Strategic research, communication and collaboration for influencing policy and practice

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Contents

Acknowledgements

In preparing this training and workbook, I consulted numerous resources on-line developed by organizations undertaking similar endeavours. Some of these resources are listed at the end of the document. However many more were consulted, particularly on the theory behind influencing policy and practice. I also consulted with three practitioners who provided me invaluable advice. Thank you Enrique Mendizabal (onthinktanks.org), Nancy White (fullcirc.com) and James Georgalakis (http://www.ids.ac.uk/person/james-georgalakis) who gave a similar training in March 2014 and shared many of his ideas and supporting slides. The South Asia Urban Knowledge Hub participants, as well as representatives from Asian Development Bank and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provided much of the rationale for why certain elements are included in this first training, and I thank them for their time and input via our meetings and interviews online.

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Key Points from the Capacity Assessment to Get Us Started

Producing a research paper is not enough.

Influencing policy and practice requires us to be strategic, plan, and think across a whole set of processes.

- It is often an underlying assumption that good information will lead to good decisions. Decision makers are often well informed, but their priorities and intentions may be different from yours.
- Influencing policy is complex. Collaboration is needed at all stages of the influencing process, with a variety of actors.
- Our challenge is to ensure your research doesn't sit on a shelf, but rather provides good input into decision-making
- To make this happen, we need to find the right policy space, the right timing, the right packaging and demand for the research.

The training and activities we will look at will help you consider from the beginning of your research how the findings might be used, and how the priorities you identify can become the priorities of your governments and practitioners on the ground.

A 6-step strategy for influencing policy and practice

Step 1: Define the issue

Step 2: Articulate the goal

Step 3: Understand your context

Step 4: Identify decision makers, key actors, and relationships

Step 5: Describe your influence story

Step 6: Monitor and learn

In the training, we will go through each step using a topic that you are considering for the K-Hub or something from your past work, drawing upon real-world examples, so you get used to what each step means and how you can use it in the future.

This activity guide will be a resource for you to use today and in the future when thinking through an issue for influencing policy and practice.

Step 1: Define the issue: What challenge are we addressing?

For advocacy, you need evidence:

- Illustrating the importance of the problem
- Illustrating that existing policies are not working
- Reinforcing the proposed solution(s)

The following questions will help you think through the issue and define your challenge:

- What is the problem we want to address?
- Is it widespread across many settings, or confined to certain localities?
- What is the root cause of the problem? (if we know)
- Can the problem be solved? (i.e. new knowledge and attention from new stakeholders will make a difference)
    - *Tip: issue should be reasonably neutral politically but important for everyone*
    - *Tip: don't choose a goal to increase knowledge and understanding or bring visibility to a broad cause or a high profile issue with entrenched beliefs where knowledge won't make a difference*
- What evidence do you have of the problem?
- Is the evidence credible? What is the legitimacy of the knowledge?
- Who are the other actors addressing this problem?
    - What is their approach?
- Can you present compelling evidence and recommendations for tackling the problem? (i.e. a short paper)

Tip: Goal may be long-term however advocacy typically takes place over 2-3 years.

Throughout this training, I will use an example by WaterAid, a development agency from the UK, based on its report "Small town water and sanitation delivery: Taking a wider view". The authors explain that for every large town, there are an estimated ten small towns – and these towns are expected to double in both number and size within 15 years and then, within 30 years, to double again. However, only an estimated 13% of development assistance had been targeted at small towns. The predicted growth of small towns is a major development challenge, which threatens to derail efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for water and sanitation. In a recent research piece designed to guide NGOs seeing to influence policy, WaterAid has carefully unpacked the issue.

Source: http://www.wateraid.org/~/media/Publications/small-towns-water-sanition-service-delivery.pdf

Example: Why do small towns often lack basic water and sanitation

What is the problem we want to address?

- Run down or often non-existent basic water and sanitation infrastructure that is often found in small towns.

Is it widespread across many settings or confined to certain localities?

- Widespread; a typical problem especially in developing countries. Will continue to grow exponentially along with population growth and migration.

