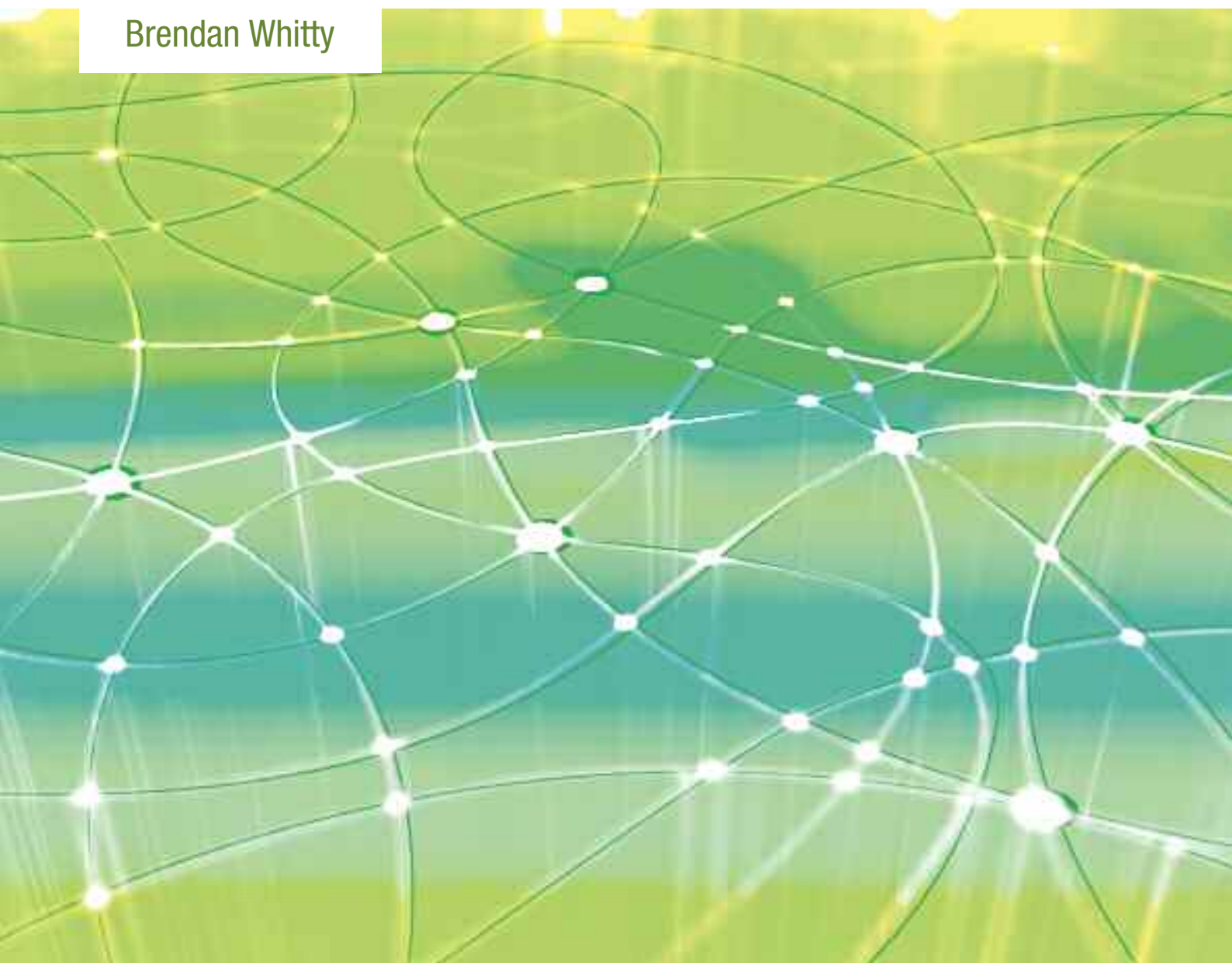




one world trust

# Accountability Principles for Research Organisations

Brendan Whitty



The **One World Trust** is an independent think tank that conducts research, develops recommendations and advocates for reform to make policy and decision-making processes in global governance more accountable to the people they affect now and in the future, and to ensure that international laws are strengthened and applied equally to all.

The project **Accountability Principles for Research Institutes (APRI)** was initiated to explore the meaning and use of concepts of accountability amongst organisations that conduct research which individually and jointly proves in many cases highly influential in the formation of public policy. These organisations come from a wide range of backgrounds. Yet in many cases, researchers, their work processes and their outputs remain relatively invisible, and there is to date no common understanding of accountability principles which touch on the different stages of the research process and the relationships it entails with a broad range of stakeholders.



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**ISBN 978-0-9559460-0-4**

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# **Accountability Principles for Research Organisations**

Brendan Whitty

**One World Trust 2008**

## Acknowledgements

This report was written by Brendan Whitty, programme officer and principle researcher on this project. The results reached in this project so far are to a large extent the result of his dedication and energy. The One World Trust's thanks go in the first place to him. In much of his work he was supported by interns Carolina Johnstone and Vidhi Beri, without whose diligence and assistance all this would have been much more difficult. As project leader the Executive Director of the One World Trust Michael Hammer gave overall direction and offered substantive contributions at a number of junctures in the project. Several One World Trust staff and interns – Marie Battini, Gina Bergh, Kathryn O'Neill, Deepti Sastry and Chris Snow – provided great assistance in the interview phase of the research. Robert Lloyd, Projects Manager for the One World Trust Global Accountability Report, helped with conceptual advice drawing on his particular experience of work with the Global Accountability Framework. Julie Gersten's assistance in the final editorial stages was equally invaluable.

It would not have been possible, nor meaningful, to engage in this project and produce this report without the support received from many people outside the organisation.

The One World Trust is particularly grateful for the contribution by the collaborating organisations, listed in full in the annex, and the participants in the on-line forum. Various drafts of this report also benefited hugely from the helpful external comments including in particular from Tom Bigg, Gopathampi Krishnan, Pamela Manalo, Lawrence Mose, Douglas Norton, Michael Otieno, Halsey Rogers, and Rajesh Tandon. All external contributors have shown extraordinary interest, commitment and enthusiasm for the subject despite their busy schedules.

Final thanks go to the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa Canada, who provided the funds for this project and were very understanding and helpful throughout – and in particular Tricia Wind and Sarah Earl.

The content and any errors in this report remain entirely the responsibility of the One World Trust.

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## Glossary

- Accountability** - The processes through which an organisation makes a commitment to respond to and balance the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities, and delivers against this commitment (One World Trust, "Pathways to Accountability", 2005, 20).
- Advocacy coalition** - Interest groups within society, each of whose members "share a set of normative and causal beliefs and who often act in concert." (Sabatier 1988).
- Causal beliefs** - A group of descriptive understandings of the world which allow a researcher to make predictions given an appropriate set of variables.
- Claimed beneficiaries** - Those people whom a research organization claims its research will benefit.
- Core policy beliefs** - Beliefs that inform the basis of policy, which will be a combination of both core values (normative beliefs) and causal beliefs.
- Corporate stakeholder analysis** - An approach to identifying and prioritising stakeholders developed in the context of the corporations (Freeman 1984) which recognises that relevant stakeholders include all those who are affected by or who might affect the corporation.
- Donors/clients** - Those who commission or fund the research.
- End user** - A term used in the innovation systems literature to describe the final beneficiary of a technical innovation i.e. the farmer of a new seed variety.
- Feedback mechanism** - The way in which an organisation invites comments and critique of its activities.
- Innovation system** - The research and policy process by which an idea is transformed into a technological innovation.
- Institution** - Both formal and informal "rules of the game" governing the interactions between actors, whether organisations or individuals.
- Internal stakeholders** - The staff, management and governing boards that work within a research institution.
- Mission capture** - The alteration of an organisation's strategy by an organization to meet the needs of a funder or other key stakeholder other than intended beneficiaries.
- Mission creep** - The divergence of an organisation from its strategy to secure funds.
- Next user** - A term used in the innovation systems literature to describe those who implement new technological innovations.
- Normative beliefs** - Core values or principles which a research organization espouses.
- Organisation** - One particular, legally constituted form of institution structured around familiar legal constructs such as "companies" and "non-profit" organisations.
- Participation** - The way in which an organisation involves stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities.
- Participatory research methodologies** - Research techniques where researchers collaborate with the proposed beneficiaries of the research to generate the research.
- Policy community** - Those involved in the production of policy. This includes both the body of researchers, government departments and decision-makers, and other relevant political actors.
- Policy-relevant research** - Research whose purpose is to change policy (used to contrast technological innovation, where the purpose of the research is to produce technological advances).
- Primary research communities** - Communities who comprise the subject of research.
- Research discipline** - An integrated set of causal beliefs, core normative beliefs, epistemology, and means of generating and verifying data.
- Stakeholder** - An actor who has a legitimate interest or claim in a process, organization, system or person.

## Introduction

Large amounts of money spent on development are allocated to research. In its research strategy released in April 2008,<sup>1</sup> the UK Department for International Development doubled its commitment to research to £1 billion over five years. In 2007, the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research spent US \$506 million.<sup>2</sup> This investment in research is necessary because rational policy processes rely on good evidence. Organisations generating evidence can have great impact on the citizens of a country. It is important that research organisations are accountable. As we shall see, accountability implies more than simply rendering an account to the clients or donors commissioning or funding research. It means engaging with the wider policy community, with the policy-makers whom you are trying to influence, and with those whom you are trying to benefit through your research. While there have been great leaps forward in a number of areas linked to accountability – such as advances in participatory research methods, evaluation of research and community empowerment – the field lacks a unifying overview. This study provides one such overview.

This study is designed for managers and researchers of policy research organisations working in developing countries. It provides a set of principles and practical guidelines to help them reflect on their organisation's accountability. The study is the main product of the "Accountability Principles for Research Institutes" project, funded by the International Development Research Centre. The project took as its starting point the One World Trust's Global Accountability Framework, which was developed over a period of five years consultative work and provides a set of accountability principles which will apply to organisations with global impact.

The term "policy research organisations" includes any organisation that conducts research and uses that research to influence policy. It will apply to many organisations whose primary aim is to develop technological innovations, since these frequently have profound policy impacts. The definition covers a great many diverse organisations. Indeed, while the original focus of the project was on "research institutes", this was soon abandoned in favour of the wider term "research organisations", as we realised that other bodies such as civil society organisations, consultancies, advocacy groups and large companies all conduct research which impact on policy.

Following this introductory part, the study is structured as follows:

- **Part 2** describes motivations for an organisation to be accountable. It draws on the good practices increasingly realised in the literature. It starts with four central principles of accountability: participation, evaluation, transparency and feedback. Using this as a working definition of accountability, it explores from both an instrumental and a normative perspective to which stakeholders a research organisation should be accountable and why.
- **Part 3** explores the tensions and constraints facing different types of organisations when they seek to hold themselves accountable. It is based on our work with sixteen diverse research organisations researching in developing-country contexts.
- **Part 4** defines in greater depth what accountability means in practice and how its principles may be implemented. It delineates nine broad processes and two policies. Based on the foregoing discussion, it describes for different research organisations the key stakeholders who should be consulted, reviews key methods which will enable a research organisation to be more accountable, and discusses practical issues and tensions in their implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/Research-Strategy-08.pdf>; accessed 28 August 2008

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cgjar.org/who/index.html>; accessed 28 August 2008.





## The benefits of accountability in research

### ***A definition of “accountability”***

“Accountability” has been described as “complex and chameleon-like” (Mulgan 2000), “inherently ill-structured” (Kearns 1994) and “malleable and often nebulous” (Newell and Bellour 2002). Most authors have given up striving to identify a single conceptual or operational definition of the term (Kearns 1994), and have concluded that all they can offer is a typology of meanings (Koppell 2005). Moreover, ‘accountability’ is dynamic, embedded in social structures. It forms a part of the “rules of the game”, the formal and informal institutions which govern the relationships of actors.<sup>3</sup> Shifts in political power give rise to a “contested” area where “accountability gaps” are created and negotiated (Newell and Bellour 2002). For example, in the first years of the century civil society organisations, who had themselves been champions of accountability of states and global organisations, found that their own accountability was suddenly under scrutiny and their role in democratic governance put under the microscope (see, e.g, Anderson 2000, Bolton 2000, Edwards 2000, Charnovitz 2006, Jordan and de Tuijl 2006).

Two points should be noted. First, the meaning of the term “accountability” has gradually expanded. Traditionally, it was linked to an agent rendering account to his or her principal for the activities carried out on the principal’s behalf. This assumed a formal agreement between them, giving the agent explicit authority to act on the principal’s behalf in an agreed way, and conferring on the principal the power to demand that the agent render an account for the agent’s use of that authority. However it is nowadays a common occurrence in the media to hear that particular organisations, industries or people should be “more accountable” or should be “held to account” for their actions, without implying the existence of a prior formal relationship granting authority. Thus, accountability now includes “softer” and non-legally binding duties. Originally suggesting the principal’s power to demand an account for the agent’s mandated activities, it now includes the process by which the authority was developed; from an exclusive relationship between two parties, it now has reference to wider engagement to a wider range of stakeholders (see p. 11 and 14 below).

The second point concerns the word “stakeholder”. The field of “corporate stakeholder analysis” argues that a corporation has a variety of stakeholders beyond simply the shareholders who have formally “bought into” the company (Freeman 1984). This was one of the first conceptualisations that most managers look beyond clients and donors to other key people who can impact on their work. Caution is necessary here. The usefulness of “stakeholder” as a word is precisely in its lack of content: it means no more than “an actor who has an interest or recognisable claim in another actor”. This vagueness carries with it risks: ‘stakeholder’ cannot be translated in many languages. When combined with the difficulty in defining “accountability”, it becomes necessary to establish clearly what is being discussed.

It is important, therefore, to say what we mean by “accountability.” For this project, we follow the One World Trust’s definition of accountability:

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<sup>3</sup> A note on terminology: we distinguish between organisations and institutions. There are several meanings of “institution”. While in global governance it often means large global organisations, such as the international financial institutions, we use it to mean both formal and informal “rules of the game” governing the interactions between actors, whether organisations or individuals. An ‘organisation’ is therefore one particular, legally constituted form of institution structured around familiar legal constructs such as “companies” and “non-profit” organisations. Organisations are governed by both formal and informal standards.

*[Accountability is] the processes through which an organisation makes a commitment to respond to and balance the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities, and delivers against this commitment (One World Trust, “Pathways to Accountability”, 2005, 20).*

In what follows, we develop the implications of this definition of accountability for research organisations. We start with the core accountability principles of participation, evaluation, transparency and feedback. These principles are then used to inform a discussion of the reasons why accountability is important, a discussion which is split into two – one branch addresses the normative or ethical justifications for accountability; the other outlines “instrumental” justifications for accountability. We conclude the part by comparing the stakeholders, as implied by these two branches.

### **Four principles of accountability**

The following framework of accountability is used in the present project. It rests on four principles of accountability: participation, evaluation, transparency and feedback mechanisms (ibid. p. 29 et seq). Each of these empowers stakeholders to inform themselves about the organisation and to become involved in its activities, providing them a voice in setting the course of the organisation. In Part 4 we will discuss the means of embedding these principles into the organisation’s decision-making processes and practices.

- *Participation* concerns the way in which an organisation involves stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities. Being participatory is a characteristic of processes whereby stakeholders are given a voice in the activities of the organisation, creating ownership of the results– and thus a greater likelihood of uptake and legitimacy. Furthermore, taking the views of others into account before the activity has commenced is a means of pre-empting challenges later. It allows a researcher to take on board the values and beliefs of the beneficiaries and policy-makers, possibly tempering a research project, tailoring it to fit the needs of each, and flagging potential dangers or issues in a research methodology.
- *Evaluation* is a process or bundle of processes by which an organisation reflects on its activities. It fulfils two key functions. First, only by a transparent evaluation process can a research organisation report on its activities, thus ensuring that the consequences and nature of the researcher’s activities are understood. Second, evaluation and appraisal of its activities permits an organisation to gather and assess evidence regarding its performance and results, with a view to learning. In formulating its approach to evaluation, research managers balance both reporting and learning functions.
- *Transparency* is a characteristic of processes defining the way in which an organisation makes available information about their activities and aims. With research organisations, this may include the information that they collect, which they analyse and which forms the evidence-basis for their policy recommendations. It will also include information about their work, their expertise and their key stakeholders. Transparency is a necessary pre-condition for any form of accountability: only through the availability of information about its actions, stakeholders and research, can an organisation be held to account for them.
- *Feedback mechanisms* comprise the processes whereby an organisation invites comments and critique of its activities. They include processes which allow stakeholders to comment on and, if appropriate, require redress for past acts. This relates closest to the enforcement and redress mechanisms inherent in the traditional principal-agent forms of accountability. Feedback mechanisms also include processes offering stakeholders the opportunity to comment on the

research and advocacy positions a research organisation adopts, as well as processes for the treatment of formal complaints which will establish the space to be heard in a safe environment, and the commitment from the research organisation that it will adequately respond to their concerns.

These principles of accountability can be applied to any organisation, regardless of its sector or field. They were developed into a “Global Accountability Framework” by the One World Trust (see for an overview *ibid*) which provides guidelines which global organisations can use to reform their own accountability by addressing their policies, management systems and processes. No organisations are perfect in respecting all of the dimensions of accountability – even “high performers” were found to have some work to do (One World Trust, Global Accountability Report 2007, 7). This framework was used to inform the present analysis.

