

**Outcome monitoring
and learning in large
multi-stakeholder
research programmes:
lessons from the
PRISE consortium**
Report



PRISE

Pathways to resilience
in semi-arid economies

Research for climate-resilient futures

Outcome monitoring and learning in large multi-stakeholder research programmes: lessons from the PRISE consortium

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This report has been produced as part of a series of papers to guide the long-term research agenda of the Pathways to Resilience in Semi-arid Economies (PRISE) project. PRISE is a five-year, multi-country research project that generates new knowledge about how economic development in semi-arid regions can be made more equitable and resilient to climate change.

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Acronyms and key terms used

Boundary Partners	Term used in Outcome Mapping to refer those individuals, groups, or organisations with whom the programme interacts directly and with whom the programme can anticipate some opportunities for influence. At PRISE, we used a more common term 'stakeholders' to refer these groups.
BRACED	Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters programme that supports people to become more resilient to climate extremes in South and Southeast Asia, and in the African Sahel and its neighbouring countries.
CARIAA	Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia programme that builds resilience in climate hot spots by supporting collaborative research on climate change adaptation to inform adaptation policy and practice. PRISE is one of four consortia under CARIAA.
Evaluative thinking	Associated with adaptive practice and program evolution, evaluative thinking involves ongoing questioning and analysis of, in this case, the stakeholder engagement process, not only by the M&E Focal Points, but by all researchers and program staff, in order to more deeply understand what works and what does not. Time and space needs to be created for evaluative thinking to be practised intentionally and continuously.
Developmental evaluation	An approach designed to support ongoing learning and adaptation, through iterative, embedded evaluation.
DFID	The UK Government Department for International Development
IDRC	The International Development Research Centre
IED Afrique	Innovation, environnement, développement en Afrique. One of the PRISE core partners, based in Senegal.
KMT	The Kenya Market Trust. One of the PRISE in-country research partners, based in Kenya.
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute. One of the PRISE core partners and the consortium lead, based in the UK.
OM	Outcome Mapping. An actor-centred approach to planning, monitoring and evaluation that is supported by concepts of complexity- and systems-thinking.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
Partners	By partners we mean PRISE research partners, i.e. members of the PRISE consortium.
PRISE	Pathways to Resilience in Semi-arid Economies
Progress Markers	Term used in Outcome Mapping to refer a set of graduated indicators of changed behaviours for a Boundary Partner that focus on the depth or quality of change.
RAPID	The ODI's Research and Policy in Development programme.
RiU	Research into Use. A term that CARIAA uses for research uptake (the use of research findings and policy recommendations) by various stakeholders.
ROMA	The RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach. A guide to understanding, engaging with and influencing policy, developed by the ODI's RAPID programme.
SDPI	Sustainable Development Policy Institute. One of the PRISE core partners, based in Pakistan.

- Stakeholders** By stakeholders we mean external stakeholders (individuals, groups or organisations) with whom PRISE engaged during the PRISE programme especially to facilitate the use of research. These include government agencies and actors, private sector, parliamentarians, NGOs and other research institutes.
- Stories of change** Tool for exploring and communicating change and progress that has occurred as a result of a project or programme in an accessible way.

Executive summary

Research programmes are increasingly designed and structured to consist of multiple projects, components and sectors. These large programmes or portfolios are often implemented in a collaborative and transdisciplinary manner involving a diverse set partners and stakeholders. At the same time, research programmes are increasingly expected to go beyond producing and measuring outputs, and to have a wider impact beyond academia, including influencing policy and practice. However, many struggle to systematically define and assess these outcome level changes, learn about these changes across projects and partners, as well as use the data they have collected to adapt and improve programme strategies and activities.

Research programmes are increasingly set up to address complex development problems such as climate change. As climate change is characterised by uncertainty, varying levels of risks and lack of simple responses, learning is seen as a crucial part of adaptation programming. It can cover a range of aims and thematic areas from gaining a clearer understanding of the context, to better assessing the risks of changing climate, and the strategies and capacities of different stakeholders for adaptation. Programmes are also increasingly focusing their learning on how to work effectively as a consortium and how to better influence stakeholders. The focus of this paper is on the latter.