What is the root cause(s) of the problem? (if we know)

- Local authorities still lack the capacity to provide or ensure delivery of adequate water and sanitation services in small towns.
- Small towns clearly fall ‘between the cracks’ of a traditionally urban/rural divide in the development and policy discourse
- Financing mechanisms tend be geared to large, expensive infrastructure programs that are unaffordable, inappropriate and unmanageable for small towns.
- Technologies tend to come either from rural approaches or those of more major urban centres, making both the economies of scale and technological appropriateness insufficient at either end of the spectrum.

Can the problem be solved? (i.e. new knowledge and attention from new stakeholders will make a difference)

- Yes. A clear recommendation is to understand what factors are generic to all small towns in a national or regional context and what factors require tailored solutions to meet a small town’s particular context. A more modularised or staged approaches to both technology and finance is needed. This would allow for the gradual build up and expansion of a service provision system that is more affordable and more adaptable.
- The design of NGO programmes should be based on supporting this policy development.

What evidence do you have of the problem?

- Several research reports quantifying lack of services in small towns were completed.

Is the evidence credible? What is the legitimacy of the knowledge?

- Yes, reports and data come from UN agencies (i.e. 2010 WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme)

Who are the other actors addressing this problem? What is their approach?

- Donors and international finance institutions are quite focused on meeting the MDGs. The emphasis has to be on bigger programmes that either reach more people in urban areas or that cluster towns together. For example, its been suggested that lending programmes be designed for many small towns, rather than for an individual town, in order to have sufficient scale for investment.

Can you present compelling evidence and recommendations for tackling the problem? (i.e. a short paper)

- Yes, report paper published here: http://www.wateraid.org/~/media/Publications/small-towns-water-sanition-service-delivery.pdf

Training Activity (25 min):

In country teams, choose an issue to work through and as a group answer the questions provided above. Jot down any key points you want to remember into your workbook, as well as additional research needs that you have. Select 2-3 main points and write them onto the flip chart, being sure to identify the issue in the flipchart title. After 25 minutes, we will regroup for a plenary discussion.

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Step 2: Articulate the goal and objectives: What change do we want to achieve?

A goal is a brief vision statement that describes a change we want to see in the world.

- Expressed as an outcome (not an activity or plan)
- Likely something you contribute to rather than achieve entirely on your own

Poor example: "To improve urban sanitation."

Improved example: "By 2015, by influencing the policies and practices of governments and service providers, 25 million people will have access to safe water, improved hygiene and sanitation."

Example: WaterAid's Goal:

"Between 2009 and 2015 our ambition is that *a further 25 million people will have access to safe water, improved hygiene and sanitation* as a direct result of our work; and that by influencing the policies and practices of governments and service providers *we will have reached a further 100 million people*."
(Source: WaterAid's Strategy http://www.wateraid.org/who-we-are/our-strategy)

The goal is long-term and the objectives represent progress toward the goal. Some differences include:

- Goals are broad; objectives are narrow.
- Goals are general limitations; objectives are precise.
- Goals are intangible; objectives are tangible.
- Goals are abstract; objectives are concrete.

Based on our purpose to influence policy and practice, objectives may include:

- A change in a specific area of policy.
- A change in how evidence informs a particular policy.
- A change in how particular policy actors engage with research knowledge.
- A change in the prominence of a specific research theme on the public policy agenda.
- A change in the nature of the policy discourse.
- A change in the way practitioners undertake their work.
- A change in the budget allocation for implementation.

Training Activity (30 min):

As a K-hub team, define a goal(s) and objectives for the issue area you are addressing (20 mins).

Now find two members from other K-Hub teams and have them provide feedback (5 mins).

Re-group with your original team and debrief what you learned and revise your goal/objectives accordingly (5 mins).

Write them on the flip chart paper so we can refer to them later. After 30 minutes, we will regroup for a plenary discussion.

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Step 3: Understand your context: What is the environment for change?

Context is everything! This step will allow you to identify and recognize engagement opportunities and flag potential entry points into the policy process. Understanding the context will guide research communication tactics.

The level of detail (and research) needed will be determined by the knowledge of the team members and the information needs you have.
Understanding of policy and knowledge landscape enables you to:

- Identify and recognise engagement opportunities
- Flag possible entry points in the policy process
- Tailor research to user needs
- Grow capacity of users to engage with and understand research
- Guide selection of research communications tactics and frame research for policy audiences.

If you intend to build bridges between research and policy or actively engage in policy influencing you must first understand the policy making and knowledge environment.

