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# Stimulating Demand for Research: Exploring Cultures of Information Use in South Asia

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# 1. Introduction

The importance of research knowledge in strengthening policy has been increasingly recognized in the development sector and there is a growing body of theory and practice that explores ways in which the goal of evidence based policy can be realized. This paper takes a slightly unusual look at the question of how to support greater use of research evidence in policy making in the following ways.

Firstly it looks at the question from the demand-side exploring issues around what motivates, incentivizes and enables policy makers to engage with research<sup>1</sup>. Although the barriers policy makers face in engaging with the research is certainly covered in some debates about evidence based policy, the emphasis is often on what this means for the supply-side of this equation, in particular how researchers can communicate their work more effectively.

Secondly it looks at evidence based policy in terms of the information behaviours of those involved in policy formulation. These information behaviours shape how policy actors engage with (or fail to engage with) research in a range of policy processes rather than just one. The paper looks at what shapes those information behaviours.

Thirdly, it considers the types of intervention that might change attitudes of policy makers towards research evidence on an ongoing basis rather than looking at how a policy maker may be convinced to engage with a particular piece of research (which we understand to be research communication) or engage with research in particular policy process.

Finally, the paper looks particularly at the contribution and potential contribution of knowledge and information intermediary actors and knowledge brokers in this context. It focuses on these actors because they are trying to change the processes by which decisions are made so that they incorporate evidence from multiple perspectives, thus they are trying to change behaviours of actors within processes not the outcomes of those processes. This aspect of their work is not well understood, often even by those undertaking it and it is hoped that this paper will help to shed some light on this area and provide inspiration to these actors about future activities.

Thus unlike much of the literature around evidence based policy and research uptake we are **not** asking:

1. How can research influence policy processes? What activities need to be undertaken to ensure that these research findings are influential or this process is informed by research evidence?

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<sup>1</sup> The term policy makers is used in this paper to be people working within national government structures. We recognize that this is a narrow definition that excludes many of the locations in which policy is generated. In focusing in this group we do not imply that policy is more important than practice or implementation in bringing about social change. Actors involved in these processes are also policy makers but for the purposes of this paper we needed to draw some boundaries.

But

2. What kind of interventions will shape the way that policy actors will engage with research in future? What kinds of activities will lead to a positive shift in attitudes and behaviours towards research?

This desk based study draws on theory and practice from both developed and developing countries and has been developed through reviewing literature about policy-research linkages and talking to colleagues working in this area, this review did not extend to undertaking first hand interview with policy stakeholders. Its focus is on South Asia and looks at research from that region as well as case studies of interventions being undertaken to stimulate demand for research among policy makers in that region, however our findings mean the emphasis is on India and Bangladesh and even includes an example from outside the region. Our exploration of interventions intended to promote greater use of research in policy making is framed around a review of approaches to promote evidence-based policy and practice undertaken by Walter; Nutley and Davies in 2005. It identified five different approaches ranging from more effective communication of research to provision of support and incentives. These approaches are explored further in our review of activities being undertaken in the South Asian region with a focus on information behaviours.

## **2. What do we mean by demand? How is it different to supply? And what is “stimulating demand”?**

“Demand” is a word often used and less often debated. When we started on the paper we, the authors, believed we had a shared understanding of what was meant by “stimulating demand for research”, however through discussion we began to realize our perspectives were different.

Shamprasad Pujar understood “demand” as a verb or behaviour; the act of asking for research, for example by searching a database for a research paper, or commissioning a research study. In contrast Catherine Fisher saw demand as a more abstract noun encapsulating value: that is a sense of a need for research that comes from value placed on research and the belief that it is useful in some way. These are of course related concepts: for a sense of value to actually turn into greater research uptake requires behaviour or action. This might be behaviours around seeking or asking for research and or behaviours around being open to and engaging with it. The relationship between value and behavior is complex and the difference between understanding demand as a verb or demand as a state of valuing something affected how we understood demand could be stimulated. We as the authors encourage the readers to consider how they understand “demand”.

So what do we understand as stimulating demand? We are looking at how demand for research can be generated when it is not there; be strengthened if it is weak or activated if it is latent. We focus in particular on how stimulating demand for research would involve people demonstrating different information behaviours in relation to research. We find the idea of information behaviours useful in the

context of understanding evidence based policy and research uptake as it helps us to look not at instances where research may have influenced policy in a particular example (this is the focus of most of the literature) to look at behaviours in relation to research that span across different processes and locations for action.

Information behaviour, as mentioned in the literature, is about “how people interact with information, how and when they seek information, and what uses they make of it” (Bates, 2010). Here in the context of policy arena, we are trying to understand how policy makers use research information in the context of policy processes. Some insights provided from the body of literature around information behaviours are: the “principle of least effort” in human information seeking whereby people generally minimize effort in finding information and over-estimate their ability to find and assess quality information; information seeking is often quite unselfconscious, people are trying to solve problems in their lives, not “seek information” so they aren't necessarily aware of when and how they do it; information behaviour is shaped in complex ways by innovations in technologies for information retrieval and; most importantly social context and social situation shape and are essential to understanding information seeking (Bates, 2010). In this paper we focus particularly on this last insight, however attention to the others may be useful to people designing research-policy interventions.