Building on the ROMA¹ approach developed by Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) team, Pathways to Resilience in Semi-arid Economies (PRISE) programme tested the use of Outcome Mapping (OM) to capture changes in stakeholders' behaviour and actions around the research process and results, and how they can ultimately lead to sustained changes in policy and practice. PRISE identified key groups of actors, which included local and national governments, businesses, parliamentarians and elected officials, that could shape the economic development of semi-arid areas in the six focus countries. The development and use of Progress Markers, which broke the outcomes down to more manageable stages, allowed PRISE to track and understand its engagement with the stakeholders. This was done by recording and analysing a) early positive responses to the research, b) active engagement with the research results, and c) deep transformation in applying the research and bringing others on board. The aim was to help projects make evidence-based improvements to their stakeholder engagement strategies and activities.

Based on our experiences, we have identified a number of challenges, responses and lessons learnt that can be useful for other programmes planning to set up a similar system to measure and understand outcome level changes, particularly with regards to research uptake and policy influence. These range from challenges of language, time and resources to the importance of regular sense-making and analysis sessions involving everyone working on the project. We also provide some practical tips on how to set up a simple online system to record and store observations.

This paper is designed to support those working in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), and the programme managers and researchers responsible for developing and working in research programmes. While PRISE is focused on climate resilience, many of the challenges and lessons are applicable to other large-scale, transdisciplinary research and implementation programmes or consortia.

¹ <https://www.odi.org/features/roma/home>

1. Introduction

The scope and aim: This paper focuses on outcome monitoring and learning in multi-stakeholder research programmes by highlighting lessons from the PRISE research consortium. While a number of articles and guidance documents have been written to share learning about working in large research programmes,² many struggle to track and assess outcome level changes in a systematic manner and, consequently, to use the data collected to adapt programme strategies and activities.

How we define learning in this paper: Learning in these types of climate adaptation programmes can cover a range of aims and topics. The purpose of learning is often to better understand the context and risks of changing climate and strategies for adaptation, and to design more robust and effective programmes and policies. As the structure of PRISE includes a range of actors, countries and projects, learning can stem from sharing of knowledge and expertise at different yet interconnected levels, building upon the experiences and lessons from partners working on the ground.

Learning can also cover other, perhaps often less discussed themes, that nonetheless have an effect on how these large, multi-stakeholder programmes function and their potential for impact. These include how to work effectively as a consortium and how to better influence stakeholders with research process and findings. The learning we focus on in this paper is on the latter: *how the Outcome Mapping system helped researchers, project managers and M&E staff to reflect and learn about the ways in which research influenced (or failed to influence) stakeholders to achieve participation, ownership and autonomous and sustained action by the stakeholders*. In other words, how to get better at influencing and interacting with stakeholders to shape policy change.

How to read this paper: We start by briefly introducing the issue of the broadened scope and scale of research programmes and why learning is seen as particularly important in climate change programming. We then go on to discuss what these changes mean for M&E in research programmes.

Those who are more interested in the practical application of using Outcome Mapping at PRISE may wish to jump directly to Section 2. There, after introducing the OM system, we discuss the challenges related to monitoring and learning in these types of programmes that arise in part from people from diverse countries, cultures and professional backgrounds all working together. We end by highlighting the key lessons learnt and provide recommendations for programmes that may want to apply a similar outcome monitoring system.

This paper is designed to support those working in M&E, the programme managers and researchers responsible for developing and working in climate change programmes, and beyond. While PRISE is focused on climate resilience, many of the challenges and lessons learnt are applicable to other large-scale, transdisciplinary research and implementation programmes or consortia.

Box 1: PRISE in a nutshell

PRISE is a five-year (2014-2018) multi-country research programme that generates new knowledge about how economic development in semi-arid regions can be made more equitable and more resilient to climate change.

Initially implemented in six countries, it now includes seven projects across eight countries in Africa and Asia: Burkina Faso, Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. PRISE is funded by the UK Government Department for International Development (DFID) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and is one of four consortia under the CARIAM programme.

