

COMMUNICATING RESEARCH FOR INFLUENCE: STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES FOR BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE



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COMMUNICATING RESEARCH FOR INFLUENCE:
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Written and edited by Alan Finlay

Proofread by Alvaro Queiruga and Soledad Bervejillo

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Introduction

Research that goes nowhere...

Practitioners sometimes complain that research goes nowhere – hard work is put into designing methodologies, interviewing stakeholders and doing fieldwork, and arriving at conclusions and recommendations. But how often does this work go any further than being filed away virtually or short-changed with an executive summary in a glossy conference publication that few people read (and many simply leave behind in their conference hotel rooms)?

This phenomenon leads to a reluctance by some to be involved in research projects where the impacts are not clear – even if they are part of research institutions, such as universities. Donors – who some argue can be a part of the problem – can also be wary of research for research's sake and demand evidence of impact, proof of how the research has influenced boundary partners, or changed perceptions and policy processes for the better. With good reason, they feel research can be a waste of scarce resources.

Of course, even the most focused research project, designed to inform critical discussions at the right time, might have little impact on those discussions. But we all know that there is a danger of doing research by

default, as a way to attract project funding, and because we think it is the “right thing to do”. Research can lend a project a veneer of respectability and offer a way of making project outputs concrete, particularly if the project itself is a little vague on exactly what it wants to do, with equally nebulous outcomes and impacts (as some of the best projects are!). If we say to donors and stakeholders “we are doing research”, everyone understands, and hopes or expects or demands that new evidence will be introduced into sometimes tired discussions, that sharper analysis will lead to new expectations, that the bar for action and decision-making will be raised, or that the research will clear hurdles that have remained in the path of clear advocacy and action for too long.

But, as this publication suggests, research cannot be effective, it cannot build influence, if it is not communicated properly.

Communicating research for influence is not just about outputs – about a report or publication or event that signals that something has been completed. It is not just about adding to a layer of knowledge and filing the results away in an archive, on a website or an office shelf. While all of that may be important depending on the influence you want to have with your research, as this publication shows, research is a communi-

cations *process* – just like research is a research *process* – and researchers need to be aware that the impact of their work depends on that communication being clear from the moment they start to talk to others about their research idea. In this way, researchers are more like journalists representing organisations at media briefings, branded with the logos of their particular media outlets, and asking their questions from a particular point of view. They do not just get to write the stories, but in many ways they create the stories in the moment they ask specific questions that are geared to have an impact and generate different kinds of responses from the interviewee – they ask “the difficult questions”, but they are questions that can have *catalytic* consequences. Journalists, in other words, can have *influence* the moment they walk into the media briefing armed with a microphone, notepad or laptop. The same is true for researchers.

Researchers are not just experts in lab coats carefully holding liquids in beakers up against the light, or number crunchers in dark rooms piled with papers and notes. This may be an important part of their job, but the more researchers are aware of communications processes, the greater the chances of their research being noticed, having an impact, and influencing important discussions.

This publication captures the experiences of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) in communicating research effectively. Drawing on interviews with APC staff members and project partners, it discusses the key learning experiences of a number of APC research projects, prefacing the discussion with insights from Ingie Hovland’s RAPID toolkit, *Successful Communication; A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*.¹ Throughout the text, we also

offer learning experiences from the *Impact 2.0 iGuide – New mechanisms for linking policy and research*,² developed by APC and Fundación Comunica.

Communicating research for influence considers the good and the bad – what has worked and what has not. In this way, we hope it offers an honest account of APC’s experience in “getting research out there” – in communicating research effectively so that it *does* something to bring about change.

What is research?

Research is learning more than anything else. It is a way of creating common ground, common knowledge and analysis which makes participative advocacy possible. This helps people feel ownership of both the research and the advocacy processes because they have been part of these at different stages: from problem analysis, to building understanding and evidence, to developing and implementing advocacy for change.

ANRIETTE ESTERHUYSEN

There are, of course, many ways to define research and many – sometimes complex – research methodologies out there. This publication is primarily concerned with social research, and specifically looks at research that has been done in the information and communications technology for development (ICT4D) sector. It is not a textbook on research methodologies – qualitative versus quantitative research, participatory research versus action research and so on – but about strategies of communicating research throughout the research process. For this publication then, “research” is defined broadly as any systematic process of inquiry that is intended to build knowledge that will

1. www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/155.pdf

2. iguides.comunica.org/index.php/Main_Page

bring about change. By research, therefore, we mean research in the ICT4D sector that is intended to be communicated beyond an organisation, that is expected to be “disseminated widely” – as most of us like to write in our funding proposals. It is research that is intended to have influence.

By “influence” we mean the ability to bring about change based on the advocacy goal of an organisation, network or coalition – its reason for doing the work it does. For example, the projects and research that APC are involved in aim, broadly, for social justice – a fairer world where everyone has equal access to the internet in order to exercise their rights and improve their lives. Within this, distinct projects might aim at fighting against violence against women online, or getting human rights on the internet governance agenda, or campaigning for open access.

In practice research conducted by activists is ubiquitous. It occurs in small ways in big projects, or can be the focus of a project itself, or may be ad-hoc, incidental, a process of simply testing new waters. Research is about learning and can happen inside an organisation, or a network or almost anywhere else. Sometimes activists are not even aware that they are conducting research when they build a campaign. So while research can be thought of as a systematic process of inquiry intended to build knowledge that brings about change, the projects we discuss here are varied in the way they go about this. What we have tried to do is capture some of the most important learning experiences of those projects, in terms of how they have communicated their key messages in the diverse ways and contexts in which they have operated.

What do we mean by “communicating research”?

Communication is important in almost all of an activist’s work – whether participating in a conference discussion, a workshop, handing out fliers at an event, petitioning with e-mails, debating online, writing project proposals and reports, researching, and producing project outputs. As Hovland puts it: “[c]ommunication is crucial in development.” (Hovland, 1)

For Hovland the purpose of communicating for the social activist is two-pronged: the activist, she argues, wants to “inspire and inform” (Hovland, 2) – and to be both “inspirational” and “informative” the social activist needs to consider *why* they want to communicate in the first place. A lot of talking (or communicating) gets done by social activists – in fact, for many, it’s what they do best! The internet both helps this natural tendency to want to engage, and hinders it – just think of all the well-intentioned spam you get in your inbox, or the casual comments that get passed around lists that have no real purpose (other than letting people on the list know you are there – which is not *always* a bad thing). But by communicating research we mean communicating with a purpose, with a particular aim in mind. And, as Hovland suggests, it is important to have that aim clear in your mind before you start spamming the lists with your research results.

The second purpose of communicating that Hovland identifies is an important one: We communicate to “learn”. When we speak, we hear ourselves in how what we have said is received by others. This is why speaking, or communicating, can be tricky, because you need an open mind – open enough to have what you say challenged and changed if necessary through the act of communicating. This is why research is very close to the communications function – we ask questions not

only to have them answered, but to have the questions themselves challenged in all sorts of ways. How many times, during a research process, have you realized that the question you are asking is not such a great one and that it needs to be changed or reshaped? Asking questions produces results or data – but not necessarily in a way that is linear. The results are re-shaped all the time, so that the research outcomes often test the original assumptions of the research – and that, often, can be the most exciting kinds of research to be involved in.

Hovland describes this learning function of research in a practical way:

We learn different things by using a range of communication activities, or by strategically choosing the communication activity that will give us most information in return. For example, by putting documents on the web, and tracking which of them are downloaded or picked up by other websites, it is possible to get a sense of which topics spark an interest in which networks. By hosting workshops or public meetings, it is possible to get a sense of which research is regarded as credible, and which is not. By asking for feedback as part of our communication activities, it is possible to get a sense of the needs and frustrations of the target audience, and therefore of how we might increase the impact of our knowledge. (Hovland, 3)

While we can use all sorts of tools and strategies to communicate our research effectively, it is useful to remember that even when the research is done the learning and communicating function is not complete. In fact, it probably never is really “complete” as we build on our research, rearticulate its findings in different forums and in different ways, and shape or re-shape our advocacy strategies based on what we have discovered. Communicating research for influence is not just about

getting your point across – it is about challenging and asking serious questions about the very frameworks that we launch the research from. It is what Hovland calls “double loop learning”, which considers the “more gradual” indirect impact research (Hovland, 4) can have – including the changes it can produce in the research organisations themselves.

Why is communicating research difficult?

Here is what the *Impact 2.0* guide has to say about the challenges around communicating research effectively:

Policy development is a complex process and there are many reasons why even the best arguments backed by solid research can fail to be heard or to be acted on. Decision makers are barraged with conflicting demands, often supported by contradictory evidence, making it difficult for independent researchers to even be heard. Low levels of public understanding and interest in policy issues, lack of political will, bureaucratic inertia, and counter arguments promoted by interests with their own agendas in mind further complicate the scenario. ... Communication difficulties between researchers and policymakers serve to compound the problem.

Communicating research for influence can be difficult – and part of this difficulty is because organisations engaged in research usually do not anticipate how important the communications function is. Sometimes researchers do not budget enough for communications or do not involve key communications staff in the research process, including the project design. At other times, researchers do not properly understand who their target audience is, or do not properly think of their research questions in terms of

a communications paradigm – that the very questions they ask hold the seed for powerful communications for change.

But there is another, perhaps more powerful reason why communicating research for influence can be difficult. Sometimes the target audience is resistant to the message. In most advocacy there are stakeholders invested in the status quo, and this can complicate and often frustrate the success of your communicating efforts.

But, as former APC policy manager Willie Currie suggests later in the publication, it is important for social activists to try to break through this deadlock, because:

The cumulative effect of these factors is that key players in any ICT policy environment... lack access to forms of knowledge that could raise the quality of their inputs into ICT policy dialogue... Where key stakeholders, particularly from civil society, may not have been able to participate in the policy dialogue effectively, the overall policy outcome may be skewed in favour of private economic interests at the expense of social outcomes.

In other words, there is an imperative behind communicating your research effectively – and it is this imperative that we hope the following sections can help you address.

Getting the advocacy message right from the start

The policy issue has to be able to be conveyed simply in a way that will be understood by the average, education citizen. What's at issue and why?