Questions to consider for context:

- How is policy made in relation to this issue?
- Have there been other policy recommendations on this issue? If yes, what happened?
- How do practitioners get information?
- What relevant policy processes are going on?
- What are the current debates in parliament? What are the hot button issues among members?
- What are the best opportunities to influence change? What are potential windows of opportunity?
- Who really controls the agenda?
- What may block or enable change?

Example

The small towns lack of water & sanitation issue by WaterAid is provided below using the questions on context as an example.

How is policy made in relation to this issue?

- There are standards in place usually from central government in relation to technology and distribution/access with varying degrees of local level autonomy.

Have there been other policy recommendations on this issue? If yes, what happened?

- Yes but often NGOs working in the area cite lack of local level capacity to carry out policy recommendations, and there seems to be little incentive for central government to give due attention to smaller centers.

How do practitioners get information?

- Practitioners here would be the local government members who arrange for the provision of services in relation to predictions of basic numbers of users and/or technical companies that install/distribute the services. They get their information from other centres/businesses and from following government standards. All depends on how geographically isolated each town is from other towns and larger urban centres, as well as the "social connectedness" of the town's population in relation to bigger urban centres.

What relevant policy processes are going on?

- Several policymakers and practitioners have suggested there is a danger that offering (relatively) big money to small towns to sort out their water and sanitation service provision creates perverse incentives on all sides to put in infrastructure that will not be affordable or manageable, in many cases, even after a few years. Consultants and construction companies make more money from designing bigger projects; politicians make a bigger name for themselves by bringing in bigger projects; donors get more money granted, contracted or lent to meet more macro targets; populations get quick fixes.
- A clear message came from several corners that more modularised or staged approaches to both technology and finance were needed. This would allow for the gradual build up and expansion of a service provision system that is more affordable and more adaptable.

What are the current debates in parliament? What are the hot button issues among members?

- Depends upon the country. In Nepal, for example, the researchers found that the discourse at the national level was very much about recognising an emerging typology of towns and how they fit into regional development.

What are the best opportunities to influence change? What are potential windows of opportunity?

- Bandipur in Nepal is a clear case where reputation as a picturesque mountain top community with potential as a tourist destination is encouraging investment.
- In Nigeria, as population densities increase and with them land pressures, resulting in falling yields for urban agriculture in many small towns, a clear potential exists for sludge re-use.
- In Madagascar, the financing of infrastructure can be a major barrier to the development of small town services. However, one dynamic mayor has managed to circumnavigate this challenge by creating links with over 15 different donors, including 'twinning arrangements' with other towns and cities, to get projects sited in his locality.
- In an attempt to bypass unreliable formal service providers, poultry farmers in one small town in **Uganda** were investing in the construction of their own wells. The presumption is that the huge

financial outlay involved will be more than recovered by the additional growth in business made possible from a reliable and plentiful source of water.
- All successful cases appeared to revolve around the fact that they were implemented at a time when the 'rules' were not yet in place or that an individual or organisation took creative leadership within or around the 'rules'.

Who really controls the agenda?
- In most places visited by the researchers, the local government or municipal structures were by and large influenced or directly managed by the local business elite. Water and sanitation service investments through existing channels appeared to be clearly skewed towards this group's own needs.

What may block or enable change?
- Attempts to work within or change the decision-making processes
- In-migrants may tip the political balance in a town.
- Capacity at the local level
- As is common in many small towns, the town of Kibibi in **Uganda** only has electricity three days a week. This seems to be the primary determinant for water services.
- The degree to which the townspeople are able to hold providers and decision-makers to account.

Training Activity (30 min):

As a national K-hub team, discuss the context of your issue using the guiding questions.

Note down any opportunities for engagement and communications on your flip chart.

After 20 minutes, we will regroup for a 10 minute plenary discussion.

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Step 4: Identify decision makers, key actors and relationships: Who do we need to influence?

Information by itself doesn't leverage change, but relationships do.
This involves people *communicating* ideas, analysis and data to other people. "People buy ideas from people".

In this step, we will identify specific people and organizations you need to reach in order to implement the desired outcome. Who influences your goal?

Things to consider include how decision-makers and practitioners acquire information, who they trust, what information sources they trust and how they make decisions.

