



Economic
and Social
Research Council

STRATEGY 2021 -2022

Low and Middle Income Countries
Research Network

STRATEGY

Our Network
The Low and Middle Income Countries Research Network brings together evidence from a large portfolio of research projects in the College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow

Background

Research evidence for policy and practice is crucial in any context. However, the pathways through which research is taken up by stakeholders is varied and multifaceted. Knowledge production and uptake happens in different forums and settings involving a wide range of actors and networks who come together to debate, interpret, and construct knowledge. These are social and political processes and navigating them can be a challenge for most research projects. Furthermore, engagement with these spaces is time consuming and resource intensive and there are no real assurances that investments will lead to impact. We need to find innovative ways to support academics and their partners to strengthen the influence of their research.

The Low and Middle Income Countries Research Network aims to create a collective approach to engagement and partnerships among research projects. The College of Social Sciences holds a large portfolio of international development research projects with established links to communities, governments, multilateral institutions, and civil society organizations. Nonetheless, synergies among these projects remain undeveloped. Projects normally produce and disseminate research results independently and engage in international development networks according to their individual capacity. This approach can lead to duplication of efforts and competition among projects. It can also favour research projects with larger budgets and academics with more skills and experience. Importantly it can make research synthesis more difficult limiting the generality and applicability of findings.

The comparative politics literature has demonstrated the importance of sustained interaction, shared goals and a sense of community in the success of knowledge networks. The LMIC collectivised approach can facilitate connections between research projects working in the Global South as well as links with non academic actors by pooling resources, contacts, and opportunities for interaction. It will help to connect evidence from different projects related to a particular issue or policy area creating a more diverse body of knowledge that includes different perspectives. Researchers will also benefit from having more opportunities to share lessons and learn from their peers.

Our goal

Advance, share and connect knowledge to improve understandings, practices, and policies related to key global development challenges

Our Priority Challenges

Our research and engagement strategies focus on five global challenges.

1. Promoting Equity and Gender Empowerment
2. Health Inequality
3. COVID 19 Pandemic
4. The Climate Crisis
5. Protracted Conflict and Fragile Contexts

Implementing our strategy

We have identified different pathways with concrete actions to achieve our goal. The figure below summarises the key aspects of our strategy.

Pathway 1 Strengthening collaboration among research projects

Pathway 1 objectives

LMIC will use a networked approach to strengthen relationships among research projects working in the Global South. The aim is to facilitate more collaboration by bringing together projects and evidence that cohere around our 5 priority challenges. A closer dialogue between researchers working on the same challenge will enable the identification of common policy areas and issues. It can also help projects identify common external engagement goals. Linking different projects will help to create a multidisciplinary body of evidence inclusive of different perspectives that will have more value to stakeholders than research findings from a single project. LMIC projects are geographically and methodologically diverse meaning the network can provide the insights necessary to address challenges and answer complex policy questions. In addition, the network will promote linkages with other engagement activities promoted by the College of Social Sciences as well as University of Glasgow initiatives such as the Advanced Research Centre and Glasgow Centre for International Development.

Pathway 1 outcomes

1. Common policy areas and issues are identified
2. Research projects adopt a networked approach to achieve research influence
3. Different collaborations among research projects are established

4. Research projects identify common engagement goals
5. Research projects develop common messages and insights

Pathway 1 outputs

1. Event involving other knowledge networks to share learning and practices with LMIC researchers
2. Meetings and workshops with involving each LMIC cluster to refine the goals of the network and identify possible external engagement initiatives

Output indicators

- Number of meetings and workshops to develop collective engagement strategies

Pathway 2 Connecting researchers with similar agendas to international development networks

Pathway 2 objectives

LMIC will expand opportunities for research teams to link and interact with international development actors and networks. The aim is to build relationships with key external stakeholders identified by each LMIC cluster (i.e Promoting Equity and Gender Empowerment, Health Inequality, COVID 19 Pandemic, the Climate Crisis, Protracted Conflict and Fragile Contexts). It is widely accepted that relationship building is crucial to increasing the influence of the research over policy and practice. A network approach can make identifying entry points and connections with research users easier. LMIC will facilitate joint work around external engagement by providing opportunities for researchers to identify international development actors and networks that could potentially use their research. Another important goal is to attract academic and non academic partners, especially those in the Global South, to the network expanding its knowledge base and resource pool. LMIC will promote dialogue with civil society, governments, donors, and international institutions by convening meetings and organising events. The network will also support research projects to participate in global policy meetings, conferences, and summits.

