crucial to ensure the quality and impact of any research output.

Applied research is complex, and will often need to be adapted and built on when moving from design into practice, especially when it needs to be translated across institutional and national borders. There may be many moments of research design and implementation, and therefore many different opportunities to involve academics and practitioners in the evolving research process.

Research questions and purpose

An important starting point is to be clear about the focus of the research and its intended use. Setting clear aims regarding what you are trying to find out, and why and how you will use the research, will guide every other decision.

When embarking on a specific project, you need to agree clear aims for the piece of research, which may be distinct from the partnership's wider or more general goals. What are you trying to find out and what do you hope to achieve through the research?

In the workshops, we developed a list of reasons that could be used to classify why a specific piece of research was being planned:

- **Monitoring:** to document what is happening.
- **Evaluation:** to provide evidence of what works, either for accountability or for organisational learning. Evaluations may be summative (looking at what has been achieved) or formative (to inform ongoing and future work).
- **Exploratory:** to challenge or engage with existing evidence.
- **Innovative/developmental:** to trial or test a new method in a programmatic intervention.
- **Capacity building:** to improve the research capacity of individuals, organisations or networks.
- **Policy influencing:** to generate evidence to support a policy position.
- **Empowering:** participatory or action research with a specific transformational agenda.

The reason for doing the research affects the decisions about who to involve and how, and the methodology and the types of evidence you are aiming to generate. It is important that both partners are clear about the purpose each has for the research. In reality, much research has multiple purposes, and this needs to be acknowledged and any tensions in meeting multiple research goals addressed.

Insight 11: Different perspectives on what constitutes a research question

Often academic and INGO partners have very different ideas about what constitutes a useful research question.

One academic partner was very interested when their INGO partner suggested research into trialling a new 'test and treat' approach, which was not getting the results expected. The partner reflected: 'A novel treatment ticks the "contribution to the literature" box, and things not going as expected [is] a perfect rationale for a qualitative study to investigate why people were not behaving as the guidelines presumed. But as we learned more about the particularities, the rationale began to unravel, and the "ideal case" began to seem less and less ideal.

'It turned out that they were becoming more successful in persuading their harder-to-reach clients to take up treatment, so our framing in terms of a puzzle that research could solve lost traction. Nonetheless, we reasoned that there was still something worthwhile in just studying how people understood and

responded to this new model. But through further communication, we gradually realised that what we were referring to as "test and treat" was not the same as what the NGO was referring to as "test and treat".

'Our NGO colleagues listed a number of research questions that they would have liked to have answered. But for us as researchers, these were local-level, fact-finding questions, rather than questions that opened up novel areas or stood to advance knowledge. We had hoped in the original framing of the puzzle that we could conduct research that would both be useful at a local level, and as a contribution to international literature, but this was not the case.'

The partners here were disappointed because their interests did not overlap sufficiently for the project to be worthwhile. This case also highlights the different purposes academics and INGOs have when they carry out research, the different audiences they have in mind, and the impact that this can have.

In some instances, the research question will be obvious, and more time will need to be spent on discussing why you are doing the research and what you intend to do with the output. In other cases, the purpose is obvious, but you might need to spend more time thinking about your research question.

In the discussions in the seminar series, it was clear that different partners had different expectations as to what makes an appropriate research question. In agreeing the research question, it is useful to consider:

- **What knowledge and evidence exists in this field?** This includes reflecting on where that evidence is, and what makes it valuable or valid. Are you defining the research question only in relation to published literature, or do you

also include practitioner, organisational or grey literature in your analysis?

- **Who needs to be involved in defining the research question?** Is it the academic, INGO or local partner? Will you include the perspective of those being researched or participating directly in the research?
- **How does the research purpose influence the research question and framing?** Is it to improve policy or practice? Is it to produce evidence about how something works or generate new ideas for future work?

Different approaches to research design

There are different ways to approach research design. One approach is to design the research centrally and then implement it according to this plan, with minimal adaptations only where necessary.

Another approach is to be more responsive to research participants and other stakeholders, with an expectation that the research design will shift and evolve during the process, and that participants will be involved in generating the research questions.

Of course, there are many variations between these two poles. Research questions may be determined and fixed early in the project, but then adapted at the collection or analysis stages to incorporate engagement and findings.

The key point is that the different approaches to research design need to fit the purposes underpinning the project, and that all the partners are in agreement about the approach.

Mapping evidence preferences

Our evidence preferences can cause us to make assumptions about the type of evidence produced in a research partnership. Evidence choices can affect how people participate in the partnership, whose voice is heard, whose knowledge counts and what impact the research has. It is helpful to think about different types of evidence, and which ones might be most appropriate, given your research aims and questions.

In considering the type of evidence to look for, it could be helpful to revisit the section on **understanding research and evidence (page 12)**. The evidence landscape influences the evidence preferences for the individuals in the partnership and their institutions. It impacts on the types of evidence that will work best for the research. For example, if the intention is that the research will influence policy, the type of evidence – how it is generated, who is involved, its form, media and style – will be different than if the evidence is intended to engage practitioners in learning from their work.

It is not enough to map out evidence preferences. It is necessary to explore why these preferences exist, what assumptions they are based on, and whether there are alternatives.

Insight 12: Different design approaches

Two examples from the series illustrate the different types of research design. The first was a research project that was designed to test a specific healthcare services intervention. It was intended to fill a gap in the literature and the intention was to use the research findings (if appropriate) as the basis for advocacy for a particular change to ensure more effective service delivery globally. The research design was led centrally by the university research partner and standardised from the outset, with some minor adaptations to the different country contexts. Data collectors followed a pre-set procedure. The focus was on rigour in the study that would enable extensive publishing in influential journals and be useful in the INGO's advocacy plans, focused on global policy makers.

In contrast, another partnership, which also involved multiple country sites for data collection, and ran for a similar length of time, used a participatory approach highly responsive to the nuances of each country context. Although the overall research questions and participatory approaches were shared in each country context, the decision making about the direction of the country studies was devolved to in-country researchers who used participatory methods with the communities to make these decisions. This limited the ways in which the research could be synthesised or generalised, but meant that the approach was highly responsive to the local setting, delivering immediately relevant results which could immediately influence the local work of the INGO.

🔧 Tool 11: The evidence practices flower

This tool uses the metaphor of a flower to explore the different assumptions that exist about what evidence is and how it is produced. It encourages those involved to engage critically with dominant practices and explore alternative ways of understanding and producing evidence.

How

Put your research at the centre of the flower. You might want to write a few words that capture your research question and/or your research purpose. Then make a ring of petals around the research and identify all the different elements of research – this might include the methodological choices and design, data collection, analysis, etc. Then create a second layer of petals; in this layer note the common ways that these different elements are carried out – we call this 'evidence practices'. These practices might be in favour due to current trends, donor interests, institutional or individual preferences, previous experiences, etc. Then make a third ring of petals and add any alternative practices you can think of.

Considering the whole flower, are there any environmental factors which you think are important to identify and that influence how your flower grows, and what are these?

Discuss where your research sits in relation to these dominant and alternative practices. What is relevant for you? Why are you making these choices? Is it the appropriate approach for the type of research question/your research purpose, or are you being influenced by dominant preferences and practices? If it is the latter, where is there opportunity for using alternative approaches?

Example

The photo shows an evidence practices flower produced during the seminar series. The first (yellow) ring of petals identified the different dimensions of a research process. This included practices of research design, making meaning and capacity development. The second (orange) ring noted dominant assumptions around these different elements and included the suggestion that research is linear, that you need specific technical knowledge and that one size fits all. The third (pink) ring looked at alternative approaches to these dominant practices – such as focusing on research contexts and building from local analysis and sense making. The blue notes identified key external pressures that impact on the flower – including institutional forces and time limitations, academic needs, etc.