PRISE uses a 'policy and development first' approach to create policy influence and change through high-quality, demand-driven research and ongoing stakeholder engagement.

² See e.g. Buffardi and Hearn (2015); Cochrane et al. (2017); Cochrane and Cundill (2018); Cundill et al. (2018); Gerlak and Heikkila (2011); Gonsalves (2014); Harvey et al. (2017).

1.1. Rise of large-scale research initiatives

Policy research programmes are increasingly implemented through large scale inter- and transdisciplinary structures involving multiple components, sectors and sites. According to Pasanen and Shaxson (2016), publicly funded research in particular is, to a greater extent, expected to influence policy and shape programmes, explicitly incorporating stakeholder engagement mechanisms from the outset, seeking coherence with other interventions and delivering results in complex and changing settings.

The trend of supporting the design of large-scale inter- and transdisciplinary research programmes is mirrored more broadly in international development. According to Buffardi and Hearn (2015), these ‘multi-project programmes’, where several projects are grouped together under a wide programme umbrella, are gaining popularity as a form to deliver both development interventions and policy research programmes.

The rationale for these large initiatives varies. Key reasons and potential benefits include learning and knowledge sharing, far-reaching broad impact and value for money by delivering programmes cost-effectively. As Buffardi and Hearn (2015) argue, the expected benefits include channelling transactions by coordinating implementing entities and by standardising management and specialised technical support to streamline processes and structure external communications. However, grouping people, organisations and projects – who tend to be culturally and geographically dispersed and often hold different levels of power and motivations – together will bring a range of challenges. For example, adding more structural layers can consequently increase the number of individual interactions, may bring confusion among implementing staff and weaken the focus of individual projects, as well as increased transactions costs or simply shift the coordination burden from one entity to another (ibid.). Moreover, uncoordinated communication efforts between implementing partners can lead to the targeting of the same people and organisations. This increases the risk of overwhelming those project stakeholders and research users.

1.2 Rise of learning-oriented climate adaptation initiatives

Climate change is characterised by uncertainty, varying levels of risks, complexity and lack of simple responses and solutions. When addressing such complex or ‘wicked’ challenges, practitioners cannot rely on known responses and past experiences. While the increased focus on learning is reflected in international development more broadly, the urgency of climate action and need to find the most effective solutions to address climate challenges, has put learning at the core of many climate change programmes.

As a result, an increasing number of learning-oriented large-scale multi-project programmes, portfolios, networks and communities of practice have been set up to address climate challenges, and to foster interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration. The structures and mechanisms to enhance learning vary. Some programmes, such as BRACED,³ have specifically contracted a knowledge manager or a learning partner to manage and drive learning across a portfolio of implementing organisations. Others, such as CARIAA,⁴ foster learning by creating collaborative spaces in a form of thematic or geographical working groups and cross-consortia annual learning events. The common underlying activity is to periodically bring a diverse set of consortia partners and stakeholders together to share knowledge and learn across different layers of programming. For more information and examples on learning in large-scale research initiatives, please see e.g. Cochrane et al. (2017); Cochrane and Cundill (2018); Cundill et al. (2018); Gerlak and Heikkila (2011); Gonsalves (2014); Harvey et al. (2017).