Another facet of how we understand demand for research stems from our shared position as knowledge brokers and intermediaries. These actors share an explicit interest in supporting greater access to and use of knowledge and information in change processes. Underpinning their work (sometimes not explicitly) is a sense that decision making is improved when it draws on multiple sources of information and knowledge (Fisher 2011). Thus our understanding of “demand for research” refers to demand for a range of research on a particular topic, not demand for one piece of research. This is keeping with the the paper that is said to have coined the term “evidence based policy”<sup>2</sup>. It identifies seven key principles for effective policy, one of which is that it: “uses the best available evidence from a wide range of sources;” (UK Cabinet Office quoted in Wyatt 2002).

Thus we are interested not only in the existence of demand for research but the nature of that demand. We understand that processes of policy formulation are “too often characterized by partial knowledge building based on a narrow evidence-base” (Leach and Fairhead 1994 ; Chambers 1992 cited in Fisher and Vogel 2008 : 7). In terms of behaviours of those involved we would expect that evidence informed decision making would be characterized by engagement with a range of sources of evidence on an issue, including contrasting positions, as opposed to evidence informed decision making resulting from being informed by only one set of research findings or one position.

Of course this is often a grey area as much evidence is based on a review of other sources, and all research builds on what has gone before, however there is at the heart an interesting and possibility controversial distinction that is not much discussed.

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<sup>2</sup> “Modernising Government” was part of a drive from Tony Blair’s time in office to transform UK policymaking from which much of the language of “evidence based” and later “evidence informed” policy making emanates. (Wyatt 2002)(Weiss in forward to Carden 2009 : xii)

We distinguish demand stimulation from being demand driven although for a while this was a source of confusion for us. “Demand driven” is increasingly a *‘mantra’* within development, in response perhaps to decades of unwanted top-down development interventions. However in this paper we are not exploring how the processes by which research is undertaken can be more demand driven, much as we acknowledge that this is important for the likelihood of its use, indeed this was a key outcome of DFID consultation exercise about “Stimulating demand for research” (DFID 2008). Nor are we looking at how research information services can be more demand –driven, although again we recognize that information services that respond to the particular enquiries of their target audience are likely to be more effective. However we see these issues as relating to supply and so do not focus on them in this paper. Of course we acknowledge that issues around supply of research, the nature of the research and the ways in which it is packaged and communicated are difficult to distinguish from question of demand for research. However in the context of this paper the question would be “to what extent activities that are about supply of research lead to changes in behavior or attitude towards research as an institution more broadly?” This issue is explored alongside with other activities intended to promote research uptake in section 5 of this paper.

### **3. What are the issues around demand for research among policy makers?**

At a recent international conference, Carol Medlin from the Gates Foundation commented that she is *“constantly surprised by assumptions that policymakers are purely rational, and all they need is to be shown the right evidence for them to want to apply it instantly”* (quoted in Wilson, 2011).

The assumption that policy makers want evidence in order to formulate effective policies and just lack access to the right material at the right time is pervasive, and convenient, particularly to those, who like the authors are located within knowledge producing and knowledge brokering organizations. This assumption prevails in spite of the more recent analysis into the interactions between knowledge and policy that has challenged some of its core assumptions. In recent years the nature of investigation into research policy nexus has shifted, with ideas of “bridging gaps” losing credibility and more complex understandings about the nature of policy processes and the actors within it emerging. The ideas embedded in what a recent review (Jones 2009: 11) labeled a “rational” approach to research and policy links are still very influential and inform concepts of “evidence based policy” and “bridging research and policy”, indeed the influence of this pervasive idea can be seen throughout this paper.

This short paper cannot do justice to the huge range of literature about the connections between research and policy, this section aims to look at some of the factors that will shape the information behaviours of those involved in policy processes. These will be affected by their location within a complex system of organizational structures, political context and society as a whole.

**Political context:** Carden (2009) recently identified five recognizable categories of research and policy interaction based on policy/political contexts that range from clear government demand to

governments treating research with disinterest or hostility, thus the political attitudes to research will shape organizational structures and individual behaviours. Space for genuine policy innovation is another key factor in determining openness and engagement with research, if policies are prescribed from outside or determined by political positioning there is little role for evidence beyond justifying predetermined policies. Various sources suggest that different kinds of decision will involve or hold potential for different kinds of engagement, “policy windows” often determined by crisis or change may also stimulate greater interest in or openness to research evidence.

**Institutional factors:** By this we mean norms, values and rules of the game around both policy and research. Belief systems will shape the way that members of a particular society understand “knowledge” and so the value placed on different types of knowledge (eg. expert, experiential, domestic, foreign) as well as the importance of “research” vis a vis other considerations such as moral or political considerations, this has been called a “civic epistemology” (Jasanoff 2005 in Jones 2009: 15). Attitudes towards the institution of policy making itself and what and who should drive it will also shape the perceived role for research in these processes. Institutional factors are embodied in the system and how it works, for example where research is considered important there may be requirements to commission research built into policy processes. Such requirements may also shape norms and values about research by normalising its use in policy processes.

**Organisational contexts:** Issues around the organisational structures in which policy processes take place that can inhibit engagement with research are well documented and discussed. Key decision makers in developing societies often lack well developed institutions to seek out and absorb research findings, review them critically, and consider their implications for local issues (Weiss in forward to Carden 2009). Resources are a key issue in terms of affording training and skilled staff and having money, materials and time to use knowledge. The ability of state agencies to hold their staff to account for good work or good decisions are also important as this will affect the ability of the system to offer incentives to behave in certain ways in relation to research.