The participants felt that developing the flower enabled them to think about how the different types of power influenced choices about what kinds of evidence was being produced to answer the research question and purpose. They noted that through discussing the alternative approaches they were able to understand the different pressures each actor was operating under. It also enabled them to consider who was participating in these research decisions, and therefore in the research analysis.

One participant said: 'Although there are systemic drivers that push us towards the "orange" practices, we can push back and operate in the "pink" space; using the flower to explore this can open up the space to have the types of conversations we need to have to allow us to understand each other and, if appropriate, to challenge the dominant narrative.'

Who is implementing the research?

The division of roles within research partnerships is most pronounced at the research design and implementation stages. This often falls along the lines of assumptions about research competencies (ie, that the academic has research expertise and the INGO does not) and remains fixed during the process.

While more obvious roles in the research process may be recognised, the necessary supportive roles may not be recognised or valued (**see tool 12 example**). These roles are equally important in ensuring research is well managed. It is therefore spending some time considering the range of roles involved. Key questions to ask are:

- What roles are needed to make the research a success?
- Who designs the research, collects data and analyses data?
- Whose voices are included in the research design?
- Are there spaces available to collectively reflect and co-develop an analysis?
- Where are the spaces for sharing learning and skills development?
- What are the implications of different spaces (including where these are, whether they are physical or virtual, and when they take place) on different power dynamics?

A core issue that needs to be addressed when designing research is making sure that the partners have a shared understanding of what is meant by data. This may be straightforward if the partners already share a common framework, but there may be different understandings of what counts as 'proper' data – whether that is a question of a particular sampling approach, or the use of visual images or note taking from a participatory session. It is important that there is overlap in the partners' understanding of what data looks like, and how it might be generated or captured and the types of expertise they require. The key questions are:

- What do we mean by data? Are there any distinctions between the different parties?
- How will we collect data?
- How will we make sense of the data?

The design for data collection and analysis rests not only on the best way to respond to the theme or question of the project, but is also constrained by the realities of the partnership's resources and capacities. You will need to discuss how fixed timings and schedules (eg, planning data collection) will affect the work. The partners may have different scheduling requirements, or calendar patterns (eg, semesters, teaching loads, project planning or annual reporting periods). You will need to discuss the role of different technologies in data collection or analysis, including who has access to them, whether you need to purchase licences or if they require expertise.

🔧 Tool 12: Agreeing responsibilities

This a simple exercise which offers another way of reflecting on the different roles people take on within a partnership, and the assumptions underlying them. It can be used to reflect on a previous research experience, or to look at how you would like the roles to work in the research you are planning. This is particularly good as a prelude to planning research design, and it can highlight who feels included and excluded in these discussions.

How
Find a space and mark one end as 'very involved', and the other as 'not involved'. Ask people to arrange themselves somewhere along the line,

depending on how involved they see themselves, in relation to these four areas:

- planning the approach to research
- choosing data collection methods
- data collection
- data analysis.

You can ask people to respond as individuals first, and then as representatives of their institutions, to see if there are any differences. Each time, ask a few people to share why they chose where to stand. You could add further categories as relevant to your discussion (see example below).

Example

We asked participants from INGOs and universities to position themselves on a scale in terms of how involved they were in the implementation of research in their partnerships. One side of the room represented full responsibility and the other side represented no involvement at all in this part of the research.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the academic participants saw themselves as heavily involved in implementation and those working for INGOs tended to be less involved. Where participants found themselves close together in the middle of the spectrum, these partnerships tended to be those based on close individual relationships or those adopting explicitly participatory approaches to research.

We then examined the concept of implementation. The initial assumptions had been that implementation was about designing the research directly, collecting and analysing data and pulling together research findings. Further discussion identified other implementation aspects, including

commissioning, supervising, supporting, reviewing and facilitating connections in research. The INGO participants appeared to be more involved in these areas than the academics.

Reflecting on this discussion, we felt that different ideas about what counts as evidence contribute to different ideas about whose skills count when it comes to implementing research. At the same time, sometimes it is practical constraints (like lack of time and different professional obligations) that determine who is involved and to what extent.

We developed an understanding of implementation that covered the traditional elements of data collection and analysis, alongside other aspects. These included coordination; facilitating connections and negotiating organisational politics; negotiating ethics; training, supervision and support; monitoring and reviewing; and holding together the overall global vision for the project.

🔧 Tool 13: The spider web

This exercise can be useful for thinking through the different roles partners play at different stages of the research.

How
Ask the group to come up with a list of 6 to 10 key stages in the research project or key aspects of the research design process. Starting from a centre point, draw a line of the same length for each of the items. Add five notches to each line to make a rough scale. Label each line. Using a different colour for each partner, rank the involvement of each partner in each of the areas. Join up the dots as you go. The resulting diagram should look like a spider web, and will show the relative involvement of the different actors.

Use the diagram to start a reflection on the relative roles of the different actors. Where do the lines overlap? Where is one partner more dominant? Try to explore why, and whether this is a deliberate choice, or you have just fallen into it.

The example below gives you an idea of what it might look like.
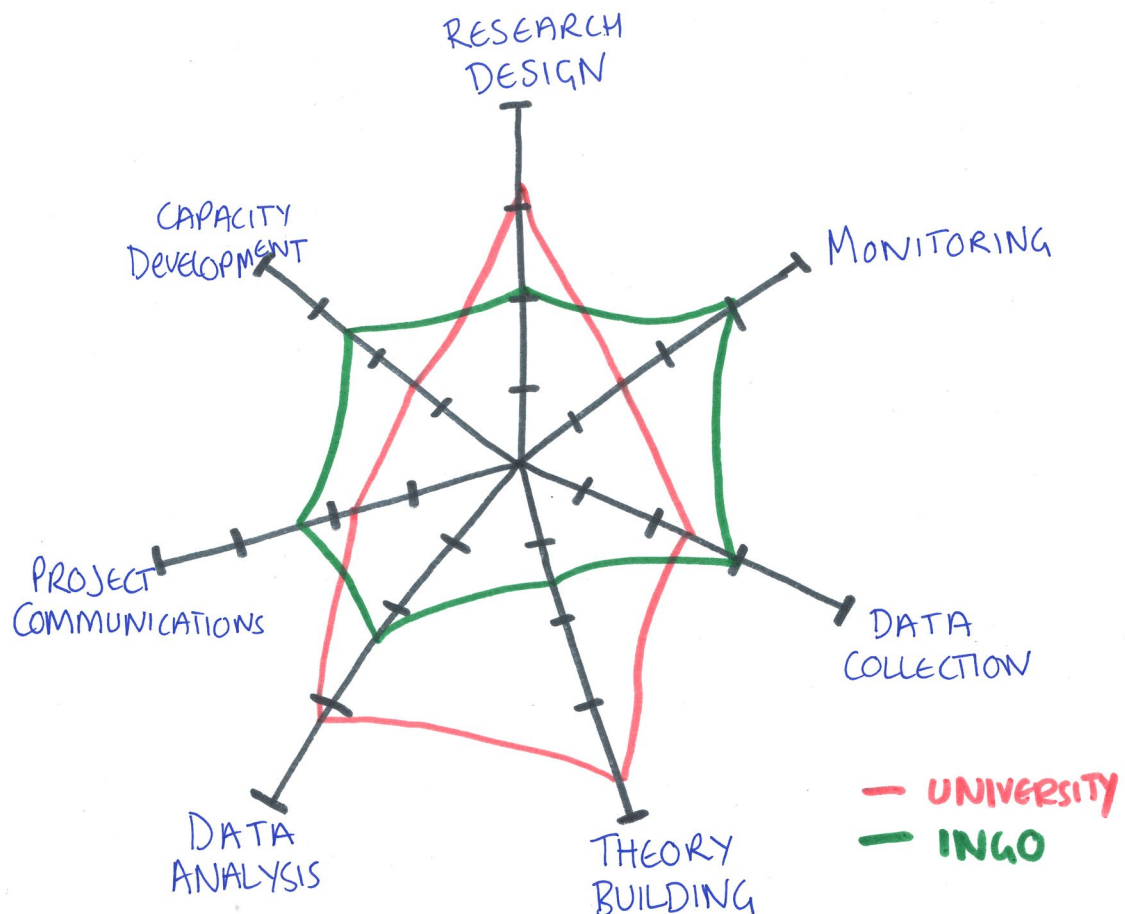
Research ethics