- How can you get to those people? If you cannot reach them directly, who are the people they do listen to, and can you reach them instead?

This step is designed to identify those who are in positions to make decisions or effect changes, including those that can influence decision-makers directly. These include intermediaries, the people who lean in to whisper advice into the ears of the decision-makers, those in civil society who can bring pressure to bear on decision-makers, those who can support, reinforce and strengthen your recommendations (academics, other researchers) and those in the media through whom we reach the public, who can also influence decision-makers.

Training Activity – Create a Network Map for your issue (50 min):

The network map will provide each K-Hub with a visualization of the network of policy actors, influencers, partners and knowledge intermediaries that you will need to engage with in order to achieve your goal. As well as helping identify key stakeholders, the network map will also establish how groups/people influence one another, and ultimately help prioritise key audiences and influencers. This information will enable each K-hub to pull together a basic narrative strategy to achieve your desired outcomes. After 50 minutes, we will regroup for a 10 minute group discussion.

The activity includes:

1. List of actors
2. Mapping top 10 on a power/interest grid
3. Drawing links (influence, knowledge, relationships)
4. How does your institution fit (links to the hub)
5. How does the present map differ from a future map?

Step 1. Create List of actors/stakeholder groups (on a piece of paper):

Consider:

- Who is impacted by the research?
- Who has influence / authority on the decision?
- Who do these people listen to?
- Who do they trust? Information sources?
- Who can support the outcome/goal?
- Who can obstruct the outcome / goal?
- Who has been involved in this type of research/goal before?

Be as specific as possible (not only broad categories but specific positions, people, names).

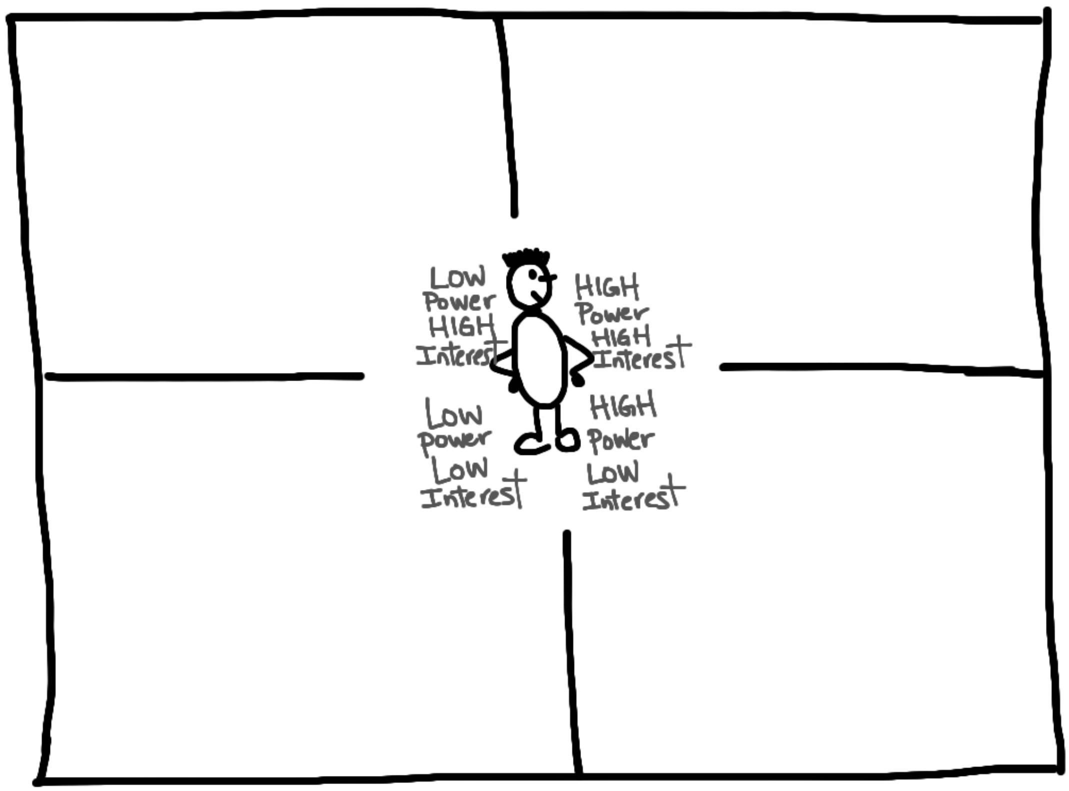
Step 2. From the list, choose 10 people you want to reach most with your findings (or that you think you must engage with):

When choosing, as a group discuss:

- Why do you want to reach them?
- How feasible is it that you can reach them?
- Are there other people who can reach them better than you can? Who might they be? Write these on the chart, too.
- Once you have listed 10 key actors, and the names of others connected to them, write them on cards provided.
- Next we will map them on the grid.