RUSSELL SOUTHWOOD

Most practitioners will tell you from experience that it is important to involve all stakeholders in a research project in the communications process right from the start – to get buy-in and commitment from those stakeholders – and that the most effective research is taken up by them and shared independently of the research project itself.

But in many advocacy research projects, even if the researchers do not realise it, and even before partners have been approached or proposals have been written for donors, there is something that the researchers want to communicate – the very reason for choosing to do the research in the first place. And this is different to a research question or research problem: it is at the core of the advocacy work the organisation does.

How can we know what we want to communicate before we have done any research?

While this may be an important question for some research institutions that do research all the time or offer research services to clients, research for advocacy poses an interesting opportunity. Most advocacy organisations have a good sense of the kind of change they want to bring about through their research before they have even started the research.

This does not mean that the research is compromised or not objective enough. Sometimes research challenges the advocacy frameworks that launch the research in the first place! But it does mean that rights-based research usually begins with a foundation of rights underpinning that research – for instance, women's rights or the right to access the internet freely and fairly – and within this framework, a rights-based approach to research often has a clear idea of the rights the research is likely to promote.

Another way of putting this is that the *strategic need* for research is clear from the start – which means, in turn, that the overall advocacy message can be identified. This may even be necessary to attract the attention of donors at the proposal stage (who are, after all, the first “audience” – the first circle of influence – of your research). The “advocacy message” here is something different to the promise of evidence, knowledge and information that will be the outcome of the research. It is, in the broadest sense, the change you want to see occur – the change that your research is contributing to. To appropriate Hovland’s point: “Before you communicate anything, you need to know what you want to say.”

“Don’t think through a researcher’s eyes – you need to think of it through advocacy eyes”

Connect Your Rights!³ is a good example of a campaign which allows research to be built around a clear advocacy message, rather than thinking of research first and action second. Its research activities have included more informal research projects, such as Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) 2011,⁴ which focused on democracy, social resistance and the internet, as well as baseline country studies in Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Pakistan, Indonesia and South Africa. But these research projects are “connected” conceptually and in message to the overall campaign idea – that human rights apply online just as they do offline.

3. www.apc.org/en/node/11424

4. www.giswatch.org/en/2011

“It’s about mobilising for influence,” says Joy Liddicoat, the project leader. “How do you take research and get people to listen to issues, understand actions and support those actions? How can you make policy matter to governments?” The first lesson is simple, she says: “Don’t think through a researcher’s eyes – you need to think of it through advocacy eyes.”

Most of APCs’ research – whether pushing for more transparent negotiations over spectrum, the greening of ICTs, or access rights – entails an underlying assumption or aim that the researchers want to achieve. “It’s about evidence-based policy influence,” says Anriette Esterhuysen, the Executive Director of APC. “Often the aim of research is not to answer questions as much as it is to gather evidence to support advocacy that we are already busy with.”

Through partnerships with key stakeholders – including the project funder, Sida – and strong branding, the Connect your Rights! campaign has had demonstrable influence, including raising the issue of human rights at key internet forums, such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), and getting the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to debate the issue. While research was only part of the overall campaign strategy, the learning still applies. “The timing was right,” says Liddicoat. “The issue wanted to be heard and APC managed to catalyse the hearing.”

“Good communications is about confidence in what you are saying”

However, as some APC projects have found, getting this message right from the start is not always that easy – particularly when working with multiple research partners. There are research projects that enter new terrain that is not so sharply defined, and it can be tricky to identify quite what that aim might be. This

makes it difficult to develop a clear, shared communication message.

For APC's Women's Networking Support Programme (WNSP), the challenge is talking clearly about research when it is testing new ground. "Our research is often exploratory," WNSP coordinator Jan Moolman explains. "For example, sometimes there is no shared language to talk about sex – people understand the same thing in different ways. So we go for a 'participatory' approach, because there is a fear of saying 'this is it'."

Moolman says that part of the challenge first involves making the argument of why it is important to consider what you want to consider. "You need to know this before you actually get to the research," she says.

A lack of confidence in the message can sometimes mean a lack of clarity in research outputs. Moolman says outputs from the "End violence: women's rights and safety online" project (which was part of the Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women – FLOW –⁵ initiative) lacked clear issues that came out of research. The question, she says, is "how to balance prescriptiveness and openness to new ideas. There were no clear recommendations. We had case studies that could serve as demonstrations. But people want direction and practical things."

The challenge, she adds, is that concepts need to be direct. It is "also about confidence," she says. "Good communications is about confidence in what you are saying."

LESSONS LEARNED

- Understand the overall advocacy objective of your research before you start your research.
- With exploratory research, spend time defining a shared goal that all the research stakeholders can agree on.
- Communicate what you are trying to achieve through your research clearly.
- Be open to new ideas – even if they may transform what you are trying to achieve.

5. www.apc.org/en/news/apc-announces-new-project-“end-violence-women039s

Disseminate by design

A number of APC research projects have found that an important part of getting the communications message right involves the shared identity of a research project – and the most immediate way to communicate this identity is through project branding. This also helps to give a research group or network a strong sense of coherence.

Few organisations think innovatively about their branding when starting out on a research project. Often they simply use organisational logos to build the identity of a research project in the field, typically including the donor’s logos to acknowledge their support. The problem is that this can have very little impact and simply confirms the organisations involved, rather than creating a unique advocacy identity. Only some organisations have a strong enough public identity for their logos to speak on their own – to convey clearly what it is their research is trying to achieve.

But for social activists seeking to encourage tangible change on the ground through their research work, the branding of the research initiative through exciting and innovative logo design is an important factor to consider. Not all research work is long-term enough to do this, but for research that extends over a period of time, it is an important aspect of take-up and a key dissemination strategy. As APC’s Strategic Technologies & Network Development Programme (ST&ND) coordinator Karel Novotny puts it, good branding “creates credibility”.



The Connect your Rights! campaign has involved some traditional branding – t-shirts, pins for handing out at conferences, and banners – all with the catchy Connect Your Rights! logo and the subtitle “Internet rights are human rights”.

Branding has been a key part of the project’s success. It is about raising awareness and visibility, but also about being “competitive”, says Liddicoat:

If you think of all those advocacy projects out there clamouring for the attention of policy-makers and constituencies – it’s a tough environment to operate in. Sometimes partnerships and alliances work, but not always. Sometimes what people aim to achieve is at odds. And stakeholders in government and other sectors such as the private sector might have competing interests. Advocacy can be a tough environment. How are you going to be heard?

The project branding was the “catch that pulled people into the research,” she says,



adding that the fliers, which referred to GISWatch 2011, citing case studies, quotes and excerpts, “went like mad” at conferences.

But Liddicoat adds that it is important to link strong branding with credible research. “We have always linked our promotional material with our research,” she explains. “This had the effect of demonstrating there was depth and credible evidence to support our logos and campaign material – we saw it was vital to have both.”

She adds that this was particularly important to influence processes at the UNHRC:

When we talked to governments they said: “Well your message is interesting, but do you have any specific information about my country?” If we said “no” then we were immediately seen as less credible. But we could say “yes” and point to GISWatch 2011 or to material our networks had produced. Much of that research had never been seen by the country representatives – and that made our communication even more powerful.

While not a conventional “research” project, Take Back the Tech!⁶ does hold some good practices in reaching out to partners and networks in order to build capacity and strengthen the influence of women’s groups at the local level. And its learning experiences are useful for research initiatives that want to catalyse widespread change.

The innovation when it came to the Take Back the Tech! branding was that it could be appropriated and used by constituencies to serve their own needs and purposes. As Jac sm Kee explains, this was important because the target audience for the project was diverse:

The project is aimed at helping marginalised women and girls – including women working in conflict situations. We work with a range of women who have been victims of violence, from survivors of domestic and sexual violence, to rural, poor and migrant women. Adolescent and teenage girls are also key beneficiaries of the project.

6. www.takebackthetech.net

But, Kee says, the diversity in audience was not just in terms of the diverse contexts of survivors of violence against women, but “different people who had different stakes in the issue”:

When the campaign was initiated, this was when web 2.0 had just taken off, so user-generated, participatory content was seen as a powerful mechanism for change – taking control of the message, articulating your own reality. This meant the dispersal of power to multitudes of internet and ICT users who could engage with change. So we wanted to call out to every internet user to use their power gained through technology to engage with the issue of violence against women and to end it. The Take Back the Tech! logo – an image of a young pony-tailed woman in jeans flicking a laptop cable above her head like a whip – contains all the kinetic energy of the empowered woman that the project wanted to convey, making the key message of the project immediately recognisable. And – perhaps the most important part of the branding concept – it was flexible.



Using the central message suggested by the logo, the branding was re-designed to suit particular country situations. “In Cambodia they changed it – they dressed the woman in traditional clothes,” says Kee. “That kicked off differences elsewhere.”

The approach to branding, says Kee, was “to take a creative approach to a known issue, and then to create spaces and processes that help people to do something and to take it where they need to take it.” Through a clear message, and through appropriation of that message by project partners, the key communications objective of the project was realised through dissemination by design.

“The project is flexible, exciting,” she says. “It realises what APC wants to achieve, but the outcomes are also independent of APC.”

“It’s *how* you talk about it that’s important,” she adds:

We did a lot of work in Take Back the Tech! on how to talk about the issue. We also created Powerpoint presentation tools to try to get the message clear. We looked at the content and tried to simplify the issue. We didn’t want to fall into the trap of clunky language or paragraphs that over-explain everything. A lot was to do with the tone we were using. We were trying to talk the right tone: not talking down, not talking angry, but provoking.



Take Back the Tech! showed that any branding strategy, even if it is flexible, is not necessarily without controversy. For instance, some APC members and partners said they found it too aggressive and even violent, and in Cambodia, there was a problem because women there do not wear pants – one of the reasons why allowing the take-up and adaptation of the logo worked so well.

Nevertheless, what the Take Back the Tech! logo shows is that even when dealing with different cultures and sensitivities, by using a creative approach to logo design you can still get a strong message across. Branding does not need to be diluted to appease the sensitivities of difference in a group or network. “A communications approach needs to be tailored to an audience – there is no one-size-fits all,” says Kee. But, at the same time, “a good logo needs to provoke an engaged response, even if it’s controversial.”