**Individual factors:** The capacity of policy makers to engage with research is also much discussed and rightly so. Policy making will frequently demand specific technical capacities to design policies – often over a wide range of areas. However there is also considerable evidence to suggest that many people involved in policy have low levels of scientific understanding, this was the most cited obstacle to use of science and technology and innovation (ST&I) information in a recent survey by ODI; identified by 64% of respondents (Jones H ; Jones N and Walsh 2008: 17). Lack of individual capacities are compounded by lack of support structures as suggested above, however where support structures such as parliamentary researchers or advisory councils do exist, they too may have serious capacity issues. So abilities are essential, however so are motivations, these are shaped by institutional and systemic factors outlined above but also by individual factors. The second most cited obstacle in the ODI study was “limited openness by politicians to using ST&I information” (Jones H ; Jones N and Walsh 2008: 17). For example each policy makers’ professional formation and training gives them an established body of knowledge, a worldview and a position within professional networks which may act as a disincentive to engaging with new sources of evidence (Fisher and Vogel 2008 : 6)

Thus the demand of those within the policy processes will be shaped by the complex interactions between individual experiences and preferences, organisational and political contexts and institutions. These provide a wide range of potential entry points for research uptake interventions; however the effectiveness of any such intervention will depend on many other factors within system and so should be designed with an understanding of the system as a whole.

## 4. Demand for research in South Asia

This section explores the particular issues that shape the information behaviours in relation to research within policy processes in South Asia.

South Asian situation is not very different from other developing countries in use of research in policy. Policies are largely the outcome of complex interactions of development discourses, institutions and actors, in which the powerful actors dominate the process. The nature of the state, particularly its political culture largely defines the policy process and the decision making is done by the conventional actors and sometimes independent think tanks, civil society and research organizations pitch in and influence. The use of evidence in the policymaking is minimal and it is often depends on the situation and nature of policy problems. It is the experience of most of the advocacy organizations in the region that the policy makers often sideline the evidence and analysis during actual decision-making practices, although they make 'gentlemanly' posture towards research (Paudel and Dhungana 2010).

There is a lack of collaboration between different ministries/departments, civil society, advocacy groups and with researchers in sharing and use of research information. In spite of shifts towards more multi-stakeholder policy forums and more space for independent research institutions (explored in more detail below), research suggests that the linkage between research and policy in South Asia is not straightforward; research is often used selectively or ignored in the policy process (Paudel and Dhungana 2010 : 14).

Research is taken seriously when it is undertaken within the government through commissions i.e. Planning commission or commissioned by research organizations or think tanks on government demand. Also a big demand for research comes, when new policies are anticipated during the change of political regimes. Otherwise, demand for research from the government is minimal and also depends more on the nature of current policy problems in hand.

Factors shaping demand for research in South Asia include the following:

- **Tendency for governments to commission their own research**

Governments in the region are inclined to commission their own research through individual academic researchers or think tanks or public research organizations on specific policy problems. This they undertake, when there is no availability of existing research or research has limited capacity to deal with the problem. Evidence from such commissioned research is considered in decision making; however sometimes such policies may be restricted only to certain projects or programmes.



For example Government of state of Maharashtra in India commissioned a research study through Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR) to know the reasons for spate of farmer's suicides in the Vidarbha region of state of Maharashtra. The research undertaken by researchers at IGIDR helped government to frame a policy and to announce a special package called 'Vasantrao Naik Sheti Swavlamban Mission' for the overall development of agriculture sector in the affected region<sup>3</sup>.

When governments commission research, it gives researchers an opportunity to get involved in the policy making process and there is a better chance of their work being used as an evidence in policy. A potential problem with this commissioning approach is the risk that decisions may be based on a narrow evidence base if a narrow pool of experts are drawn on to undertake research.

- **Growth of think tanks and attitudes towards them**

Most of the countries in South Asia in the post independence era witnessed the emergence of public research institutes with the mandate to provide intellectual inputs into government planning. However, because their research agendas were influenced by the government, research was limited to few areas and sectors hence they failed to make impact outside the formal and state policy. This led to the growth of independent think tanks, which undertake research on diverse areas and sectors affecting large part of population (Paudel and Dhungana 2010).

The governments in the region are gradually showing increasing receptiveness to research undertaken by think tanks. The demand for participative policy making has created an opportunity for think tanks to engage constructively with policy making process. This has opened up spaces that have expanded avenues for evidence-based policy making in the region (Paudel and Dhungana 2010).

For example a forum of think tanks including DNET in Bangladesh influenced government to bring in changes to National Agricultural Policy of Bangladesh by taking voices of farmers to policy makers through a discussion paper highlighting their expectations. The evidence was considered and accordingly government brought changes to policy<sup>4</sup>.

- **Impact of Civil Society**

Impact of civil societies is now being increasingly felt in the region. Unstable political environment and lack of political will to implement certain policies has given space for civil societies to influence the policies in the region. They receive research inputs and data from independent researchers and research organizations on various specific issues, which they use

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<sup>3</sup> [vnss-mission.gov.in/htmldocs/WEBSITE%20PRESENTATION.htm](http://vnss-mission.gov.in/htmldocs/WEBSITE%20PRESENTATION.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Md. Masum Billah, August 3, 2011

in their advocacy programmes to influence government to take action (Paudel and Dhungana 2010).

For example a civil society campaign headed by 'Manusher Jonno Foundation' played very important role implementing 'Right to Information Act' in Bangladesh by providing necessary evidences to Ministry of Law, Government of Bangladesh.<sup>5</sup>

Civil society advocacy programmes on issues, which are affecting the public at large or marginal groups often attract the attention of government. This may prompt the government to look for information to find a response, so possibly stimulating demand for research.