Most universities will have an established ethics procedure and academics will need to submit detailed information on any planned research to an ethics board.

Not all INGOs have ethics procedures. Where these are in place, they are often linked to broader institutional values and practice, rather than focused on research per se. For example, they might have a security protocol and assessment process, but this will be relevant for all activities, not just research.

Where INGOs have longstanding links with communities, this might be reflected in their approach to ethics. For example, they may focus on maintaining relationships or on expectations about accountable practice. As such, participation, transparency and feedback at community level may be the key priority in considering ethics, which can look quite different from university frameworks.

For example, one organisation shared how it had set up community ethics boards to enable community members to decide whether to participate in a piece of research. Part of the understanding was that the community members could include clauses for participation, or suggest adaptations to the research questions or methodologies. This could lead to very different questions and an alternative ethics approval process to the university ethics board.

As part of any research planning process, it will be helpful to share and discuss the different approaches to ethics and agree what standards need to be met in a piece of research.

Further information
For further details about the seminar upon which this chapter is based, see **https://rethinkingresearchpartnerships.com/seminar-3/** and **https://rethinkingresearchpartnerships.com/seminar-4/**

Insight 13: Ethics and data

One INGO related a difficult case of partnering with a UK university with strict ethical procedures, including a provision that data collected in the field could not be shared with anyone outside the immediate research team. The contractual arrangement stipulated that the data collected was the property of the university and not shared between partners. The INGO had agreed to this when negotiating the contract, but had not thought through the full implications.

There was a particular challenge in one country, where the data would have been of immediate use to the country programme staff and could have improved practice. The researcher collecting the data had asked for the consent of all participants to share it. However, the researcher was not able to do this because of the contractual clause. By the time a report had been written that could be shared, it was no longer of use to the participants in the research.

The university felt it was upholding an ethical framework to protect potentially vulnerable research participants, but some INGO staff felt the process was extractive, and benefited the university over the needs of participants and implementing staff.

5. COMMUNICATING AND ENSURING IMPACT

Checklist

By the time you have worked through this section, we hope you will have:

- ☑ Agreed who will be involved, and how, in data analysis, in identifying the key findings or messages, and in designing and developing the research outputs.
- ☑ Identified who you are trying to engage in the research findings and what types of research output would best suit these different audiences.
- ☑ Decided how the research will be represented, and what will, and will not, be communicated.
- ☑ Understood the different institutional and individual priorities and interests for research outputs and agreed which will be met.
- ☑ Clarified if and how you expect dialogue or feedback from your audiences or how you intend them to use and adapt your research into practice.

Themes

Identifying audiences
🔧 **Tool 14: Evidence body maps**

Agreeing what should be communicated
🔧 **Tool 15: Top headlines**
  ✍ Insight 14: Different needs and tensions

Dissemination strategies
🔧 **Tool 16: Communication methods onion**
🔧 **Tool 17: The communication path**
  ✍ Insight 15: Fitting communication, change and partnership together

Representing research
🔧 **Tool 18: Getting the balance right**
  ✍ Insight 16: Authorship and ownership of research outputs
  ✍ Insight 17: The labour and skill of communicating research

Introduction

Good communication rests on identifying your audience, what you want them to know, what you want them to feel, and what you want them to do as a result. For many engaged in research, particularly in academic contexts, communication can be seen as peripheral, the endpoint where the key findings are disseminated in a journal article or report. Rather than focus on two-way discussion or active engagement with research findings, the focus is on a more passive dissemination of material, with responsibility ending once the research results have been published. However, both academics and INGOs are now under pressure to ensure research has an impact and they are expected to demonstrate tangible and attributable outcomes from the work. This trend brought together or funded many of the partnerships in the Rethinking Research Partnerships project. It also meant that our own language evolved from talking about dissemination – a one-way sharing of research results – to communication, suggesting more active dialogue and engagement with the outcomes of research.

Research communication does not need to wait until the end of a project. It encompasses work promoting research findings, including dissemination strategies, media and social media promotion, and events. However, it also includes a broader range of communications that occur throughout the research process among project partners and with different audiences. Early engagement with the potential audience can bring people with you on a research journey – which can both deepen your research analysis and enhance the likelihood that your research has an impact.

Collaboration in research communication not only refers to decisions about which data should be included in outputs, but also about how the research is presented, and in what formats. Journals, social media, cartoons, posters and radio all reach different audiences. Whether you choose to present findings as tables, charts, statistics, quotations, diagrams or artwork will affect how different audiences understand, value, reproduce and share the research; and ultimately how much impact it might have.

Decisions on how, when and to whom research is communicated are deeply embedded in power relations. Whose voices count in setting the communication agenda? If existing, familiar channels and formats are used, who has access to them, who do they reach and, more importantly, who is excluded? These choices are both practical and political, and are important to negotiate and agree in partnership.

Identifying audiences

Strong communication will start by considering who the research is for and how you expect them to use it. This is closely linked to the section on the **purposes of the research on page 33**. Considering who needs to be reached and which information formats they best respond to means you can frame the research in a way that responds to their evidence needs. However, in understanding your audience and their preferences, you also need to be clear about the extent to which you are playing into or challenging the dominant paradigm, and what is most appropriate given your research and communication aims. You will also need to consider how different stakeholders in the partnership (including the research participants and in-country partners, as well as users of the research) will respond to these communication decisions, and whether they might hold alternative views. Thus, in thinking through who your audience are and how best to reach them, there are a range of ethical and political questions to consider, alongside the more practical ones.

On a practical level, you should consider whether there is already an interested audience for the evidence from your research project, or if you will need to work to generate interest and demands for your research findings. For each target audience, you will need to ask what approach is likely to get their attention and how much time they will have to engage. One strategy for ensuring that the outcomes of the project meet the needs of a particular community or actors is to consider engaging them early on. Can these audiences be involved in defining the question or commenting on emerging findings? Or is there just one opportunity to communicate with those you are trying to reach?

While the purpose of the research will influence who your audience is, there are also ethical issues to consider. If officials and powerful individuals are the focus of your communication outputs, how will those with less power, such as the communities facing the problems the research is addressing, be able to access the research findings? Is your communication strategy inadvertently reinforcing power relations? In identifying audiences, it is also important to think through the kinds of tensions that might arise when multiple audiences with different needs have been identified. How will these tensions be addressed?

Tool 14: Evidence body maps

We each have personal preferences for how we engage with evidence, but these are influenced by our experiences, current roles and day-to-day practice, as well as wider cultural trends. By understanding our own evidence preferences, we can start to think through how best to communicate with and engage others.