1.3 Influencing policy and practice through research

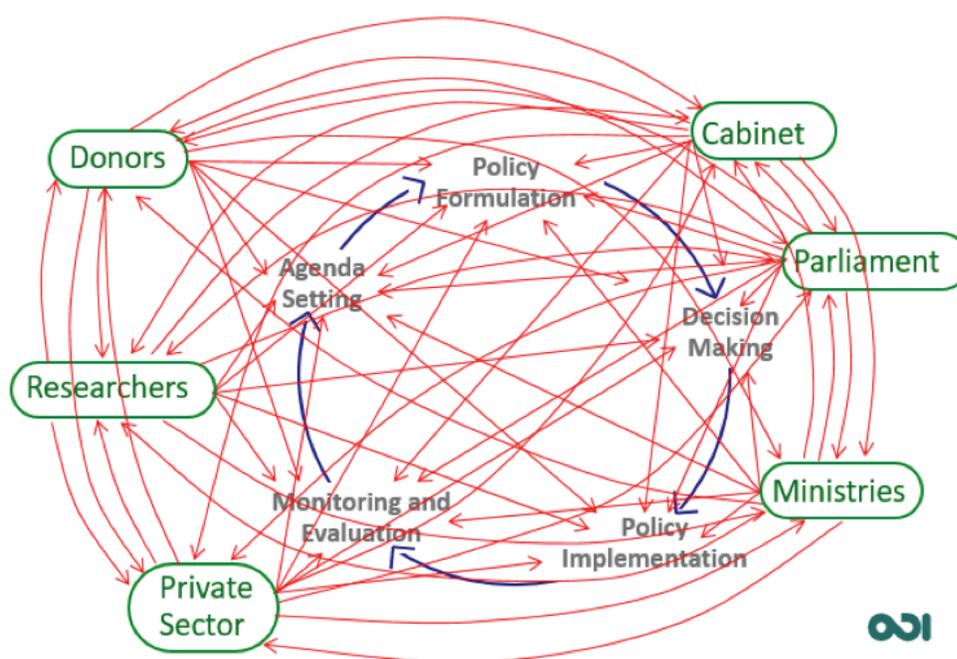
From the outset, PRISE was designed to use a ‘policy and development first’ approach to influence policy through high-quality, demand-driven research and ongoing stakeholder engagement. Though research has the potential to inform policy and practice, the fact that policy-making is a dynamic and complex process, and involves numerous different actors and moving parts, can make influencing challenging (as Figure 1 illustrates).

As policy-making is often a very political process, evidence is only one of its many influences (Jones, 2009; Langet et al., 2016). Policy-makers’ own values, experiences and expertise also play part, together with contextual factors, cognitive processes and mental models such as identities, stereotypes and causal narratives. Moreover, there are number of factors that can hinder and support the use of research. The most common barriers and enablers found in the literature are listed in Tables 1 and 2.

³ www.braced.org

⁴ <https://www.cariaa.net/>

Figure 1: Complexity of policy-making



Source: John Young, 2008.

Table 1: Barriers for research use identified in secondary literature reviews

Limited channels exist for policy-makers and researchers to interact; there is a ‘gulf’ between researchers and decision-makers (Orton et al., 2011); there are **problems with engagement, collaboration or communication** between stakeholders or there is inadequate dissemination (Clar et al., 2011).

Research is not relevant for decision-making, clear, presented in an appropriate format, or reliable. (Oliver, Innvar et al., 2014; Orton et al., 2011).

Research is not available or accessible to decision-makers. (Oliver, Innvar et al., 2014).

Organisational systems and support structures do not encourage the use of research evidence in decision-making (Newman, 2014; Oliver, Innvar et al., 2014).

Lack of time and opportunity to use research (Oliver, Innvar et al., 2014; Newman, 2014).

Low capacity to understand and use research evidence. Evidence suggests that although capacity gaps may be more extreme in low-income contexts, they exist in high-income contexts too (Newman, 2014; Orton et al., 2011; Oliver, Innvar et al., 2014).

Lack of resources, funding and investment in evidence-informed policy-making processes (Clar et al., 2011).

High staff turnover undermines systematic use of evidence (Clar et al., 2011; Liverani et al., 2013).

Institutional barriers to the use of research evidence, e.g. the nature of political systems and the political nature of specific issues (Newman, 2014; Liverani et al., 2013).

Source: Adapted from Punton, 2016, p.6.

Table 2: Enablers for research use identified in secondary literature reviews

Trust, interaction and collaboration between researchers and policy-makers. (Clar et al., 2011; Oliver et al., 2014; Orton et al., 2011). Research is **presented clearly** and presented through tailored dissemination efforts (Newman, 2014). **Interactive approaches** and partnerships, knowledge brokering and exchange (Liverani et al., 2013).

Research is **clear, relevant** for decision-making, and reliable. (Oliver, Innvar et al., 2014; Wallace et al., 2012).