Some points are worth noting about the organisation for which the original framework is designed. First, the focus is on *global* organisations. While the principles will apply to smaller organisations, their application in previous One World Trust work is limited to global-level. Second, due in part to

**Textbox 1: Relevance of technological research to policy**

*Research organisations whose primary function is to conduct scientific or technological innovation may not see the impact on policy – typically conceived as the laws, regulations and practices of the government – as a matter for their concern. According to the traditional “transfer of technology” model, the aim of TROs is to generate and then hand over new technologies, to be adopted by the implementing agency, typically the government. (For critiques, see Chambers 1997, 67-75). This product-oriented focus relies on other organisations to adopt the innovation. As Ekboir (2003) points out, the complexity of processes of adoption of technologies renders the success of transfer of technology uncertain. Technological research is therefore divided from policy work. Nevertheless, this project will include organisations conducting primarily technological research for four reasons:*

1. *Descriptively, many organisations will be engaged in both technological research and policy-oriented research, even if researchers may be separated into different programmes, with social scientists working in different research silos to those working on technological innovations.*
2. *Our literature review revealed a growing realisation that innovation – such as, in developing countries, agricultural scientific innovation – benefits from close integration with social and economic research disciplines. Since agricultural activities are embedded in social and economic structures, this closer integration would help innovators recognise and understand economic and social constraints and opportunities for their innovations (Hall et al. 2004a, 1).*
3. *Technological innovations will frequently have profound policy impacts. For example, the “Green Revolution” was made possible by technological innovations and developments, but had huge global repercussions in government policies. Policy impacts may include the need to regulate science and tailor the services offered by a government to take into account new capacity.*
4. *While the report addresses organisations whose primary role is to engage in policy-oriented research, it will be worthwhile to draw insights from innovation systems literature, because – as we shall see (p. 19 below) – the discussions reflect discussions taking place in the literature on policy-relevant research. The report will draw on insights from both disciplines in developing its principles.*

the focus on organisations which straddle many countries and have many offices, it was recognised that policies, management systems and processes are of great importance to ensure common respect for accountability. For smaller organisations, this may not be the case. Third, the framework was developed for any global organisation: whether it is a multinational company, a intergovernmental organisation or an international non-governmental organisation; and in whatever sector the organisation works. Fourth, government organisations are not covered, even if those can project power or influence globally.

In this paper, we are using the basic principles of the GAP framework to inform an accountability framework for research organisations working to influence policy. This definition prompts some initial distinctions to earlier work on global organisations. It is focused, not on the “global” nature of the organisation, but on the *activity* being carried out – i.e. whether the organisation conducts research with a view to influencing policy. Our research showed us that this definition covers a wide range of activities (see below p. 21 for a discussion of how our research dealt with this diversity). It can include organisations ranging from the very small to the very large, and across all sectors. It can include NGOs, companies and can also include public organisations.

### ***Two reasons why accountability matters***

The purpose of this section is to show that research organisations have strong motives to be accountable not all of which are based on ethical demands being placed on them by outsiders demanding better performance. There are significant reasons why participation, transparency, evaluation and feedback mechanisms can assist research organisations in achieving their goals. The first task of this project is therefore to understand the benefits of taking a definition of accountability that moves beyond the traditional ‘narrow’ meaning and that puts the instrumental as well as normative argument for a wide definition of accountability.

To do this we draw on the field of corporate stakeholder analysis, where the expanded definition has been developed (see for the pioneering work in the field, Freeman 1984). The extension of the term accountability beyond its traditional “narrow” meaning, has been supported by the proponents of corporate stakeholder analyses using three justifications (Donaldson and Preston 1995, Mitchell et al. 1997, Jones and Wicks 1999, 207).

Aside from the descriptive justification which bases the relevance of corporate stakeholder analysis on observations of what managers actually do, there are two justifications which present prescriptive reasons for being accountable to a wider group of stakeholders:

1. **Normative:** there are a number of ethical triggers for accountability, which depend on the nature of the relationship between the stakeholder and the research organisation. Each individual ground is based on an ethical principle which requires that the research organisation is answerable for its actions.
2. **Instrumental:** the reasons for being accountable are not limited to ethical exhortations. The responsiveness entailed by accountability will be instrumentally useful in the attainment of the research organisation’s goals. Building on recommended practice in research and innovation, it becomes increasingly clear that to be a good manager, it is necessary to take all one’s stakeholders into account, not simply those with whom one has a formal accountability relationship.

While the descriptive justification captures who research organisations currently consider their key stakeholders to be, this study attempts to do more than simply review current practices. We want to develop an ‘ideal’ holistic set of principles for accountability based on principles and arguments of effectiveness – that is, both the normative and instrumental justifications for accountability.

To avoid confusion, we will for the rest of this study use “accountability” for the normative justification and “responsiveness” to describe instrumental justification.

### ***The normative reason: ethical demands of accountability***

A research organisation will accept authority and mandate to carry out its work. Most such mandates will carry with them the need to render account. This is the foundation of all normative justifications for accountability. As noted above, accountability traditionally arises from the principal-agent relationship, where the principal confers authority on an agent, who will report back to the principal. The normative source of this “traditional” type of accountability arises from the contract and the importance of the respect for agreements. An agreement, however, is not the only case in which authority and corresponding accountability is triggered. We introduce here a range of different ethical triggers of accountability and the stakeholders to which they are owed.

Before moving to address the forms of accountability in turn, three points should be noted: First, an organisation may be accountable to more than one stakeholder.

Second, the accountability relationships will have different urgencies (if not different contents) and will require different prioritisation, guidelines for which will be examined in Part 3.

Third, they may change in nature over time, as they take on new projects, forge partnerships, and conduct research in different areas. The possible normative triggers include: legal accountability, triggered by the existence of laws.

#### **Legal accountability**

States almost invariably confer some duties to render account along with the conferral of recognition of an institutional status. Even in the most neo-liberal state, a research organisation will be born already carrying some obligations to be accountable. The decision to incorporate and the state-conferred authority to trade as a company or a formally recognised NGO entails in turn some responsibility. These forms of accountability may be described as what Jordan and van Tuijl (2006) call “organisational” accountability. Founded on the importance of respect for rule of law, they are, in general, non-negotiable.

#### **Internal accountability**

This report does not deal with internal governance and internal accountability structures – set by internal hierarchies, reporting to management, formal disciplinary proceedings, and line management norms. This is because there is no significant difference between good internal management and governance of research organisations and organisations who do other activities – like building schools, or running a hospital; and because there are differences in the laws governing formal internal governance between public, private and non-profit organisations. We will accordingly only note the type of accountability here, but will not treat it in detail.

#### **Contractual accountability**

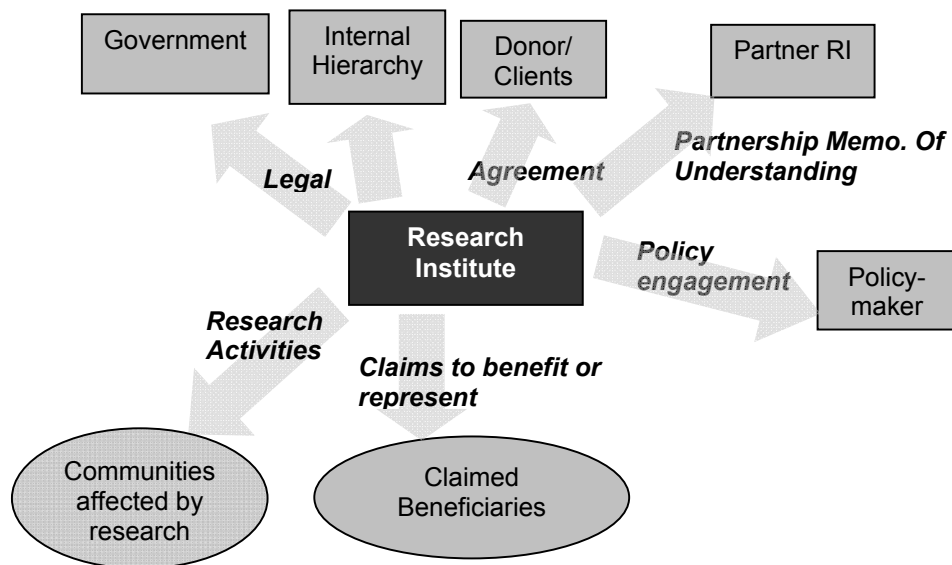
This is the traditional way of establishing an accountability relationship: agreeing specifically that you will be accountable, normally as a corollary of being given funds, a grant, or powers to do something else (Lloyd 2005; Peruzzotti 2006, see also Mulgan 2000 the “core” meaning and Bovens 2005, the “narrow” meaning). The normative basis for this accountability is the importance of respect for contract and promises.

There are two stakeholder groups to which contractual accountability is often owed by a research organisation: donors and partners. With each, the authority conferred is different – the donors or

clients transfer funds in return for an output. Partnership agreements, in contrast, confer authority on all partners to conduct research activities and advocacy activities on behalf of the partnership. One important note of caution should be sounded at this juncture: when signing a contract, the research organisation may not be able to control its terms, particularly if the contract is with a donor or client, who often have standard-form contracts.

These terms may force the research organisation to compromise on or supplant its general accountability principles – for example, by keeping information confidential.

The relationships described in Figure 1 are a variant on notions of “upwards” and “downwards” accountability to stakeholders. The arrows pointing up are formal accountability obligations, those pointing down are informal ethical obligations.



**Figure 1: Different types of stakeholder groups and sources of accountability**

### Accountability for claims to benefit or represent

The core notion of accountability arises where a principal-agent relationship is conferred by agreement by the researchers. We argue that public claims by a research organisation that they represent a community also create an accountability relationship of this nature. They assert the existence of an expressly conferred mandate. This subject has been addressed in strong attacks on the role of civil society engagement in policy and their claims to represent communities which were made since the turn of the millennium (Bolton 2000, Edwards 2000). Accordingly, organisations are increasingly hesitant to make these claims – indeed, not one of the sixteen organisations with whom we collaborated to develop principles of accountability made such a claim (please see below for a discussion of these organisations and how they were identified, p. 21).

Taking this a stage further, however, we also argue that there is an accountability relationship in the related situation where a research organisation claims to conduct research for the benefit of a group (be they “the poor”, a particular community, the population of a country or city, or other group).

“Through these claims a research organisation may gain access to resources such funders, media space, regulatory approval, or future customers.” (Johnstone et al 2008, 4; see also Morsing and Schultz 2006). Frequently organisations will use claims that their research will benefit a section of society to leverage funds or policy impact for its operations – meaning that the research organisation has acted as though it has the authority to speak for the group. This, we argue, incurs an ethical obligation to render account to that group (see Stone 2007, 267). The claim may bring benefits to the research organisation, in terms of its positioning in the research community, such as the potential availability of funds and potential public relations points (see for these Johnson et al. 2008).

If an organisation takes a position in the public sphere and in the policy debate on the public assertion that it is working to further the interests of a group of people, we argue that the legitimacy of this claim, and the accountability of the organisation requires justification. This is because it acted in the public domain *as though* such an agreement existed and gained whatever boost to its credibility its claim has provided. This principle of accountability suggests that a research organisation which claims to benefit a community or act on its behalf should inform the community of the activities it is undertaking, ostensibly for its benefit.

### **Advocacy as a claim to the objectivity of research**

Research organisations try to claim the objectivity of their research. For example not one of our research organisations admitted that it was an advocacy organisation, since advocacy is associated with interest groups unsupported by objective research. Advocacy appeared to mean a campaigning organisation, whose views lacked systematic evidence to back them up. “Our data and research output informs the policy changes... The research itself informs how to engage society.” (KHRC, interview, 8 April 2008). We argue that the attempt to influence policy through research and advocacy creates an accountability relationship to the policy-makers, by virtue of the claim of objectivity entailed by the presentation of objective research. The claim is that, at least, the research is an accurate representation and is not an active attempt to mislead.

Neither scientific claims nor research policy recommendations are neutral (Weingart 1999). Keeley and Scoones (1999) argue that scientific fact is socially constructed, and as such it becomes “necessary to ask how and where knowledge was produced and to what end.” While it may be claimed that science and technocratic solutions to problems are apolitical, in fact under this conception science is not neutral but rather may be used to obscure the interest groups in fact determining the policy (ibid, 21-22). Research can be used for tactical reasons – to support existing policy decisions – rather than for the reasons intended (Weiss 1979, Mitchell et al 2006, 312). By putting a question or problem in the hands of technical experts, actors not capable of engaging in the discourse are prevented from contributing to the policy (ibid. 25-26). Thus Stone (2007, 276) argues that think-tanks are not mere informants, but serve to shape the policies, often pushing ideas with nothing more than a weak relationship to the public.

We argue therefore that the attempt to influence policy through research and advocacy creates an accountability relationship to the policy-makers. However, *no* accountability is owed to those impacted by policy changes. That is to say, a research organisation which argues for a tightening on regulations should not be accountable to those who are impacted by the decision, except insofar as they may be claimed beneficiaries. Two reasons lie behind this: first, the indeterminacy and unpredictability of the impact of research means that it is unfair to hold research organisations accountable for the policy that arises, since they simply do not have control over its implementation. Second, to hold a researcher accountable for the decision of a policy-maker usurps the authority of the policy-maker.

### **Accountability to those impacted by act of research**

People impacted by the activities of a research organisation ought to be able to hold the research organisation to account (One World Trust, “Pathways to Accountability”, 2005, One World Trust, “Global Accountability Report” 2006). This accountability is most relevant when the affected group is weaker and lacks alternative means for redress or alternative channels to make their voice heard. For research organisations, this consideration applies to those who are affected by the direct act of primary data collection (whether it be an ethnographic study, a participatory rangeland mapping exercise or a pilot field test of a new variety of crop). We argue that the researcher should be accountable for these impacts.

### ***The instrumental reason: the benefits of being responsive***

Normative principles like those outlined above are not the only motivating forces behind the need for accountability. The instrumental justification for greater responsiveness is based on the assertion that stronger links and better communication to a wider range of stakeholders will make the research organisation more effective. This assertion is rooted in the evolutions in understanding of both the impact of research on policy and the role of research in innovation processes. In both, the linear model of research has been abandoned in favour of an understanding of research as a complex process embedded in a wider community of actors. This section will review the literature outlining the fresh understanding of policy communities and innovation systems as complex systems and the good practices identified. From these good practices, it will focus on the benefits to research organisations of deeper engagement with a wider group of stakeholders.

#### ***Text box 2: Importance of accountability to policy process***

*The latter section showed that science and research are inherently political and often reflects the interests of an advocacy coalition or interest group within society. Claims of science and research as sources of objective representation of the truth are therefore open to question. Conversely, while research is not neutral, and can be harnessed for political interests, a policy-maker with no research or data at all will have no alternative but to follow his or her political gut. Inaction on the part of research, or an overly delicate sense of the necessary preconditions of research quality for submitting recommendations may leave the field open for less scrupulous actors. Jones and Walsh (2008) argue “...when researchers recoil too far from the policy implications of research, they leave a ‘vacuum’ that is filled by politically motivated parties who offer their own interpretations, and without credible opposition, can mislead the public towards their goals.” (See also Higgins et al. 2006).*

*The importance of evidence-based arguments is acknowledged, but they must also be understood as socially constructed and political – and as such subject to the same scrutiny and conditions for legitimacy as other arguments. We contend that researchers can improve the legitimacy of their arguments by formulating and communicating research in an accountable way – by being transparent about the process and methods that were used, and by formulating their arguments in a participatory manner – and that this is the source of the normative justification for accountability of research.*

*Strong mechanisms for participation, transparency, evaluation and feedback will ensure that policy in developing countries is appropriate to its context and shares the values of those it is trying to impact. Our conception of legitimacy states that it is the reality, and the values, of the end user that ought to count, and that **accountability is a means to achieve legitimacy.***



## Understanding policy communities and innovation systems

The traditional conception of policy formulation describes a causal linear process, whereby a problem is identified, research is conducted to develop solutions, the best solution identified, implemented and its success evaluated. In this conception, the policy community is split between a body of researchers, mostly academics, who provided expertise and knowledge to a second group, the policy-makers, mostly civil servants and elected officials. Research results in a product which is passed from the researcher to the policy-maker.

These assumptions are being increasingly challenged (Court and Young 2005, 20). Lindblom (1956) described policy formulation as a process of “muddling through”, rather than a systematic review of well-researched options. An institutional gulf was identified between the policy-makers and the academics (Caplan 1979; Reimers and McGinn 1997). What makes for good academic or scientific research may obtain an author publications and citations, but it is not necessarily the type of research that policy-makers are interested in. Policy-makers want a clear policy solution that can be implemented. Researchers, in contrast, find that they cannot provide a simple answer which is also scientifically rigorous without adding a slew of qualifications. They are faced with the challenges of communicating an appropriately nuanced, and yet still clear version of the research. The groups have contrasting expectations for research which may result in a lack of communication in needs from research, and ultimately to a failure in the impact of research (Choi et al. 2005, Higgins et al. 2006).

Instead of a linear process, research processes are now understood as having a variety of impacts. For example, Weiss (1979) identifies seven impacts or uses of research, of which direct adoption is not the most important nor the most frequent (Rip 2001; see, for developing country contexts the findings of Court and Young 2003 reviewing 50 case studies as part of the Overseas Development Institute’s RAPID project). She noted that research can have more impact on policy by changing the terminology of an ongoing discourse through “knowledge creep” (Weiss 1979, Rip 2001), by gradual “decision accretion”, and by changing the language and wider policy community – the “enlightenment” effect. This leads to an understanding of the impact of research as a more subtle phenomenon, which occurs over a long timeframe (Sabatier 1988, 131, Carden 2004), and which involves the interaction of a range of actors. Policy is formulated by the interaction of a number of actors, and as such its formation is a complex phenomenon (Ramalingam and Jones 2008).

Similarly, in the context of technological innovation Gibbons et al. (1994) described a “new production of knowledge” whereby “Mode One” knowledge has given way to “Mode Two” research. Mode One comprises a linear process marked by the transfer of knowledge from the scientist to the user of the research. For Mode One, practical applications of research are always separated from the actual knowledge production. Mode Two, in contrast, describes a research system that is highly interactive and ‘socially distributed’, where researchers are only one actor. Knowledge production is generated “in the context of application” and is the product of trans-disciplinary work.

Moreover, since Mode Two argues that researcher processes involve ongoing social interactions with a wider range of people, scientists are more integrated into society, and these interactions promote a form of “social accountability”. The new production of knowledge is one popular theory amongst a number noting the evolution in research practices. All agree on a departure from linear transfer of technologies into more complex and interactive systems (see for a recent overview Hessels and van Lente 2008).

