H48: Bridging the Gap Between Research and Policy

Session slot no. 2: Roundtable Discussion

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- Obadia Miroro is a Knowledge Manager at the INCLUDE Secretariat and assistant knowledge manager at the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC).
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ABSTRACT:

The roundtable discussion of the panel H48 was held between four knowledge platforms initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to bridge the gap between research and policy. In the discussion, these knowledge platforms – Netherlands Food Partnership, Knowledge Platform on Security and Rule of Law, Share-Net and Knowledge Platform INCLUDE – shared their experiences on brokering knowledge. As they all focus on the sharing of research findings and the strengthening of linkages between different actors, opportunities and challenges identified were often similar. However, ways of dealing with these can differ between platforms and the presentations contributed to sharing their different approaches. At the end of the session, relevant discussion points were raised about the role of the private sector, diverging interests between relevant stakeholders, and on how to measure the impact of knowledge brokering.

PRESENTATIONS

Knowledge Platform on Security and Rule of Law (SROL)

Manirakiza, representing the Knowledge Platform on Security and Rule of Law (SROL), stressed the importance and challenge of creating ownership of the learning agenda amongst the grantees during the implementation of programs, notably the ARC programme Manirakiza was referring to in the round table. To create ownership, representatives from the field need to be included at the very start of program creation. Little engagement of people from the field has often been the result of an overrepresentation of international NGOs in dialogues with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) while local voices were not heard. Another way to keep interest amongst all stakeholders in the program is to create active feedback loops, in which implementation of programs is constantly re-evaluated, re-adjusted, and improved. Not only does SROL regard it as their role to include a diverse range of actors in dialogue, it is also key that the relationships between actors is collaborative rather than competitive. This is related to the importance of the creation of 'safe spaces' in which grantees can both share their success stories and failures and learn from them accordingly. Lastly, a challenge SROL encountered was that of limited resources and the unclear definition of for what goals the available resources should be reserved for.

Knowledge Platform on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Burundi

The knowledge platform on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Burundi experienced slightly different challenges compared to SROL. The main challenge Share-Net Burundi encountered was that of political, religious and cultural conservatism, which complicates open dialogue about sexuality. As an example, it is difficult for Share-Net to engage with policy makers about sexual health and rights if the LGBTQI+ community is not recognized. To tackle this, Share-Net encourages 'intergenerational dialogue', to lighten the taboo on sexuality. Another challenge is that of a lack of data and evidence available. Similarly to SROL, Share-Net Burundi also faces the lack of funding of research, and competition rather than collaboration between stakeholders. To ensure ownership of the programs Share-Net engages in, members of the knowledge platform have significant impact on the agenda. Safe spaces are also created to talk about sensitive and taboo topics.

The Netherlands Food Partnership

The Netherlands Food Partnership with NWO-WOTRO found that co-creation and research sharing as multi-stakeholder Food & Busines Research (F&BR) projects with local and national governments' agendas throughout the project work contributed to influencing governmental policy formulation and implementation. Furthermore, the information derived from research provided to local actors, such as farmers, should be directly applicable and relevant to local contexts. For the F&BR projects, a main challenge was finding public sector actors to be part of the research consortia. Another issue was the limited capacity of authorities to keep engaging with the application and potential upscaling of new research results. All in all it is important to acknowledge the two-way street of research and policy for contextualized and research-based policy formulation so that it is significant and applicable for those working in the field.

The INCLUDE Knowledge Platform

Miroro, knowledge manager at INCLUDE and AERC, focused on INCLUDE's Policy Dialogues. Miroro stressed the significance of the flexibility and adaptability of the format and content of the dialogues. Similarly to what The Netherlands Food Partnership found, one must ensure that approaches are not too broad but rather context specific. Concretely, this means tapping into different strategies of

disseminating information, whether it is on the local radio, TV, or a 'breakfast meeting with policy makers'. A challenge that arose during the Policy Dialogues was that political stakeholders change due to elections or instable political situations which makes it hard to establish tight relationships with policy makers. Lastly, policy makers might be willing to engage with evidence provided by researchers depending on the political culture. As an example, Miroro illustrated that Rwandan governors have been actively engaging which research whereas in Nigeria and Kenya it has been difficult due to the variety of interests represented in politics.

DISCUSSION

Private sector involvement

The first discussion point raised focused on the role of the private sector. All platforms aim to engage and strengthen relationships with members of the private sector. A concrete example provided by Makambira is that of Share-Net Burundi's close engagement with companies producing sanitary pads. In the context of INCLUDE's Policy Dialogues, the private sector is involved since the beginning as they are affected by changes in policy and they are able to contribute to the provision of knowledge and ideas. The Netherlands Food Partnership, having had many private sector actors as leads of research projects, experienced that the private sector might have limited time to discuss and exchange ideas like researches and are not always in favour of open access working.

Dynamics between stakeholders

A second discussion point is that of tensions between actors: local actors' interests differ from researchers' interests which might lead to a lack of interest in engagement on local actors' side. Manirakiza elaborated that this had been the case for SROL because the research questions identified in the beginning were broad and general, and not specific enough for a local actor. She plead for context specificity of knowledge and learning. This also applies to researchers' questions at the very beginning of the creation of a project: what a good question means to a researcher might not be a relevant question for a local actor. For the Netherlands Food Partnership, this experience was slightly different. Interestingly, local implementers, being in the lead of many projects, found their way to adapt the global agenda to their own local context but the Dutch embassies present in the countries sometimes criticized the agenda for being too broad. For INCLUDE's Policy Dialogues, a way to tackle this challenge is to keep flexibility and adaptability so that the discussions' focus can be adjusted according to stakeholders' interests and local relevance.

Measuring success of knowledge brokering

The third and last discussion point that was addressed was on how to showcase the added value of the knowledge brokers' work. Manirakiza here raised an issue that was unanimously agreed upon by the other contributors. She pointed out that the quantitative numbers or results do not capture the success stories of the Knowledge Platforms. The definition of success must change in order to fully understand and grasp the importance of knowledge brokering. What is much more important, she says, is to ''analyse the way in which we have been able to capture the variety of stakeholders to shape the conversation''. Dekker, coordinator of the INCLUDE secretariat, plead for ''knowledge brokering as a public good''. A good example is INCLUDE's work on social protection, a theme that was not in demand from Dutch policy makers initially, but has gained momentum in the current global and development context. Time bound evaluation and measurement does not capture such dynamics.

Despite the shared challenge amongst all knowledge platforms to externally display impact, small ways to display impact were brought to the table. Nigten mentioned the Gold Standard Report and concluded that the time might be right to have a second edition of it conducted. Miroro and Maria Codina, Country Coordinator at Share-Net International, argue for emphasizing small tangible effects. An example from INCLUDE is that Ghana put the creation of jobs on their political agenda, and Share-Net Jordan celebrated the inclusion of rights into Jordan's agenda for sexual and reproductive health. It is unquestionable that the Knowledge Platforms played an important role here, though the success stories are evidently a result of collective action. All in all interest was expressed in continuation of in activities on the method of knowledge brokering and also thematically by the Knowledge Platforms jointly.