Recent events in India related to fight against corruption campaign have involved society in general raising its voice demanding government to enact a law to control corruption. This suggests a changing relationship between citizens and state whereby greater accountability is demanded of policymakers. If policymakers are held more accountable for outcomes of their decisions this *may* stimulate demand for evidence in their formulation.

- **Broader attitudes towards information use in society**

The region is experiencing shifting attitudes towards information use in society owing to rise of literacy levels. In view of this, people in general are realizing the importance of the need to access and use information in their daily lives. This change of attitudes in society has made people information conscious, which has resulted in demanding more information on any activity. Civil society campaigns for Freedom of Information Acts in a number of countries in the region and talk of "knowledge economies" are evidence of shifting attitudes. Changes in societal attitudes towards information may bring about changes to culture of information use in decision making, either through changing norms and/or greater scrutiny of their decisions.

- **Capacity of parliamentarians and civil servants and the value placed on them**

Like many developing countries, South Asia region also lacks research capacity and administrative skills to utilize research findings within policy circles. This could be owing to factors such as levels of education, lack of interest, subject backgrounds, lack of incentives etc. This situation has called for corresponding interventions for capacity building both for the parliamentarians and bureaucrats through workshops, effective working groups, formal or informal meetings or governance and civil service reforms (Virmani and Das 2008 : 10). Strengthening their capacity has been felt essential to ensure the greater use of research in policy and create demand for it.

- **Broader acceptance of involvement of academics in government**

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Md. Masum Billah, Aug 3, 2011

The involvement of researcher in policy making is now it is widely accepted in the government circles in the region. They now increasingly contribute to the multi-stake holder policy processes through participation in commissions, advisory groups, task forces, working groups, councils etc. This kind of participation helps them to interact with political leaders, civil servants, civil society actors and local communities. This allows an integration of research, advocacy to influence policy and also gives an opportunity for them to engage with specific policy negotiations (Paudel and Dhungana 2010).

An example of this is the appointment of renowned economists in the Planning Commission of India to undertake research on economic development issues, which is used for developing the five year and annual plans.

In some countries, for example Sri Lanka the acceptance of the involvement of academics depends on the type of activity and the type of data. Academics concerned with hard data and hard science such as engineering are more acceptable than academics from social science backgrounds concerned with working on social issues such as poverty etc<sup>6</sup>. This phenomenon was also the experience of developed countries as described in the literature (Weiss in forward to Carden 2009).

Interaction between academics, policy makers and other players help building an understanding among each other, which is broadly understood to contribute to greater use of research evidence in policy making.

- **Impact of international organizations**

Research policy dynamics in the region is highly affected by external influences by the major multi-lateral and bi-lateral financial and developmental organizations such as World Bank, ADB, UNDP, DFID etc,. International agreements with WTO, ILO etc also have been observed to influence extent of research and research policy inter-linkages. Impact of donor's policies on results based management, poverty reduction and growth strategy, sustainable environment was observed to be high (Virmani and Das 2008 : 65). However, sometimes, their influence is limited only to the projects funded by them.

International agencies may limit space for evidence based policy making by not only by providing policy prescriptions so limiting the ability of legislators to design their own policies but also by providing evidence that is given more weight than evidence generated nationally.

On the other hand, in some cases external agencies have advocated for policy processes that are based on evidence, for example the ADB advocated for evidence based approach to designing a policy for the resettlement of internally displaced persons in Sri Lanka. So external influence may push governments towards using evidence, however in the Sri Lankan example, there was little local state ownership over the resulting policy and it has not been widely implemented (CEPA 2011).

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Azra Abdul Cader, Jul 20, 2011

- **Role of Corporate/Private Sector Organizations**

The private, corporate sector has also emerged as an ‘invisible’ but influential actor in shaping public policies in the region (Paudel and Dhungana 2009 : 4). The trade and industry associations and federations of chambers of commerce in the region had always has a say in certain public policies. For example some of the economic reforms initiated in India were influenced by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICII), which are the representative bodies of private/corporate sector in India<sup>7</sup>.

There are also instances that some private firms producing research for particular policy problems in the region. For example in Nepal, the process of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) was led by the consultancy houses, who worked closely with the bureaucrats (Paudel and Dhungana 2009). Their influence is quite evident in big infrastructure projects as most of the governments in the region appoint major private consultancy firms like McKinsey as consultants to undertake preliminary studies to advice on socioeconomic issues.

- **Role of information intermediary organizations**

Information intermediary organizations also play an important role in bridging the research and policy in some countries of the region. Their activities include efforts in summarizing, synthesizing and repackaging research in simple terms to create awareness and conducting of workshops to build capacities of policy makers. Examples of intermediary action in the region are explored in section five.

### **Case Studies on Cultures of Information Use in South Asia:**

In the following section we have explored some of the case studies giving examples of cultures of information use in the policy process in order to understand the research and policy nexus in the region.

#### **Bangladesh:**

The Case study on linking research to policy and practice: The Bangladesh Agricultural subsidy showcased how think tanks, civil society, NGOs and intermediary organizations influenced government to bring in changes to policies related to agriculture subsidy. These organizations through research and advocacy programmes demonstrated to the government, how the faulty policies created during 1980s and 1990s mostly under the policy prescriptions of international organizations led to the decline of growth in the agriculture sector. The interventions helped successive governments to rethink on agricultural policy and bring in the required changes based on evidence (Ahmed and Farah 2010).