The “new production of knowledge” is descriptive of the evolution that has occurred in the processes of technological innovation. Other theories are more prescriptive, laying out suggestions to research managers of how research ought to happen if the innovation systems theory – of which there are a number of variants (Hessels and van Lente 2008, 745) – is prescriptive, but shares a

rejection of linear model of innovation, on the basis that maintaining research separate from the wider innovation system will not result in effective research. Like Mode Two research, systems thinking in innovation studies emphasises the importance of interactions and feedback mechanisms between all actors involved in innovation (Freeman 1987; Lundvall 1992). Increasingly, innovations systems theories are being adopted by scientists working in the field of agricultural science research (Douthwaite 2002; Ekboir 2003; Hall et al. 2004a). Science is not independent from social and economic policy. Innovation is a complex system and a social process (Hall et al 2004a).

In both innovation systems and in the evolving understanding of the impact of research on policy, the effectiveness of research requires several conditions: the need for collaborative generation of research; the need for close links with the wider scientific and policy community – which is considered to be far broader than the centres of academic expertise; and good communication to policy-makers and end users.<sup>4</sup> The principles of participation, evaluation, transparency and feedback mechanisms that act to ensure an organisation will be accountable will also act to strengthen the effectiveness of research – although the emphasis will fall on different stakeholder groups for each (see p. 18).

**Table 1: Shifts in understanding of research impact and innovation processes.**

	<b>Linear model of policy process</b>	<b>Policy process as complex interaction of actors</b>	<b>Linear innovation models</b>	<b>Innovation systems model</b>
<i>Mode of knowledge production</i>	Linear, causal transfer	Participatory, policy as “argument”, chaotic, complex	Linear, transfer of technology	Reflexive, distributed, interactive
<i>Relevant actors in process</i>	Polarised, academic research and government policy-maker	Plural, cross-sectoral, several advocacy coalitions and networks	Scientists, recipients of research	Private sector, academics, civil society organisations, distributed
<i>Conditions for research effectiveness</i>	High quality evidence and rigorous analysis	Links with policy-maker and wider policy community; local credibility and legitimacy; intermediate impacts in wider community	Technical expertise, high quality science	Collaborative generation of research, communication

### **Benefits to research organisations from responsiveness**

The foregoing discussion provided a brief overview of some of the key works re-conceptualising the impact of research on complex policy contexts and innovation systems. There are obvious reasons to be accountable to potential donors or clients, and to the government of the country in which you are operating. But what of other stakeholders? Here we focus on the need for responsiveness to the wider policy community.

<sup>4</sup> A note on terminology. We understand “end user” to mean the intended user of an innovation (Manning, contribution to online forum, Whitty 2008). “...the stakeholders to whom we are accountable are not just those ‘end users’ who are in need of improvements in livelihoods and reduced poverty etc, but also very importantly those ‘next’ users of research – those extension officers, teachers, policy makers etc who need good knowledge from which to inform decisions, empower people, provide top others etc.” (Manning, contribution to online forum: in Whitty 2008).

Increased responsiveness is a thread that runs through the literature. In what follows we review the benefits, mostly focused on causing **intermediate influences** rather than direct changes in policy (Lindquist 2001, 23). These intermediate influences are phrased in terms of building capacity, on wider networking and on interaction with policy-makers. These benefits, we argue, provide instrumental grounds for justifying increased responsiveness to stakeholders.

#### *Increased chance of research uptake*

Close linkages with policy-makers are essential – but not sufficient – conditions for the adoption of research. Thus Court and Young (2005, 28) emphasise “operational usefulness” of the research – which can be defined in terms of the salience, legitimacy, and local applicability of the research (Mitchell 2006; see also Bernard and Wind 1998; Waardenburg 2001; van Kerkoff and Lebel 2006). In the context of innovations, this requires engagement with the end-users of an innovation in the course of the research itself (Douthwaite 2002). Linking closely with policy-makers during the research process and during the communication of the information increases the chances of the “enlightenment” impact of research (see above p. 13; Weiss 1979, Lindquist 2001, Mitchell et al 2006). Engagement with end-users of an innovation or the policy-makers to discover the type of information and innovations they require, and their participation in their research process itself, will therefore be important to its ultimate adoption (Chambers 1997, Douthwaite 2002).

#### *Reframe the debate; “enlightening policy actors”*

Policy communities involve discourse, and the language used affects the policy prescriptions (Keeley and Scoones 1999). Weiss (1979) noted that research can have the most impact by enlightening actors. By forging policy networks and advocacy coalitions, research is more likely to be effective in obtaining policy change because networks allow smoother communication and the transfer of information. It is important that the research organisation engages with the wider actors in the system, not simply the policy-maker. Thus networks are increasingly being harnessed as ‘platforms for action’ to generate wider support, to empower their members and to provide a space for discussion (Carden and Nielson 2005, 147-150; Kickert et al. 1997; Robinson et al 1999; Court and Young 2005). Research organisations who find themselves in the role as a neutral policy broker can have particular influence (Sabatier 1988, 133).

#### *Harness external expertise*

Partnerships with other policy actors provide additional knowledge or expertise which does not exist in-house. The innovations systems work in particular emphasises the importance of partnerships (see Bammer 2008, 876). Not only are partnerships increasingly popular, but the number of types of viable partner has increased. The end-user and “beneficiary” communities should not be overlooked as a source of expertise (Douthwaite 2002; Chambers 2007). Participatory research techniques are increasingly supporting the expertise of the communities to generate their own solutions, as well as simply sources of information and needs assessments.

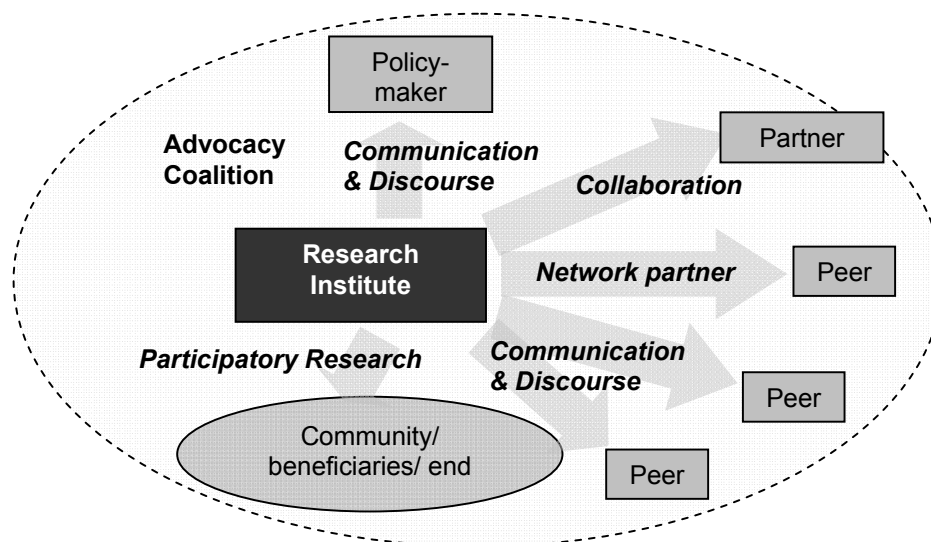
#### *Increase the legitimacy of the research*

Instrumental and normative motives are not perfectly polarised. A reputation for good ethical practices can increase the legitimacy of the research. Engagement with communities affected by the policies can increase the legitimacy of a research organisation. (Fine et al 2000). Participatory research techniques and engagement with “beneficiaries” are important sources of legitimacy (Court et al 2004), particularly if the recommendations proposed by research organisations are claiming to benefit the public or a particular sector of the public (Johnson et al. 2008). Only through transparency in data, methods, tools and processes is it possible that research findings can be read and evaluated by policy experts and a strong reputation for credible research be established.

### *Increase the sensitivity to policy opportunities*

Research organisations must be ready on short notice to exploit opening ‘policy windows’ (Kingdon 1995) – the opportunities that chance and the policy process throws in their way (see also Court and Young 2005, 25 for the importance of political considerations). Carden and Neilson (2005, 153) express it best: “hurry up and wait”. For example, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach was developed by Robert Chambers in a memo to the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in 1986, and was then adopted by a number of significant international NGOs. For the Department for International Development, it arrived at a “serendipitous” (Surr et al. 2002, 5-6) moment: “the [Sustainable Livelihoods Approach] was timely in that it arrived just at the time – after 1997 - when DFID staff needed a way of developing a sharper focus on poverty reduction, and both [the Rural Livelihoods Department] and [Infrastructure and Urban Development Department] wanted to ensure greater people-relevance of their ‘science’-based work”.

Figure 2 shows possible relations the research institute may have to different actors in the policy community. The expertise of many peers can play a role in allowing the research organisation to become more effective, and accountability can permit the research organisation to engender their contributions.



**Figure 2: Location and relationship of a research organisation in an advocacy coalition**

In short, research organisations are recognising that they can only be effective by integrating themselves into the wider policy or innovation system, sharing information and capitalising on the knowledge and information of others. Collaboration, partnership and dialogue increasingly define the way that research organisations can work effectively in policy contexts. These methods comprise the instrumental justification for increased responsiveness to a wide set of stakeholders, beyond the narrow band of potential funders and government policy-makers.

### **Comparing accountability with responsiveness stakeholders**

Part of this section aimed to show that increasingly development practitioners and researchers more generally are realising that participation, evaluation and transparency are routes towards greater effectiveness. According to this growing field of literature and practice, ethical concerns overlap closely with strong instrumental arguments.

**Table 2: Mapping out the normative and instrumental motives for accountability and responsiveness, one against the other.**

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Normative (accountability)</b>	<b>Instrumental (responsiveness)</b>
<i>Government</i>	Legal rules, e.g. accountancy.	Legal sanctions, enforced by state apparatus.
<i>Policy-makers; next-users</i>	Researchers are accountable to the policy-maker (and particularly a public organisation) when they attempt to impact and influence the policy-maker's work.	For research to have an impact, and to ensure the utility and relevance of the research output, researchers must be responsive to the policy-makers (Court and Young 2005, Neilson 2001, Bernard and Wind 1998), not to say "supplicants" (Stone 2007). Likewise, innovations should ensure they are tailored for the next-users (insofar as they are the target, rather than end-users), by involving them in the process.
<i>Funder/ Client</i>	The grant, consultancy or other contract creates obligations to the other contract party.	The possibility of repeat funding and the long-term sustainability of the project, programme or organisation urges continued interaction with funders and clients.
<i>Research Partners</i>	The contract or Memorandum of Understanding between partners is a voluntarily incurred source of accountability. Furthermore, local partners in particular are seen as proxies (per comment in online forum, Tom Bigg; see also Jordan and Van Tuijl 2006, Edwards 2000, Newell and Bellour 2002, Peruzzotti 2006).	Partnerships are a means of harnessing the resources, expertise and knowledge (Bammer 2008). The disciplinary expertise or the methodological experience of other organisations, can help each to further mutual goals. Furthermore, a partner can give a researcher additional legitimacy, in terms of either academic expertise or local knowledge.
<i>Academic/ policy community, network</i>	None. While there can be an impact, that impact is as between equals, and therefore creates no special duties of accountability.	The impact of research is conditioned by causing the right intermediate impacts (Lindquist 2001) such as shaping the debate within an advocacy coalition or the wider policy community, there are strong pragmatic drives for all researchers to interact with the policy community. In the 'innovations system thinking' (Hall et al 2004a), the responsiveness is determined by the need to harness the expertise within the wider system.
<i>Claimed beneficiary; end-users</i>	A claim to benefit a group (or, much more rarely, a claim to represent a group) incurs a duty to be accountable to the claimed beneficiary.	Links to claimed beneficiaries provide a source of legitimacy and credibility, particularly if the relationship is an ongoing one.
<i>Primary research communities</i>	The unilateral impact of research itself creates an obligation to provide basic opportunities for primary data communities to hold you to account.	The need for this is dependent on the discipline. Where factors such as research fatigue and the need for longitudinal research collection are present, research teams have pragmatic need to be accountable to their primary data community.
<i>Policy Subjects/ Citizens</i>	Normally, none, although some may have greater impact than others. The nexus between research and a policy change is in most cases too abstract, remote and unpredictable to infer a duty between researcher and the "end user".	Increasingly, "policy subjects/citizens" are being accessed through participatory research not only to understand their values, but to harness the information that they possess. There are strong reasons linked to the desire for relevant research and legitimacy why a researcher might be responsive to the needs of specific policy-subjects and citizens.
<i>Media</i>		The media, as noted in the course of the online discussion (Carpenter, contribution online forum, Whitty 2008), are important tools for communicating research, but are not in themselves beneficiaries. Their utility is strictly instrumental. However, they are also actors in their own rights, and must be convinced of the merits of the research.

### **Concluding remarks**

There are strong normative and instrumental reasons for broad accountability. These justifications form the theoretical and normative framework against which the remainder of the study is based. Evidently, the diversity of stakeholders of research organisations offers substantial challenges. How are managers of research organisations to maintain formal accountability to donors, members and the board, and yet balance the interests of their claimed beneficiaries? How are they to simultaneously interact with the policy community? How can they offer flexibility and yet strong leadership; balance short-term and long-term goals (Horton and Mackay 2003, 129)? An organisation which attempts to widen responsiveness runs the risk of succumbing to “multiple accountability disorder” (Koppell 2005). Much of this study will be employed presenting preventative measures to this disease. These will be addressed in Part 3 and 4, (p. 21 and 32).

To conclude this section, a few general points and principles from this mix of instrumental and normative motives for accountability can be extracted: **There are strong reasons to be accountable to “informal” stakeholders, as well as those to whom a formal obligation exists.**

While accountability processes can involve transaction costs – participatory processes, evaluation processes and communication outreach can all cost time and money which a hard-pressed organisation may feel it can ill-afford – there is an increasing emphasis on wider collaboration and wider accountability as a route to both accountability and effectiveness.

Many organisations are already accountable to policy-makers, policy experts, their donors and their partners. Many researchers are used to convoking policy dialogues with their policy peers, procuring informed consent and formulating and communicating objective analyses. While not normally framed in terms of accountability, they can be reframed easily as such.

**Seen as measures to put accountability into practice, the challenge becomes to make these processes wider, deeper and more systematic.**

Accountability to claimed beneficiaries and to those involved in primary data collection communities is weaker. **Special efforts should be made to be accountable to claimed beneficiaries and those involved in the act of research.** As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, this extra effort will pay dividends in accountability, legitimacy and effectiveness.

Accountability mechanisms in contracts bind research organisations. Before signing a funding contract or a memorandum of understanding, care should be taken to ensure that it enables accountability. Where, for example, an agreement is incompatible with accountability policies, an organisation should, if possible, discuss the terms.

## Tensions and challenges of accountability in research

The foregoing discussion sells accountability as both a useful and an ethical set of practices. It introduces the incentives for being more accountable. This section discusses the practical stumbling blocks that might arise in balancing the accountability interests of a range of stakeholders. Drawing on our research, we examine how research organisations of different kinds react to the “stakeholder groups” identified in Part 2, and proffer a means of structuring the approach to overcome these obstacles.

### *Methodology*

The project explored the extent to which research organisations are accountable to the stakeholders identified in the foregoing discussion. That is to say, the extent to which they (1) allowed participation from these stakeholders in their internal process; (2) employed evaluation and learning techniques and processes; (3) were transparent to their stakeholders; and (4) invited feedback on their work. It studied how research organisations prioritised the interests of different stakeholders in practice and how the principles manifested themselves in different key research processes. It drew out the good practices, but also the obstacles and constraints, which different kinds of organisations faced in their engagement with organisations.

### **Case study selection**

We sought to identify a set of research organisations to collaborate with us who would reflect that diversity of types of research organisation – university centres, public institutes, civil society groups, etc. Our selection methodology involved, first, identifying six policy sub-systems which were defined in accordance with the approach of Sabatier (1988).

#### *Identification of subsystems*

Our methodology for identifying research organisations followed Sabatier (1988) by understanding research as political and research organisations as typically embedded in advocacy coalitions. According to this conception, within a sector there will be a number of **policy subsystems** which include “actors at various levels of government active in policy formulation and implementation, as well as journalists, researchers and policy analysts who play important roles in the generation, dissemination and evaluation of policy ideas” (Sabatier 1988, 131).

These actors can be aggregated into a number of advocacy coalitions, each of whose members “share a set of normative and causal beliefs and who often act in concert” (although between which there will frequently not be consensus on key policy issues). Policy subsystems were defined by **disciplinary sector** and **country**. We therefore started from the perspective that research organisations would be based in diverse “policy subsystems”, defined in terms of national<sup>5</sup> responses to a particular field or sector.

Two broad sectors were selected – agricultural science and governance – on the basis of the difference in nature of the research conducted. Thus agricultural science is driven by scientific research and technological innovation, including technological investigations in the highly contested area of the application of genetic technology. Governance, in contrast, was identified as a highly politicised area where research concentrated on understanding society, and the accountability, shape and constitution of the state both locally and nationally.

<sup>5</sup> While debates are increasingly international (see e.g. Carden and Nielson 2005), through a pilot we observed that the decision-makers remained national, and the advocacy coalitions, while sharing information across borders, focused on national issues.

Three countries were selected: Kenya, India and the Philippines. These were chosen on a combination of objective and subjective reasons – they are culturally different, have very different economic profiles, and are all English speaking countries.

*Identification of policy “issues”*

Each subsystem contains a set of strategic issues which are contested by various advocacy coalitions (ibid). These often employ different disciplines and are founded on different values. The approach was therefore to construct a picture of the policy communities by identifying the important issues. This allowed us to identify the main advocacy coalitions addressing the issues. To identify issues and advocacy coalitions we used two techniques: (1) we identified relevant academic literature emerging in the areas; (2) we interviewed key informants engaged in the policy subsystem. These established the main contested policy issues and the orientation of advocacy coalitions. Approaching organisations through the broader policy context was felt necessary because the accountability of organisations is dependent on their position in advocacy coalitions. Their relationship with different stakeholders will be determined by their context.