Step 3: Map the actors on a grid (four quadrants):

Draw a grid on your flip chart with 4 quadrants representing power and interest (see example)



Place the cards with your 10 key actors (and any additional actors) where they fit best.

Once the group agrees on the location of actors, tape the cards in place.

Step 4. Draw linkages:

Given influence is very much about relationships, after each stakeholder has been placed onto the grid, we need to consider our relationship to them and their relationship to each other.

- How are the actors connected or not?
  - For example:
    - Who gives money to whom
    - Who works in partnership
    - Who collaborates
- This is an opportunity to identify both formal and informal linkages and influencing pathways. Arrows can be used to indicate direction of influence, flow of knowledge or power relationships.
- At any point if you feel you are missing important stakeholders, please add them to the map with new cards.
- Finally, as a group consider how you and your institution fit on the map (conversation).
  - What access do you have to key influencers and decision-makers?
  - Whose knowledge counts?
  - What knowledge/networks exist?

- Where do you need to build links? Strengthen links? Nurture relationships?

Step 5. Reflect on the map:

Thinking about your goal (the change you want to achieve) (step 2), how is the “Now Network Map” different from a “Future Network Map”?

- How will the position of the stakeholders in relation to one another (and to you) have changed?
- How might their position on the grid have changed?
- What does the present map show us in terms of the strategy we need to take to achieve our goal?

Note any key points on the flip chart and photograph your map.

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Step 5: Describe your influence story: What is your process of change?

The step is about MOVING the knowledge into the hands of those that need to be influenced!
Your influence story should briefly summarise your strategic approach to achieving the change you want. Think about potential uses for the research and the impact it might have on policy and planning as well as what steps should be taken to ensure that the right people are willing to pay attention to the findings of your research.

It may contain the following elements:

- How will your policy engagement and communication activities influence key stakeholders' behaviours and attitudes?
- Who are you going to prioritise and why?
- What are you going to have to do? (build internal capacity, establish networks, engage media, etc)
- When will it happen – is there a broad timeline?

Your approach should reflect what you learned about the policy and knowledge landscape from your mapping exercise.

Training Activity (45 min total):

Part 1 - 30 min

Form small groups of 4-5 people that include at least 3 different country members.

Decide whose story you will work on (ensure that at least each country in the room has one story worked on).

The other members of the group are there to help develop the influence story.

Write a brief statement about your approach to achieving the change the K-hub seeks.

You are describing your hypothesis as to how this will work and why (in one page, 200 words maximum). This should reflect what you learned from the network mapping exercise.

Some questions to consider:

- How do you propose to bring the knowledge to the attention of your target audience?
- Who are the key actors you will work with and who you will try and influence with your engagement and communications work and how?

    - Who are you going to prioritise and why?
- What opportunities exist to tell people what you are working on and what you are learning?
    - What opportunities exist and what new ones can you create?
- How will you build trust in your research (legitimacy of data, analysis and recommendations)?
- What steps do you need to take? (build your capacity, establish networks, engage media, etc.)
- When will it happen?

Important! Document your assumptions. Ask yourself why your approach will work, why not, why is one course of action better than another and note it down as part of the strategy.

Part 2 – 7 min

Return to your country group and review, adapt and edit your story to meet your needs.

Part 3 – 8 min

Share stories with the entire group and take questions/feedback from others.

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The role of communications in your influence strategy

Note: this training doesn't cover communications in detail. However the following are a few points and reminders to keep in mind.

What is research communications?
Research communications is the ability to interpret or translate complex research findings into language, format and context that non-experts can understand (Definition from DFID).

Effective research communications should:
- Distill research findings
- Use plain language
- Make information accessible
- ID needs of target groups
- Tailor products and communication for different audiences

It's important to think beyond dissemination to engagement.