#### **India:**

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with R. Nagaraj, Sept 5, 2011

In the recent past, India has seen two instances of major policy change at the national level owing to the influence of civil society: Right to Information Act (RTI) and the Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGS). The impetus for policy change was provided from three levels – national, state and grassroots with each level actively interacting and building a coalition and exercising influence in various ways. Advocacy efforts of influential individuals, social activists, parliamentarians, media, NGO's and others influenced the implementation RTI and NREGS schemes. The success of the implementation is also owed to efforts of key members of campaign, which led to core policymaking processes as they were closed to the corridors of power (Mahendra 2008).

### **Nepal:**

Nepal till the recent Constituent Assembly Members Election Act, 2007 did not have enough representation of women in the parliament. The new act made it mandatory to allocate 33% reservation of assembly seats for women, resulting in greater participation of women in the constituent assembly in 2008 elections. This change was a result of continuous research, advocacy, awareness and capacity building activities undertaken by NGOs, civil society and international organizations in convincing government in enacting the Act and political parties in implementing. The research studies undertaken by these organizations helped to bridge the gap between quality research and policy as there was a lack of culture of using research based evidences (Joshi 2010).

### **Sri Lanka:**

A Case study of disaggregated poverty data and its policy influence highlights the direct use of evidence in policymaking. The data produced by Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) on poverty was used by the government to redraw the economically backward regions and to re-orient some of its projects and programmes especially the social protection programme 'Samurdhi' for poor. The success of use of evidence in policy happened owing to its alliance with the context, dissemination mainly targeting technocrats followed by bureaucrats and politicians, timing when the policymakers desperately looking for this data and also the legitimacy of the organization which brought out this data (De Silva and Gunetilleke 2010).

## **5. Stimulating demand for research: Examples of action from South Asia**

In this section we explore examples of activities that have attempted to encourage greater uptake of evidence in policy making processes in South Asia. We use as a framework for our findings a review of approaches for promoting evidence-based policy and practice undertaken in developed country contexts by Walter; Nutley and Davies in 2005. Their review identified the following five mechanisms that underpin evidence based policy and practice (Walter; Nutley and Davies 2005 : 341):

- Dissemination of information in more or less tailored formats
- Interaction between the research and implementation communities
- Social influence or the power of influential people to persuade (eg issues around working with the media and examples of that)
- Facilitation or the provision of technical, financial, organizational and emotional support; and
- Reinforcement or offering reminders and rewards to reinforce collaborative behaviours

Here we explore these mechanisms further specifically in relation to how they affect information behaviours and give examples of the different kind of activities that have been undertaken in each area in South Asia

### 5.1 Dissemination of information in more or less tailored formats:

The first mechanism for encouraging greater research use that is identified in the paper is dissemination of information: a supply side approach to encouraging greater research use. Strategies using dissemination tend to emphasize the role of the disseminator, usually the researcher, in adapting research findings to their audience and ensuring they are circulated. In the studies reviewed by Walter; Nutley and Davies (2005) “the research-use model is of a traditional, linear process in which discrete, objective and isolatable findings are straightforwardly transferred to policy and practice domains”. These are often based on theories of rational information seeking and decision making as outlined in section 3. The review found that interventions using simple dissemination approaches are not widely effective in changing behaviour. Tailoring research for potential users and enabling discussion of findings seem to enhance the chances of instrumental research use.

As outlined in the introduction many of the activities intended to link research and policy fall within this supply side model. Ensuring that research information is accessible and known about are key parts of a broader picture of research uptake.

There are a range of examples of activities or services in the South Asian region, which repackage and distribute research information in different formats. They help both to meet demand and may stimulate demand by a) reducing the "cost" in terms of time and effort of engaging with research b) being a practical contribution to a shift in culture whereby research is considered. and c) bringing changes in attitudes may encourage change in information behaviours.

In the region examples of services concerned with dissemination of information include web portals, workshops and policy briefs.

- Web Portals: There are a number of web based portals within the South Asia region intended to increase access to information. These include Bangladesh Online Research Network<sup>8</sup>, Indian

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<sup>8</sup> [www.bdresearch.org](http://www.bdresearch.org)

Environmental Portal<sup>9</sup>, Open Index Initiative (OII)<sup>10</sup> and the Sri Lankan Poverty Portal<sup>11</sup>. OII is enabling access to information and others are trying to provide summaries and synthesis of research in the areas of development, environment, health, livelihoods, poverty etc. In addition to providing summaries, they also link original papers, to enable interested users to look for further details. Summaries are intended to help time constrained decision makers to have a quick look at the research and if it is relevant to policy problem in hand, they may even use it.

- Policy briefs: The Protifolon<sup>12</sup> policy brief produced by DNet in Bangladesh provides synthesis of a range of research in South Asia on a particular topic i.e. disaster risk management/climate change and in a short accessible print format. This policy brief differs from more typical policy briefs in that it presents a range of research findings rather than aiming to communicate the findings of one research study. DNet organise events around Protifolon to engage policy makers in discussion of the findings it shares. PRS Legislative Research<sup>13</sup> in India provide a range of accessible evidence based briefings on Bills passing through parliament.
- Workshops and briefing sessions: workshops provide another format by which research can be communicated. For example SANDEE Policy dissemination workshop<sup>14</sup> enables discussion on environmental issues and may help to build the capacities of policy makers to understand the subject better which may eventually support change in the practice. PRS Legislative Research hold regular sessions for policy makers taking place in and around parliament on topical issues.