**Text box 3: Policy subsystems – notes on the selection of agricultural science and governance**

**Agricultural science:** *Agricultural science, and particularly application of the modern developments in the fields of biotechnology, proved to be a hotly contested field. In the course of this research project, the food security “crisis” broke in the mainstream media, and efforts of the international institutes to provide technical advances which would resolve the crisis by offering a “gene revolution”, similar in scope to the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, redoubled. Several issues could be identified in this field, many of them to do with the role of biotechnology in research (heavily restricted, unrestricted, or harnessed to pro-poor perspectives) and the impact post-Green Revolution economies (at least in India and the Philippines) has had on rural populations.*

**Governance:** *‘Governance’ has grown as a distinct field, particularly in the field of aid and development interventions, where governance specialists and governance-focused organisations, such as the One World Trust, are common. Governance, however, is a cross-cutting field, which penetrates into every sphere of public activity and every field of research. As such, there was no discrete governance discourse or subsystem, in the sense meant by Sabatier, in any of the three countries we studied. Governance debates were interwoven throughout. Thus a governance failure in the field of health will not necessarily be debated solely by governance experts, but by health experts too. No common epistemology may exist. Nor is governance governed by any single discipline: our research identified human rights groups, economists, civil society organisations focused on empowerment and participatory methodologies, public administration experts and lawyers all engaged in the field. This is not to say that ‘policy issues’ could not be characterised as ‘governance’ issues. Decentralisation narratives were hotly debated in all three countries. In Kenya, it formed the core of the disputed election; in India, the recently-promulgated Right to Information Act (2005) offered to civil society organisations a tool whose use and even existence was still under debate; and in all three countries, government capacity and corruption were matters of concern and their mitigation an issue of considerable importance. All are ‘governance’ issues – it’s just that these are also cross-cutting debates regarding process and authority which exist in all sectors.*



### Identification of collaborating organisations

Having determined the key policy issues and advocacy coalitions, we then identified organisations that generated research and analysis to support or attack these narratives, using internet “snowball” research (searching for participants in workshops, publications, exploring network members, and following website links) and key informant interviews as the primary tools. These were scored on the basis of their research scope and formal status. From the groups of research organisations we identified in this process, we selected twenty. These were chosen to represent the most common accountability profiles.

We approached each, and invited them to participate. Where our invitation was declined, we proceeded to another research organisation which, insofar as possible, had the same profile. In the end, we were able to work with sixteen organisations.

**Table 3: Engaged Organisations**

Type	Agricultural Science	Governance
International Public	International Rice Research Institute	World Bank, Development Research Group
International non-profit	International Institute for Environment and Development (*) (United Kingdom)	
International private	Monsanto(**)	
National Public	Kenya Agricultural Research Institute	Congressional Budget and Planning Department (Philippines)
		Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA)
		Philippines Institute for Development Studies (PIDS)
National Private	Marsman Drysdale Biotechnology and Research Corporation (Philippines)	
National Non-profit	Gene Campaign (India)	Centre for Governance and Development (Kenya)
	The Energy and Resources Institute (India)	Kenya Human Rights Commission
		Public Affairs Centre (India)
		Society for Participatory Research in Asia (India)
University	Tegemeo Institute for Agricultural Policy and Development (Kenya)	La Salle Institute of Governance, De La Salle University
(*) The IIED was approached opportunistically.		
(**) Monsanto did not engage with the project. Our findings are based on secondary research.		

### Engagement with collaborating research organisations

For each collaborating organisation we analysed the publicly available information, including strategic documents, policy documents and research products. We then identified senior research managers in collaboration with the management of the organisation. For each we interviewed them using a semi-structured interview over the telephone. These interviews addressed their accountability and processes of interaction with the research community. The interview teased out information on the transparency, participation, evaluation and feedback mechanisms they had in place. It also invited an understanding of who their stakeholders were, and what tensions they felt between the interests of their different stakeholders. It also explored possible obstacles to putting

accountability into practice. On the basis of these interviews, we invited them to contribute specific case studies, which, where appropriate, are included in Part 4 of this report.

### **Online forum**

An online forum was held to explore with experts and practitioners their perspectives on accountability and, in particular, their stakeholders. The two questions posed were as follows:

1. *Who are the stakeholders of a research organisation?* Open from 25 February to 14 March 2008.
2. *How should research organisations engage with and be accountable to their stakeholders?* Open from the 3 March to the 14 March.

Usernames and passwords were provided by email to all those who requested them. Only the administrator could start new topics. Members could post responses to any of the topics, which were shown in thread format. Non-members could see the forum but had no other access or interaction privileges. A total of 122 participants from across the world received usernames. A substantial interest was generated, with in excess of 5500 views of the topics. Twenty-six substantive posts were added to the forum, in addition to the introductory posts made by some contributors. The forum was advertised through a variety of means, chiefly web-serve lists and the newsletters of the One World Trust and International Development Research Centre, and those interested were invited to participate.

### ***Two factors determining accountability tensions and challenges***

The aim of this section is to sketch out the tensions and challenges that our research indicated that organisations face in balancing the interests of the multitude of different stakeholder interests noted in Part 2.

The first point is to note that our study showed that research organisations are extraordinarily diverse: “any moves towards ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches for ‘research organisations’ should be discouraged, and...understandings and practice of accountability ultimately may need to come about through more nuanced reflection, analysis and learning at the level of the organisation itself - perhaps guided by principles or processes that can facilitate this” (Taylor, contribution to online forum, in: Whitty 2008).

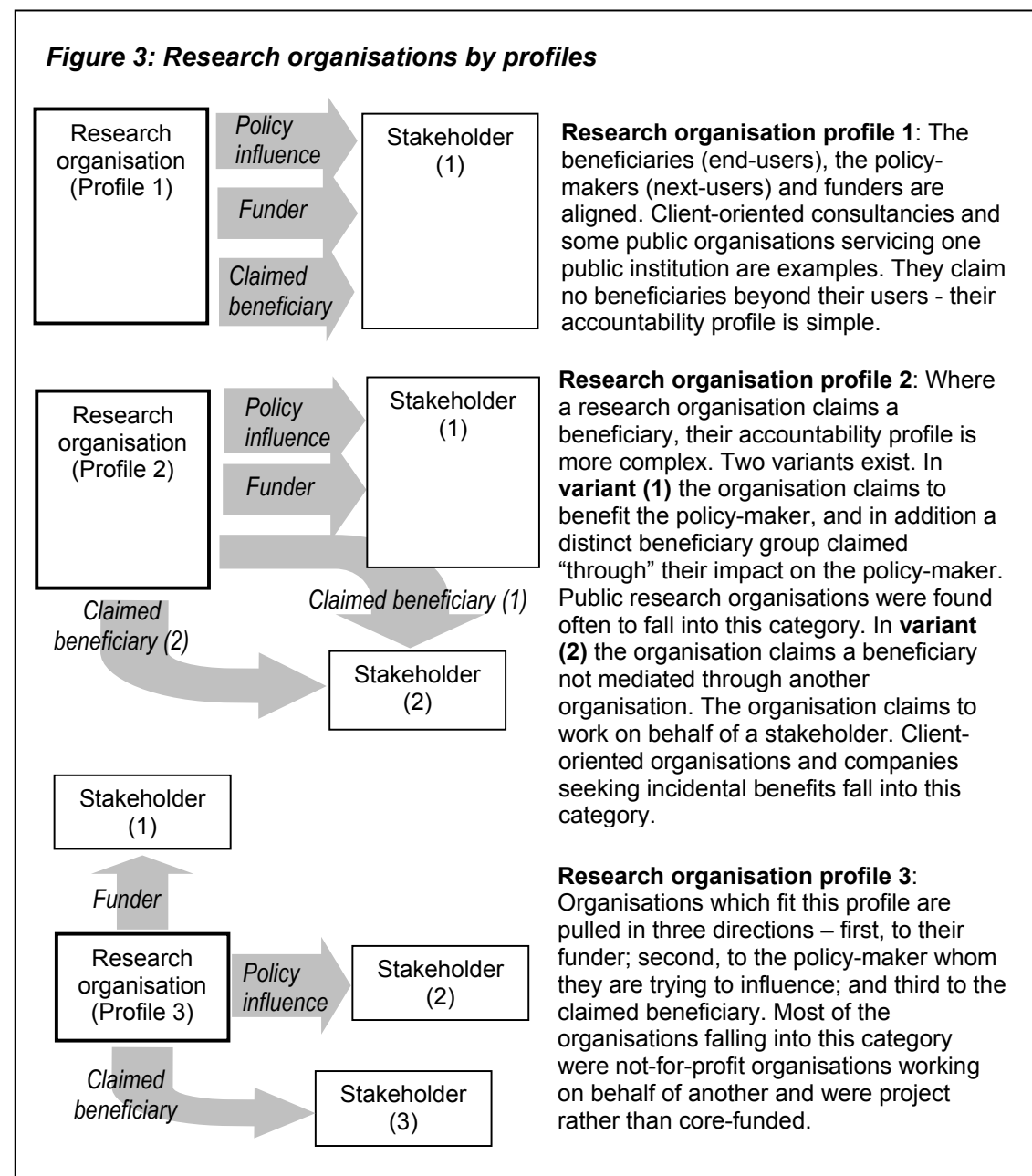
As another contributor to the online forum suggested, every social unit from a family to the government could be considered a “research organisation”. (Pant, contribution to online forum: in Whitty 2008). Each organisation, moreover, will be embedded in a different context, and will have different relationships to its stakeholders. It follows that there are no strict and determinative rules for identifying the stakeholders of an organisation.

We found that two key factors expressed, to a large part, the accountability tensions and challenges to be faced. First, the formal status of the organisation, which tends to determine the alignment of stakeholders’ interests, and thus also the probable accountability tensions. The second important dimension of classification for the purposes of accountability is the research expertise of the organisation.

This will define the positioning of the organisation in the wider policy community and will determine the opportunities and space for participation. We shall deal with each of these key characteristics in turn.

**Stakeholder alignment: the perils of mission creep and capture**

Most of our collaborating organisations claimed to work on behalf of a group of stakeholders. Thus KIPPRRA claimed to benefit “the Kenyan society and people” (interview, 25 March 2008); IRRI reported “rice farmers” as their beneficiaries (interview 24 April 2008) and the World Bank DEC claimed the development community (specifically including colleagues on the operational side of the bank, developing country governments, civil society and development academics; interview, 17 April 2008, correspondence). Gene Campaign, Marsmen-Drysdale, PRIA and the PAC in contrast reported specific communities with whom they worked (interviews, 12 June, 13 March, 29 April, 8 April 2008, respectively). Monsanto, claims in its pledge to benefit “farmers in developing countries”.<sup>6</sup>



This section explores the extent to which claims to benefit a stakeholder, triggering an accountability to link to that group, align with responsiveness/accountability links to funders and policy-makers.

From our research, three main profiles were suggested (figure 3). Our collaborating organisations could be grouped under these profiles as follows: Those grouped under profile 2.1 are national or international public organisations. All those grouped under profile 3 are not-for-profit organisations. This suggests that an organisation's accountability profile will, in many cases, be linked to its formal status. This will act to determine the degree to which different stakeholders align, and the way in which an organisation balances its relationship to its funder (donor or client), and its responsibility to its beneficiaries.

This focus was suggested in the course of the interviews and the online forum:

*“Whilst our ‘clients’ and funders are not always the primary users or target of our research, there is also a line of accountability to them, as stakeholders in the work we are doing, although it may be a different form to the responsibilities we have towards the users of the research. This is where the danger of ‘multiple accountability disorder’ is most present, with donors and funders putting demands on projects which are sometimes unrealistic and/or irrelevant.”* (Remnant, contribution to on-line forum, in: Whitty 2008).

The challenge is in managing the demands of the donor or client and the beneficiaries claimed in the mission of the organisation. These can be manifested in the tensions of **mission creep** or **mission capture**. The first expresses the need for an organisation to *diverge* from its mission to secure funds; the latter expresses the related but deeper concept of the *alteration* of the mission to meet the interests of the funder or client.

The dangers of mission creep/capture run deepest with not-for-profit organisations and university centres, which tend to fall into profile 3.

Several non-profits suggested that they must balance the search for funds and the demands of donors, and the interests of their claimed beneficiaries. Their funders and claimed beneficiaries may be very different, and they must constantly justify their mission to funders to obtain project funding (on which, rather than core funding, they tend to rely). In the course of our interviews, several noted the existence of these dangers, both in their selection of projects and in the manner by which their research was to be implemented. To this The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) is an exception, since it resembles a private consultancy in its operations.<sup>7</sup>

Public organisations tend to fall under profile 2.1. The danger of mission creep/capture is muted by the nature of many public research organisations as embedded in the government, because their whole purpose is to generate research for government organs.

Thus, the strategies of the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute and the Philippines Institute of Development Studies (PIDS) were formed to provide research, respectively to the broader government agricultural and budget planning schemes. Two organisations, KARI and the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) have increasingly adopted private sector-influenced planning and efficiency drives. Each characterise the government as their main “client”, but each invites additional clients as well, in an effort to reconfigure themselves as private

<sup>6</sup> See [http://www.monsanto.com/responsibility/our\\_pledge/monsanto\\_pledge.asp](http://www.monsanto.com/responsibility/our_pledge/monsanto_pledge.asp)

<sup>7</sup> TERI's internal organisation is structured in a way resembling a commercial consultancy, but its formal status is that of a non-profit organisation, with a range of clients including public, private and non-profit organisations. For many of its projects, therefore, it is contracted for specific research outputs to be used by the government. It claims to benefit and work on behalf of specific communities (interview, 20 March 2008) and its mission states that it aims to “tackle issues of concern to Indian society, and the world at large”. [http://www.teriin.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=35](http://www.teriin.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=35) . Accessed 22 August 2008.

consultancies. Thus all our collaborating public sector research organisations received core funds from the government, supplemented by project or grant funds and occasionally by providing commercial services (a pattern the International Rice Research Institute, IRRI, also followed).

The CBPD was unique amongst our research organisations. Its function is to provide research support to members of the Congress of the Philippines, and they claimed these members as the sole beneficiaries of their research.

Public organisations face a different form of mission capture – the need to **protect their independence**. This is the flip side of the coin to the dangers of mission creep/capture.

To the extent that their funds (and the authority for their formal existence as an independent research organisation) rely on the government, their objectivity as independent providers of analysis may be threatened – particularly if their role is to critique government policy. The need to balance independence and research quality will be a function of many factors. In our interviews, certain crisis points were noted where their independence was encroached upon by political actors. In such circumstances, the strategy of research managers was to ensure that they provided transparent research of high quality.

**Table 4: Engaged organisations by type**

Profile 1: Aligned stakeholders	Profile 2.1: indirectly claimed beneficiary	Profile 2.2: directly claimed beneficiary	Profile 3: Unaligned stakeholders
Marsmen Drysdale CBPD	IRRI KARI KIPPRA PIDS World Bank, DEC	Monsanto TERI	CGD IIED KHRC LSIG PAC PRIA Tegemeo Institute

### Research niche: expertise and the space for accountability

*“I am now thinking that actually our stakeholders are determined for us by the nature of our work in terms of the type of knowledge generated and then our choices of outputs and outcomes coming from our work and less on actual targeting.”* (Manning, contribution to online forum, in: Whitty 2008).

We saw in the previous section that what an organisation *is* – defined in terms of its legal identity – tends to reflect the likely accountability profile of its stakeholders and will give rise to different accountability challenges. This section presents our findings on how what an organisation actually *does*, in terms of its research and advocacy actions, also affects accountability. To do this, we start with an analysis of what constitutes a research organisation’s expertise. We move on to explore how different kinds of research expertise present different accountability challenges. The focus will be on the extent to which they permit laypersons – including claimed stakeholders, end users and communities involved in the act of research – to participate meaningfully in their decision-making processes.

### *Dissecting expertise*

The actions of a research organisation determine many of its accountability relationships: the research partnerships it forges; the claims it makes about those whose interests it is furthering; its impact on public policy; its data collection and its interactions with research communities. The importance for an organisation of carving out a distinct research niche is based on the simple observation that for researchers to be able to fulfil their role of providing expertise, they must – by definition – be experts in their field, and must in general distinguish themselves from other organisations (Lusthaus et al 2002, 47: “niche management”).

A research organisation must therefore carefully define the bounds and content of their comparative edge.

Our work with our collaborating research organisations suggests that ‘research expertise’ may be broken down into the following parts:<sup>8</sup>

- **Causal beliefs:** Every academic discipline has causal models, or structures of causal beliefs, which allow the expert to analyse a state of affairs, whether it be a household’s livelihood, the traits of a variety of wheat or the fragility of a political system. The economics specialists (PIDS, CBPD, KIPPRA, the World Bank and the Tegemeo Institute) employ the vast range of economic models. Organisations working on technological innovations also employ the causal models of the way the physical world works. Thus agricultural scientists harness knowledge of plant breeding and, increasingly, genetic technology, to produce innovations (IRRI, KARI, Marsmen Drysdale, Monsanto, Gene Campaign). Causal beliefs allow an expert to predict what will happen to one variable if a second is affected, and prescribe possible solutions: e.g. access to credit, a genetic modification or good governance institutions. The role of assumptions will play a role in both physical and social models (e.g. Keeley and Scoones 1999, 10).
- **Values (“normative beliefs”):** Values are the principles which a research organisation espouses. Their importance should not be underestimated (Sabatier 1988). Values will be embedded in disciplines in different ways. Thus, the Kenya Human Rights Commission, has as its core values human rights principles. These determine its research activities, which is composed largely of human rights monitoring (albeit the focus will shift to take account of relevant topics). Other disciplines have implicit goals. For example, the aim of the World Bank is to reduce poverty, and their values increasingly reflect elements of welfare beyond the income poverty suggested by neo-classical models. For other disciplines, such as crop science, the techniques can be turned to further different causes – as for example the location of Monsanto India and Gene Campaign taking radically different positions in the debate about applications of genetic technology in agriculture, because they have very different values and priorities.
- **Ideas of validity of evidence, research tools:** All disciplines propose methods of collecting data and criteria for evaluating the data collected, techniques for manipulating the physical world or criteria for evaluating when the information/techniques have been correctly applied. The development of new and powerful means of collecting data can comprise the competitive advantage of an organisation. Thus, the Public Affairs Centre’s use of their Citizens’ Report Card tool has become its core expertise. Similarly, the participatory tools developed by La Salle Institute of Governance are primary sources of its competitive advantage.
- **Context-knowledge:** The knowledge of a particular context may provide its competitive edge – particularly important given the “local, complex, diverse, dynamic and uncontrollable” characteristics of developing contexts which can act to confound even the most sophisticated

<sup>8</sup> The observer may notice that they are informed, at least in part, from Haas’ shared elements which go to make up an epistemic community (Haas 1992).

model (Chambers 1997). Context knowledge may include links to key actors – either to the grassroots (for example, CGD, who have built coalitions to unite Kenyan farmers and experts on accountability and governance), or to policy-makers (e.g. the public organisations, TERI) – which provide them with something to add to the debate.