Three ingredients of effective communication are:
- Message
- Audience
- Channel
    - Publication
    - Online
    - Media
    - Events

When thinking about communications pathways, consider what your key actors need to know:

- How will you find out more clearly what your key actors need to know, what their interests are and how the information will be of use to them?

- What knowledge do you feel would be necessary in order for this change to occur and who would need to have that knowledge? (look back at previous steps)

Key messages need to be developed and include the following steps:

- Describe the problem
- Offer compelling or new evidence
- Why should policy makers, practitioners or people care?

- Asking for change (this 'ask' may be different for different actors you want to influence)

Always keep in mind that there is an opportune time to influence policy and practice, such as at events where you could present your research, during opportunities to collaborate with others. Tracking the policy environment will help you to maintain awareness of the timescale opportunities.

Some example of opportunities for communications include:

- Publishing announcements in newsletters of other organizations;
- Opinion pieces in national newspapers;
- Policy brief;
- Special lectures at universities;
- Audio programs for radio stations;
- Key events (i.e. South Asia Sanitation Conference, Bangladesh, Nov 2015; others?)

Tip: Build on what you use and know rather than an entirely new suite of tools.

Communications is central to your influence strategy and the tactics are numerous. A list of resources and links are provided at the end of this workbook.

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Step 6: Monitoring and Learning: improving and adapting our process

Monitoring is important to:

- Hold yourselves accountable
  - Are you doing what you said you would do?
- Follow progress toward stated objectives
  - How do we know if we have influence?
- Recognise when you may need to adjust your initial strategy for better results
- Learn what is working and not working to share with others working on the urban sustainability agenda in our country, region and the world and for ourselves in future endeavors.

What might you monitor?

- Target audiences seeking information from others to verify information they are receiving through your research communications
- Media reporting messages from target actors that are consistent with your messages
- Responses to policy briefs, thought pieces, papers, frameworks, regulations, research
- Demand for more work from Think Tank leaders

The Open Society Foundation Change Handbook has an excellent example of indicators for policy and practice change as well as progress towards change.

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Excerpted from: A Successful Guide to Advocacy (Open Societies Foundation)

Measuring impacts in advocacy—examples of indicators

OBJECTIVE	INDICATORS OF PROGRESS	INDICATORS OF IMPACT (AS TOWARD OBJECTIVES AGAINST ORIGINAL OBJECTIVE)
1. POLICY CHANGE • Guidelines for search procedures changed by the city police departments • Revision of detention policy to guarantee detainees access to lawyers • Drug laws revised to reduce disparities between crack and powder cocaine sentencing	❑ Increased number of members in a coalition of organizations calling for change, or the number of new advocates ❑ Increased dialogue about and attention to the policy that needs to be changed, e.g., increased number of press articles or public statements by elected officials ❑ Changed opinion (whose?) ❑ Changed rhetoric (in public/private) ❑ Undermining activities from target and target's allies	❑ Changed policy ❑ Change in legislation—enacted when?
2. PRACTICE CHANGE • Changing police stop and search practices • Ensuring armed forces observe UN 1820 on sexual violence	❑ Increased dialogue about and attention to the practice that needs to be changed among practitioners as well as policymakers and broader public ❑ Changed opinion of one or two leading	❑ Policy/legislation change implemented ❑ Budget is allocated to roll out ❑ High quality personnel in charge of

• Rolling out inclusive education techniques	practitioners in their field ❑ Pilot practice change model initiated and/or exchange visit/training initiated ❑ Senior level discussions on implementing practice change, evidence that external advice is actively sought and used	implementing policy ❑ Evidence of monitoring and enforcing practice change (guidelines, orders, standards, inspectorates) ❑ Evidence of penalties being handed out for not implementing policy ❑ *(and in the very long term)* positive change in people's lives as a result of the policy/ legislation change
3. ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE • Countering discrimination against LGBTI, Roma, disabled groups, migrant groups *NB: This is an enormous subject area about which much experience abounds; this table simply offers some generic indicators which may be useful to measure change.*	❑ Greater awareness of individual rights and the power systems that withhold rights ❑ Changed rhetoric in public and private ❑ Change in citizens' skills, capacity and knowledge to mobilize and advocate on their own ❑ Evidence of nurturing emerging leaders ❑ Evidence of new groups mobilizing who are self-organized	❑ Public and actionable recognition of rights by decision makers. ❑ Spokespeople from these groups feel able to engage in public discourse without fear or prejudice ❑ Leaders of these groups are accountable to their constituencies ❑ Participation of leaders in policymaking processes ❑ Positive change in people's lives as a result

Training Activity (25 min):

In K-Hub teams, review your goals and objectives (step 2).