How

Start with either giving each individual a simple outline of a person, or asking them to draw one. Give everyone a few minutes, and ask them to note down or draw their characteristics and other relevant factors that impact on the way they engage with research evidence. When they have done this, they should share their person with the group. As a group, compare the factors.

What does the range of options for accessing evidence look like for different people? What is the result of personal preference? Discuss what power structures are at play – how do gender, race, ability and class impact the way people engage with evidence? What about issues such as where you live or what organisation you work for? What other issues are important?

Having reflected on your own positions, use this to think about each of your main desired audiences. What might their body maps look like? How will your communications products reach different audiences and respond to their evidence preferences?

Example

The three examples below highlighted many similar issues in accessing resources. Participants identified the issue of language (mapped to the mouth and ears), while approaches to information (education, curiosity, evaluating reliability) were mapped to the head, and where the participants physically accessed information was mapped to the feet. Other issues such as particular interests, location, time, resources and access to the internet also come up in these body maps.
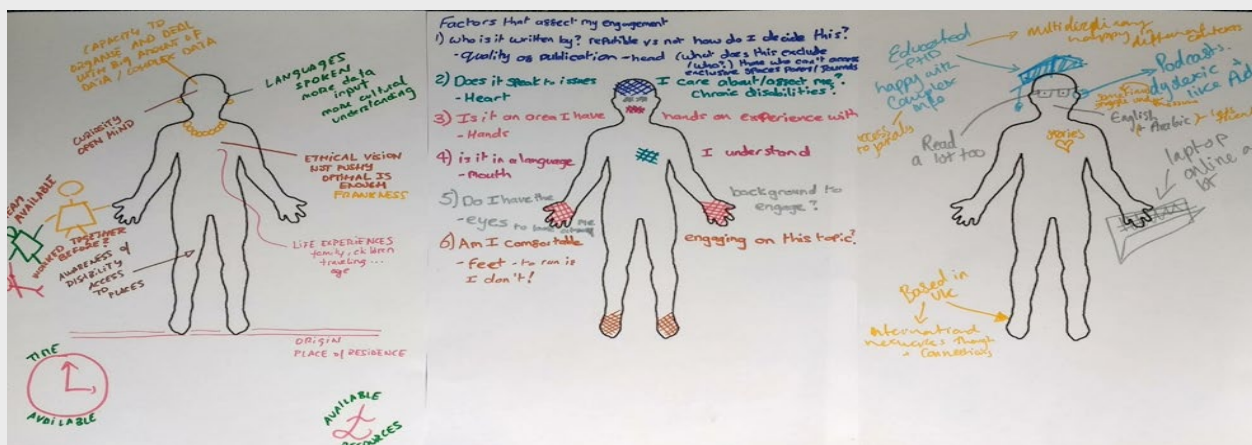
Agreeing what should be communicated

The research approach and methodology will influence the types of research findings and potential outputs, but deciding what to communicate often goes beyond this. There needs to be agreement on what counts as good evidence, what is understandable to key audiences, what is strategically important to share, and what should be shared when.

In deciding what to communicate, it will be important to revisit the discussions around research purpose and research audiences. Is the aim to contribute to a specific literature or body of knowledge; or for advocacy or to influence practice? It will also be important to consider when to communicate – for example, are there specific institutional or funding-related requirements? What is the impact of communicating emerging findings or using a particular communication channel? For example, in putting together this discussion toolkit we had to consider how the material included here would impact on our ability to publish an article in a peer-reviewed journal which would not appear until after the toolkit was published.

Although one partner might take a lead on data collection and analysis, this should not necessarily mean this partner should make all the decisions on what is communicated and to whom. Studies of collaborative research projects (see resources

section) show that there is rarely adequate discussion of what the data collected means or involvement of non-academic partners in data analysis. Responding to this suggests a series of practical and ideological questions should be discussed including:

- Has time been set aside to enable all partners to engage with research data?
- What support or translation will be needed for different actors to be able to interpret and make sense of this data?
- When and how should we share findings and, potentially, data with those at the periphery of the research partnership (ie, research participants, funders, the wider research organisation)?
- When can we share research findings beyond the partnership and who should be involved in making this decision?
- Who should be involved in deciding what to share from the research, and how should they be involved?
- Are there wider learnings (on research or partnership process) that should be shared beyond the partnership?
- Will we invite people to respond to and feed back their ideas in relation to the research findings?
- Who 'owns' the research findings and what copyright issues are there?

Tool 15: Top headlines

This is a quick and simple tool for partners to check whether they agree on the top findings from the research report.

How
Individually or in small groups each write your top three headlines for the report in a newspaper format. These could highlight the study findings as a whole, report launch, particular data or recommendations. The key is to focus on the main message you think

should be conveyed. Come back together to compare the findings. If the group is larger and there are multiple participants from different partners, first compare in teams from the same organisation, then come together as a whole group. Reflect together on whether you have the same headlines. If there are differences, are they very stark? Do they reflect the different partners' interests, work or agendas? How will any differences in priorities about what to communicate be handled going forward?

Tool 16: Communication methods onion

This exercise uses the metaphor of an onion, with many layers of skin, and is intended to help you think through the different ways you communicate and the impact of these different methods.

How

Think about the main ways you plan to or have communicated your research, eg, reports or social media. Draw a rough pie chart reflecting the level of importance (time or resources) placed on each. Draw another circle around this, and extend out the pie chart divisions. In each of the segments, note how the piece of communication was accessed (online or hard copy), then draw another layer and consider who has access. Additional layers might include the language of the communications, the lead authors, etc. You can adapt these to suit your project. Using different colours or shading might help make certain aspects more obvious.

Use the diagram to discuss any surprises. Does it look like most of your communications are in one language? Do they require internet access? Who might be excluded or included?
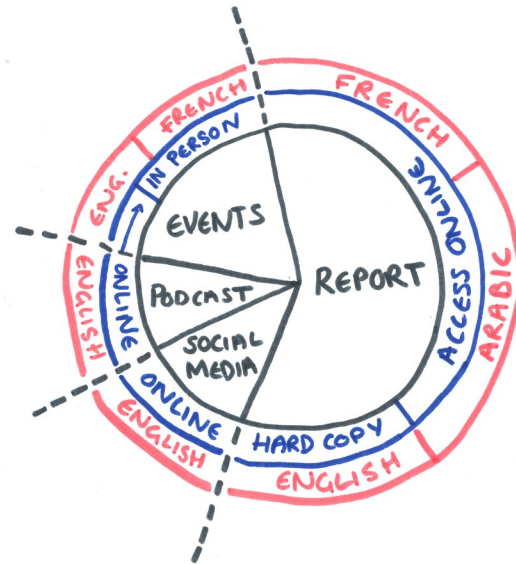
Insight 14: Different needs and tensions

In the case studies, partners often had different requirements for the research outputs. This often came down to a question of timing and certainties. In one large multi-site case study, the academic partner was reluctant to release any materials about the outcomes before they had been fully finalised, while the INGO could see a key advocacy opportunity to present the early provisional findings at an event. In the end, a compromise was reached on how the findings would be talked about at the event, and the academic partner's institution was delighted with the high-profile event and potential to demonstrate impact.

In another case study, the partners noted that tensions arose in their partnership over the reporting and dissemination of the research. The INGO's senior management had concerns about reputational risk, and a lack of clarity on who the research was seen to represent. This resulted in additional scrutiny of the research from the INGO. The partners noted that the scrutiny was often positive, leading to the clarification and strengthening of some outputs, and the tensions provided a useful learning space for the partners.