## 5.2 Interaction between the research and implementation communities:

One of the key contributing factors to enabling research uptake is interaction between researchers and implementation/policy making communities. This involves building relationships of trust and fostering greater understandings between the two groups. Unsurprisingly this has been the focus of efforts intended to increase research uptake.

Intermediary services can play a role here by creating spaces in which interaction can happen so reducing the need for policy makers to develop intensive 1:1 relationships themselves which is time consuming and unlikely across the range of areas in which they are expected to be knowledgeable. The spaces enable policy makers to gain better knowledge and access to the latest research and a chance for

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<sup>9</sup> [www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in](http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in)

<sup>10</sup> [oii.igidr.ac.in](http://oii.igidr.ac.in)

<sup>11</sup> [povertyportal.lk](http://povertyportal.lk)

<sup>12</sup> [www.bdresearch.org/home/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=60](http://www.bdresearch.org/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=60)

<sup>13</sup> [www.prsindia.org](http://www.prsindia.org)

<sup>14</sup> [www.sandeeonline.org/workshopcat\\_disp.php?mode=W&id=4](http://www.sandeeonline.org/workshopcat_disp.php?mode=W&id=4)

researchers to orient their work to the needs and perspectives of policy makers. Interactions between both the groups result in improvements in knowledge levels and attitudes towards engaging with research. This helps to create demand and stimulate demand for research thus promoting better use of research in policy. There are some examples of activities in the region, which are trying to create the kind of space policy makers require to debate on the issues related to economics, environment etc to keep themselves better informed in order to ask for evidence in policy.

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) Parliamentary Standing Committee and Budget Oversight seminars<sup>15</sup> for MPs particularly for the members of the Standing Committee on Food and Disaster Management held on the state of economy, economic outlook, budgetary insight and public expenditure tracking on food and disaster management. Through examples the event showcases how Members can oversee budgetary expenses and its impact on economic policy of Bangladesh. This example of interaction is helping MPs to become knowledgeable on economic issues.

Another example of this from India is theme based CLRA Parliamentary Forums<sup>16</sup>, which provide parliamentarians, cutting across party lines, a common platform to come together and discuss the different views and concerns and engage with experts (i.e. researchers) and civil society groups and consequently bring convergent knowledge to influence the policy making process. The forums, which are being run under different themes include: 1. Indian Medical Parliamentarians' Forum; 2. Parliamentarians' Group on TB (PG-TB); and 3. The Parliamentarians' Group on the Millennium Development Goals (PG-MDGs).

### **5.3 Social influence or the power of influential people to persuade**

Social influence refers to change in an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviors that result from interaction with another individual or a group (Rashotte n.d.). This approach proposes that behaviour may be changed by the attitudes and behaviours of significant others (Grol and Grimshaw 1999 cited in Walter ; Nutley and Davies 2005 : 345).

Social influence approach encouraging greater use of research in policy processes rely on "influential others such as colleagues and role models to inform individuals about research and to persuade them of its value" (Walter ; Nutley and Davies 2005 : 345). It has been found in the literature that policy makers and practitioners commonly turn to their colleagues as a key source of knowledge to inform their day-to-day work. Such interactions focus on interactions within policy and practice contexts rather than with researchers to promote the use of research (Walter; Nutley and Davies 2005).

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<sup>15</sup> [www.bids.org.bd/RcntRsrchDetails.php?id=78&Page=Research%20Details](http://www.bids.org.bd/RcntRsrchDetails.php?id=78&Page=Research%20Details)

<sup>16</sup> [www.clraindia.org/parliamentary\\_forum.shtml](http://www.clraindia.org/parliamentary_forum.shtml)



An example of an activity which we feel may draw on social influence to shift attitudes towards research is the Parliamentarians' Forum on Economic Policy Issues (PARFORE)<sup>17</sup>, which is providing space for Members of Parliament (MP) in India to have discussions among themselves on core economic issues in the fields of trade, competition, regulatory reforms, investment and their cross linkages. The Forum is convened by CUTS International which provides research inputs but is led by MPs themselves. We consider this an example of an intervention that uses social influence approach as we understand that it is largely a peer to peer forum where they are able to actively engage with research with others who value research, so demonstrating and reinforcing such behaviours. Other MPs who do not currently place value on research may feel that they *should* be a part of it, over time this may shift attitudes and behaviours towards research.

While Walter; Nutley and Davies (2005) focus on the influence of peers and others within a particular system, other literature points to the potential role of actors such as the media and civil society in contributing to changing the rules of the game in relation to attitudes towards research. For example Bangladesh media is playing a pivotal role in bringing research closer to the policy by reporting socio-economic issues and conducting discussion programmes on television involving group of policymakers and researchers to discuss on issues of importance such as budgeting, food subsidy, poverty etc. This has resulted in bringing changes of attitudes of policy makers in making use of evidence in policy<sup>18</sup>.

There are also some examples, wherein the community of researchers and practitioners are trying to influence the opinions of policy makers and general public and try to bring changes in their behaviours and attitudes towards research. One of the examples covered here is outside the geographic boundary of South Asia, but owing to its uniqueness we thought it would be appropriate to cover it in order to showcase how this kind of programme can generate demand for evidence based policy making.