In order to better respond to the demand for knowledge LMIC will also support academics to carry out research synthesis and compilations of evidence as well as communications outputs. Synthesis plays a crucial role in increasing research influence over policy and practice. However, synthesis encompasses many methods and can differ a lot in terms of nature and scope. At this initial stage LMIC will bring together evidence from different research projects and disciplines to produce non academic knowledge products as well as communication outputs such as briefings, blogs and videos. They will make research findings short, concise, and accessible to stakeholders. The LMIC website and publication

series will be the principal platform for these outputs. The publication series consists of Working Papers, Policy Briefs and Research Reports and are targeted at non academic audiences. The series is published on the website and promoted on social media. However, tailored dissemination strategies for knowledge products can also be developed according to specific engagement goals.

Pathway 2 outcomes

1. Research projects have more access to external networks and policy spaces
2. Research projects build closer dialogue and relationships with key stakeholders
3. Knowledge is coproduced and shared across different stakeholder groups
4. Research evidence influences debates, policies and practices

Pathway 2 outputs

1. External events to expand dialogue between research teams and international development actors and networks
2. Participation in global policy meetings, conferences and summits
3. Membership in International Development Networks
4. LMIC publications authored by different research teams and partners
5. LMIC publications authored by early career researchers and post graduate students
6. Blogs, videos, and summaries of academic papers published on LMIC website
7. LMIC Twitter handle and LinkedIn page

Output indicators

- Number of external events/meetings organised by LMIC
- Number of attendees per event
- Number of side events, conferences and summits attended which were supported by LMIC
- Number of LMIC publications
- Number of LinkedIn followers

Pathway 3 Promoting learning and development

Pathway 3 objectives

LMIC will provide a space for sharing, learning and reflection among research projects. Expanded engagement activities will enable academics to learn how to disseminate results and messages to non-academic audiences more effectively. It will also support researchers to develop specific skills for policy dialogue and influence. Furthermore, the network will provide a platform for researchers to come together and share experiences and good practices in knowledge exchange and partnerships. These capacity building outcomes will be beneficial to academics at all career stages however they will be particularly useful to early career researchers. Furthermore, LMIC will identify potential sources of funding for engagement activities in the University of Glasgow (e.g., Impact Acceleration Account, Glasgow Knowledge Exchange Fund) and as well as external funders (e.g., RSE Research Network Grants). Researchers will also be encouraged to allocate specific funding for the network in their grant proposals.

Pathway 3 outputs

1. Researchers receive training through the CoSS Researcher Development Programme
2. Internal events to share good practices in policy dialogue and partnerships with non-academic actors

Output indicators

- Number of researchers participating in training programme
- Number of capacity development initiatives
- Number of attendees per event

Risks and Assumptions

- Multiple projects despite sharing methodological and thematic similarities may not always add up to more than the sum of their parts. They may not cohere around an identifiable policy frame or solution.
- The transaction costs involved in producing briefings and other communications outputs as well as planning and participating in events is high, while the likelihood of an instrumental policy change taking place in the short and medium term is low. However, building awareness of a body of research and strengthening relationships and networks are crucial steps towards impact.
- The current impact advice is wide ranging covering very practical issues such as how to write policy brief to more complex aspects such as engaging with policy making and agenda setting. Yet, there are still few empirical evaluations of strategies to increase research use and uptake. There is also extensive debate around factors that facilitate engagement such as good communications, building trust, and forming long term partnerships. Yet the relative importance of different factors in the achievement of impact has not been clearly established by research.
- Many actors influence choices, understandings and framing of issues. Policy decisions are made at local, national, and global levels involving several types of actors and institutions making these processes very difficult to navigate. Influencing policy requires specialist skills and is a time consuming activity. There is a risk that researchers will not have the capacity invest in it. Engaging in political processes and actively seeking to shape agendas may also present dilemmas to some academics. Furthermore, established policy networks can often favour ideas and evidence that are aligned with existing paradigms and exclude new evidence that challenges them.

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