I think the “EROTICS” tag really worked in branding the research, and giving the five countries with disparate studies a common umbrella – so in international or cross-country studies I think branding has another function – to bring the studies together and give them one identity

MANJIMA BHATTACHARJYA

Similarly, the EROTICS project worked with building an identity separate from any one of the participating organisations: “We wanted to build something that gave the new network an identity, an ‘opening up’,” says Kee. “We also wanted to match the energy and uniqueness of research of the project.” The resulting logo looked at creating a “censor label” that you might find on popular me-

dia such as CDs or DVDs, with the url signifying online content and the bright red colour “demonstrating danger”. This identity helped because the project was a “long process”, says Kee.

But, she adds, the EROTICS acronym itself was in effect more powerful in forging an identity:

EROTICS became really widely known between women’s rights activists because it was easy to remember, rolled off the tongue, and was a little bit cheeky as well – subverting the heart of the issue or question which starts with censorship of sexual content (i.e. porn). I’d say this was more effective than the visual identity.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Spend time developing unique branding for your research project.
- If your project involves more than one stakeholder think about how this branding can be adapted to suit different contexts and needs, while preserving the central advocacy message of your research project.
- Think about your project acronym – is it catchy and interesting? Is it easy to remember by all stakeholders and beneficiaries of the research? Does it convey what you want to achieve?
- Strong branding on its own is not enough – support the key branding messages of your project with solid evidence.

Working with partners

Any research project that involves more than one organisation presents challenges around the communications function of the research – of how to get buy-in from all of the organisations involved in the research. As we have seen, a common identity can be forged both through the campaign message and through innovative project branding. But often additional challenges are presented when working with partners who may have different interests and skills, and join a research project at different stages of its development.

Getting the timing right...

One challenge that is often underestimated is the time needed to develop a strong communications base in a project – and this is not always determined by the researcher coordinators. For instance, Sonia Correa from Sexuality Policy Watch – an EROTICS project partner – says part of the difficulty with the EROTICS research was the research timeframe:

From where I sat I had the impression the project did not do enough to benefit from the research experience accumulated in the group, exactly because of the very tight time frame and the anxiety of delivering products. The research topics were too vast and complex to be properly processed within the timeframe in terms of the country research and more so in terms of deeper exchanges across countries that could allow for a more dense and substantive analysis.

“I think it is important that the actual researchers be involved in the planning of the research,” says Abi Jagun, a research consultant who worked on Open Spectrum for Development⁷ research, part of APC’s Action Research Network. “However this is hard to implement as researchers are typically engaged after funding has been secured and the process of applying for funding can require that the design of the research be at an advanced date (if not concluded).” But, she says, “early communication with, and involvement of those conducting the research is key to ensuring that the overall project objectives are met.” In the case of the Open Spectrum for Development research, she adds, “engaging researchers earlier may have revealed that some of the data being requested for was not attainable in the timeframe, and with the resources available.”

7. www.apc.org/en/node/10445

A question of capacity: “How do you talk about the project as a whole, when everything is so inconsistent?”

Not all organisations are research organisations, and many do not have an interest in research – even though they might have an interest in advocacy and bringing about change. And if there is a disinterest in the research as a process and a lack of capacity to implement that process effectively, the research outcomes can be compromised.

In the case of APC’s “MDG3: Take Back the Tech! to end violence against women” project,⁸ “working with twelve countries with communications run centrally didn’t work that well,” says Moolman. “That’s because things are local, and contexts are different. The partners who were implementing the project had different skills. It really became a challenge to manage the local relationships.”

Long-time APC partner and consultant Claire Sibthorpe agrees:

The APC staff don’t have the resources to undertake sustained communication activities for a particular project or ensure it is disseminated nationally and regionally at key opportunities. The research needs to also be owned by key stakeholders and partners who will be able to take forward the dissemination of the research after the project funding has ended.

To try to overcome some of these challenges, Moolman says the project focused on a participatory approach: “Although we developed a template for the research in this way, there was still disagreement about what was acceptable, and not everyone agreed with the process. So the communications challenge was imbedded right at the beginning in the project design – in the partners that we worked with.”

8. www.apc.org/en/node/7892

One of the results of this was that although the project’s research methodology was standardised, the papers that resulted from the research “varied hugely in quality and style as well as in outputs.” “LAC could do regional analysis, but we couldn’t do this for Africa and Asia,” says Moolman. She says the varied capacity amongst the partners was a problem in terms of communicating:

The capacity of project partners to do research impacts on the effectiveness of communications. Some components got more coverage than others – in some countries individuals rather than organisations did research. In Pakistan our research was contested, so we couldn’t publicise it. Our challenge was: How do you talk about the project as a whole, when everything is so inconsistent?

In contrast, the “End violence” project proved much more successful in getting the communications function embedded into the research process. “We’re working with about eight countries,” says Moolman. “We’ve identified researchers through the partners we’re working with. We came together right from the start to talk about the research design. Because we agreed on the process first, there is support for that process.”

And the “End violence” project also benefited from drawing on the identity already created by the Take Back the Tech! campaign. “This built a context for the research,” she says, “it created project recognition.”

Staying flexible and open to new challenges...

While a communications function – in terms of outputs – can be planned ahead of the research, it is important to be flexible during the research process and to constantly review the likely effectiveness of the outputs as the research unfolds.

Sometimes the kinds of data or research that you anticipated at the start of the project is not possible – either, as we have seen, due to capacity of the researchers, or in some instances, due to bureaucratic and political bottlenecks that prevent research from being conducted properly.

Although the Open Spectrum for Development project followed a structured approach to the research, in practice the outputs were not clear for all researchers involved. “A lot had to do with the political context of the countries,” says Pablo Accuosto, the research leader. “They struggled to say certain things in their reports – which is one of the key research communications challenges when following rigid templates for the research.”

The communications strategy for Open Spectrum for Development traced what might be considered a standard arc for an exploratory research project in terms of outputs. A background study into open spectrum was commissioned, which was followed by an issue paper; then country reports were written, fact sheets produced from these, and finally a synthesis report developed. These documents would serve as advocacy materials for specific interventions or used to inform future strategic interventions – and each output could serve a different function.

“The APC Communications team wrote short media articles and conducted interviews, and we are going to publish a book with all the country studies and the synthesis report. We plan to launch it and invite policy-makers and civil society stakeholders,” says Accuosto.

But, as Accuosto explains, while the fact sheets were to be based on the country reports – each one synthesising the main findings and country advocacy opportunities – the final results were not homogenous.

In countries where there is an authoritarian government they might say one thing. But when you look at practices, and start

looking at what’s happening, you see that the policies and laws aren’t really implemented in the way they say they are. So the researchers had to find some way to balance what the government was saying – through interviews or evidence. They found themselves in a difficult position.

This meant that while the Open Spectrum for Development project did plan the research outputs from the start, because the research was exploratory it was not always possible to produce the effective outputs the project had anticipated. “The outputs were dictated on a case-by-case basis – not exactly after the research had been done, but when the researchers knew the issues and found out what was going on,” says Accuosto.

Esterhuysen agrees, adding that the Open Spectrum for Development project was an interesting example of where research initiates learning among researchers. She says that often researchers only understand the research problem and the potential solutions properly during the course of the research, posing challenges for effective communication:

When this is the case communicating the research can be very fuzzy – if it starts too early. Better then to wait and make sure that those involved in the research have built a common language and understanding before focusing on communications to others.

Accuosto points out that it is important to have a small budget – a “catalysing fund” – to support changes in the direction project dissemination might take. He says the expectation is for organisations interested in the issues to use the publications in independent advocacy initiatives. “The question for any research project,” he says, “is how do you support this? What sorts of reports do *they* need?”

“Research can create champions by building local capacity,” says Accuosto. “They then

take the issues forward by producing research outputs that can help them intervene more effectively.” This approach made sense, says Accuosto, because “you don’t always know what the situation is in a country – it was difficult to know what possibilities were.”

“Hearing loudly”: strengthening impact through partnerships

As APC has found, working with partners from different research backgrounds can strengthen the overall impact of the research. Given the complex nature of the question for the EROTICS research, it was important to develop a rigorous research methodology, says Kee. “Our priority was to work both with activists and academics to enable a sharing of knowledge, methodologies and experiences. We wanted to create a body of evidence that could withstand criticism – academics were key partners in stage of research and are also key stakeholders in internet governance.”

According to Kee, through this alliance, activists strengthened their research skills while academics “grounded their research approaches in the more complex reality of on-the-ground activism.” This strengthened the impact of the research across diverse fields:

In Lebanon, where the lead researcher was an activist, being part of the research enabled her to speak with authority about the field and played a key role in collaboration with other local activists to intervene and stop what was a potentially damaging internet regulation law. When academics lead the research, as in South Africa, they were able to collaborate and lend credibility to their research through collaboration with other research team members in different events. Academic-

Impact 2.0 found that working with partners effectively required both online and offline strategies for success. Web 2.0 tools could be used for:

- Creating a space for partners to continue interacting between and beyond face-to-face events and activities
- Broadening the stakeholder base by reaching out to stakeholders that have not taken part in face-to-face events and activities
- Holding online events for stakeholders to learn more about the issues based on your research findings
- Documenting and managing your coalition members.

For more, see: iguides.comunica.org/index.php/Main_Page

activists in Brazil were able to do both – raising the research in their academic circles through presentations as well as journals, and through their engagement in the sexual rights activist movement in the country.

The first phase of the project also involved working with a network of resource people throughout the research process, which offered the “possibilities of reflection” as the body of evidence was being built.

In these contexts – especially in complex research fields – clear communications between the researchers is critical to the success of the dissemination process. As APC partner Chim Manavy emphasises: “There must be open communication,” which includes sharing project information with all partners, as well as

lessons learned and good practices from different nodes in the research conducted in the project countries.

Working with research partners from different sectoral backgrounds also may mean that different kinds of research outputs are necessary. In terms of the academic audience the output – a book published online – was seen as the most appropriate way to communicate the findings. The academic researchers were also invited to relevant events, where they helped to shape the arguments in face-to-face encounters. “Academic activists are good at bringing work from the academic field into more open spaces. They were backed up by activists,” she says. Researchers were also encouraged to write about what they found interesting, before developing the issue papers, which were translated into Spanish and Portuguese and distributed at policy events.