Based on your goals and objectives, consider:

- What are some indicators that will help you track progress?
- How will you assess the degree to which things have changed?
- How are you going to follow up (monthly, quarterly, yearly)?
- What will you do with the results?
- How will ensure you are learning and how will you share this with others?

Take notes in your workbook and write at least 2-3 indicators and methods for monitoring on the flip chart provided. After 25 minutes, we will regroup for a 10 minute plenary discussion.

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Presentation and Peer review of K-Hub Draft Strategies

To close Session 3, each K-Hub will review their strategy from steps 1-6 and present their strategy to the wider group for feedback.

Training Activity (80 min total):

In K-Hub country groups, review your strategy from start to finish and summarise the key points. Come up with a creative way to present this to the group (15 min).

Each group will have 3-4 min to present their strategy followed by an opportunity for feedback from others (10 min/group). Feedback should focus on strengths and limitations, as well as ways to improve the strategy.

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Additional thoughts on working with partners as national K-Hubs and a regional K-Hub

Some key points from ADB's Guidelines on Knowledge Partnerships (p27-47) to help knowledge partnerships succeed.

Ensure you have:

- Clear, shared purpose
- Outcome oriented workplan
- Leadership and governance
- Processes for collaboration and exchange
- Ongoing reflection and learning
- Sustainability planning

Competition vs. cooperation vs. collaboration is something we all need to consider in a knowledge hub. Cooperating will help you get joint tasks done, because you will be summing efforts between research organizations. However, collaborating, which is multiplying efforts, means that you can go even farther in influencing policy and practice in the region.

Training Activity (35 min total):

Silently and individually, consider the following two questions and note down your answers in the workbook (3 min):

- How is this knowledge hub different than traditional academic work?
- What are some techniques you think we could use to work together (national partners, regional hub partners)?

Next, find a partner (someone you met in the training that you did not know before) and share your answers (5 min).

Finally, find another set of partners (group of 4 total) and share your findings as a group. What are the similarities and differences? Are any patterns emerging?

Together decide on the a few top ideas you want to share with the entire group and note these down (10 min).

We will finish with an all group discussion of the key points (15 min).

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Recommended On-line Resources on Policy Influencing

Research to Action: http://www.researchtoaction.org
Research to Action (R2A) is an initiative catering for the strategic and practical needs of people trying to improve the way development research is communicated and utilised.

Think Tank Initiative – http://www.thinktankinitiative.org
TTI is dedicated to strengthening the capacity of independent policy research organizations in the developing world. Launched in 2008 and managed by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Initiative is a partnership between five donors.

GDNet – http://gdnetcomms.wordpress.com
GDNet is the GDN Knowledge Services program created in 2001 to help researchers from developing and transition countries and support their work to have a greater global impact.

On Think Tanks Blog - http://onthinktanks.org
A blog about think tanks (or policy research institutes) in developing countries.

ODI RAPID – http://www.odi.org.uk/programmes/rapid
ODI's Research and Development programme (RAPID) works to understand the relationship between research, policy and practice and promoting evidence-informed policy-making.

Evidence, Messages, Change: An Introductory Guide to Successful Advocacy (Open Societies Foundation)
http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/evidence-messages-change-introductory-guide-successful-advocacy
The guide outlines important steps to ensure that advocacy is as effective as possible.

Communications channels and tools
http://onthinktanks.org/2012/08/20/communication-options-for-think-tanks-channels-and-tools/

How to write policy briefs by IDRC (click the document on the last slide for a template in word)
http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Resources/Tools_and_Training/Documents/how-to-write-a-policy-brief.pdf

How to write policy briefs by GDNet – http://www.slideshare.net/Connect2GDNet/writing-policy-briefs

And if interested in the theory of what difference a policy brief makes:
http://www.ids.ac.uk/project/exploring-the-impact-of-research-communications-what-difference-does-a-policy-brief-make