Most successful research organisations will occupy a research niche which comprises a comparative advantage in one or more of these areas and which will distinguish the research organisation from the other actors in the policy community.

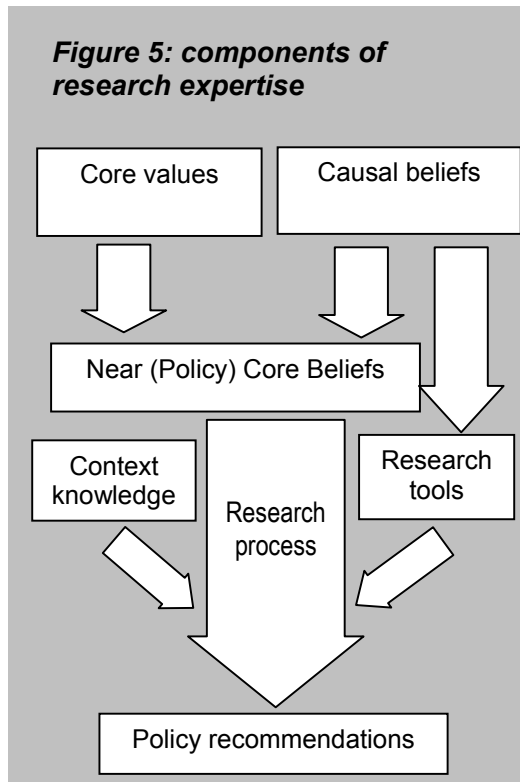


Figure 5 shows how these different elements fit together in the research process.<sup>9</sup>

Research policies are based on an intertwined combination of causal beliefs, which include the narratives of causal impact of different policies, and normative bases, the justifications on why a recommendation is a ‘good thing’. Thus Sabatier distinguishes between the “deep (normative) core” beliefs (which are the “fundamental normative and ontological axioms”) and “near (policy) core” (which are defined as “fundamental policy positions concerning the basic strategies for achieving normative axioms of the deep core” (Sabatier 1988, 145). The former are what we define as “core values” – the latter may be challenged with reference to sharing core values. These are then tested, using research tools deriving from the causal beliefs, which build up knowledge on applications of the core policy beliefs.

“Core policy beliefs” tend to comprise both core values and causal beliefs, and these form the basis of research. Our research suggests that different research disciplines, and different research organisations, will place more emphasis on “core values” or on “causal beliefs”. We take here as examples two disciplines

presented in the course of our research: one is the human rights discipline of the Kenya Human Rights Commission; the other is genetics, as applied by a variety of our organisations, including Monsanto, Gene Campaign and the International Rights Research Institute. Human rights as a research discipline involves the systematic research into human rights abuses, as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The core values of the human rights discipline, and those who dedicate themselves to investigating them, are central to the discipline. These values rather than any “causal beliefs” form the core of the discipline. Indeed human rights as a discipline may be described as the structured application of a value system. We may contrast ‘genetics’ as a discipline. It may be applied in a number of ways, which permit it to further a number of different values. Thus Gene Campaign and Monsanto may share a technical discipline, and therefore causal beliefs, but they locate themselves in different advocacy coalitions because they apply the same disciplines in pursuit of different values.

<sup>9</sup> It does not consider the feedback loops that research will arise, as new research calls into question and refines near (policy) core beliefs.

Moreover, the research niche will position the organisation in the wider innovation system or policy community. It will determine the information needs of the organisation, the communities it needs to engage with for information and the expertise gaps it needs to close through partnership agreements.<sup>10</sup>

*Expertise as defining and limiting ‘space’ for participation by stakeholders*

The foregoing is important because aspects of a research niche will have a profound impact on accountability. Our research showed us that some organisations consulted more widely with communities, civil society and other stakeholders than others. This bore a relation to the research they were carrying out, and their need to consult as part of their research methodology and causal beliefs.

In arguing for greater accountability of think-tanks, Stone notes that they cater “primarily to the economically and politically literate and at some distance from the rest of society” (2007, 269). But how, it may be objected, can laypeople participate meaningfully in the decision-making processes of an organisation whose staff will, presumably, be the experts in the field? Laypersons will find it difficult to engage with complex models at the cutting edge of a modern academic discipline, regardless of their education level. In the course of defining the strategy, identifying research needs and planning research activities, there will be significant call on accountable organisations to engage with key stakeholders.<sup>11</sup> How, in particular, can an organisation’s claimed beneficiaries and communities involved in the act of research (who may in some countries be uneducated and illiterate) participate meaningfully in these processes? These are challenges intrinsic to the nature of research. Textbox 4 below offers some thoughts on how they may be addressed.

**Textbox 4: the space for participation in research**

*One way is to try to decouple the causal beliefs from the core values, to render explicit the core values (rather than the causal beliefs) of the organisation or a research project, and to invite stakeholders to discuss the core normative values. Explicitly stating core values and stating them as distinct from causal models offers research organisations the opportunity to engage their key stakeholders in a meaningful and yet accessible manner. It can also help to reveal needs and knowledge that complex models can obscure.*

*This is not to say that all “downwards stakeholders” will be laypersons: many will have some substantive knowledge or expertise to offer – for example, farmers’ knowledge of their environment and their crops can be profound, and can contribute meaningfully to a research activity (Chambers 2007, 14).*

*Participatory methodologies in research for tapping into these sources of knowledge are gaining currency. Moreover, everyone is an expert in their own personal context, and this knowledge can be invaluable to researchers in questioning the basic assumptions they make in their models.*

*Participation as a compromising activity*

The organisation’s positioning in the academic policy community may give rise to limited opportunities for participation. Consider the following:

*“Take the academic [research organisation], for example. Some of the influence of academic researchers arises precisely because they are linked so strongly to the international research community - in some (but certainly not all) cases, this is what gives them standing in policy*

<sup>10</sup> Thus the Tegemeo Institute (a policy research Institute under the Division of Research and Extension of Egerton University) partners with Michigan State University; the International Institute for Environment and Development, based in London, forges strong ties with partners located in the developing world.

<sup>11</sup> We discuss this in the light of the processes we identify in Part 4.



*discussion ... their role as "credible bearers of evidence" sometimes depends on their not being linked to advocacy.*" (Yeo, contribution to online forum, in: Whitty 2008).

Thus a research manager may be faced with the "**dangers of proximity**" (or, the "objectivity dilemma" Whitty 2008): while accountability, and particularly participation, creates research which is more relevant and useable to the policy community, too close a relationship with policy-maker or end users may bring accusations of bias. One key question will be whether such organisations claim to work on behalf specific communities (see Stone 2007, 267, noting that while think-tanks frequently make this claim, they rarely act on it). According to the conception of accountability formulated in this study, by not making such claims, the need to be accountable to them vanishes.

#### *Research activities bridging gap between researcher and research beneficiary*

Our final point in this section is to note that research disciplines which rely on causal models run the risk of losing touch with the facts on the ground – the local knowledge. Chambers (1997, 31) notes the "**danger of distance**", which "blocks, blurs and distorts vision". The act of being open to claimed stakeholders and allowing challenges can overcome this danger. Similarly, engagement in primary data collection tended to root an organisation more closely: those who conducted primary research amongst communities reported more specific beneficiary groups than those whose relationship with the communities was more distant, who either reported the innovation or research-user as their beneficiaries or a wider and less-defined group of beneficiaries (see Annex: Interviewed Organisations).

### **Concluding remarks**

We presented here a review of some of the most significant challenges and tensions for accountability, why they arise, and for what type of research. **Accountability is framed by both what a research organisation is and by what a research organisation does.** Each of these, formal status and research expertise, offers constraints and tensions to accountability. The formal status and consequent funding structure of an organisation will determine its relation to funders, and will dictate whether research organisations will have to guard against **mission creep/capture** or **encroachments on its research independence**. The research expertise of an organisation will define its **space and opportunity for participation**. Where organisations claim to be working on behalf of a group of stakeholders, they should **explicitly state their values and open them to challenge**.

**Both proximity and distance carry dangers**, depending on the expertise of the organisation, and its relationship to policy-makers, claimed beneficiaries and funders. In Part 4, we will see how accountability mechanisms can support organisations in their efforts to harness the opportunities, and can mitigate some of the constraints.

## Implementing accountability in research and related processes

This section outlines possible approaches to implementing accountability in nine processes and concludes with an outline of two policies. In the course of our discussions with our collaborating research partners, we found that these processes – with the exception of the last – were usually to be found, but that each organisation implemented accountability in different degrees in each process.

For each process, we suggest reasons why it is important, identify the key stakeholders and offer some starting points for the key tools that are currently being used in the public domain. The recommendations and suggestions listed under each of the processes are means of implementing the four principles of accountability introduced above (see p. 8): participation, evaluation, transparency and feedback mechanism. Of these, we treat participation and transparency as key accountability characteristics that should be considered in each process. Evaluation is itself a process, but one that is intertwined with a number of planning and research processes and intrinsic to an accountable, learning organisation.

As a process, we suggest ways where it can itself be participatory and transparent. Finally, we address feedback mechanisms – this covers a range of specific mechanisms, including evaluation. In the present set of tools, we address this issue through the policy on complaints handling.

The processes are illustrated by case studies from our collaborating research organisations.<sup>12</sup>

For each of the processes and policies, we also include a checklist. This lists some considerations in addressing research. This checklist is drawn from the application of the principles of accountability to key stakeholders identified in the course of this research, and is formulated as a series of questions prompting possible matters to be considered by a research manager.

We avoid where possible statements as to how stakeholders should be prioritised – this will be a matter for the individual organisation and will be highly context specific.

### *Processes*

1. Defining strategy
2. Defining programmatic structure
3. Forming partnerships, engaging in networks and coalitions
4. Identifying research projects
5. Planning research projects
6. Evaluating and learning
7. Conducting the research
8. Conducting advocacy and outreach
9. Empowering communities

### *Policies*

- Information release
- Complaints handling

<sup>12</sup> The case studies are presented on the basis of our initial interviews with collaborating organisations. We hope, through continued phases of the project, to build on this practical element of our work.

## **Process 1: Defining strategy**

The process of defining a clear research strategy for a research organisation (as for other organisations) is to **interpret the mission, identify the goals and objectives** of the organisation and **set clear means by which they will be achieved**. It therefore normally acts to establish a **research niche** for the organisation and position the research organisation in the wider research community or innovation system (see p. 15 et seq. for the importance of this)

### **Role of accountability/responsiveness**

“Strategic planning is a participatory process engendering a shared commitment to organisational direction.” (Lusthaus et al 2002, 23). The strategy plan establishes a research organization’s goals and means of attaining them. It is a vital document, but it marks the end product of a process – responsiveness and participation in this process is vital to foster support behind the strategy. For an organisation to be effective, internal ownership of the strategy and buy-in to the mission from key internal stakeholders – the staff, management and governing boards – is usually important. Their participation, expertise and opinions is often of great importance in formulating the document.

The strategy plan may also be seen as an opportunity to set core values, which will inform future participation. The explicit recognition of the values of an organisation will help its stakeholders to understand the “space for participation”, and thus will contribute to forming an explicit basis for participation in the processes below (see p. 27 et seq., for the space for accountability).

The policy will establish the research niche and expertise necessary to occupy that niche and thus the positioning of the organisation in the policy community or innovation system. It therefore requires a consideration of the wider research environment, particularly with a view to ensuring that the expertise of the organisation gives it a competitive edge in the marketplace – a factor important for private, not-for-profit and increasingly public organisations.

### **Who are the stakeholders?**

The following stakeholders may usefully be involved in the process.

1. **Internal stakeholders:** The staff, management and governing boards are usually of primary importance, since they will be implementing the strategy and since they will have the unique expertise and insight needed to help position the organisation. One informant in the online forum suggested that close institutional partners should be included in this group (Determeyer, contribution to online forum, in: Whitty 2008).
2. **Claimed beneficiaries:** If the research organisation claims to benefit a set of beneficiaries or “end users” (see p. 16), to ensure the applicability of the research to their needs, it may be useful to consult them even at the stage of consulting on the abstract strategy stage to ensure their views must be taken into account. Partners play a dual role in the formulation of strategy. As was noted during the online forum (Bigg, contribution to online forum, in: Whitty 2008), local civil society and research partners are both the repositories of expertise and ‘proxies’ used as touchstones for the wider population.
3. **Donors, clients:** The instrumental exigencies of financial sustainability demand that research organisations remain relevant to donors. All organisations need resources to meet their mission. It may be useful to engage significant donors or clients specifically. We would, however, highlight the risk of mission capture at this stage, (see p. 25).
4. **Research users and policy-makers:** The manager of a strategy paper formulation process may find it useful to canvass the opinions of the policy-makers – while not an ethical requirement, it may help them position the organisation. However, researchers should not despair if their views are not politically fashionable with the ultimate decision-maker (see p.

16 et seq.). In these circumstances they may attempt to reframe the debate, by mobilising across networks and coalitions – and thus it may be valuable to engage with the wider policy community in the formulation of the strategy.

<b>Checklist Process 1: Defining Strategy Checklist</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have internal stakeholders participated in the formulation of a clear objective, and defined means to achieve it?</li> <li>• Have you considered conducting an external stakeholder analysis to identify key stakeholders to be involved?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do your claimed beneficiaries/end-users have the opportunity to contribute?</li> <li>○ Will your partners or fellow coalition members be involved?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Have you identified the core beliefs of your organisation? Are they explicitly set forth?</li> <li>• Will the strategy be financially sustainable?</li> <li>• Has the strategy been published on your website?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you make clear your intent in policy change, and the research and innovation activities you conduct?</li> <li>○ Is it necessary to communicate the strategy to your claimed research beneficiaries/ end-users, research communities, partners and fellow coalition members?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Have you set a clear process by which the strategy can be revisited?</li> </ul>	

### Starting points for tools

A number of additional techniques may be employed in the process of design to support the participatory discussion. Some tools aid the organisation to understand its research context and stakeholders:

- **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats:** This analyses the organisation from the perspective of their economic positioning against their competition.
- **Social network analyses:** These may be used to understand the formal and informal networks that operate in a particular field (Schelhas and Cerveny 2002). They can help identify advocacy coalitions. They are of great use in positioning an organisation and in the planning stage (see Process 4, p. 39 below).
- **Actor linkage map and actor linkage matrix:** This enables an organisation to understand the links that exist between its own actors and other stakeholders, including informal links which may not be reflected in formal policy (Biggs and Matsuert 2004, 181-195).

There are also tools that aid an evaluation of the institutional performance (see Hovland 2007, 16-19 for an overview). Organisational assessments are usually wider than the objectives and strategy and are often conducted by an external expert. They cover the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of the organisation, and often the positioning and internal processes. (Lusthaus et al. 2002 offer one framework). While all of these can be useful as a basis for further discussion, their role is to provide an understanding of the research environment. They should be used as an opportunity for discussion and a starting point, not an end point.

### **Case study**

The International Rice Research Centres has a strategy plan which covers from 2007-2015.<sup>13</sup> This drew on (1) a stakeholder survey, targeting experts; (2) an external evaluation by a multi-disciplinary panel; (3) staff workshops, based on trends outlined in the external plan; (4) consultation with NARES leaders; (5) farmer focus group discussions; (6) a finalisation of the draft by the Board of Trustees.

### ***Process 2: Defining programmatic structure***

In the course of our research, we found that most of our collaborating research organisations were structured by **programmes**, each comprised a reservoir of expertise containing staff members with more or less homogenous disciplines. Projects were procured and assigned within programmes. For a small number, the expertise lay not in the discipline, but in their knowledge of specific contexts or communities. The process of defining the programmatic structure<sup>14</sup> identifies the means by which an organisation achieves its goals.

### **Role of accountability/responsiveness**

Accountability can be important for (1) formulating the programmatic structure, and (2) as a model for considering the best way for different programme employees to interact (i.e. to be transparent and participatory).

As a general guideline, we found that the programmatic structure will normally reflect the research niche that a research organisation wants to occupy. As with the strategy, then, transparency and consultation can be useful in order to position the organisation, and to test the utility of the research services it provides to the customers of the research – whether end-users or policy-makers (and the wider policy community, see p. 12).

Second, as has been noted (*ibid.*), innovation and research activities are better if they draw widely amongst the expertise available to an organisation (Lusthaus et al. 2002, 55). Just as interdisciplinary approaches to research working through networks, coalitions and partnerships improve the effectiveness and efficiency of research outside an organisation by drawing on additional expertise, so building the smooth communication channels and transparency between entailed by accountability between programmes can improve internal research processes. Research managers may want to consider how to draw on external expertise, and capitalise on the in-house knowledge that they have available to them.

### **Who are the stakeholders?**

- **Internal stakeholders:** As with process 1, it will be vital to engage internal stakeholders to define the research programmes, and to define the human resources necessary to conduct the intended research programme. This may be streamlined into the process of defining the strategy plan.
- **Clients, donors:** It is necessary to identify the needs of “clients” (Lusthaus et al 2002, 47-51). This entails taking into account the interests of those who can offer the organisation financial sustainability.

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<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.irri.org/BringingHope/ImprovingLives.pdf> . 59-60. Accessed 26 August 2008.

<sup>14</sup> We do not deal here with governing structure. While internal accountability is of great importance, it has been dealt with extensively in other literature – see for an application by the One World Trust, “Pathways to accountability” (2005).

### Starting points for tools

For the tools to establish programmatic structure, see Process 1 above. In addition, research managers should set in place processes to establish their position in the research network and the interests of their clients.