For activists, commentaries, interviews, summaries and even videos were developed. But these, says Kee, were only partially successful. “The two videos we produced didn’t work – partly because of the timing, but mostly because they didn’t communicate the complexity of the research,” she says. “They were beautiful, but they just didn’t work.”

The EROTICS project has also aimed at creating local champions to popularise the research material. “We’ve supported the participation of key members at events such as the recent IGF in Nairobi to talk about what they have done,” says Kee. “A strong project identity can operate separately from the project coordinators,” she adds. The important thing is to have face-to-face engagement so that the issues can be heard. “You could hear sexual rights loudly at the IGF – in a space when you only hear about it as a negative thing,” she says.

LESSONS LEARNED

- It is important to build in enough time to facilitate strong communications between research partners, and between the researchers and the stakeholder communities. Effective communications is about good timing.
- The different capacities of the researchers to be involved in a project will affect how the research is communicated. In multi-partner research, the research coordinators may find it difficult to coordinate all of the communications functions effectively. Think about building a collaborative communications structure into the project from the start, where the communications responsibilities can be shared. Local champions are necessary.
- It is important to stay open to changes in a communications strategy, given that country contexts may pose challenges to an original dissemination plan. Think about including a small catalysing fund in your project so that you can take on challenges and obstacles creatively.
- Working with research partners from different research fields can strengthen the impact of your research. But this may require different kinds of research outputs that are appropriate and effective in different sectors.
- Introduce your research partners to unfamiliar territory where their specific research abilities will shine and increase the overall impact of your research.

The network effect

For former APC policy manager Willie Currie, “communications for influence” is a “concept that seeks to combine research, communicating the research and advocating on the basis of that research to influence policy processes.” As he explains in the following extract, this process has had some – if uneven – success in influencing change in East Africa:

When “communications for influence” is linked to a process of building a network that will coordinate the production of research, the research communications and the advocacy, then the creation of a networked approach to communication for influence can emerge. This can change the way people and institutions think and develop approaches to policy change.

This is a theory. APC put it into practice by building regional ICT networks in East Africa, Central and West Africa and the Andes region between 2008 and 2010, which undertook research, communicated the research and undertook advocacy on policy issues. As an experiment, its results were uneven in that it was sometimes difficult to make the direct linkages between the various activities. However, as a form of activism in a regional policy space, the approach showed that it had merit and can be used

In most cases there already exist formal and informal networks among stakeholders with interests in public policy. These networks represent an opportunity for a researcher or activist to present their findings and push their agenda. *Impact 2.0* suggests that web 2.0 tools can help to establish a presence in these networks in the following ways:

- Find electronic (online) representations of these networks
- Join these networks
- Publicise their own findings in these networks
- Make findings available in proper formats that capture attention, facilitate data verification and allow easy sharing and interactivity.

For more, see: iguides.comunica.org/index.php/Main_Page

as an underlying methodology for enabling people and organisations brought together in a network to develop an evidence base for their advocacy and to communicate it in an advocacy process.

As with all advocacy processes, “a plan of battle does not survive its first encounter with the enemy”, or to paraphrase General von Moltke’s dictum, no plan survives its encounter with reality. So one has to view the process of communication for influence as a road map that will change as obstacles are encountered or new factors come into play. In the case of East Africa, what began as research into the implementation of telecom reform policy in the region and its implications for broadband morphed into a plan of action to convene an East African Internet Governance Forum (EA-IGF). Within the policy space of the EA-IGF, broadband became one amongst a number of internet governance policy issues such as cyber-security and net neutrality rather than the primary issue. This did not matter because the momentum built around the EA-IGF produced a new policy space – a forum for dialogue between government, private sector and civil society, modeled on the global IGF as a multi-stakeholder space of engagement. Indeed, this momentum created a number of stepping stones that enabled Kenya to host the sixth global IGF in Nairobi in 2011.

This can be seen as a series of network effects. The Kenya ICT Action Network (KICTANet), which emerged from APC’s implementation of the Catalysing Access to ICTs in Africa (CATIA) project in Kenya, responded to the need for ICT policy change in Kenya by creating a multi-stakeholder space for policy dialogue within Kenya. This was in the context of a newly democratically elected government and included the emerging entrepreneurial private sector and civil society. The Internet Governance Forum legitimated the concept of a multi-stakeholder approach to addressing problems of internet gov-

ernance at the global level. KICTANet then drew in civil society groups from Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda to form a regional ICT network that could make the linkages with other stakeholders to hold the first EA-IGF in 2009. The combination of these national, regional and global network effects culminated in the holding of the sixth global IGF in Nairobi in 2011.

In practice, the EA-IGF process followed three main steps:

- First, there were national online discussions which took place in the individual countries for a period of about 1-2 weeks, moderated by national animators.
- Second, this was followed by face-to-face National IGFs for all the stakeholders to build consensus on national internet governance issues, challenges and recommendations, and to contribute to developing the regional EA-IGF programme. The national IGFs provided the building block for the regional EA-IGF.
- Third, the EA-IGF brought together the national IGFs. The regional IGF provided an opportunity for national issues to be debated and discussed at the regional level. The regional process also involved identification and consensus-building around five regional issues that would benefit from increased advocacy and/or development of policy – for example: access to broadband, cyber security, regional communication policy, consumer issues, critical internet resources such as the regional top level domain and strengthening ccTLDs.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Creating or engaging networks of like-minded stakeholders is an effective way to influence policy processes and amplifies the impact of your research.
- Research processes can be used to catalyse networks and to convene important stakeholders around a central problem that they share.
- Networks built around research, communications and advocacy imperatives can develop a life of their own, and their influence can be felt for a long time after the research project is complete.

Telling a story

As we have seen in previous sections, a research partner's interest in conducting systematic research, and capacity to do so, will impact on the communications function of a research project. Typically this scenario results in poorly written and badly conceptualised research reports.

One way around this challenge is to work with a “story” approach, rather than a rigorous research design and template. This can be a good way to encourage a more direct participation and ownership in what is being said by researchers – a strategy that was employed relatively successfully in GISWatch 2011.

In previous issues of GISWatch, a standard template was created for the country report authors, which included asking them to do policy environment scans in their countries in an effort to produce comprehensive country reports that captured the policy status of the country situations. However, given the different topics for the GISWatch reports each year and the different skills levels of the authors, the outputs were not systematic or even comparable – even while there were many that were competently done. “It was hard to know or even monitor where the policy gaps were,” says GISWatch editor Alan Finlay. “We were asking authors to be systematic in their country reviews, but had no way of verifying the data that was produced,

or really even supporting the research process on the ground.”

“One way around this was to get the author-researchers closer to the ‘story’ they wanted to tell – to the actual advocacy we wanted to encourage by asking them to write the country reports in the first place,” he says. Instead of a survey of a particular policy environment, the project partners asked the authors to select a single story or event to illustrate the topic for that year, which, in the case of GISWatch 2011, was “Internet rights and democratization: freedom of expression and association online”. The authors then wrote about that story, drawing conclusions and developing advocacy action steps that were directly related to it, rather than attempting to summarise the overall policy or institutional environment in a country, which can be a specialised and difficult task.

The result was a rich tapestry of reports that approached the topic of the internet, human rights and social resistance from different angles – whether discussing the rights of prisoners to access the internet in Argentina, candlelight vigils against “mad cow” beef imports in South Korea, the UK Uncut demonstrations in London, or online poetry as protest in China.

In effect, the “story” focus of the report allowed the nuances of social activism using the internet to emerge – as well as, in many

reports, the spirit and courage of that activism to be narrated.

According to Liddicoat, “a key strength of the reports is the extent to which the depth and breadth of policy analysis of freedom of expression, freedom of association and democratisation issues varied across country reports. Country authors gave their own expression to the thematic issues and in their own authentic voice. This adds to the overall credibility of the publication when taken as a whole and also ensures that the process of developing GISWatch demonstrates the outcomes that we are trying to achieve.”

Liddicoat points out that “variance may make it difficult to strictly compare country reports with each other” and emphasises that the story approach needs to be backed up by good quality research. However, she feels the project was more effective in engaging on human rights advocacy when it could “tell a story” about internet-related human rights issues, such as filtering or lack of access: “That was always much easier and more persuasive,” she says.

The story-telling approach has been used successfully in other APC communication strategies. For Esterhuysen, this becomes an important output in its own right, even if it is not linked to formal research outcomes: “It creates awareness, and, provided you target the same audiences, it makes them more receptive to eventual research outputs.”

This was the case with the Communication for influence in Central, East and West Africa (CICEWA)⁹ advocacy project, as Currie explains in the following extract:

9. www.apc.org/en/projects/communication-influence-central-east-and-west-africa

Another interesting dimension of the communication for influence approach lay in the use of stories to convey the kernel of the research that was done. The problem that arises is that research tends to be inaccessible to a key target group engaged in processes of policy dialogue and regulatory activities – policy-makers, regulators, activists and in many cases, journalists. It is inaccessible as a result of complexity, cost and its mode of distribution.

The complexity of research is related to discursive factors such as length, academic or technical language, use of indicators and statistics. This makes it unlikely that members of the key target group whose attention span is limited by a range of pressures will get beyond the executive summary to the substance of the facts or arguments being made.

The cost involved in accessing much academic or commercial research is extreme.¹⁰ This places the work outside the public domain and has a number of negative effects. First, lack of access to the range of available research creates asymmetry of knowledge in a policy environment where certain academics, consultant and private sector players will have more access to knowledge than other players such as policy-makers, regulators, activists or journalists. Second, players with access can selectively use research to influence policy processes by making it selectively available to key policy-makers or regulators, while other players have no means of evaluating the research. This asymmetry has a knock-on effect on power relations within policy processes and can skew policy outcomes.

10. For example, the journal ‘Telecommunications Policy’ is currently available on annual subscription at a price of USD1,257 for institutions in Africa and USD310 for individuals in Africa. www.journals.elsevier.com/telecommunications-policy/#description

The mode of distribution is also a factor inhibiting access of knowledge in policy environments. Even publicly available research can become costly to download in parts of Africa where members of the target group are dependent on dial-up internet connections and cannot easily access .pdf files weighing several megabytes from a website. Academic journals may only be located in a few libraries on the continent and may take time to access through inter-library loans.