Development Policy Research Month (DPRM)<sup>19</sup> is a flagship yearly programme coordinated by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) since 2003 when then President of the Philippines Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo made a formal proclamation that stated that it would be observed every September. The Proclamation stressed that:

“the observance of Development Policy Research Month will provide the means for promoting, enhancing, instilling and drawing nationwide awareness and appreciation of the importance and necessity of policy research as a tool for national socioeconomic development” (PIDS 2003: 4)

Drawing an analogy with other public holidays, the organisers of the first DPRM described how:

“For 30 days, policymakers will feast on the results of policy research to be presented that would spice up their policymaking; researchers, including students, will have a wider selection of research to follow through; and ordinary people will have a better appreciation of the process of research, some findings of certain research, and how they apply to or impact on their everyday lives. Eventually, it is hoped that

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<sup>17</sup> [www.parfore.in](http://www.parfore.in)

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Md. Masum Billah, August 3, 2011

<sup>19</sup> [www.pids.gov.ph/dprm9/](http://www.pids.gov.ph/dprm9/)

the regular observance of DPRM will help inculcate, in the consciousness of not only the policymakers but also of the general public, the need for analyses and solid empirical bases in crafting sound policies and in making careful decisions.” (PIDS 2003: 4)

Each DPRM focuses on a different theme, this year it is on Education. The DPRM activities include exhibits, sectoral consultations, panel discussions and seminars on various topics, Another feature of the DPRM is the researchers’ engagement with popular media including radio, television and print, for example by taking part in chat shows. DPRM also includes research outreach to the general public through talks at schools.

The DPRM is so interesting because it uses a wide range of high profile approaches to advocate for the value of research for policy processes both to policy makers and to the general public. The organisers plan to undertake an evaluation of the outcomes of the DPRM next year (2012) on its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and it will be fascinating to see to what extent it has been successful in changing attitudes and behaviours towards the use of research in decision making.

#### **5.4 Facilitation or the provision of technical, financial, organizational and emotional support**

Facilitative interventions aim to create a context that facilitates the uptake and use of research by involving professional development activities to equip individuals with the skills and expertise to enable them to use research or apply evidence based practices. Such programmes focus on enhancing individual’s skills and motivation to access, interpret and apply research or may address the organizational and structural conditions that support or hinder the use of research (Walter ; Nutley and Davies 2005). This is a kind of practical assistance for individuals and groups to change their attitudes and behaviours. In the policy context it refers to building capacities of policymakers to help them understand research and enable its use in policy as many of them are averse to it. Such capacity building programmes undertaken in the form of workshops or training also help in broadly changing their behaviours resulting in stimulating demand for research.

There are few examples from the region, which are trying to improve the capacities of policymakers such as legislators, civil servants and other government officials to enable them to practice evidence based policymaking.

PRS Legislative Research<sup>20</sup> from India is one organization which is trying to stimulate demand for research among elected representatives by building the capacities of Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs). From 2005, PRS has prepared short legislative briefs papers to help MPs understand the issues related to Bills being considered by Parliament. It also provides them with oral briefings on legislative and other matters on request.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> [www.prsindia.org](http://www.prsindia.org)

<sup>21</sup> [www.prsindia.org/aboutus/products-services/](http://www.prsindia.org/aboutus/products-services/)

In 2011 PRS ran its first India Policy workshop for MLAs. It was based on an objective to introduce participants to the concept of data based research and analysis which may help them in making more informed decisions. The workshop brought together experts from different spheres of policy areas to teach and discuss on various state and national issues, its intended objective was to encourage legislators use evidence to strengthen legislation. Given the huge number of MLAs (about 4000), their geographical spread, and their linguistic diversity, PRS is currently unable to provide the level of direct input it provides to MPs (such as regular meetings on bills under discussion) so this workshop provided a useful entry point for future work with these actors

Another PRS initiative 'Legislative Assistants To Members of Parliament (LAMP) Fellowship'<sup>22</sup> is helping to build the capacities of MPs by providing assistance in the form of a fellow, who would work with an assigned MP to provide research assistance on matters such as undertaking research for committee meetings, research on constituency related issues, interacting with stakeholders, framing parliamentary questions, media related work etc. This is a very practical input which could help overcome time and resource constraints that MPs face in engaging with research as well as issues around skills and abilities to engage with research. Although it is too early to tell, it will be interesting to see whether such practical interventions shift attitudes and behaviours in the longer term and whether shifts are only to those MPs whom have been assigned a fellow or whether it contributes to broader changes in behaviours of Parliament as a whole.

One more example in the region is Strategic and Economic Capacity Building Programme (SECP)<sup>23</sup> initiated by ICRIER with the support from MacArthur foundation with an objective to address South Asia's increasing need for research and capacity-building in formulating its policy stance on strategic and economic international relations. Its training module is set with an objective to expose South Asia's younger diplomats and opinion makers to front line international strategic thinking and analysis, by conducting annual advanced briefing programmes on critical strategic and economic issues for the future. The programme was initiated to create a genuine interaction among a larger policy community comprising intellectuals, younger diplomats and opinion makers, covering both strategic and economic security aspects for the development of region. The topics of deliberations in its first training programme included issues of climate change, energy challenge, economic and strategic situation, food security and nuclear and other technologies.