Dissemination strategies

INGOs and academics will have different networks, resources and capacities, and working collaboratively on dissemination was highly valued in many of the case studies shared in the seminar series. As part of your planning process, there are a range of communication questions you might ask. These include:

- Which institutions, networks, resources or individuals are available to use or support dissemination?
- Are there key hubs, channels or points of storage that you should be considering in your research?
- Can you reach all the audiences through these channels? Who is excluded and how could you reach these groups?
- Are there skilled colleagues in your organisations who would be able to support dissemination (eg, media experts, translators or communications teams) and do you need to plan or budget for their time?
- What institutional support and capacity for dissemination exists within the partnership?
- What other networks or organisations could you reach out to for further support, and does this have budgetary implications?

Consider timing when developing your dissemination strategy. It was noted in the partnerships discussed in the series that often very little time is allowed for dissemination, despite suggestions that as much time should be spent on dissemination as on doing the research to ensure impact. As with other decisions in the research process, the best times to disseminate research may be affected by the partners' own institutional schedules – teaching semesters, funding, reporting or programming cycles – and by global events, such as key conferences, and meetings of global, national and local policy makers and influencers.

Another key consideration in dissemination is how and where outputs will be stored, including access arrangements. Questions include:

- Will they be hard copies and/or online?
- Will they hosted by one of the partners or by another organisation?
- What are the implications for ownership and intellectual property?
- What are the options for archiving?
- Will they be available open access or behind a paywall?

You will need to talk about the comparative advantages of these arrangements and how they serve different interests and agendas.

As noted previously, there are different incentives to generate outputs in academic and INGO work practices. Academics often have a personal incentive to publish (primarily in journals), but in INGOs the incentive may be institutional rather than personal. Moreover, each institution will understand the concept of impact differently; for example, academics are incentivised to publish in highly ranked peer-reviewed journals, and INGO staff may be incentivised by a public event or media coverage. This will impact how each institution/individual in the partnership prioritises within a dissemination strategy. Beyond this, there is also a consideration of timing for dissemination. For academics, incentives may exist to publish research findings beyond the end of a research contract; while in INGOs, if a specific project comes to an end and staff are reassigned or leave the organisation, continuing to work on outputs may be less likely.

Finally, as well as communicating project outputs, you should also consider how dissemination will fit into your partnership. Can dissemination be used to build or mobilise networks and relationships in ways that serve the interest of the partnership and help to achieve further impact in future? Are you investing in research engagement and uptake, as well as creating resources for dissemination?
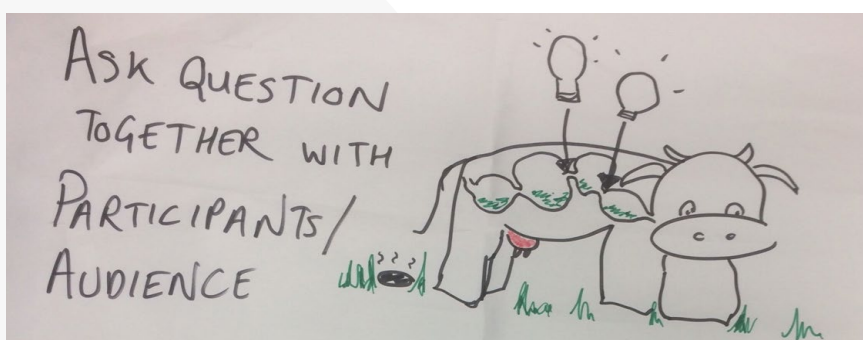
Just as a cow has five stomachs to fully digest its food, getting the most out of research often involves multiple stages!

🔧 Tool 17: The communication path

This exercise can help you think through the different ways that people might discover your research, and the barriers they might face in accessing your research findings.

How

Using a large sheet of paper, mark the element of the research you want to communicate at the bottom. This might be your research findings or something about the process. At the top of the page, identify the key audiences that you want your research to reach.

On sticky notes, write down all the ways that your audiences could find out about your research. This might include reports, articles, events, conferences, traditional media and even word of mouth. Using different colour sticky notes, write all the barriers preventing your audience from engaging with your research

findings – this might be language, ability to travel, literacy, disinterest, access to technology or libraries, etc. Arrange both sets of sticky notes on the paper.

For each of the audiences, plot the journey your research needs to make to reach them. Is it possible? Which barriers will affect them? Are there ways of communicating to get around these barriers? Who are you able to reach and who gets left behind?

Take the discussion further by questioning what you want people to feel when your research reaches them, and what you want them to do with that evidence. These two questions are key to establishing the potential impact of your project.

Insight 15: Fitting communication, change and partnership together

The case studies in the seminar series were all quite different in terms of their understanding of how development happens, their theory of change for the programmatic work, and their assumptions around how evidence can lead to change in practice. This impacted on what was communicated, how and to whom.

One partnership suggested that they believed that evidence itself was not the key to change, and instead it was ideas that generated change. The partner said: 'Both partners, we think, felt it is social movements which change the world by mobilising and

legitimising both evidence and ideas – and in some ways the partnership was understood as having at least some similarities with something a bit more like a social movement. Thinking about evidence and the politics of participation provided the context for the partnership, and heavily influenced its purpose. In turn, both context and purpose have heavily shaped how the partnership has sought to approach the research it has undertaken and supported, the kind of evidence it has collected and the ways it has collected it, and the ways in which it has been reported and disseminated.'

Representing research

How data is given meaning and becomes 'evidence' involves a range of decisions, which are impacted by a complex set of factors. Certain elements are included or excluded because of the extent to which they fit with pre-existing arguments, ideological standpoints conform to stylistic conventions, formats or media. For instance, a single statistic can be written or spoken, framed in a specific way, altered to fit with a house style guide, presented in a chart or pictogram, or situated within a policy brief, journal article, documentary film, conference, event or performance. Each of these circumstances may impact its significance. The way data is represented also affects its power to convince different audiences and in different settings. For example, in the UK's policy sphere, statistical data is commonly seen as more credible than data presented as interview extracts or an art exhibition. However, in another setting, a picture may be more emotive and therefore more persuasive.

One issue that was raised from the case studies in the seminar series was the need to agree processes for signing off research outputs. Different partnerships had different processes and levels of involvement of the individual partners and their organisations. Other areas to discuss include: How will reputational risk be negotiated where research findings are controversial? Will you be able to respond quickly to obtain agreement if work in progress is communicated in response to unexpected opportunities? Are there any protocols that need to be agreed around how different data is presented, and whether combined data (from surveys, focus groups and participatory exercises for example) needs to be presented simultaneously or can be used separately? You might establish a formal process for these questions, or it might be reliant on trust and individual judgement.

Beyond the question of who decides what is included in research outputs and how the research is represented there are a whole host of areas that need to be considered. These include:

- What language (s) should be used - this includes both the language itself but also the kinds of vocabularies used. For example, what is the 'right' balance between making findings accessible to a non-expert audience and capturing the complexity and nuance that may have emerged during the research?

- Should there be one single key resource which is translated and tailored to different audiences, or multiple resources targeted at different audiences? What might be gained or lost in this decision making?

- How should we respond to the knowledge that presenting research in certain ways carries particular kinds of authority or legitimacy in the eyes of some actors, but may diminish it for others? For example, a peer-reviewed publication might add status to the research and be symbolically important for both the institutions involved and the users of the research. But it might also carry implications for the way the research is represented and the audiences reached and it may limit the potential for 'hard-hitting' policy recommendations. These dynamics will need to be negotiated.