The cumulative effect of these factors is that key players in any ICT policy environment in Africa lack access to forms of knowledge that could raise the quality of their inputs into ICT policy dialogue. In addition, access to knowledge resources is asymmetrically distributed between players in a policy dialogue or process which may lead to skewed policy outcomes and which may lack full ownership of stakeholders. This, in turn, may lead to attempts to circumvent, undermine

or litigate against the policy or regulations by disgruntled stakeholders. Where key stakeholders, particularly from civil society, may not have been able to participate in the policy dialogue effectively, the overall policy outcome may be skewed in favour of private economic interests at the expense of social outcomes.

In this context, the challenge is how to make research accessible and the key element is to uncover a narrative dimension in the research that can be used to tell a story which illustrates a broader ICT policy issue. For example in the case of research conducted in Uganda on the implications of high taxation on ICT products for universal access, an APC journalist worked with the researcher to develop a story to explore this issue in an accessible manner and it was then published online as “Milking a cow you don’t feed: Is Uganda starving telecoms growth through high taxes?”¹¹

LESSONS LEARNED

- A story-telling approach to research outputs is an effective way to make research engaging for the reader and for the author.
- Story-telling helps to get to the heart of a problem, and allows the country-specific nuances of an issue to be expressed.
- Story-telling is effective in reaching non-professionals, such as the general public, and serves as a strong advocacy tool.

11. www.apc.org/en/node/9093

Mapping audiences

A [clear] self-understanding of what forms of communication are suited to what audience is needed.

MANJIMA BHATTACHARJYA

The target audience of any research process is always a potential communications partner in the research – and effective research communications means that that audience will take up the message, grapple with it, disagree with it or approve it – but they will disseminate it in some way. In other words, your research will enter into public debate and discussion, and by doing so, it has a greater chance of becoming persuasive.

According to APC's Communications and Information Policy Programme (CIPP) manager Valeria Betancourt, the *Impact 2.0* guide also suggests that involving target stakeholders in the research serves as way of “verifying” the research:

One of the communication strategies used in Peru by the project partners resulted in not only catching the attention of the policy maker but also to get him interested in what the researchers had to say in relation to the public policy issue. The researcher was invited to take part in specific meetings where the public policy strategy was being discussed. So this served as a form of “verification” – engagement in the real world based on the initial communication through a virtual channel.

There are usually a number of stakeholders with interest in a particular issue or with some type of influence on the formulation of public policies. Getting to know them and getting a clear picture of what role they play (or could play) helps us find allies for our cause and design our strategy of intervention in the policy making process. We can keep track of who the main stakeholders are by:

- Finding out who is involved in discussions on particular issues
- Involving them in online forums and other spaces where issues related to specific public policy are being discussed
- Building online relationships with main stakeholders
- Surveys among end-users of specific public policies.

For more, see: iguides.comunica.org/index.php/Main_Page

As APC has found, multi-stakeholder networks – consisting of those that a research initiative aims to influence – have often proved critical in strengthening research and advocacy outcomes. Building audience participation in the

Open Spectrum for Development research process helped to generate a sense of authenticity in the research results. “In Colombia the country researchers held a national debate,” explains Accuosto. “This gave the research process and the researchers legitimacy. There was buy-in into the importance of the research project by the intended beneficiaries and audience of the research from the beginning.”

Similarly, the KICTANet network in Kenya, which was formed with the private sector and the media as dissemination partner, gave the process institutional legitimacy, to the point that it became the preferred forum for the government to comment on ICT matters. By including the media in the network, journalists began to understand the complexity of the issues, with a tangible impact on the quality of reporting.

But these sorts of multi-stakeholder partnerships work best in the local environment, and typically in face-to-face encounters where co-learning can happen. Often researchers want to reach outside of this sphere of influence, to multiple audiences who are strangers.

As we have seen, selecting your research partners based on a combination of their skills and influence (which hopefully is outside of *your* circle of influence) and on the maturity of your relationship with that partner is important. It is, however, equally important to consider exactly who you want to reach when you communicate your research. Regardless of the kinds of influence you might want your research to have, as Maya Indira Ganesh advises: “Map your audiences for communicating research really well.”

There may be a number of ways to go about this. Some research projects might have a clear idea of audience, while other, more exploratory research projects, might imbed an expanding notion of the target audience in the research process itself as it seeks to create and expand its influence. Similarly, country authors for the GISWatch project are encouraged to consult boundary partners and

Impact 2.0 found that the key strategies for established legitimacy are:

- Follow all opportunities to profile the issue in the media, in this way influencing policy makers
- Encourage debate and discourse on the issue
- Gather supporters and allies that support the work you are doing in relation to the issue.

For more, see: iguides.comunica.org/index.php/Main_Page

stakeholders prior to writing the report in order to help build a constituency and audience for their reports. Still others might find a tiered approach to audience mapping useful.

The challenge of the Open Spectrum for Development project, says Accuosto, is that there were essentially two target audiences: a specialist audience interested in the details of open spectrum management, and a general audience who might just want to know the basic ideas to be informed. While the news articles and interviews, produced by the APC Communications team and circulated online, as well as a synthesis report catered for a more general audience, the issue paper, which was prepared by long-time APC partner Steve Song, served to raise the level of take-up of the debate in more specialist circles.

“We commissioned a synthesis report of the country reports from the LAC and some of these conclusions were presented at the IGF,” says Accuosto. “It was useful to have the synthesis paper because each country study was not looking at the regional debate, but what was going on in that specific country. By presenting a regional perspective we opened up the audience to the studies – we made it more relevant to more people.”

The purpose of the issue paper, which was also distributed at the IGF, was “to debate things at a more global level,” he says. According to Accuos-to, there was a good response to both outputs at the IGF, which included hosting a workshop on open spectrum: “Through both outputs and the presentations, we feel we helped to raise the profile of open spectrum at the event.”

“If someone has had to take the time and trouble to download a document, I think they are more likely to have used it in some way.”

In a number of cases, multiple outputs using different dissemination platforms might be necessary for your research to have impact and reach your intended audiences. “It is important to have a document where the results of the research are written in a clear and accessible way and the methodology used is provided,” says Sibthorpe. However, she says this is generally not sufficient:

There should be a short summary document for those who don’t want to read the more detailed report as well as consideration for what other formats and methods of communication would be most effective. For example, the research results need to be incorporated into an advocacy campaign, included in training or workshops, presented at important events, and so on. There also could be a visualization of the research, videos, press articles, or stories.

Betancourt points out that communications strategies must take into account the communication platforms that the intended audiences use – and, she says, web 2.0 offers a unique potential to verify research results:

In my view, the potential of web 2.0 tools to communicate research and verify it is closely related to the target audiences’

adoption of web 2.0 behaviours. It has to do with a change in the way in which the internet is used – a move from paradigm of providing information to one where knowledge is collaboratively produced.

For Jagun, the multiple outputs of the Open Spectrum for Development project helped the project to have impact:

Formats adopted for research outputs depend on the audience of the research and the more varied formats that are adopted – such as reports, audio, video – as well as the more platforms that are used in disseminating the research the better. The communication strategy for the open spectrum research (I think) worked well in this regard.

Southwood agrees and states the issue even more forcefully: “Communicating to specialist policy groups is dead easy but it’s ‘singing to the choir’: it is important to keep them informed but they can’t be the measure of success.” Moreover, while it is important to capture the research results in some kind of archival format, defaulting to the obvious, such as the printed version of a publication, is not always that useful. “Funders frequently ask that there are print copies of things,” he says. “It is not difficult to give these away but I’m not sure again what impact this has. If someone has had to take the time and trouble to download a document, I think they are more likely to have used it in some way.”

Manavy reminds us that it is important to cluster communications outputs based on general assumptions of audience access. “It depends on the local context – what kinds of media play important roles in communities,” she says. “For communities where people are illiterate we should consider old media like radio or TV. For people with adequate education who are able to access to and use the internet, then social network tools such as Twitter, Facebook or blogs are very common, particularly amongst the young such as students at universities.”

Ganesh suggests that it is equally important to note that for cross-regional projects, some countries may be better suited to certain kinds of dissemination formats than others: “There was some discussion about EROTICS animated films, and even we thought about doing something for EROTICS India but didn’t really have the time or bandwidth eventually.”

Sometimes it is not always that easy to clearly map audiences with the most appropriate dissemination platform. As new technologies infiltrate our everyday lives, we all tend to access information in varied and multiple ways, from libraries to newspapers to conversations with friends, to workshops, radio, websites, wikis, blogs, Facebook, or Twitter. More and more there is less of a clear line between a dissemination platform and who is reached using that platform as individuals who might form part of the target audience decide how they want to work online and how they want to get the information they need. Language, Correa suggests, also ghettoizes research results, and not taking into account the specific languages of your target audience limits what can be said – and in this regard she points to the importance of Portuguese, given the impact this allows in countries like Brazil.

Creating new audiences

Exploratory research in the field of women’s rights has often broken new ground – stimulating interest and activism in areas that were not clearly defined before. And with that, often, the kinds of audience reached cannot be anticipated from the start. Instead, an awareness of audience evolves incrementally. In these instances, it’s important to stay alert to audience take-up, documenting and tracking the use of research outputs as you go along. “The Take Back the Tech! project changed a lot,” says Kee. “When it started, the landscape was very different. In 2006 we were not talking about violence against women.”

At first the Take Back the Tech! research interventions were unfunded. “We started with a research paper, and then aimed to do a campaign – also because the research paper really pointed to the need for wider engagement on this new issue,” she says. “Feminists then shared the paper with partners. At a time when we started the campaign after the research, there was no funding for the project. We just decided to take it on.”

She says the success of the project’s visual language opened up new audiences for advocacy. “It is exciting, provocative, makes you think. Violence against women is usually depressing: We wanted to work on it in a positive way.”

Unexpectedly, there were a lot of men who wanted to get involved in the project, and older women too. “They saw this as a very important topic,” says Kee, “and it grew from there. Now the landscape is very different from five years ago.”

Kee says the MDG3 project is a good example of research turned into action. “Our activities have grown from a largely volunteer-driven online campaign to securing funds for supporting multi-strategy activities in 12 countries. The campaign has grown because of the work of local campaigners, from its beginning until now,” she says.

And in 2010 the project created an online global mapping platform to document violence against women online. “This became another way to talk about the issue,” she says. But, she adds, it is a “struggle” because now the advocacy role is very broad, and needs to respond to many “different people with different concerns and realities.”