Checklist Process 2: Defining programmatic structure	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is your programmatic structure appropriate to the strategy and goals of your organisation?</li> <li>• Do your internal processes encourage communication across programmes, interdisciplinary approaches to problems and joint work on projects?</li> <li>• Have you ongoing processes by which the intended research products from your programmes are evaluated for the relevance to research users and policy-makers?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you have processes by which the research users and policy-makers are systematically asked what research they need?</li> <li>○ Do you consider what other research is being produced, by whom, and what that means for your organisation in terms of possible partners or competition?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Are your programmes and the research services they provide communicated adequately to potential customers and/or clearly established on your website?</li> </ul>	

### ***Process 3: Forming partnerships; engaging in networks and coalitions***

Research products are best **formulated and communicated through partnerships, networks and coalitions**. The literature on forming, governing, evaluating and working within and through these bridging mechanisms has multiplied over recent years. As the linear conceptions of policy communities and innovation systems were abandoned in favour of theories rooted in the complex interaction of multiple actors, an understanding of the importance of strong linkages with external organisations has grown (see p. 16, *ibid.*).

For organisations whose research is aimed at **changing policy**, partnerships offer the opportunity to take advantage of skills which do not exist in-house (Bammer 2008, Bradley 2007, 13-14). Networks and coalitions offer means to develop and communicate information and thus be more effective in engaging with the wider community. This can assist them in achieving intermediate impacts amongst the wider policy community.

For organisations engaged primarily in **technological innovation**, partnerships are key examples of “innovation systems thinking” (Hall et al. 2004b, 143). Partnerships are a means of sharing resources, skills and knowledge in order to produce more effective and relevant innovation processes.

This study can only give a brief overview (on networks see the articles in Stone and Maxwell 2007; see for a literature overview Bradley 2007; see Bammer 2008 for a discussion of the challenges; for a review of practices within the CGIAR, Hall et al 2004b).

### **Role of accountability/responsiveness**

A partnership is an ongoing relationship, which means the initial process of formulating its basis is important. Good consultation and transparency practices in the formulation and conclusion of the partnership agreement can minimise the potential challenges and tensions that can arise from a close collaboration with research organisations. The danger of concluding an inappropriate

partnership can be prevented by transparency and participation. Being transparent will entail being clear about what values and goals each partners have, including and the proposed beneficiary of any piece of research and being clear about what each partners brings to the table, in terms of expertise and knowledge. As the partnership continues, communication channels and transparency can aid more effective teamwork.

### **Who are potential partners?**

Potential partners bring additional expertise, communication channels and links to a research project. Similarly, networks offer the opportunity to leverage greater advocacy impact, and to communicate more smoothly between fellow members.

It has increasingly been recognised that there is a broadening of the organisations with whom meaningful partnerships can be forged. This can be traced back to the conceptual departure from Mode One models of research (see p. 15 above) and from linear policy processes.

Thus, for example, the CGIAR centres are increasingly realising that they must form non-traditional partnerships in order to supplement their traditional linkages with country-based National Agricultural Research and Evaluation Systems (Hall et al. 2004b, assess developments in the context of biotechnology). Funding for public research has declined as the money spent in private research has increased (Byerlee and Fischer 2002).

#### **Textbox 5: Questions to ask about making partnerships**

*Adapting Bammer (2008, 876-880) we outline the following six questions which should be asked when considering forming a partnership:*

1. **Integration for whom?** *For whom is the product of the research designed? This will involve considerations of the claimed beneficiaries/end-users of each partner.*
2. **Integration of what?** *Given the aim of the project, what does the potential partner bring in terms of resources, expertise and knowledge? What do you yourself bring?*
3. **What is the context for integration?** *What are the outstanding external factors which may affect the work? Factors may include the political context and the product of the research.*
4. **Who will be integrated?** *Bammer (ibid, 879) notes that the integration will happen at the level of research managers. Integration involves a “cascade” of responsibility (ibid 878) where products from individual teams are synthesised.*
5. **How will the integration take place?** *This will depend on the nature of the partners. It will include allocating of roles and responsibilities between the partners and, clearly establishing expectations. However, no single set of rules can govern the interactions between the partners, and none should be attempted. As a general rule, while debate and critical discussion may be useful, the role of research managers is to lessen the tensions (ibid, 881).*
6. **How will success be evaluated?** *This involves setting aims and objectives as part of a joint planning initiative.*

*The principles are the same, but may be less stringently applied, when joining a coalition or network, where the commitment is lesser in nature.*

Moreover, the development of new techniques of participatory research has drawn on the knowledge and experience of farmers- organisations are increasingly partnering with farmers groups (see Chambers 2007, 14). Context knowledge, as well as expertise in a particular discipline, may also be invaluable to technological innovators and policy-researchers alike.

### Challenges and tensions

Partnerships are usually formed to harness useful differences between organisations. This carries with it the potential for tensions, because the positive differences may come packaged with more challenging differences – in organisational culture, aims, approaches and practices. Although these are not directly accountability-linked tensions, the application of accountability principles of transparency and participation can help to address them.

A further challenge presented by entering into a partnership is the possibility that research independence may be curtailed. To the extent that the project sets goals and responsibilities, it limits the possibility of flexibility.

<b>Checklist Process 3: Forming partnerships; engaging in coalitions and networks</b>	
<p><b>For partnerships:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it clear for whom the research is being conducted? Have you and your partners established a clear goal for your project and a clear idea of what knowledge and expertise each brings to the collaboration?</li> <li>• Are you sure adequate resources will be available to conduct the research activities at the heart of the partnership? Are the donors of the project on board?</li> <li>• Has the research project been planned by both partners, in a participatory manner?</li> <li>• Have expectations been transparently set out and responsibilities clearly allocated?</li> <li>• Has a monitoring and evaluation framework been established, with clear allocations of responsibility in its application?</li> <li>• Have clear lines of communications been set out, including, if necessary, a steering group, regular meetings and contact people?</li> <li>• Is it clear who has intellectual property and publication rights for the product of the research?</li> <li>• Do you have a process by which conclusions of the project are drawn?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>For networks and coalitions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the aims and functions of the networks clear?</li> <li>• Is there a clear set of beneficiaries in whose interests the network or coalition is convened?</li> <li>• Are information sharing processes clearly set out? Is it necessary to specify meeting schedules?</li> </ul>	



## Case studies

Example: the IIED form an excellent example of how to form and manage partnerships.<sup>15</sup>

Their focus is on supplementing their expertise with the local knowledge of communities. The division of expertise is therefore obvious, and offers clear synergies for both IIED and their national partners. Indeed, the importance of partnerships finds itself in their mission statement, which states that they will help bring sustainable development “through partnership”. In formulating proposals, they emphasise joint planning and the formulation of joint monitoring and evaluation matrices, the clear specification of responsibilities and the clear ownership of products.

Example: the CGD used coalitions in different ways to structure their relationship to the farmers who are their claimed beneficiaries as well as to the policy community. Thus the farmers are members of the Kenya Producers Coalition, with whom the CGD works, and which brings together both individual farmers and organisations in specific agricultural sectors. This is used as a basis to launch campaigns. In contrast, the Coalition for Accountable Political Finance, founded in 2004, is a means for creating a space for dialogue between the government and a group of civil society organisations on political financing in Kenya.

Example: Recognising the importance of the independence of its research, the Kenya Human Rights Commission created the Kenya Human Rights Institute. It plans to transfer its research and advocacy functions to this unit, which while at present a programme, will become a separate institute in its own right.

Example: PRIA identifies three different forms of partnerships it engages in. (1) Multi-dimensional and long duration partnership involves research, mobilisation and action, and may entail internships with students and seminars. (2) International coalitions with partners such as IDS and University of Victoria, Canada. These are much more research-oriented partnerships and programmes. Capacity building and dissemination are an integral part of these partnerships. (3) The third kind of partnership is specific to the research project, where contact is made with other organisations for a particular defined task.

## ***Process 4: Identifying research priorities***

In this process, we examine the **role of accountability in the identification and prioritisation of research projects**. The freedom of research organisations to address the research needs will be identified by their funding structure (see p. 25 above). Thus an organisation which has core funding will justify their identification of research needs in a different way to those who rely chiefly on project funding.

### **Role of accountability/responsiveness**

As the crux of the threats of mission creep or, conversely, threats to the independence of the organisation, accountability and responsiveness here is about balancing the need of the research agenda to be **relevant to its claimed beneficiaries** while at the same time remaining **financially viable** and **independent**. Wide consultation leading to careful positioning and a level of transparency dispelling thoughts of mission creep can help avoid the twin horns of the dilemma.

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<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.iied.org/docs/exec/collabcode.pdf> for their Code of Conduct for Collaborative Research, IIED, July 2001.

### **Textbox 6: Demand and supply-led project identification**

*In our work with research organisations, it transpired that there was a wide range of ways in which projects were identified. Which was prevalent within an institution depended on a number of criteria, including: the relationship with the funder or client; the appropriate means of reporting on and justifying research and research success; the relationship with claimed beneficiaries; and prevailing political interests. The following were identified:*

- 1. Technical criteria (supply led, non-participatory): Different disciplines will have different criteria for formulating their research project. The potential for this is greater in the case of research which results in specific technologies, than in the case of policy-oriented research. In the context of agricultural research, increasingly sophisticated mechanisms have been developed to estimate likely economic impacts.*
- 2. Technical criteria plus community-led (supply-led, semi-participatory): organisations with specific relationships with communities identify needs of these communities in the light of the technical observations of the researcher and ongoing conversations with that community.*
- 3. Participatory community-led (supply-led, participatory): research organisations working closely with their community also harnessed participatory methods to identify key problems and challenges within the community and thus prioritised research needs.*
- 4. Donor or client-led (demand led): some of our research organisations identified projects on the basis of the needs of their donors or clients.*
- 5. Policy-maker (demand led): it may also be the case that the research is a reaction to a perceived lack of information driven by a key information – in other words, research organisations reacting to an opening policy window (Kingdon 1995).*

*Most organisations contained a balance of supply and demand-led projects. Nor are the two polarised – frequently, a project will be defined by the negotiation and cooperation between donor and research organisation.*

### **Who are the stakeholders?**

In identifying and prioritising research projects, the aim is to make the research agenda relevant to the claimed beneficiaries and financially sustainable.

- **Claimed beneficiaries:** Normatively, the focus in identifying projects should be on those communities on whose behalf the organisation claims it works. They should be engaged transparently in the process. Of course, those who make no claims to benefit anyone through the research will incur no such obligations.
- **Donors and clients:** Often, project identification will be reactive to donor or client demands.
- **Internal stakeholders and close partners:** It will normally be useful to include internal stakeholders and close partners since their expertise in the needs of stakeholders and can offer valuable contributions to discussions.

While it is vital that policy-makers and users are engaged, their contribution should be strongest when designing the focus of the report.

### Challenges and tensions

- **Mission creep:** mission creep – whereby was highlighted during our research as a danger in this process. It is a particular challenge for “profile 2.2” and “profile 3” research organisations (see p. 25 above) where the stakeholders are unaligned. A distinction is plain here between supply-led projects and demand-led projects (see Textbox 6). While most organisations will balance both supply and demand-led projects, what is important is that the donor does not dictate the terms of the contract. Good research niche management (Lustaus et al 2002, 51) is necessary to take into account competitors and maintain financial viability.
- **Prioritising supply-led projects:** Where the agenda is suggested by the research organisation itself, it may be **selected or prioritised on the basis of participatory criteria, or by positivist technical criteria**. Examples of the latter include economic impact projections. We argue that the former is more accountable, since the latter offers no space for participation. Reflecting the discussion of monitoring and evaluating orientation (p. 45 below, Watts et al 2008; Mackay and Horton 2003), this marks a distinction between the needs of the client donor to show measurable impact to clients or donors (reporting), and the learning needs of the organisation.
- **Participation of wide stakeholder groups:** Some research activities affect a wide range of people. The first question is how to access these groups, the second how to balance possibly contrasting needs (see p. 18).
- Organisations who do not have claimed beneficiaries are under no normative duties to be accountable to those who might or might not benefit from their research. It therefore becomes important what claims organisations are making – including public organisations who are servicing government decision-makers, but who make the claim that their ultimate benefits are the public.

<b>Checklist Process 4: Identifying research priorities</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do your processes for prioritising research activities include permitting stakeholders to contribute to the decision-making process?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you need a formal process establishing these methods in your organisational practices?</li> <li>○ Have you ensured that your researchers are trained to use appropriate methods?</li> <li>○ Do you, insofar as possible, involve the claimed beneficiaries in your decision-making processes?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• To the extent that you use technical criteria for identification of priorities, do you test these methodologies by peer review?</li> <li>• Is the method of identifying research needs and the prioritisation of policy processes transparent?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Have the justifications for the process been specifically communicated to the policy-makers or next-users who might implement it?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

### Starting points for tools

Several tools have been developed which offer the possibility of providing needs assessments to structure demand-led investigations of impact. Participatory appraisal techniques have been developed which allow communities to communicate their own needs (Chambers 1997, 2007; Gaventa 1981; Gaventa 1993).

Tools have also been developed to assist planning of projects, which offer ways to identify project needs; for example, **outcome mapping** (Earl et al 2001) and participatory **impact pathways** analysis (Douthwaite et al 2006). **Innovation histories** permit reflection on the way an innovation was taken up, and its impact among various stakeholders. These are reviewed in more detail below (p. 44).

### Case studies

Example: When interviewed, the researchers of the Philippines Institute for Development Studies stated that the policy-makers were “their major clientele”. The other public institutions reported a similar focus. During the course of the on-line forum, representatives of the CGIAR<sup>16</sup> noted that while the “end users” were their intended beneficiaries, the focus had to be on providing the tools to “next users” – their stakeholder governments’ National Agricultural Research and Extension Services – for them to develop and exploit the advances.

Example: *the CGD convene regular stakeholder forums to identify problems.* “All the problems are identified by stakeholders. For example, we held a stakeholder forum for farmers in Kenya to identify their main issues. One of the main issues was gender participation. We developed a project around it, and it was funded by PACT Kenya.... Some issues identified were funded, others not.” (Interview, CGD, 2 April 2008).

### Process 5: Planning research projects

This is the process by which **research proposals and methodologies are planned**, once the priorities have been identified. Where projects are demand-led (reacting to the funders) the planning and prioritisation stages will most likely be simultaneous. It is therefore closely connected to the identification of research priorities (process 4 above) The process also bears close relation to evaluation (process 6 below). Indeed, they will happen simultaneously – evaluation processes simply continue after the planning process is completed.

### Role of accountability/responsiveness

Accountability in the planning process helps to ensure that the research will be in the interest of whoever it is intended to benefit, whether claimed beneficiaries or clients. It will also help the research manager ensure that it will be tailored (if appropriate) to the users of the research. Participation in the planning stage therefore helps to ensure the relevance of the research to key beneficiaries, while transparency will help to guarantee its credibility.

As noted above, the process of prioritising research (see Process 4 above) and planning the research are not completely distinct: in the event that the former precludes wide participation (particularly of stakeholders), research planners may want to consider using a more participatory method for designing the research itself. As Biggs and Matseart point out, it is possible to use one technique for identifying a research priority, and another for planning and implementing the research itself (Biggs and Matsuert 2004, 179).

### Who are the stakeholders?

Again, whether the organisation allocates its resources and emphasises normative accountability or instrumentally-driven responsiveness and effectiveness, will determine how the stakeholder interests are balanced.

<sup>16</sup> Manning, contribution to online forum, Whitty 2008.

- **Policy-makers and the research-users:** Following the conclusions from the literature on the impact of research on policy, for a research project to be effective, it is imperative that its products are useable (see e.g. Mitchell et al 2006, 316; Bernard and Wind 1998; van Kerkoff and Lebel 2006; Biggs and Matsuert 2004, pp. 16 above; see p. 48 below, Process 7). For this to be possible, researchers and research managers may want to consider engaging the users of the research early in the process, at the stage of the planning process, if not during the stage of identifying and prioritising research projects (Process 4, p. 39). If relevant, the aim is to foster ownership of the project and to ensure that the project is tailored to their needs, so that the research-users will be more likely to pick it up. This means an accurate understanding of who the policy-makers are is vital – which will entail stakeholder analyses of the wider policy community and the research organisation’s positioning with it.
- **Donor or client:** In order to fund the research, the researcher must be responsive to the requirements of the donor or client, on whose funds the research relies – whether the research is demand or supply-led. The research must therefore either meet the requirements of the donor or client (in the event of a tender process or a research organisation-initiated approach), or must meet the internal procedures regulating the allocation of a budget (in the case of large commercial organisations, such as Monsanto and Marsmen Drysdale, or public organisations who receive core funding from budget allocations).
- **Claimed beneficiary:** In the process of formulating the project, the claimed beneficiaries should be engaged on normative grounds to ensure that the aims of the project are oriented to their benefit.

An organisation must balance accountability obligations and responsiveness imperatives to these stakeholders. However the considerations are prioritised, transparency in the process is necessary. The basis for the decision should be communicated to all interested stakeholders.

Whether planning using logical framework tools or network models (see “starting points for tools”, below) to plan a research project, it will be necessary at this stage to consider the purpose of the evaluation (see p. 45 below, Process 6). Traditionally, the role of evaluation was to report on output targets and results. More recently, however, the importance of organisational learning has been emphasised (Watts et al 2008; Mackay and Horton 2003), and evaluations have been conducted with that in view. Considered in this light, an evaluation resembles other forms of research, tailored for specific purposes: this means that it must be in a form of use to the researcher (Mackay and Horton 2003, 160; Watts et al 2007). Evaluations should therefore be seen within an organisation as a powerful tool to analyse the successes and challenges of research activities, and to internalise lessons-learned.

### Challenges and constraints

This process forms the key process where research managers may find it difficult to overcome the challenges of communicating the complexities of their research discipline to laypeople (see p. 30 above). The extent to which participation is possible will be defined according to the **space for participation**. For example, sophisticated economics models may not offer many entry points to the uninitiated. While this challenge is indeed significant, there will however remain space for participation (see p. 27 above) in a discussion of assumptions. By **explicitly stating its core values** and **if possible the policy (core) values**, the research organisation may be able to open a discussion on its assumptions, and thus offer an opportunity to test and refine its ongoing relevance to its beneficiaries.