There will always be different motivations and priorities to consider in responding to these questions, and it might be helpful to return to the earlier discussions you had in establishing the partnership or identifying the purpose of the research. Reminding yourself about your initial motivations for the partnership and why you are doing the research should support your decision making processes around communication priorities.

Another issue to consider is the specific skills and interests the partners have currently, and what skills they might want to develop. For example, many of the INGOs involved in the seminar series were keen to develop experience in writing for a peer-reviewed journal; while academics were excited by the opportunity to use creative media and art to communicate key findings. Thus, as with other aspects of research, the communication 'moment' in a research process can also be seen as an opportunity to develop new skills, than rather just follow traditional roles.

Further information
For further details about the seminar upon which this chapter is based, see **https://rethinkingresearchpartnerships.com/seminar-5/**

Tool 18: Getting the balance right

This exercise can help to weigh up options for different approaches to representing or disseminating research. You can use the tool for any issues where there are trade-offs between two or more options. Here, it is used to focus discussion on the balance between pitching to an audience (ie, using the type of communication and evidence the particular audience generally expects and responds to), and shifting the assumptions the audience has about what counts as 'good evidence'.

How

On a sheet of paper, draw a set of weighing scales, including two circles to represent the weighing plates. Give each of the participants three small objects, such as sweets, pebbles, counters or sticky notes. Explain that one side of the scales is for communicating the research in the way that an audience expects and usually engages with. The other side of the scales is for shifting the audience's assumptions as to what good evidence looks like. Ask the participants to

put their objects on the scales where they think the focus should be. Having an odd number of objects forces those less sure to prioritise.

Are the scales balanced at the end? Does one side come out strongly? Ask people to reflect on why they placed their objects on one side or the other. How does this reflect the balance of your planned or completed research outputs? Could you change your planned outputs to better reflect the balance in the scales?

Additional discussion points could focus on the nature of power in this context and where there is space to challenge communication expectations.

Insight 16: The labour and skill of communicating research

Making complex research findings understandable and intelligible to a wide audience was an issue that came up in several of the case studies. There were different approaches to tackling it, often reflecting the original purpose and approach to the research.

One partnership involved graduate students conducting research projects with the intention that the output would be used as their dissertations for academic assessment and as reports for use in country. It was challenging to meet both needs with one document, and it was eventually decided to shift to two separate outputs.

Another partnership grappled with communicating the results of a large, multisite healthcare research programme. One participant reflected: 'Understanding the complex research and putting it into layman's terms was tricky, especially as implementing agencies tend to want clear recommendations

to be able to act on, while academics are often reluctant to give concrete directions where results are very nuanced. Resolution of this seemed to work best when INGO partners took academic papers and synthesised the key findings and formatted them into short briefs or FAQs which were then checked by the academics.

'Although there was often discussion about content, academics were satisfied that it was related to interpretation, not manipulation, of findings. Whilst this is a time-consuming process, it has been beneficial to the INGO community as the findings have a stronger rigour behind them than the more frequently used "programme best practice" approach. The approach was appreciated by those in fundraising and advocacy as well as local partners all of whom could use the evidence in their work.'

Insight 17: Authorship and ownership of research outputs

There are many questions to consider around authorship and ownership of the research outputs. For example, you should think about who is involved in producing the outputs and how they, and others, are acknowledged in the authorship, intellectual property and copyright.

In designing this discussion guide, we needed to consider how to acknowledge the contributions of the seminar participants (and have responded by listing the individuals involved on page 2 and including institutional logos on the back cover). We have published the guide on an open access basis, using a Creative Commons copyright. We encourage anyone who is interested to translate and adapt the resources, although we would ask that you reference the original seminar series. We hope that you will use and adapt the tools and images and we would love to hear more about your experience in doing this.

We have put Christian Aid and the Open University on the front cover of the guide and taken the credit for the compilation and writing of the material. The ESRC funded the seminar series, and contributed to the costs of producing this guide, so we have also given prominence to their logo.

The original contributors saw an early outline of the publication, and it was shared with the wider Rethinking Research Partnerships group at the conference. However, these contributors have not had a chance to comment on the final content or agree the final design and publication – as with many processes, the timing has made this complicated. More significant perhaps is that we have not gone back to the initial research participants who were represented in the case studies and discussions in the seminar series. It is our hope that in sharing the collective insights which fed into our workshops and evolved further during discussion we have remained true to the spirit of consent and the basis on which these experiences were originally shared.

It is also worth highlighting that this discussion guide is not the only output of the seminar series. Throughout the series different participants wrote blogs, seminar reports were produced (both of which can be found on the website) and an academic article is forthcoming. The conference event was also seen as a key moment in communicating research findings.

6. BEYOND THE PARTNERSHIP

Checklist

By the time you have worked through this section,
we hope you will have:

☑ Agreed the extent to which your partnership is aiming
to be transformative (in relation to the wider context).

☑ Developed a framework with which to evaluate the
research partnership.

☑ Decided whether to conclude or continue the
partnership beyond the end of the specific piece
of research.

☑ Identified how to institutionalise the learning
beyond the partnership.

Theme

Mapping the transformative potential of
the partnership
🔧 **Tool 19: Legacy table**

Evaluating and capturing learning
🔧 **Tool 20: Capturing learning**

Endings and new beginnings
🔧 **Tool 21: Partnership scenarios**

Introduction

The seminar series and this guide have focused primarily on exploring the place of evidence and the politics of participation *within* research partnerships. However, these discussions also involve some consideration about what will happen to the research beyond the partnership. How might the evidence be used in other contexts? What sort of impact might the research have? Equally important are considerations around the partnership dynamics and processes, such as the impact of the research on the partners involved, and what new and different ideas have emerged about research collaborations.

In the **first chapter**, we looked at how research partnerships exist within a specific context and how this context influences many aspects of partnership, including why partnerships are formed, the roles different partners play and the types of evidence used and produced in partnerships. The tools and questions in this discussion guide should have enabled you to engage with your context, to explore the ways it might (or has) affected your partnership and to make decisions regarding the extent to which you might accept or challenge these factors. While context influences partnership potential, it is also clear that partnerships themselves can influence their context.

As the formal research comes towards a conclusion, it is worth reconsidering these issues. For example, has the experience challenged or changed assumptions about research and evidence, and the roles different actors can and do play? Changes to the individuals involved in the partnership might include developing new skills, practices, languages, sensibilities and confidence (for instance, a stronger sense of being a researcher or a deeper understanding of development practice).

Many of the INGO participants in the Rethinking Research Partnerships project have now embarked on graduate research or training, and new areas of research interest have opened for academics and others. A research partnership could lead to the development of networks, grounded in shared values, ideologies and understandings. The agendas, structures and processes of each partner might expand or shift as a result of the partnership. New tools, resources, templates, technologies and even infrastructures might materialise. The language of 'research partnerships' might also be influenced, with implications for policy.

In the series, we identified two dimensions that are important to the long-term transformative potential of a partnership. First, the ongoing importance of learning in partnerships, which might involve carving out spaces for individuals and groups to reflect, and specific research outputs to encapsulate that learning. Second, the ways in which the partnership is evaluated and how change is understood can generate lessons for future partnerships.

Some partnerships open up spaces and ideas for doing things differently, but others do not. For some, this might be exactly what is intended – the research is implemented as planned and there is little interest in questions of wider change. For others, it might be that they wanted to do things differently, but there were problems in the partnership itself. Both the initial intentions and how these were translated into practice have implications for how partnerships are concluded or taken forward.

There may be an argument for cutting research partnerships short if they are not adequately serving the interests of the partners involved or if these interests have changed over the course of the research. Challenges – such as shifts in priorities, in personnel, in institutional buy in, or if new risks have been identified as the research unfolds – can all be good reasons for ending a partnership.