### **5.5 Reinforcement: feedback and rewards to encourage research use**

The final set of approaches for encouraging greater research uptake are incentive-based interventions in the form of rewards or encouragement for using and disseminating research or reminders, audit and feedback to individuals or groups in order reinforce appropriate evidence based practice in framing policies. These kinds of intervention are based on learning theories which assert that behavior can be

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<sup>22</sup> [www.prsindia.org/lamp/](http://www.prsindia.org/lamp/)

<sup>23</sup> [www.icrier.org/page.asp?MenuID=5&SubCatId=173&SubSubCatId=226](http://www.icrier.org/page.asp?MenuID=5&SubCatId=173&SubSubCatId=226)

influenced by controlling external stimuli. The probability of acting in a particular way is seen to increase when it is followed by positive consequences and decrease when it is followed by negative consequences. (Walter; Nutley and Davies 2005: 349).

There are a number of factors that make such approaches limited in applicability in the contexts we are studying as compared with the contexts on which the Walter; Nutley and Davies (2005) study was based. In these approaches, incentives (encouragement and chastisement) need to come from within the system in which policy makers are operating.

The issue of incentives within political systems is complex. Policy makers are subject to multiple accountabilities and have a range of political incentives to behave in different ways. Incentives provided from *within* the system may not be as strong as incentives provided from *outside* that system to behave in certain ways; corruption driving decisions that benefit certain groups over others is a good example of this.

The willingness of a political system to set up systems of incentives and chastisements to engage with research will be shaped by the range of value it places on research, which we have identified is often low. As the Sri Lankan example illustrated, external pressure placed on systems to create policy in particular ways may have limited results. Even if the willingness is there, the ability to implement systems that ensure those involved use research in policy making processes may not be. Tony Blair's efforts to reform UK policy processes so they were more evidence based met with mixed results even in a stable, well resourced, linguistically and culturally homogenous context, the challenges are greater for many of the countries in South Asia.

However there are some indications that governments themselves are placing weight behind greater use of research in policy processes and are creating systems to encourage this. For example in a recent post to the Evidence Based Policy in Development Network (EBPDN) list, Ravinder Kumar A. (2011), Vrutti Livelihoods Resource Centre points to the role of the Indian Independent Evaluation Office within the Planning Commission, and Outcome Budgets as some of the 'push' initiatives by Government of India for promoting demand for research and evidence in policy making.

Such steps by governments themselves should be commended and watched closely for their effectiveness. They may in turn inspire or motivate other governments in the region to take similar steps.

## 6. Conclusion

The study has revealed that the demand for research and cultures of information use in the region is limited and the policy making is still largely a political process. However, the review has showed that the countries of South Asia are slowly opening up towards research based policy engagement owing to the efforts of civil society, think tanks, research organizations, international agencies and intermediary organizations.

The paper has brought together our thinking on demand, issues around demand and demand for research and cultures of information use in South Asia. Some interesting areas around demand for research in the region have showcased changing landscape of research and policy arena which has impacted the demand. This has pushed for greater use of research and has brought in changes in the thinking of both policymakers and researchers.

In this paper, we tried to focus on change in attitudes or behaviours towards research help in stimulating demand. We strongly believe that unless there is a change in the behaviours of policy makers, demand for or use of research in policy will be minimal. We find the idea of information behaviours useful in the context of understanding evidence based policy and research uptake as it helps us to look not at instances where research may have influenced policy in a particular example (this is the focus of most of the literature) to look at behaviours in relation to research that span across different processes and locations for action. This, we think is a matter of further investigation in the future of research in this area and also food for thought for intermediaries.

The concept of demand is a useful metaphor in that it helps us to explore issues around desire and value placed on research and to distinguish these from issues around “supply” of research. However the range of understandings about the concept of “demand” and potential associations with ideas of “supply and demand” from economic theory may mean the metaphor is more confusing than enlightening. We wonder whether it is too resonant of rational or linear ideas around research policy linkages. So we find the concept useful but to be used with careful consideration.

We identified a range of interesting initiatives; we found that so far there had been little analysis or evaluation of their relative success or the changes they had brought about particularly in terms of the behaviours of their key stakeholders in relation to research. This is a pressing area for investigation.

Many interventions we identified were around provision of research findings in more or less tailored formats, broadly these were based on assumptions that increasing access will increase demand for it. There is some anecdotal evidence from some services but it would be interesting to explore further whether these kinds of intervention are stimulating demand or meeting previously unmet demand.

Another common intervention is the creation of spaces for researcher-policymaker interaction. Experience and the literature seem to suggest these are valuable for increasing uptake of research, and that knowledge brokers and intermediaries can play an interesting role in creating spaces that allow engagement with multiple perspectives. It would be valuable to explore these kinds of intervention in terms of what kinds of knowledge are included or excluded from such processes and whether they serve to broaden the evidence base that informs policy or conversely to consolidate the influence of an already privileged evidence base. Knowledge brokers and intermediaries can play a key role in creating spaces for engagement that enable marginalised voices to be heard and we would encourage such actors to be aware of power dynamics and issues of inclusion and exclusion in their work.

We found relatively few examples that were attempting to increase the uptake of research through social influence. We feel that this is potentially a rich arena for action and hope that the examples here may inspire those interested in greater research uptake to explore further. Greater evidence about the efficacy or otherwise of these approaches would help in making the case for such interventions.

Most of the interventions we identified did not have an explicit theory about the changes they sought to create. This is perhaps unsurprising; it may not be strategic to share the assumptions about change that underpin interventions. However, we would share the observation made by a number of authors (Weiss in forward to Carden 2009 ; Jones 2009) that many programmes in this area are not obviously designed in reference to a particular body of theory about how knowledge informs policy processes. We would encourage those attempting to make changes in this area to engage with the literature and to avoid relying exclusively on linear or “rationalist” models of knowledge to policy processes.

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