Checklist: Process 5: Planning research	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you engage key stakeholders – claimed beneficiaries and policy-users – in your planning?</li> <li>• In signing funding contracts with donors, were you constrained by their requirements – either substantive or procedural?</li> <li>• Have you considered how impact will be achieved? Have you considered among which actors? Is it worth conducting a stakeholder analysis, mapping out the changes in behaviour amongst which actors?</li> <li>• Do you mainstream the formulation of evaluation processes in your projects?</li> <li>• Have you considered whether the emphasis in your evaluations are focused on learning or on reporting on your achievements?</li> <li>• Do your plans specify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Clear outputs, milestones and responsibilities for attaining them?</li> <li>○ Realistic and measurable impacts?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Are your plans and research methodologies publically available? If sensitive in nature, do you have processes by which you control release or justify non-release?</li> <li>• Do you review proposals for methodological rigour? (Kassam et al 2004, 11).</li> </ul>	

### Starting points for tools

Recently, new research and evaluation methodologies have been developed which seek to capture the complex processes of innovation and research and the complex impacts of these processes. They harness analyses of networks and the actors involved to plan their approach. Increasingly, evaluations also include policy-users in the evaluation (Watts et al 2007).

- While **logical framework models** have been used extensively to plan and execute projects and evaluations, increasingly their utility as the sole answer to planning is being called into question in the light of the complexity of policy processes and innovation frameworks (see p. 15 above). The focus is increasing on moving towards employing network analyses alongside/instead of logic models.
- The **Outcome Mapping Approach** aims to capture impacts on the policy system, and considers impacts on “boundary partners” (Earl et al. 2001). Accepting the difficulties in proving changes in policy, instead it focuses on intermediate impacts, framed in terms of changes in behaviour of those people, organisations and communities with whom the research organisation works directly, and whose behaviour it seeks to change. It emphasises intense collaboration with the wider policy community.
- The **Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis** was developed by the CGIAR’s Institutional Learning and Change initiative<sup>17</sup> (Douthwaite et al. 2008, Douthwaite et al 2006). It allows participants in a workshop to make explicit their assumptions and hypotheses about how their projects will achieve impact using problem trees (using a causal logic) and network models. These are distilled into outcomes hypotheses, or predictions, which can be used for planning

<sup>17</sup> [www.cgiar-ilac.org](http://www.cgiar-ilac.org)

and formulating impact assessments, and monitoring and evaluating the projects. Douthwaite et al (2008,1) note its interest for involving different teams.

- **Actor linkage timelines, maps and matrices:** These allow an organisation to map the “relationships and flows of information” to be used as a basis for reflection and planning of research activities (see for an overview Biggs and Matsuert 2004, 179).
- **Peer review:** Oriented towards the methodological robustness of the research proposal, peer review of proposals by both internal and external stakeholders is a useful tool for ensuring good quality research planning.

### Case studies

Example: The PIDS uses extensive internal and external peer review systems for project proposals, which are made in response to tenders. These include a presentation to internal staff members and the review of the documents by both a senior member of staff and an external expert. Reviews consider both the technical utility and the policy-usefulness of the proposal. The final review is considered by a review committee, consisting of the Vice President, other senior members of staff and the relevant researcher. Many organisations, including for example the KHRC, have a board who offers research and policy expertise and who forms a repository of talent for review. These should be drawn on, where possible.

## Process 6: Evaluating and Learning

As we noted above, the process of evaluation and learning is closely linked with planning processes (Process 5), but continues long after process 5 is finished – and indeed, will continue as long as the research programme continues.. Evaluation is vital to planning and monitoring research. This process concerns the manner in which evaluations are used, first, to report on the activities of the research organisation to the client or donor, and second, to enable research organisations to learn.

### Role of responsiveness/accountability

Balancing the need to formulate evaluation mechanisms for the purposes of both learning and reporting is challenging. “While there are many purposes for carrying out evaluations, two stand out: to account for resources used and results achieved and to generate knowledge to improve decisions about policies, programs and organizations. In practice, it is difficult to combine two such diverse purposes in a single evaluation and satisfy both sets of audiences.” (Horton and Mackay 2003, 129; OECD 1997, 8). Evaluations can be formulated for reporting on the success of the operation (summative evaluations) or they can be used as a means to learn about success (formative evaluations) (Mackay and Horton 2003). Evaluation resembles other types of research in that to be of use – it must be salient to the decisions makers it is trying to impact (Mackay and Horton 2003; Watts et al. 2008).

### Who are the main stakeholders?

Corresponding to the dual potential roles for accountability, there are two main sets of stakeholders:

- **Clients/donors:** This aspect of accountability is closely associated with the process of research. It may be tied in with the desire to show concrete benefits for the money spent.
- **Research organisation:** The second key group of stakeholders are within the research organisation itself. Here, evaluation is seen as an opportunity for learning (Horton and Mackay

2003; Mackay and Horton 2003; Watts et al 2008). Participation is used as a means for collecting perspectives for the use of the research organisation itself.

**Textbox 7: the difficulty in quantitative impact assessments**

*The complex nature of innovation systems and policy communities is a challenge to good planning. Most evaluation techniques strive to identify causal relationships between the activity and the result (Carden 2004). Thus, for example, within the CGIAR centres, positivism in impact assessments is the norm (Douthwaite et al 2003, 244, Kassam et al 2004), underpinned by the success of the organisation in the Green Revolution. These use techniques to provide a quantitative measurement of economic impact. Increasingly, however, they have been called into question (Mackay and Horton 2003; Ekboir 2003; Watts et al. 2008)*

*Policy impact can rarely be attributed to a single actor (Carden 2004). Good advice can be ignored in the face of prevailing political winds or the agenda of external actors (Court and Young 2005) and the alignment of values of the research and policy-maker (Bernard and Wind 1998, Waardenburg 2001) are factors which may simply be out of the organisations' control. Research can take a long time to 'percolate' before it has an impact, and it may be difficult for an evaluator to ascertain a specific cut-off point at which to evaluate impacts, even if these impacts were clear and measurable (Weiss 1979; Garrett and Islam 1998; Carden 2004).*

*While these comments are made in the context of policy-oriented research, similar concerns have been raised in the context of innovations: "Impacts are the consequence of research outputs interacting with many variables that influence adoption ... within a system characterized by multiple interactions among several agents and institutions." (Ekboir 2003, 167). This complexity means it is difficult to attribute changes in behaviour to a research process or to measure their impacts.*

**Challenges and tensions**

There are significant difficulties conducting quantitative assessments (see Text Box 7) of research impact. These concerns raise the spectre of the "performance paradox" (van Thiel and Leeuw 2002), which notes that greater evaluation may lead to unintended consequences as local actors attempt to achieve their targets rather than their goals (Carden 2004). In other words, there is a weak correlation between the indicators of performance and the performance itself (van Thiel and Leeuw 2002, 271). Increasingly, qualitative means of understanding impact are being developed that are less positivist, and more tailored to take into account the intermediate impacts of a piece of research.

According to the former, evaluation will be a reporting mechanism. Such evaluations may not capture the lessons to be learned, or communicate them well. Mackay and Horton (2003) noted that evaluations resemble other pieces of research, in that they include recommendations which are seeking uptake by decision-makers. As such, they should be salient and tailored to the needs of the decision-maker. This will involve targeting them to a specific decision-maker, providing realistic demands, and fitting in with the interests, ideologies and institutions (ibid 146-149) in question.

The challenge here comes from balancing the needs for internal learning against possible demands of donor accountability – which may reflect the demands for a measurable output, to justify the expenditure.



Where possible, a research evaluation should attempt to achieve both. Over-evaluation can be a sapping process, and evaluations need to focus on the positives as well as the negatives (OECD 1997, 8).

### Tools and resources

A research organisation will have to make a decision between research which is designed to be for reporting or learning purposes (the choice is not binary, but it is polarised) and whether it is to be quantitative or qualitative in nature. There are several aspects of research which may be evaluated: outputs, outcomes and impacts.

*Outputs:* The timeliness of outputs can be measured against the outputs and milestones set out in the initial research plan. To evaluate the quality of the research, criteria are pre-set in the research disciplines themselves. Internal and external peer review mechanisms are typical means of evaluating the quality of the research outputs. They provide a system by which any other expert in the field will be able to evaluate the quality of the research.

*Outcomes:* Outcomes are those results that fall within the program's sphere of influence (the immediate groups and people with whom the research organisation is working, and whose behaviour they seek to change). They are, therefore, a subset of impacts – but defined as only those activities where the program can claim it contributed to a direct effect. The **outcome mapping** tool assesses impact in this sense.

<b>Checklist: Process 6: Evaluating and learning</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you instituted evaluation systems, such that they are instituted at the planning stage for every project?</li> <li>• Are your systems of evaluation sufficient to learn what is necessary, but not too time-consuming or burdensome on your staff?</li> <li>• Do you make special efforts to return to claimed beneficiaries and to the research communities to inform them of the progress of the research? Do you involve them in the evaluation itself?</li> <li>• Do you use appropriate methods for evaluation (Hovland 2007, 38; Mackay and Horton 2003, 157), taking into account the challenges in conducting quantitative impact assessments?</li> <li>• Do you use a cost effective combination of internal and external evaluation techniques?</li> <li>• Do you make efforts to ensure that your organisation views evaluations as an opportunity to learn, rather than as a reckoning for failures made or a policy-process?</li> <li>• Do you make efforts to learn from the successes and mistakes of previous evaluations?</li> <li>• Do you feed the information and learning back into the research project?</li> <li>• Are your evaluations available to the public?</li> <li>• Do you make the effort, at the end of the project, to ensure that the evaluations are communicated back to the stakeholders involved, thus “closing the loop” on the projects?</li> </ul>	

*Impact:* We have already covered techniques which formulate *ex ante* evaluation plans (see above, p. 44; see also Davies et al 2005). Additional techniques which permit *ex post* learning:

- **'Innovation histories'** are methods for recording and reflecting on an innovation process (Douthwaite and Ashby 2005). The techniques allow them to take their understanding forward on that basis.
- **'Most significant change'** (Davies and Dart 2005) provide mechanisms which will help organisations reflect on their work, understand better who they are targeting and what changes in behaviour are desired and will have impact in the future

Increasingly, evaluations are drawing from a range of techniques and include a combination of internal and external evaluation techniques (Mackay and Horton 2003, 156).

### Case Studies

Example: Emphasising the importance of evaluation as learning, PRIA goes beyond the requirements of the contracting partner, and includes in its monitoring and evaluation frameworks additional indicators and methods which are tailored for their own internal use and learning.

## Process 7: Conducting the research

The manner in which the research is conducted will be determined by the models employed in the research framework and the methods specified by a research discipline as appropriate for the collection of information. We explore here **how a research organisation can be accountable in the manner in which it conducts its research**. At this stage, we suggest focusing on (1) the **need for transparency of research**, particularly to people impacted by the research and (2) the **role of monitoring** as established at the planning stage. Process 9 also deals briefly with possible opportunities for participatory research and participation in the research process.

### Role of responsibility/accountability

Accountability in the course of research is a matter of being transparent to those with whom the researcher is working. The principle of informed consent is fundamental to many fields of research ethics, with different rules depending on the research discipline. Normally it entails researchers being prepared to explain the nature and purpose of the research, what will be done with the information and must seek permission to carry on before proceeding.

Again, there are strong instrumental reasons to be more accountable, and to follow these normative theories. Developments in participatory research techniques such as integrated pest management (which engages farmers in the development and implementation of pest management regimes for their crops) suggest that the capacity of communities to play a role in formulation of effective practices and policies should not be underestimated.

Participation will also increase the feeling of ownership of the research and thus lower the risk of research fatigue. Research fatigue in the communities was identified by our research organisations as an important constraint, where communities grow impatient at the demands of research organisations, consultancies and needs assessments but which – the communities perceive – show few dividends. The 'research fatigue' phenomenon can cause significant problems for sustainable research collection. In our own research, those conducting non-participative primary data collection research raised this concern. This was highlighted by several research organisations who conducted primary data collection (the CGD, KHRC, Tegemeo Institute).

### Who are the stakeholders?

- **Communities involved in research itself:** The main stakeholders when conducting the research are those on whom the research is actually having an impact – those communities involved in primary data collection. In collecting primary data, our collaborating research organisations who conducted field research also noted the importance of approaching local government and community leaders to ensure their awareness and acceptance of the project.
- **Funder/clients:** The signed contract will usually provide precise terms for reporting and evaluation conditions.
- **Policy-makers and users:** For the product of the research to have an increased likelihood of uptake, key policy-makers should participate in the project, thus fostering ownership. The research should be responsive to their requirements (Mitchell et al 2006, 316).

### Tools and resources

- *Transparency through the media:* Where possible, claimed beneficiaries should be informed directly and regularly about the research project. Accountability can be a challenge when the beneficiaries or research communities are diffuse and ill-defined: “We have repeatedly tried to come back to the question of our accountability to the ‘grassroots’, the people who we are writing about and who are often the subject of our field research. How should we communicate our work to them? We take our responsibility to give them feedback seriously, and organise feedback workshops and focus groups whenever we can give respondents a chance to discuss our findings. However, we also think that this kind of feedback should extend beyond the direct respondents to the wider ‘grassroots’, but how do you communicate research to such a wide audience?” (Remnant, contribution to online forum Whitty 2008). Imaginative use of media outlets can provide an innovative way to reach out to wider communities. Indeed, the media should be treated as important stakeholder in research in themselves (Carpenter, contribution to online forum, Whitty 2008).
- *Advisory boards and steering committees* can be used to monitor the progress of the research, bring policy-makers into the planning and reach out to partners. In the case of highly contentious research, they can also help establish its credibility by enabling close observation of its progress. Lastly, in contentious areas of research, it will be important to foster belief in the credibility of the research. This best way to do this is to involve possible opponents to its outputs, and the policy-makers who the research is trying to influence, to participate in the monitoring of the research.
- *Monitoring* a monitoring framework should involve continual and ongoing assessment of the research but should not be too onerious. Goals and milestones will normally be set in the planning stage, and progress should be reported against these goals and milestones.
- *Participatory research methodologies:* The techniques and methods of participatory research have become increasingly powerful (see Douthwaite et al 2003, 245; Chambers 2007). They allow researchers to support the communities to harness their own knowledge and institute policy-change themselves. Developments in participatory research techniques such as integrated pest management suggest that the capacity of communities to play a role in formulation of effective practices and policies should not be underestimated.
- *Newsletters:* Newsletters can be used to inform diverse stakeholders about the progress of the project.

<b>Checklist: Process 7: Conducting Research</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If working on technological innovations, are you working collaboratively with those who will use the research? Have you considered what role they can play?</li> <li>• If your research aims to benefit certain communities or groups, is there value in involving them in the research process or the research decision-making processes?</li> <li>• If engaged in primary data collection, have you sought informed consent from the subjects of your research to engage in the data collection? Have you cleared your research with the local authorities, formal and informal?</li> <li>• Do you have a clear workplan, which specifies milestones and outputs specified from the beginning of the project?</li> <li>• Do you have clear processes by which progress of the research against these milestones is specified?</li> <li>• If you are working on a disputed or contentious area, have you ensured that your research will be respected by inviting external monitoring of the work by both policy-makers and by potential opponents of your research?</li> <li>• Do you report back regularly to your research communities?</li> </ul>	

### Case studies

Example: Gene Campaign finds itself often in opposition to the dominant government position on the role of biotechnology in agricultural policy. Consequently, in the course of its biodiversity project, it brought together representatives from the contesting advocacy coalitions to oversee the project, and to provide input. An advisory board that reaches out across advocacy coalitions creates wider legitimacy for the research.

Example: The CGD uses radio slots to inform local residents of their work. By using phone-in shows they also allow for feedback and open up a public two-way dialogue.

Example: KIPPRA has “an annual performance contract with the [Ministry of Planning] based on the strategic plan and the annual work program”. To monitor adherence to this, an internal performance contract monitoring team was set up. This was complemented by external evaluations by an independent evaluation unit, housed in the Office of the President. While impact was acknowledged to be an important aspect of success, it was not measured. Their focus was on outputs in adherence to specific requirements.

### ***Process 8: Conducting advocacy and outreach***

The role of researchers does not stop at the production of a report. It is increasingly being noted that to have an impact, researchers must be successful in **communicating its research to the wider policy community or innovation system**.

#### **Role of accountability/responsiveness**

Policy impact rests on consistent and clear communication as a necessary condition – it may not guarantee impact, but it help to bring it about. To be effective, research should be communicated clearly and to the wider policy community. The aim is to change the behaviour, not simply of the policy-makers, but of the policy community more broadly. Where policy communities are split over

specific issues, accountable research which is backed by credible evidence can over time reframe the debate. While, therefore, research should be acknowledged as being a social construct and therefore political in nature (see Textbox 1, p. 15), research organisations are in a strong position to act as brokers between advocacy coalitions or create a space for calm, measured discussion (Sabatier 1988).

### Who are the stakeholders?

- **Policy-makers:** The stakeholders are policy-makers specifically. Research should be put forward clearly, and research organisations should be prepared to make their case persistently, over a long timeframe. Carden and Neilson (2005, 151) highlight the importance of an explicit and clear statement of exactly what the research change is intended to be.
- **Policy community, innovation system:** While the ultimate aim may be to change policy, this will be a function which is – in most circumstances and for most organisations – outside the sole control of research organisations, who will be in the hands of prevailing political winds, and policy streams. When faced with inaccessible policy streams, organisations have instead the option of reframing the debate. To do this, they may need to formulate advocacy coalitions who will have a greater chance of changing the policies.
- **Media:** The media is increasingly becoming recognised as a key instrumental stakeholder (Carpenter, contribution to online forum, in: Whitty 2008. Given the importance of political opinion, getting the media “onside” can be invaluable, since they can help mobilise wider support. The media can also be instrumental in communicating the views across wide sections of the population.