However, it is also the case that there is a tendency with project-based funding to carry on regardless and to present all publicly funded projects as successful. This approach can lead to huge resources being invested in work that is unusable or even damaging. In rethinking research partnerships, we urge partners to be aware of these potential pitfalls and honest in their analysis of their partnerships. There is significant learning that might emerge from 'unsuccessful' partnerships – if adequate space is given to exploring this and if the institutions involved are receptive to that learning.

Mapping the transformative potential of the partnership

The tools and questions in the earlier chapters set out an initial understanding of the research and evidence context of the partnership. As you come to the end of the partnership, it can be useful to revisit the initial analysis and consider if and how things have changed. This might be because of the findings of the research, or the way it was framed and communicated, or because of the process of partnership itself – and how different actors collaborated in and engaged with the process. In understanding the full transformative potential of the partnership, it is necessary to consider various dimensions.

Focusing on the internal context of the partnership, it is useful to reflect on how partners have changed as a result of the partnership. What shared values, principles, frameworks or understandings have emerged through the research? The river tool on **page 20** could be revisited and extended to map the flow of the actual partnership, identifying the rocky patches, meanders, pools and obstacles encountered in the journey.

Looking outside the partnership, areas to explore include which actors (individuals, groups and institutions) have become interested in and are able to act on the evidence produced. Has the evidence contributed to any shifts in the language or vocabulary? Think through the ways that the evidence generated has interacted with existing resources, or contributed new ones.

Evaluating and capturing learning

One challenge is how learning from the research partnership can extend beyond the individual into organisational learning, and be used to influence the wider sector. This is particularly the case when considering learning around partnership dynamics. While there is likely to be formal means to communicate research findings, there may be no formal requirement to capture learning from the process of partnering, and yet it is likely that this learning could be usefully shared more widely. Careful decisions must be made about what the key messages are, who should be targeted, how the learning should be communicated and where and when this communication should take place.

In the **sustaining partnership chapter**, ideas for regular **monitoring and evaluation** were discussed. This is often the foundation for deeper learning, and could be a useful input when capturing learning from across the partnership. Ideas in the **communication chapter** will also be useful in thinking through how to capture learning, make it accessible, and promote its uptake and use. Conventional reports may not be the best mechanism, and more creative or interactive formats could be considered.

There are questions around how sensitive issues regarding the partnership dynamics should be approached. What should be included and excluded from reports? How can you assess when it is appropriate to protect the individuals and institutions?

The seminar series was designed to enable research partners to share their partnership experiences honestly and openly. For this to happen well, there needs to be trust. Within the series, we identified that we needed to be clear when speaking as to whether we were sharing an individual view or something that was shared by other members of the partnership. There was also a need to ensure that we 'protected' the broader partnership. If we were going to feel safe sharing our experiences in partnership dynamics, we needed to do so without concerns that the sharing process could damage our future partnership relationship.

Endings and new beginnings

In an ideal world, a research project will reveal lessons that positively impact on practice and inform further research, while the partnership will evolve and lead to future collaborations. However, this is often not the case. Research interests and career paths diverge and there may be very good reasons why individuals and organisations go their separate ways.

Projects and partnerships can end formally, in a predetermined fashion, or in a more casual manner.

Planned ending: Some partnerships may have an ending built in from the start. Funding protocols might dictate the formal end, or memorandums of understanding or contracts might specify a time limit or a scheduled period to review and reassess.

🔧 Tool 19: Legacy table

In an ideal process, you would have spent some time early on in the partnership planning for change, but in reality the potential of a partnership may only become clear later on. This exercise asks individuals to think back and identify key insights and potential sustainable changes that have been created by the partnership.

How

Ask participants to spend some time thinking about their key 'aha' moments from the partnership. What struck them as particularly important or interesting? This can prompt people to think about the research and the partnership itself, or changes in policy, practice and donor behaviour, or the wider environment. Write these on sticky notes.

Divide a large sheet of paper into two columns. Try to group the aha moments. In the first column, add insights specifically related to the research itself (eg, changes in policy or

programme practice or specific contributions to knowledge). In the second column, include insights that are related to wider change (eg, a shift in understanding of evidence, or a key concept or way of working). Is there more clustering and classification that could be done, for example, to look at whether these aha moments concern a new way of doing research, of thinking about specific concepts, or of recognising and valuing specific skills.

Using different colour sticky notes, ask participants to consider what is needed to enable these aha moments to be translated into a longer-term legacy. What is needed to ensure the true transformative potential of the partnership experience?

Are there specific strategies that should be pursued to ensure the longer term impact? Where should each partner invest their energy? What are the appropriate next steps?

Example

This exercise was used at the international conference at the end of the seminar series, with groups thinking about different partnerships they had been or were involved in.

A general observation that emerged from the exercise was that often 'the end is the beginning'. Participants emphasised that there is a need to think about the legacy of the research or partnership from the start, and to understand the different partners' aspirations for the legacy of the research.

In considering legacy, the group noted that it can be difficult to achieve a desired outcome as things change, both internally within the partnership and partners, and externally with the context providing different pressures

and opportunities. This means it is important to revisit questions of legacy at different points during the partnership process, to ensure decisions taken at one moment do not threaten the overall aspirations for a deeper legacy.
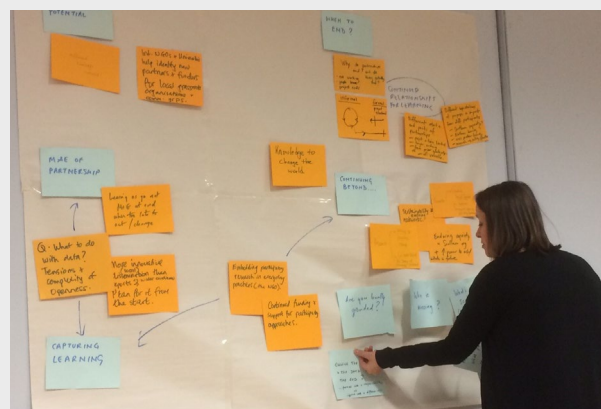
Tool 20: Capturing learning

At the beginning of the research, you will have explored individual motivations for participating in a research partnership, in addition to wider institutional interests. As the research or partnership comes to an end, it is important to spend some time reflecting on key learning from the partnership. This tool is a way for individuals to reflect on their own learning.

How

Ask everyone to spend some time thinking about themselves in relation to the partnership and research; and then to draw a visual representation. Some questions to prompt you in your drawing include:

- Where are you in this picture? What are you like as an individual? What have you learnt or gained from involvement in the partnership? Has it been transformational?
- Where is your organisation in the picture? How has it changed?
- Where is the research – who has it reached, what influence/impact has it had?
- What is the wider context? How has this changed?
- Where are people living in poverty? How have they benefited from the research?

Participants could then share their pictures, and consider the different learning and understandings developed through the research and partnership process. Did different members experience the research partnership in the same way, or were there significant differences? To what extent has the learning fed into organisational memory, or has it been kept at the individual level?

The discussion could bring out 'meta learnings', which could be recorded and shared with different actors (both internally and across the sector, if relevant).