Demanding attention

Disseminating information is also not just about accessing channels where that information can be shared, but about attracting the *attention* of those you want to reach. This is especially important in a wired up world where hundreds of research projects and other forms of campaign messaging could be clamouring

for the same kinds of attention from similar audiences.

For instance, the *Impact 2.0* guide suggests that visualisation of research results can be critical in attracting the attention of policy makers – as Betancourt puts it:

Time is always a scarce resource for policy makers and public officers. The visualisation of data shows content in an easy and versatile way. It facilitates the comprehension of concepts, particularly when they are complex and are linked with other concepts. It also facilitates visualisation of links between concepts and facts or evidence.

While Novotny feels that APC has a lot to learn when it comes to using social media and visualisation techniques – organisations like Privacy International and Tactical Tech are held up as implementing best-practices in this regard – Manavy suggests that the effectiveness of social media is all about the clarity of the message:

Use simple words, evoke the discussion using a small and simple topic – but it should be the hot and common concern. For example, in Cambodia the hot topic at the moment is about land grabbing, evic-

tion. Rape and trafficking are serious, but those are long-lasting issues.

She also suggests that it is important to be sensitive to the local cultural and political environment, even when using social media, which sometimes can create the illusion that we share common cultures and ways of thinking:

We should understand the culture and political environment of the country where we are working. Cambodian people are reluctant to speak out because they are afraid of saying the wrong thing, accusing, and have for a long time borne a culture of silence due to low education.

In other words, it is not sufficient to simply state that you will use “social media” for dissemination, as if there is a ready-made audience just waiting to take-up your campaign messaging and run with the new ideas presented to them. Like any media channel, you need to map the audiences and channels for social media too – and work as hard at the campaign messaging compared to any other dissemination channel. While “there has to be a social media strategy,” says Southwood, “it can only be effective if the organisation has already built itself a ‘base’ of people who follow, or ‘like’ what you do.”

LESSONS LEARNED

- It is critical to map who the intended audience of your research is, and to be clear about the communications platforms they typically use.
- Think about producing different kinds of outputs for your research, tailored to the interest and knowledge levels of the different audiences.
- Sometimes audiences of a research project might evolve over time – this means you need to continue to map new audiences as the research project grows.
- Web 2.0 can be effective in creating collaborative learning processes, but you need to think hard about your messaging to be effective.

Working with a communications team

The communications team or somebody specialised in communications should definitely be part of the research project. But often this is done on an ad-hoc basis and the communications person doesn't tend to have sufficient dedicated time available.

KAREL NOVOTNY

The APC Communications team is the engine room that produces what we might normally call “research outputs” in APC projects – the publications, the online webspaces, the leaflets and fliers and factsheets. Their role is to appeal to a more general audience than the research stakeholders might engage at conference or events, or in the research process themselves. For instance, they work at attracting media attention.

Many organisations have people or a group of people responsible for communicating the work of that organisation. However, when it comes to research, organisations often forget to include their communications team in the research process. “Those responsible for the communication strategy should also be involved in the design phase,” says Jagun. “They can provide input into the formatting of research outputs and (amongst others) their contribution in identifying stakeholders and audiences for the research can help researchers in writing up their findings.”

The following extract has been written by Lisa Cyr, coordinator of the APC Communications team.

Conveying the message: Making the most of research for advocacy

APC communications methodology for communicating research

Over the past few years, the APC Communications team has undertaken efforts to present its work in more interesting and lively ways than ever before. APC has reworked its website's skin and interface, as well as looked for new ways to present the findings that emerge through the research it commissions.

Because long reports rarely receive attention from the general public, the communications team has devised different ways of disseminating information to different audiences using social media, multimedia, repackaging, adaptations, and news articles. Most of these formats are then featured prominently on our main website, apc.org, in three languages¹² and sent in our bi-weekly e-mail newsletter, APC-News.

12. Unless there are budget and regional constraints, all articles appear in three languages: English, Spanish and French. Articles may sometimes be translated only to one language, or to an additional language (Portuguese) depending on the region of interest and where impact is sought.

Creating content : Repackaging, adaptations, original articles

Repackaging

Repackaging research is simply taking smaller sections of a report and re-publishing them separately, with perhaps an additional change to format and layout. The most basic and least time-consuming way to present research and information is by simply repackaging it. Repackaging is typically done for major publications. With these texts it is possible for us to minimally “adapt” the piece by trimming away content, and changing the format and layout, yet preserving the essence of the article.

For example, the publication GenARDIS 2002 - 2010: Small grants that made big changes for women in agriculture¹³ provided many smaller, ready-to-publish pieces taken directly from the book, including the introduction.¹⁴ The individual stories in the publication were edited and a short abstract was written and then published on APC.org. We also used this method for publications such as GISWatch, generally republishing the individual thematic and regional reports. Introductions, executive summaries and conclusions or recommendations sections often make great content for repackaging, as well as short chapters or smaller reports. This also helped in the UN Universal Periodic Review research because APC could re-package the country reports into a specific submission tailored to the review in Brazil, India, South Africa and Ecuador.

Repackaging is one of the most efficient ways to disseminate information, which requires relatively small amounts of time and effort and can garner interest from a wider audience.

13. www.apc.org/en/node/11062

14. genardis.apcwomen.org/en/node/152

Adaptations

Another easy way to present research is by writing an adaptation of a report, drawing on its executive summary, introduction or conclusion. An adaptation is using the essential elements of a text more holistically and then writing a shorter document to reflect the most important ideas of the original text. This will generally take more time than repackaging something that is ready to be published and will depend on the extent to which the information is being adapted.

For example, Unbounded possibilities: Observations on sustaining rural ICTs in Africa,¹⁵ a report by Ian Howard was adapted to reflect the quality of the stories it contained. The entire report was adapted by cutting out text, reformulating sentences to be more concise and fitting everything into 800-1,200 words.¹⁶ Though it was time-intensive, it proved to be well worth it for our readers, which now number around 13,000 for that article.

In cases where an executive summary is available, such as with the Application of ICTs for climate change adaptation in the water sector¹⁷ publication, a full executive summary is available in addition to a shorter, more digestible 1,000-word adapted version,¹⁸ which links on APC.org to both the executive summary and the full publication. This can increase readership of the full publication by allowing the reader's interest to be piqued with a shorter overview of the publication's essential message. Using text from introductions and conclusions sections also allows for the main ideas to be presented in a simpler and easy-to-read format, without requiring the full publication to be read.

15. www.apc.org/en/pubs/research/unbounded-possibilities-observations-sustaining-ru

16. www.apc.org/en/node/7178

17. www.apc.org/en/pubs/application-icts-climate-change-adaptation-water-s-0

18. Water-related stress and ICTs: New publication includes developing country experiences www.apc.org/en/node/14374

Tips and recommendations sections from larger publications are also valuable, generate a large number of reads and require minimal amounts of time and effort to publish. For the Communicating for influence in Central East and West Africa (CICEWA)¹⁹ final evaluation report, a “key lessons” piece was created, which drew its content from the report’s summary text. Such pieces are ideal, especially when information is organised in bullet-point lists, such as with the GenARDIS publication, from which a piece entitled “Seven tips”²⁰ was adapted.

Original news articles

Increasingly, APC’s communications team has been producing original news articles and interviews based on research results. These allow us to communicate research in a fresh and appealing way by drawing from interviews with researchers and authors as well as the reports themselves. News articles are most useful when the topic is timely and when there are several country reports that can be published as a series such as with our work on CICEWA,²¹ Digital Broadcast Migration in West Africa,²² ICTs and environmental sustainability,²³ and Open Spectrum for Development.²⁴

Since many research reports can be quite technical and detailed, much of the information presented is not useful for the production of news items. Since reports cannot always include broader contexts and related issues,

interviewing report authors has proven to be an effective way to extract relevant and news-worthy information (sometimes referred to as “policy knots”). For research that is not policy-based, such as with APC’s Gender Evaluation Methodology,²⁵ bringing attention to an important or surprising fact will generate a similar effect.

Videos

On occasion, the APC communications team creates videos for campaigns, programmes and events. Videos are a more engaging medium for disseminating research findings, causes and issues, garnering large amounts of interest. The Connect your rights!²⁶ video is a perfect example of how policy issues can be conveyed visually. Similarly the Take Back the Tech! video²⁷ was effective in communicating a complex subject in a simple and engaging way. Video can also present interviews, which, like news items, help to convey the main ideas in research in simple, every-day language.

Social media

APC has experienced success with social media, in particular Twitter. Our Twitter account, @APC_News, now has over 1,000 followers. Initially, Twitter accounts were created in three languages for use at events only, but as our followers grew and the capacity of the communications team increased, we began to tweet on a daily basis, engaged in re-tweeting and started conversations with our followers. We see the number of @APC_News followers grow every day.

19. www.apc.org/en/projects/communication-influence-central-east-and-west-afri

20. Seven policy tips to ensure rural women equal access to ICTs genardis.apcwomen.org/en/node/151

21. Collected research and articles: www.apc.org/en/node/9321

22. Collected digital migration articles www.apc.org/en/node/12504

23. Collected GreeningIT e-waste articles www.apc.org/en/pubs/environment/greening-it-collected-research

24. Open spectrum for development articles www.apc.org/en/node/11863

25. Gender Evaluation Methodology portal: www.genderevaluation.net

26. Visit rights.apc.org and scroll down to view the video

27. www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCwK8Y1Unr4



Apc.org: APC's main communications space

The APC website is our main communications vehicle and the space where much of our communications intersect and originate. APC.org is a dynamic space that gathers information about our work and the work of our members. On the site, information can be found about our funders, projects, programmes, staff and members, and more.

In the past five years, hits to the APC home page have increased significantly. During this time, we have made efforts to revamp the website by giving it a new look and by reorganising the presentation of information on the homepage. Focusing on visuals using blocks and hot boxes and choosing appropriate and appealing photos to accompany articles has proved attractive to online visitors.

The APC site can have an overwhelming amount of information, therefore we also carefully categorise our work areas and name site sections so that they are easier to locate. For example, the "What we do" tab divides our work into strategic priorities rather than projects.

The home page is divided into three columns, which are also subdivided vertically into blocks to help separate content.