#### **Textbox 8: tailoring research to the needs of policy-makers**

*The literature agrees that research cannot simply expect that their work will be adopted based purely on the quality of the research (van Kerkoff and Lebel 2006). The key is to make research relevant, and to communicate it to the stakeholders.*

*In their outline of guidelines for communicating in briefing papers, Jones and Walsh 2008 specify: tailoring findings to political contexts and to audience interests; presenting actionable recommendations; putting forth opinions on the research implications; presenting messages in clear language.*

*Mitchell et al 2006 provide a similar set of recommendations: (1) define the problem in such a way that it resonates with the concerns of the audience; (2) discuss its consequences, in terms of the values of the audience; (3) identify what concrete actions the audience can employ to respond to the problem (4) ensure that the recommendations are ‘localized’, both in terms of the data taken (ibid, 319) and the recommendations (ibid 318); (5) take into account what each audience will feel is credible (in the event that it is designed for more than one audience). Where there are multiple audiences, this may mean that the focus of the communications may have to change for each one: “many of our cases lacked salience with ‘additional audiences that were not initially demanding, involved in, or an attended audience of the assessment.” (Mitchell 2006, 315).*

*Through engaging policy-makers in the planning and research process itself, this process will be rendered easier.*

### Starting points for tools

In their efforts to impact upon policy, researchers play vital convocation roles. They provide the spaces for debate; hold conferences, and launches, and seminars and workshops. When engaging in communication activities, invitees to workshops and conferences should come from all sectors of the advocacy coalitions. Where the research concerns or criticises key actors, such as a government ministry, they should be informed in good time so that they can prepare a measured response.

The convocation of members with a shared epistemology through the creation of formal networks has been identified as an effective method for sharing ideas, inviting comments and policy debate, and bridging the divide between policy-makers and research producers (Carden and Neilson 2005). The aim should be to foster a non-strident debate (Lindquist 2001, 21). Many of our collaborating

<b>Checklist: Process 8: Advocacy and outreach</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you identified who the relevant policy-makers are?</li> <li>• Do you make special efforts to communicate the research clearly to them?</li> <li>• Have you identified key stakeholders in the wider research community?</li> <li>• Are you clear in your policy intent and to the wider research community?</li> <li>• Are data and analysis transparent and available for analysis? (see below, p. 55)</li> <li>• Do you convoke seminars, conferences or workshops to put your point across?</li> <li>• Are your outputs targeted, specific and short?<sup>18</sup></li> </ul>	

research organisations were involved in networks, either in a capacity of a member or by participating in different degrees of discussion and collaboration. Some had founded networks and coalitions themselves, and provided secretariat roles.

### Case study

Example: PRIA has been conducting evidence based research on developmental programmes and schemes to assess whether the benefits are reaching out to the people. One of the centrally sponsored schemes, National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme was initiated in 2005. Following completion of the study, the study reports and meetings were conducted with the political leaders and bureaucracy before releasing the study findings in the public domain (Prepared by Rajesh Tandon, PRIA).

Example: The Citizen Report Card<sup>19</sup> (CRC) was developed by the Public Affairs Centre as a mechanism to hold the state to account. Blending the science of random surveys with the art of communication and advocacy, CRCs provide diagnostic pointers to service providers to reform their services as well as empower local people to demand better services and plan future action. Disseminating Citizen Report Card findings in the public domain and opening a platform for dialogue between the community and the service providers is the first step towards community advocacy. These platforms for dialogue include workshops and seminars (to promote awareness and opportunities for institutionalizing feedback processes), open houses (a creative forum for the service providers and citizens to share their opinions on various issues), media partnerships (to spread awareness among the common citizenry) and public campaigns. For most of the above

<sup>18</sup> I am aware that there is some irony in this being written in this document.

<sup>19</sup> See [www.citizenreportcard.com](http://www.citizenreportcard.com) for details.

community advocacy initiatives, PAC works with ‘local champions’ who would continue to sustain the work. (Prepared by Meena Nair, PAC).

### **Process 9: Empowering communities**

Participatory methodologies have gone beyond a means to elicit information. They are increasingly being used to support communities and research participants to conduct their own research and advocacy. The use of such techniques may not be appropriate for every organisation – indeed, good participatory techniques as much as any other discipline require special skills and techniques. The desire to apply it in a token fashion should be resisted. However, participatory methodologies can be used as a means of effecting policy change (Wheeler 2007). Two of our research organisations – LSIG and PRIA – used participatory methodologies to empower communities.

#### **What are the motivations to be accountable?**

Participatory research techniques aim to empower the “lowers”, and allow the community to participate in decisions on the delivery of aid (Chamber 1997). They are excellent ways to ensure accountability and responsiveness to the communities with which a research organisation is working. Empowering communities to enable them to conduct their own research and advocacy is in part prompted by a growing “recognition that governance is about more than governments, and that policymaking involves broad networks and coalitions of actors” (Wheeler 2007, 12).

#### **Challenges and Tensions**

Participation techniques have themselves been subject to critiques – even being described as “the new tyranny” (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Williams 2004). The arguments state that participatory methods act to obscure power relations within communities thus depoliticising development, rendering development professionals as uncritical in the face of these power imbalances, while shifting responsibility for the consequences of its projects away from themselves (Williams, 2004 563).

These criticisms can be characterised as attacks on “praxis” rather than striking at the core of participation as a methodology (Parfitt 2004), and may in part be answered by adapting organisations as “learning organisations” whose internal processes are dedicated to improving their practice. Participation in research is intended as a method for collecting information, and should include an appreciation of the political implications. It is important, furthermore, that participation is taken seriously. If it is not, it may contribute to “lay cynicism” (Williams 2004, 571) and community research fatigue. One element to this will be to manage the expectations of the communities who are being supported in their research and advocacy (Wheeler 2007, 14).

<b>Checklist: Process 9: Empowering the community</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have the capacity internally to conduct participatory methodologies?</li> <li>• Have you ensured that a monitoring framework is included against which the participators can evaluate the success of the project?</li> <li>• Have you managed the expectations of the community with whom you are working?</li> <li>• Have you explained to them clearly the purpose of the project?</li> </ul>	

## Case studies

**Example:** The La Salle Institute of Governance empowers their research collaborators through participatory methodologies. As part of this process, the LSIG report back to contributors to their research two years after the research project is finished. The purpose of this trip is, at least in part, to inform them of the success of the project.

**Example:** A pilot Citizen's Report Card (a methodology developed by the PAC to get feedback from user communities to hold governments to account) was carried out in the rural areas of Tumkur district in the state of Karnataka. It addressed public services provided by the lowest tier of the government – the Gram Panchayat (GP). Participatory exercises were carried out in the best ranked and worst ranked GPs (identified on the basis of satisfaction ratings from the CRCs). Feedback was taken on specific aspects of the services from both the providers of the services and the local community. Both the groups were asked separately to give a score to each of the indicators covered in the CRC survey in terms of accessibility, service quality, problem incidence and resolution, staff responsiveness and satisfaction. Both sides were then brought together and shown the ratings given by each other to offer them an opportunity to understand the other's viewpoints. This helped not only the community to express their satisfaction and disappointments with the providers but also understand the limitations that the providers face in terms of resources – financial, human, procedural - while implementing these services. Decisions were made to follow up on both sides' recommendations, thus bringing about a self-sustaining forum of continuing their work. (Prepared by Meena Nair, PAC).

**Example:** PRIA was engaged in conducting research on the status of education in its intervention sites – Jaipur and Jhunjhunu district of Rajasthan in the year 2006-07. The study revealed that quality of education was one of the important issues which led to high drop out rates in the government schools. In order to enable access of education to the girl children, it was felt necessary to address the issue of poor quality education in the schools. For this, a community monitoring system was evolved where communities were involved in conducting monitoring in a systematic manner. All the stakeholders including students, teachers, parents and elected representatives of panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) were involved in identifying indicators (attendance of teachers, quality of midday meal, facilities – toilet and drinking water for the children) and choosing the methods of data collection. Every week, the data collected by the core group (consisting of parents, citizens and standing committees on education of PRIs) was consolidated in a monthly report and shared in appropriate forums with the authorities of the block and districts. Some positive actions were taken to address issue of drinking water, less women teachers in the school was taken by the block and district authorities as well as local panchayats, motivated the community as they saw the process of engagement truly rewarding. (prepared by Rajesh Tandon, PRIA).

## ***Two policies: information release and complaints handling***

We conclude by suggesting two policies that we believe will make research organisations more accountable: complaints handling and information release. Research organisations should consider how they will regularise and make consistent their approaches to accountability policies. What form should they be in, and how formal should they be?

### **Does the organisation need policies?**

For a policy to work, commitment to its principles, management systems, practical processes and training may all be necessary (One World Trust, "Pathways to Accountability", 2005). A policy on its own might not be enough – nor may a formal policy be the best route to guarantee accountability



good practice. Attitudes to transparency in information, for example, are part of an institutional structure (Determeyer, contribution to online forum, Whitty 2008) and a formal process may do less to change that than the concerted leadership of senior management. Bureaucratic processes and systems can act to constrain communication and innovation, and therefore an organisation should think carefully before their application (Keeley and Scoones 1999, 17).

Research managers should consider what level of formality should be generated for a policy. Nevertheless, a formal policy may be useful in certain contexts to establish for internal and external stakeholders the rules which an organisation commits to follow.

### **Which policies?**

What follows are recommendations based on principles of accountability (One World Trust, "Pathways to Accountability", 2005). They focus on the need for research organisations to formulate two key policies; one addressing transparency, and the other addressing the manner in which they deal with complaints (as a particular form of feedback mechanisms, requiring specific processes).

#### *Information release*

For research organisations, transparency is particularly important since the legitimacy of their work relies on the powers of rational argument and a strong evidence-basis for their data: "How we do our research should and does matter – by subjecting our work to peer review, by being transparent about how the research was done, by making our own agendas clear, and by making it publicly available." (Miller-Dawkins, contribution, online forum in: Whitty 2008). Only by being open about possible influences can a research organisation dispel possible thoughts of bias (see Keeley and Scoones 1999 for an examination of the "construction" of policy narratives by policy-makers and experts).

#### *Complaints handling*

Complaints handling mechanisms are necessary elements of good governance and accountability. Their role is to handle appropriately formal complaints. By complaints we do not mean objections to a particular policy-position – which are subjects for policy debate– but rather complaints directed at the manner in which staff members of an organisation have conducted themselves. The division is not completely clean; the latter category includes concerns about access to debates and to the space offered by research organisations – who is invited to the conferences, which opinions have been misrepresented and complaints about the research and advocacy activities themselves (about the way data was collected, partners were engaged and advocacy was conducted).

### **Content of policies**

#### *Information release*

An information release may set out a commitment by the organisation to make certain key data public. This information should include both substantive information, and information which will allow a reader to understand better the organisation and its positioning within the policy community:

- the mission, strategy and research agenda of the research;
- key ongoing projects, and their methodologies;
- information about key stakeholders- donors, partners, research networks and advocacy coalitions of which it is a member;
- and basic staff profiles.

There may be many reasons why research organisations wish to keep some of their data secret, and justifiably so. Of these, the strictures of research ethics rightly prioritise the protection of sources. A good transparency policy will have a presumption of transparency, but confidentiality forms a significant exception to this general rule. Sensitive information which endangers the source of the research, for example, should certainly not be publicly available. In general, however, the *presumption* should be towards making the information available, and when an organisation withholds information it should present a justification why.

<b>Checklist: Policies: Transparency and complaints handling</b>	
<p><b>Transparency</b> (One World Trust, “Pathways to Accountability”, 2005, 40-41)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you considered what level of formality is necessary in formulating the transparency policy?</li> <li>• Have you allocated responsibility to a senior member of staff or the governing board for the policy for its implementation?</li> <li>• Do you need to allocate a member of staff to manage requests for information?</li> <li>• Does the policy clearly specify a commitment to data availability? Does your policy specify which justifications may be used for not distributing the information?</li> <li>• Does your organisation make key data about the organisation available and easy to access? Information includes research activities, funders, partners and staff members.</li> <li>• Does your organisation manage intellectual property in an appropriate way, balancing the needs of the users of the research and your own rights?</li> <li>• Is the transparency policy itself publicly available?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Complaints handling</b> (One World Trust, “Pathways to Accountability”, 2005, 46-47):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you considered what level of formality is necessary in formulating the policy?</li> <li>• Have you allocated responsibility to a senior member of staff or the governing board for the policy for its implementation?</li> <li>• Do you need to allocate a member of staff to monitor for complaints? What resources, including training of members of staff, may be necessary?</li> <li>• Does the policy specify clearly what constitutes a complaint, and the process for dealing with it? Does it specify an appeals process?</li> <li>• Is there a commitment to deal with complaints confidentially and within good time?</li> <li>• Is the complaints policy publicly available? Is it, for example, on the website?</li> <li>• Do you need to make special efforts to make claimed stakeholders, communities involved in the act of research and partners aware of it?</li> </ul>	

### *Complaints-handling*

The policy should specify a process which invites complaints from anyone affected by the research organisation’s activities. This will specify what constitutes a report, what process will be in place to address them, and will set adequate resources in place to deal with them.

Adequate communication of the policy is particularly important because it offers a means of redress to stakeholder groups who normally have no other means of redress. In particular, it is important for

those stakeholders who have no practical 'hold' on the research organisation: the beneficiaries who have no voice; the communities involved in the act of research who are affected by the activity of research; perhaps partner researchers unhappy with the way a project is being conducted. When designing a complaints handling process, research managers may want to consider special mechanisms to communicate to these actors.

### **Challenges and tensions**

At the project-level, research data should also be available. This, however, is subject to several caveats (noted above). An additional tension that should be raised, however, is that research and analysis is precisely the collection of data and this data comprises a valuable asset, often bought by the expenditure of a great deal of effort and expertise. For a researcher to open the body of work to the public, and other researchers, is for them to lose this asset. This forms the core of the "transparency dilemma": an organisation in an ideal world may wish to be transparent, but cannot afford to release the data to competition. Our argument is that once the organisation has stepped into the public domain and used their research to influence public policy, transparency becomes important. The trigger, however, is entry into the public debate.

Example: the Centre for Governance and Development collect primary data from a variety of sources. While they are open about this data, it is not publicly available until they have themselves analysed it, produced recommendations on its basis, and issued these recommendations in public debate.

For commercial organisations in particular this is a challenge, since many consultancy contracts demand confidentiality. An organisation will often consider its accountability before signing a contract which demands of it secrecy.

Example: the Public Affairs Centre does not agree to funding opportunities for which conditions of secrecy apply.

The dilemma poses a careful balancing of an organisation's desire to conduct research which will further its mission through the consultancy, and its desire to be accountable.

## Conclusion

Accountability is both a challenge and an opportunity. To step back and review the full array of stakeholders of an activity so wide-reaching – and yet so indeterminate in its effect – as research, requires for many a change in perspective on their own role. We have tried to show that this change in perspective is the route to balanced and legitimate policy-oriented research. If researchers achieve this goal, they will be rooted more deeply in the problems and challenges of the communities they are trying to assist. They will be more responsive to the needs of the policy-makers they are trying to persuade and have a greater chance to realise the values and mission of their research.

An accountable, transparent research organisation with good processes and a robust self-knowledge can do this without sacrificing its independence. In countries where policy processes are weak, researchers can form an important bridge between people and their decision-makers.

The area is an exciting one. Developments in participatory research techniques are carried forward by leaps and bounds across the world. Evaluation techniques and the understanding of the role and impact of research in policy is becoming increasingly sophisticated.

This study tries to add to that debate by showing, in a holistic way, opportunities for research organisations to look at the way they balance their stakeholders and consider how they might be more accountable to each of them.

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## Annex: Interviewed Organisations

	<i><b>Core Expertise</b></i>	<i><b>Status</b></i>	<i><b>Primary Data Collection</b></i>	<i><b>Claimed beneficiary</b></i>
<b>CBPD</b>	Economics (public administration)	Public	None	Philippines Congress
<b>KIPPRA</b>	Economics	Public	Extensive	The Government of Kenya
<b>PIDS</b>	"Primarily" economics	Public	Little: "We use mainly secondary data."	"Policy-makers are our major clientele."
<b>Tegemeo Institute</b>	Ag. Economics	University	Extensive research projects.	Benefit the farmers and rural community in general.
<b>WB</b>	Economics	Public	Limited. Mostly through national statistics office.	"Development broadly" – no specific beneficiary.
<b>GC</b>	Crop sciences	Nonprofit	Extensive	
<b>IRRI</b>	Crop sciences; some social science	Public	Scientific experimentation, including pilot fields	Rice growing farmers
<b>KARI</b>	Crop sciences, animal sciences, social sciences and NRM	Public	Extensive, in the fields of agricultural science, natural resource management (water, agricultural land and rangeland).	Government is the main stakeholder, but the main "clients" are farmers. Farm and community organisations, ministries, NGOs and universities all benefit.
<b>MDBRC</b>	Crop sciences	Private	Scientific experimentation, including private field studies.	Plantation communities from whom workforce is drawn.
<b>Monsanto</b>	Crop sciences	Private	Scientific experimentation, including pilot fields	"improve agriculture and the environment, to improve crops, and to help farmers in developing countries", Monsanto Pledge.
<b>CGD</b>	Social sciences	Nonprofit	Extensively primary data collection; farmer focus groups and empowerment	Farmer coalitions; expert coalitions in field of accountability
<b>IIED</b>	Sustainable development	Nonprofit	Extensive, in cooperation with partners	"the world's poor", Mission statement, Annual Report 2007
<b>KHRC</b>	Human rights	Public	Primary focus, through human rights monitoring	Various communities, defined by monitoring relationships
<b>LSIG</b>	Participatory methods	University	Participatory methodologies driving data collection	Local governments and civil society organisations participating in projects
<b>PAC</b>	Research methods; e.g. Citizen Research Cards	Nonprofit	Primary focus, drawing out community's perspective using research tools.	"We speak on behalf of citizens". Specifically, the same groups as the research communities.
<b>PRIA</b>	Participatory methods	Nonprofit	Primary focus, using participatory methods to draw out community's perspective, combined with wider 'traditional' research.	Communities engaged in the course of their work.
<b>TERI</b>	Multi-disciplinary	Nonprofit	As required by contract	Benefit specific contracts with whom they work. "We have an underlying purpose to benefit the India public".

Source: interviews with senior managers, unless specified otherwise.





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ISBN 978-0-9559460-0-4

£15.00

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