While this tool is introduced as part of the evaluation and learning stage of the partnership, it could be used earlier to contribute to planning and check in on motivations for involvement in the partnership.
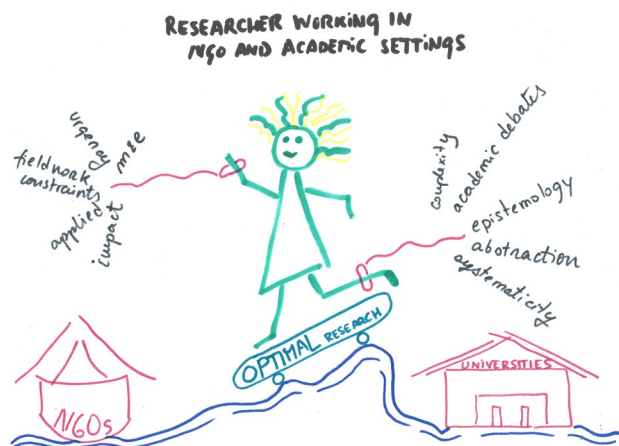
Illustration of being a co-investigator in a research process

Emergent ending: Some partnerships come to an unplanned close. There are many reasons for this, including shifting institutional agendas, changes in personal circumstances, unforeseen events that restrict or alter the nature of the research or pose serious risk, or irreparable relations between partners. In this case, concluding the partnership early may be the best course. If this happens, it is still important to spend some time reflecting on the partnership and why it ended. If possible, do this collectively, but if not, then reflect individually or within your own team or organisation. You can use some of the tools in **chapters 2** and **3** to explore whether it might be time to end the partnership or understand why a partnership has ended.

Unclear ending: Sometimes the conclusions of partnerships are unclear. While a particular project might end, the partnership itself may be exploring possibilities for continuing to work together. Working relationships may remain without an active partnership or funding available. The partnership may fade out over time or reinvigorate. Even in the smallest scale partnerships between two individuals, ideas and initiatives may continue to emerge and evolve through informal social interaction.

End of a research project, but a continuing partnership: Despite planned endings, many partnerships may continue, collaborating for further funding bids or renewing partnerships. If this is the case, partners should consider which elements of the research should be formally concluded and the timing. It will be important to separate the elements of the partnership which might be ongoing, and to consider how new aspects of the research or developments in the partnership be taken forward.

Regardless of how a partnership ends, there are a few questions that need to be resolved.

These can often be very practical and might include:

- What is the timeline for ending the partnership?
- What impact does the end of this piece of research have on the individuals involved? What is their employment position? Do they need support to continue their career?
- What aspects will continue after the end of the partnership? For example, are there specific outputs that need to be stored and made accessible, and how will this happen?
- What needs to be communicated about the end of the partnership and to whom? For example, the partnership might end between a UK university and an INGO, but do the local level research participants know this?
- Are there any specific obligations to funders or host institutions that need to be fulfilled?

Where partnerships are continuing in some form, consider:

- When should informal partnerships be institutionalised and through what types of mechanisms?
- What are the advantages of informal or institutionalised arrangements for both partners?
- Should these partnerships be purely research focused or might they serve additional agendas, such as teaching, training or capacity building?
- What broader research agendas does the research reveal and how can these be pursued?
- What types of funding might support further research?
- Is the current partnership the best vehicle for additional research?
- How can lessons from the current partnership be channelled into the development of new research collaborations (even with the partners remaining the same)?
- Are there other actors that you should be connecting to as you evolve this partnership/research?

The exercises in the **establishing** and **sustaining partnership** chapters might be helpful in addressing some of these questions. It will be particularly important to clarify personal agendas and motivations if the partnership is to be continued.

🔧 Tool 21: Partnership scenarios

As a piece of work comes to an end, it can be challenging to think about what happens next in a partnership. A relationship has been established, but partners could be concerned as to how to be honest about what they hope will be the next steps. One way of creating a safe space for discussion is to use abstract scenarios.

How
Create three future partnership/research scenarios – this could be done collectively, or one individual or organisation could produce these. These scenarios should include ideas addressing the following aspects:

- **The nature of the partnership.** You could use Tool 6: Metaphors of partnership on page 22, or Tool 8: What is your partnership like? on page 28.
- **The type of research** – eg, a small, discrete, literature-based piece of research, or a large-scale applied and participatory endeavour.
- **The members of the partnership** – who is involved and how the partnership is situated in their respective organisations; is the membership transnational; does it involve local actors, etc. How institutionalised is it?

One scenario should include the 'no partnership option', with the individuals and institutions going their own way. These scenarios can be written up or created visually. Introduce them, and then place them around the room. Ask each individual to identify which scenario most appeals to them and to go and stand by it.

If everyone is standing in the same place, this suggests that this is the best way forward for the partnership. If people are in different places, they should discuss in their group why they have chosen the particular scenario and what it means to them. If it is just one person they will need to consider this on their own. Then share the analysis of each scenario.

The whole group should collectively decide on next steps. Do partners need to spend more time thinking in their own institutions; or explore potential funding streams; or look at what other actors are already involved in this area; or can a decision be made on the spot?

Further information
For further details about the seminar upon which this chapter is based, see https://rethinkingresearchpartnerships.com/2017/05/30/producing-evidence-for-development-conference-report/

FINAL THOUGHTS

As a partnership comes to an end, many of the points that were raised at the beginning of this discussion guide will need to be revisited. This gives you the opportunity to consider the evolving context, the shifting priorities in the sector and in the institutions involved, to look at new research that may have been carried out while you were doing your research and to explore how notions of evidence have changed.

The Rethinking Research Partnerships process formally ended in March 2017 with a two-day international conference. We hope that the learnings from the series will live on through active engagement with this guide, which will be brought to life with different partners in different places; as you negotiate your partnerships and contribute to the body of evidence for international development.

We also hope that this guide will encourage you to think critically about research partnerships, and be innovative in how you enter these partnerships, and in the ways you design and think about research, the roles that are played, the relationships formed and the evidence that is produced. But ultimately, the key consideration is whether and how our evidence for development is able to impact on the lives and potential of those living in poverty and their own development journeys. We entered the process with a deeply ingrained belief that we need better ways of engaging in partnership, to enable knowledge to be gathered and diverse perspectives to enter development discourse. We hope that the areas considered in this guide will enable different types of evidence to be considered within the field of international development research and practice.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on the Rethinking Research Partnerships project, visit the project website: **https://rethinkingresearchpartnerships.com**

For more information on the participatory methods that inspired the tools included in the guide: **www.reflect-action.org** and **www.participatorymethods.org/resources**

Academic resources on partnerships and the politics of evidence

Aniekwe CC, Hayman R, Mdee A, et al, *Academic-NGO Collaboration in International Development Research: a reflection on the issues*, Development Studies Association, 2012, **www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Academic-NGO-Collaboration-in-International-Development_September-2012.pdf**

Donaldson SI, 'A Practitioner's Guide for Gathering Credible Evidence in the Evidence-Based Global Society', in: *What Counts as Credible Evidence in Applied Research and Evaluation Practice?*, SI Donaldson, CA Christie, MA Mark (eds), Sage, 2009.

Eyben R, Guijit I, Roche C, et al (eds), *The Politics of Evidence and Results in International Development: Playing the game to change the rules?*, Practical Action Publishing, 2015.

Hanley T, Vogel I, *Effective Academic-Humanitarian Collaboration, A practical resource to support academic and humanitarian organisations working together*, Enhanced Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance, 2012.

Hayman R, King S, Kontinen T, et al (eds), *Negotiating Knowledge: Evidence and experience in development NGOs*, Practical Action Publishing, 2016.

Shucksmith M, *How Can Academics and the Third Sector Work Together to Influence Policy and Practice?*, InterAction, 2016.

Stevens D, Hayman R, Mdee A, 'Cracking collaboration' between NGOs and academics in development research, *Development in Practice*, 2013, 23(8): 1071-7.