Left column

A news column on the left is fed with the latest articles and news items

Middle column

The APC blog box in the centre column features blog entries on a variety of ICT-related topics from the APC community

- *Top five, most-read articles*
- *Latest publications*
- *List of APC's current projects*

A Tweet feed box is displayed on APC.org's home page. Typically, posts including @APC_News are visible. However, when there is an event, feeds from the event's hashtags are displayed. For example, during the recent IGF and AWID Forum²⁸ we displayed posts that included #igf or #awid. This box is useful because it demonstrates our lively activity on Twitter, shows interesting conversations and provides visitors with links to join in the conversation. Twitter also helps you feel part of a community if you are using it regularly on particular topics or hashtags.

Facebook has not been as successful, however. Our small team has limited capacity for social media and Facebook has taken some time to grow and become a regularly fed media. Currently, all news items are posted on Facebook along with any other major announcement, yet our Facebook followers remain few and the page is not a particularly lively space.

It has been helpful to assign one particular person to manage the social media accounts – generally, too, one person per language – because otherwise they can become neglected.

28. www.forum.awid.org

The *Impact 2.0* guide offers a number of useful learning experiences in using web 2.0 tools for communicating research effectively – this reflection by APC’s Valeria Betancourt, who led the *Impact 2.0* project.

The communication process is not linear and, when it comes to communicating research results to policy makers or public officers, it gets even more complex due to the following aspects, among others:

- The division between the private domain and the professional one is not clear and it is often conflicting when policy makers and public officers use web 2.0 tools to communicate with researchers and other stakeholders.
- Most of the public institutions have established policies of access and use of web 2.0 tools that limit or block access to and the use of these tools by public officers and policy makers.
- Communication strategies need constant adjustments to respond to technological changes that influence work habits.
- Effectiveness in communicating research results is related to a long-term and sustained communication strategy. Strategies over short periods of time oriented towards only communicating research conclusions are much less effective than long-term communication strategies.
- The marketing approach through web 2.0 adopted by both research institutions and public institutions is not always effective: it creates a lot of noise and can be counterproductive in terms of linking research and policy.
- There is still prejudice in relation to web 2.0 tools. Messages coming through those channels are sometimes not taken seriously by policy makers and public officers.

- The interactive potential of web 2.0 tools is not used in practice by policy makers and researchers, meaning that they are used well in debates and discussions and for collaboration.

Betancourt also points out that, on the practical side, there are some key issues to take into account:

- The policies and rules established by public institutions that limit or block the access and use of web 2.0 tools by policy makers and public officers.
- How policy makers and public officers use web 2.0 tools. As mentioned before, the linear approach is still predominant. Because of this, it cannot be concluded that the popularity of web 2.0 tools opens, by default, channels for exchange and collaboration between researchers and policy makers. It also cannot be concluded that the simple use of web 2.0 tools produces web 2.0 behaviours that strengthen the political action to make the public policy processes more participatory and open.
- Reaching policy makers through web 2.0 tools to share research outputs does not necessarily mean that it will make the policy process a more informed and effective process. Most of the times, web 2.0 mechanisms and strategies have to be accompanied and complemented by face-to-face interaction and other offline forms of communication.

There are still a lot of questions that remain in relation to the differences that adoption and appropriation of web 2.0 tools by researchers and civil society produce in effectively reaching policy makers. It has to be determined if the web 2.0 tools open real opportunities for establishing new connections and alliances, and if they facilitate understanding the power dynamics and interests of those who are shaping public policies.

For more, see: iguide.comunica.org/index.php/Main_Page

Right column

- APCNews subscription box
- “What’s hot” block for featured and thematic site content
- Twitter feed for @APC_News
- Banners and logos for other APC spaces link to projects like GISWatch, Take Back the Tech!, and other mini-sites
- Map visualisation of APC’s global membership
- History of APC video
- List of APC’s six strategic priorities

Our efforts to re-organise APC.org have been quite successful as hits rose from 24,526 in May 2008 to 55,975 in May 2012. However, the increase in site visits was not only due to these efforts; they were also due to an increase in interesting and relevant content.

Room for growth

APC communications must continue to grow and realise our potential to be even more evocative, lively and efficient in engaging our network and beyond. The communications team periodically revisits its communications plans in order to find new areas for improvement. And this is an important part of the communications cycle.

Sustaining influence

Getting journalists to cover things in Africa is relatively easy. What is much less easy is the question of what impact it has. As someone who has been on both radio and TV over the years, I'm not really sure.

RUSSELL SOUTHWOOD

Project evaluation, many agree, is critical to understanding how successful the research has been, or how much influence it has produced. “Evaluation is important but is often not done,” says Sibthorpe. “There should be both evaluation of the research process and methodology as well as the effectiveness of the communication of the research.”

While Bhattacharjya feels that anonymous peer review of a project or of research outputs can be helpful in assessing their impact, for any research project, the influence it produces is often uncertain – even if there are systems in place to assess this influence. Despite working with clear concepts of different audiences, and evidence of take-up of the project messaging at forums like the IGF, Accuosto still feels it is difficult to be certain about the impact of the research. But, he also cautions, as with all advocacy based on research: “It’s hard to measure impact – the impact is not immediate.”

For Correa, this ambivalence is often built into the project design – with a gap between the kinds of influence a project hopes to achieve, and how it is evaluated:

I do know donors these days do not like so much “process” and field building and mostly focus on “products” and problem solving. I acknowledge the relevance of outputs, but am also convinced that when evaluation is narrowed down too much a loss occurs in terms of what you are aiming to measure. It is hard to measure process, but it is not possible to make out as if it does not matter.

Both Correa and Sibthorpe put part of the challenge down to the timeframes and budgets that limit longer-term assessments and communications strategies – even while it is practically necessary to constrain the timeframe of any research project. As Correa argues, research projects focused too strongly on final products and advocacy outcomes do not “[allow] horizontal exchange and learning”:

From my own experience of global projects of this scope I would say EROTICS would have required at least one additional year of work and at least two more exchange meetings for the country teams to be able to better process data collected, exchange knowledge and more collectively

strategise for future advocacy action. The timeframe, in my view, has in many ways restricted the possibilities of the teams to collectively and more smoothly process findings, and divergent and convergent learning and views.

Kee agrees. Even though EROTICS forged a shared identity, which helped bring diverse people from diverse contexts “under one shared question or issue,” the identity did not grow in the way that Take Back the Tech! did. “This is because it was largely a ‘research project’,” she says. “There was no follow-up action that people could take part in – which is why Take Back the Tech! was so successful.”

“There is often a short period of communication at the end of the project once the research has been completed,” says Sibthorpe. “But there is no resourcing to do a more sustained effort to communicate the results.” However, “project cycles and budgets mean that the research gets produced, there is a short burst of communication and then staff move onto the next project”:

There needs to be a way of ensuring that staff and stakeholders are communicating the research at strategic opportunities even after the project and project funding has ended. Otherwise there is a risk that a lot of good research ends up online not really being read.

When considering communicating research for influence, the most important stakeholders to influence are the researchers themselves – who are, after all, the champions for change. And it is here that perhaps one of the most important impacts *can* be demonstrated. Sometimes the research an organisation does gets lost within the organisation itself. For instance, according to Moolman, the findings of the MDG3 research could have fed back into the project processes much more clearly:

“In terms of learning, we didn’t really incorporate it along the way – we didn’t take a conscious decision to do that.”

For Correa, the EROTICS project would have benefited from extended learning partnerships: “I do think that within these limitations all country teams and the collective as a whole have beautifully performed. But I do think that we have somehow lost a privileged opportunity of deepening cross-cultural knowledge and learning and of creating a more solid basis for future joint work.”

“It’s important,” says Liddicoat, to go back and reshape and re-use what you have already done. “If you’re not going to do that [use your own research results creatively], how can you expect others to?” she adds. The Connect your Rights! project is a good example of how this can be done effectively and in a way that contributes towards a coherent advocacy strategy. In the case of GISWatch 2011, while the country reports provided good motivation for the need for advocacy, more needed to be done to turn the stories into an advocacy agenda. Because of this, the project has shaped the action steps recommended in the country reports to see if these can be turned into a framework for monitoring progress. At the same time, she says, the country reports have a long “life cycle”, and can be used effectively in other advocacy in processes – such as the UN Universal Periodic Review – over the coming years, allowing APC to work with the authors on local advocacy agendas in the future.

“The policy spaces in which GISWatch can be used are clearly expanding and country authors and network members are taking opportunities to link the GISWatch country studies to their national and global advocacy,” she says. “The country studies of India, South Africa, Brazil and Ecuador, for example, informed national coalitions (including APC members) in their submissions to the Universal Periodic Review processes.”

As Esterhuysen points out, planned dissemination strategies do not end when the budget ends. Publications, fliers, and other advocacy material are “recycled” at relevant events long after a research project has stopped – here key policy stakeholders are often targeted with advocacy material, and APC is constantly on the lookout for how to proactively insert its advocacy content in formal publications with a wide reach and influence, including UN reports.

For Sibthorpe, there is often a limit to what an organisation’s communications team is able to do, which, she says, makes it important that partners and stakeholders are actively involved in taking forward dissemination activities at the national, regional and international level. “Dissemination activities tend to stop once the project has come to an end,” she explains, “which is understandable since that is when the budget ends. However, this means that it is not possible to take advantage of opportunities to disseminate research more strategically after the project ends.”

LESSONS LEARNED

- The most important “audience” for the research is the researchers themselves – they need to learn from the research they have done. In this way, the outcomes of the research can influence future projects and advocacy agendas.
- It is important to develop a dissemination strategy that extends beyond the budget timeframe. This can be done simply and easily, but use appropriate opportunities that present themselves to share relevant research outputs.
- Think about reshaping, re-using and re-mixing research outcomes in a way that they can be adapted to suit future advocacy agendas.
- Pay attention to the recommendations you arrive at. Map them, and implement them wherever you can.

Budgeting for communicating research for advocacy

Effective communication of research is not easy and needs to be strategically considered, planned and resourced for from the start.

