GROUP B   *Going the Extra Mile***: Promoting Utilisation of Research.**

1.   WHO ARE THE USERS (Decision Makers)?

Need to consider policy makers at **different levels.** Users are variable in different countries. Different messages may need to be targeted at different levels.

Identify key players to strengthen message impact. Key players may not always be the most senior post holders in policy organisations. Key players need to be identified at the planning stages of research.

Planning/ finance departments of govt. are also important users of research. Need to target these departments in promoting utilisation of research.

2. KNOWING THE CONTEXT/ ENVIRONMENT.

Knowing the political/social context of the country important in getting research utilised. (E.g. conducting abortion research in countries where it is illegal will require awareness of situation and need to involve stakeholders at the outset. (Research authorisation)

Research need to be **realistic in terms of resource limitations** within developing countries. Recommendations need to reflect resource limitations.

Researchers are not aware of what may be involved in implementing their policy recommendations. Researchers may be dismayed when recommendations are not taken up in policy. **Drawing up recommendations jointly** with users of research would be more realistic so that research issues and 'on the ground realities' can be combined effectively.

Good quality research and dissemination may assist in influencing the cultural environment / attitudes and in **dispelling myths.**
- Malawi: policy to arrest sex workers to reduce HIV/AIDS – utilisation of research may convince govt. that implementation of certain policies is not realistic. Lobbyists may seek researchers to provide the evidence-based research for this type of situation.

Timing of lobbying (using evidence based research) is important to take into consideration the political/social situation to influence impact.

3. WHEN SHOULD USERS BE INVOLVED?

- at the beginning of the research process.
- involvement is a process throughout the research

4. HOW TO INVOLVE USERS?

- **token involvement** on users steering committees of developed country driven research

- how do you **pay potential users**/stakeholders for their time/ involvement/ contributions. Mostly voluntary contributions. Donors and funders should allow funds for this.

- Researchers may be concerned about **ownership of research** if users are intimately involved.

- Some **donors require users involvement** (ESRC). Required to show involvement of users in research proposals.

- Get users involved early but potential users may change throughout the process. Need to be **flexible** in continually identifying potential users.

Ethical issues
- not discussed in workshop but important – ethics issues
- eg reporting back to subjects on research issues

How do we market research?

- donors want to know more broadly what are the **priority research issues** rather than the favourite areas of particular researchers

- how do donors decide on the most important issues – what are the areas which will have the most impact for the money expended

- donors need to see the importance of research and research capacity. Need to create a culture where MOH values research and relevance to programme implementation

- The perceived **value of research** is important. How the users value research is important pre-requisite in utilisation

- some PM may not be convinced that they need the evidence to develop policies. We need to develop an evidence-based culture to meet half way.

NURTURING PARTNERSHIPS WITH USERS

- early involvement with users is always recommended.

- users always interested in situational analysis and in the problems of implementing innovations (research outcomes)

- successful partnerships are usually developed over many years to develop mutually agreed programmes.

ISSUES FOR DISSEMINATION

When is research convincing enough to adopt a whole country approach on issues?
- Researchers may need to **identify limitations of research** for generalising results. May lead to conflict of random controls vs. other methodologies

- Encourage some forms of peer review before wide-scale dissemination

Cost is a factor in communication / dissemination

Language of research is open to misuse depending on reporting especially media reporting

PERCIEVED BARRIERS

- Expectations may differ between researcher and users.

- Not all research can be transferred into practice

- researchers need to engage with policy makers in dissemination process but researchers don't necessarily know HOW to implement their recommendations

- draft rather than final recommendations are useful – it may be more of a process over time– build this into the research budget

- Researchers concern about the brevity of research briefs (one page summaries) BUT for policy makers one page summaries may be an introduction 'a hook' – know the issues/ research group/ contacts

- A mediator may not be able to communicate the research realistically in a summary. Therefore involve researchers.

- Good example of research communication is Social Science Info Gateway –three levels of info
1. Titles
2. one page summary
3. full text.
This allows users to access the level they require.

Time Factors

- "PM don't want to be surprised" – brief the PM during the process – allow then to make comments before dissemination. PM value this involvement – time is necessary for this.

- time for writing up may not be sufficiently funded. No time to disseminate to different levels. May be difficulty in convincing funders to add more time for this

- funders may be happy to support a coherent communication strategy.

- Quality research often needs to be peer-reviewed. Should research be disseminated before peer review process– if this is insistent then this has an implication for time of research/dissemination.