CLAIRE SIBTHORPE

A final note on budgeting for research. There is no standard formula for budgeting for research communications – it all depends on the kinds of outputs you want to produce, how they will be published, how you want to engage your target audience (e.g. will it involve travel?), and how many organisations are involved in the research, including what role they will play in dissemination. In fact, it is entirely conceivable that research can be effectively communicated without any sort of communications budget – if the research process is oriented towards communicating and engaging with stakeholders right from the start.

For example, imagine if you want to bring about a particular kind of policy change in a specific context. You might decide to do five interviews as part of your research process – that is all! You start with an interview with an economist, then an ICT activist, then a respected social analyst, and then a leading member of the official political opposition, who is also a respected women's activist. For

each interview you explain clearly the objective of the research and the change you are looking to bring about, and you document the interviews clearly, developing supporting arguments for your position along the way. When you finally meet the policy maker for your research interview, you have a strong argument to present to him or her for particular policy change, and have done the work! The policy maker might even be relieved! The simple point to illustrate here is that by imbedding the communications function into the research process – by the researchers becoming champions of the research, with clear messages – change can be produced.

However, most research does need publicity to be effective and persuasive. As Sibthorpe puts it:

It is important to ensure there is sufficient attention to a budget for communication activities. Communication activities need to be thought through in the proposal and design stage and the communications team (and any others that will be involved in communicating the research) need to be involved in the project from the start.

APC's experiences suggest there are a few project components and activities that are worth budgeting for in order to produce effective communications of the research. These are:

- Budget for outputs (tangible costs like design and printing) as well as time. This includes planning work. As Bhattacharjya advises, it is important to “plan to give more time to prepare communications materials other than the report and printing costs.”
- Also budget time for the communications team in your organisation to be a part of the research process, including the project design. This is critical for organisational buy-in, and for creating consistent public messaging throughout the research process. The communications team should be able to influence the design and the research process based on its assessment of audience and impact of the research.
- Set aside some time for media work, in particular writing news stories focusing on a particular aspect of the research. Media houses are hungry for good information that can be easily republished, and if you write a news story for them you increase the likelihood that it will be copied and pasted into the publication, or online. This is often better than writing a media release that a journalist needs to spend time turning into a story.
- Budget for the production of easy-to-use, short documents or fact sheets that summarise what your research has found.
- Have a small budget for good layout and printing in gloss. This is sometimes more persuasive for businesses and policy makers.
- Set aside a budget for a designer. A good logo and good layout of your work will make you feel good and have greater impact.
- You can consider a budget for tech tools – such as a blog or wiki or website.
- Set aside a small communications budget for local-level work – for the unexpected opportunity to catalyse action to produce an effect.
- Set aside a budget for an independent or anonymous evaluation of the impact of the research – for instance, interviews or surveys with boundary partners.

These are only some of the perhaps more important costs of communicating research effectively. Most of this communications function will come from the personal commitment and energy of the researchers, and that you cannot budget for. As a rough rule of thumb, you might want to work on 30-35% of the total project costs for the communications functions above. But really, this could be as high as 50%, depending on the nature of the project, or as low as 5%.

Sibthorpe says that “there could perhaps be more effort to engage donors in helping to communicate the research results (e.g. have them actively involved in communicating results).” Be clear to your donor or sponsor what you want to achieve and why, and as some of the APC projects show, doing some of the work before you write the proposal goes a long way to convince donors that your research is worthwhile. Remember: a donor is the first stakeholder you want to influence! And it may be one of the most difficult and important stakeholders to convince that your research is worthwhile.

Some conclusions

Communicating research for influence is not easy. You might do everything right, and have all the pieces in place for a good communications strategy, but the timing of your research or campaign message might just be wrong – maybe you are years ahead of public thinking on an issue, or maybe someone else has offered a better approach. Often, there is more that stands in the way of good research being taken-up and popularised than what facilitates seamless communications. And, as has been implicit in most of what has been said here, research, like advocacy, is never really done. There is always more to investigate and more to refine.

“Communicating research for influence” is divided into several sections that suggest approaches that have been particularly successful for APC projects – while also suggesting shortcomings in these approaches. Most of the projects discussed here involved multiple research partners, and those are the kinds of processes that receive the most attention. However, sometimes it is just your organisation that is involved in the research. In these cases, many of the comments here should still prove helpful and interesting.

To summarise some of its key points:

- Know why you want to communicate something before you communicate it. Think about creating a distinct research identity based on what you want to communicate.
- Consider the organisations you want to work with – what sort of interest in research they have. Some may not be interested in research as a process, but they may be good at advocating for change based on the research outcomes.
- In contexts where the skills and capacity of research partners differ, create participatory decision-making processes from the start in order to maximise buy-in.
- Map communications channels and their limitations, as well as the types of content that will work in specific contexts. Research outputs need to be tailored to the specific country contexts, as well as the kinds of technologies your target audience uses.
- Consider a story-led approach. They create rich resources of advocacy material. These can then be mined later to maximise the advocacy potential of research.

- Creating local multi-stakeholder forums increase the likelihood of your research being taken up. Consider forming a network around your research in order to create cycles of influence and change as your research progresses. These networks can also feed into the research process, and build on what you are learning.
- Outputs are communication processes, not events. The hard work is going back to what you recommend or say through research, and learning as an organisation from that process.
- While a communications strategy can be planned ahead of the research, it is important to be flexible during the research process, and to constantly review the likely effectiveness of the outputs as the research unfolds. Sometimes the kinds of data or research that you anticipated at the start of the project is not possible – due to capacity and skills of the researchers, or bureaucratic and political bottlenecks that prevent research from being conducted properly.
- Outputs should be geared towards being useful to participating organisations. Before developing outputs, think about who they are aimed at. For academics, a book publication might be more appropriate. For activists, factsheets, summaries or interviews that capture the key findings of the research.
- Where possible, build in a small advocacy budget or catalysing fund. This should be incorporated into the budget to help organisations take up the issues independently of the primary researchers or coordinating organisations.
- Involve the communications team in your research right from the start. They should be able to influence the research design based on their knowledge of audiences.
- Always budget for time for dissemination activities, for planning, for production and for learning.

Doing these will go some way towards helping your research have influence. But there is another aspect that is equally important: the legitimacy of your message. As this publication has suggested, this legitimacy is closely interlinked with self-learning, with “hearing” and with change in the organisations that are doing the research themselves.

Research outputs are not just “outputs” – they are communicative actions and processes. They are as much an opportunity for the organisation doing the research to listen and learn, as they are opportunities to reach a target audience, who in turn work as dissemination champions. The feedback they give on a project impacts on its framework and assumptions. This aspect of dissemination is often lost – dissemination is about feedback in the most basic and intrinsic sense. This is what Hovland calls “double loop” learning:

Many of the current recommendations on communication aim to maximise the direct impact of research on policy and practice. In the process they frequently lose sight of the more gradual and indirect impact that research can have. The current focus is on instrumental change through immediate and identifiable change in policies, and less on conceptual change in the way we see the world and the concepts we use to understand it. (Hovland, 5)

And it is this type of learning that is the most difficult to quantify and justify – but one of the most critical parts of building influence for change.

Appendix

Brief summary and overview of factors affecting communicating research effectively

In her review of publications on communicating research, Hovland suggests several other reasons for weak communications which we have elaborated on here. These include:

- A lack of *communication skills*, including writing media releases, basic advocacy material, or people skills, such as persuading delegates at a conference, debating, or the ability to deliver convincing and clear presentations that are suited to the audience (how many people research the likely audience when asked to present at a conference?).
- A gap between researchers and policy-makers. Sometimes policy-makers are seen as the “beneficiaries” or the target audience of research, rather than key participants in a research process. If policy-makers have a stake in research results, and can influence those results in positive and responsible ways, they will pay more attention to what those results say (even if it is not good news for them!).
- A disconnect between the kinds of “platforms” that are created to communicate the research and who you want to reach. An invite-only workshop is unlikely to stir widespread public response to price collusion amongst internet service providers (unless, of course, you want to inform very well positioned public activists and consumer bodies).
- A lack of capacity in the target audience to *use* the research. It is important that the research outputs you produce are tailored to the skills (including languages) of the target audience. There is no use producing a high-end video that takes an hour to download if you are trying to reach busy policy-makers who have poor internet access in their offices. And if you speak in terms that are too technical, a non-technical audience just will not understand.
- A gap between what users (or an audience) actually need in terms of information. Researchers might have a clear idea of research questions, but little idea of the information needed – or the “information demand” amongst the target audience. Often this is because the target audience is not considered or involved in the research process.
- The environment in which the research is communicated is not receptive to what is being communicated – it lacks an “en-

abling environment”. As Hovland puts it: “failure to use research/information is not always due to lack of communication, but can instead be due to lack of a favourable political environment or lack of resources.” (Hovland, 4)

Communications, Hovland says, need to be seen as a “systemic issue” – it occurs in a particular economic and political context, which is usually in flux. Communications strategies need to take this into consideration, and try to understand how these forces might shape

the uptake of research, including whether or not what is being advocated for by research is practical and possible at any given time in a country’s or region’s economic and political development. In this way, the successful communication of research is not just about communications tools or channels. It is about understanding who you are reaching, involving them as much as possible in the research process, understanding your research questions in terms of what you want to communicate, and being realistic about the impact your research will have.

List of contributors to this publication

NAME	ORGANISATION AND POSITION
Pablo Accuosto	APC Communications and Information Policy Programme (CIPP) (former staff member coordinator)
Valeria Betancourt	CIPP programme manager
Manjima Bhattacharjya	Post Doc Fellow at the Urban Aspirations Project, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai
Sonia Correa	Sexuality Policy Watch
Willie Currie	Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) councillor (former APC manager of the CIPP programme)
Lisa Cyr	APC Communications team, coordinator
Anriette Esterhuysen	APC executive director
Alan Finlay	GreeningIT initiative (former senior coordinator)
Maya Indira Ganesh	Programme director, Evidence & Action Programme, Tactical Technology Collective
Abi Jagun	Research consultant
Joy Liddicoat	APC Connect your Rights!, senior coordinator
Chim Manavy	Open Institute executive director
Jan Moolman	APC Women’s Networking Support Programme (WNSP), coordinator
Karel Novotny	APC Strategic Technologies & Network Development Programme (ST&ND), coordinator
Claire Sibthorpe	Maple Consulting Services
Russell Southwood	Balancing Act
Jac sm Kee	APC WNSP, coordinator