Research is **available and accessible** to decision-makers. (Oliver, Innvar et al., 2014).

Organisational processes and systems encourage or enforce decision-makers to consider and apply evidence (Newman, 2014; Orton et al., 2011).

Charismatic leadership, high-level or local champions, commitment and support (Clar et al., 2011).

Source: Adapted from Punton, 2016, p.6.

Influencing policy-making with research requires relationships and networks, and can include a range of actors from civil society, the private sector, the research community, media outlets and so on. It also requires time and commitment, and as Tilley et al. (2017) state: 'policy influencing is usually a marathon not a sprint'. It is important to keep in mind that potential change may often take place years after the research has been conducted (which has implications for what can be realistically measured during the lifetime of a research programme, as discussed later in this section).

Changes in policy and practice can take many forms. While changes in legislation are often seen as 'final' or the most visible change, there are many other non-legislative changes in policy and practice that research may influence. These include resource allocations, framework or strategy development, a rise in awareness, whose voice is included in debates, perceptions and attitudes, and even the language that people use around an issue (Young et al., 2014).

The formulation of policies is complex; it has its own formal and informal rhythms. It is essential that the research reaches the target audience at a time when they are able to take action (Tilley et al., 2017). Sometimes this may come up very unexpectedly, such as following a natural disaster or an election, after which large policy shifts may happen.

1.4 Why focus on monitoring outcomes?

The diversified expectations of large-scale multi-project research programmes have implications for what is monitored and evaluated. Traditionally the 'success' or 'impact' of a research project, especially in the academic world, was assessed by the number of articles published in peer-reviewed journals. However, this is no longer sufficient. These more complicated types of research programmes are expected to contribute to broader change, going beyond publishing outputs to having an impact outside of academia.⁵

Where research programmes particularly struggle is, first, defining outcome level changes and, second, measuring them in a systematic manner. Too often monitoring outcomes relies mainly or solely on anecdotal evidence. This is not only a challenge for monitoring but also for evaluation, which often uses case study-based approaches instead of looking at changes across a portfolio of projects. These challenges further underscore the need for a systematic approach to measure progress towards outcomes, especially in large-scale multi-project programmes that span across countries and continents. This is one of the reasons that PRISE decided to explore the use of Outcome Mapping to systematically measure outcome level changes and feed that information back to stakeholder engagement strategies and related activities.

⁵For example, in the recent Research Excellence Framework 2014 rating, which assessed universities and their research, one fifth of the overall score was weighted to the impact the research had beyond academia. More information see, www.ref.ac.uk.

2. The Outcome Mapping system at PRISE

2.1 What is Outcome Mapping?

Developed by the IDRC in 2008, [Outcome Mapping](#) (OM) is an approach for planning, monitoring and evaluating development programming that focuses on social transformation and thus places development actors at the heart of its processes. OM provides methodological guidelines and a set of practical tools that projects, programmes and organisations can use to identify and unpack an initiative's theory of change. It helps to identify a system's actors and their changes in behaviour – actions, activities, relationships, policies or practices – towards a common vision. The initiative supports this behavioural change through key strategies and activities.

OM's framework allows projects, programmes and key partners to collect, analyse and make sense of these behavioural changes – or change pathways – in order to understand, explain and learn from the ways in which change happens. This data collection and the subsequent analysis and reflection of data can be used to make mid-course improvements, provide rich stories of change, and empower actors to explore and assess their own behavioural change.

At the planning stage OM helps to identify actors, the changes it intends to support, and the appropriate strategies to achieve these changes. At the evaluative stage (monitoring, evaluation or developmental evaluation) it can be used to assess the changes that have happened (planned and unplanned) and what contributed to those changes.

2.2 OM for tracking and learning from research influence

Part of the challenge of tracking and assessing the influence of policy-oriented research is due to high unpredictability, slow timelines, and incremental and seemingly 'small' steps to get research users on board, and to see them use data and recommendations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a broader political/decision-making system at work, and if researchers don't make an attempt to understand it – and be strategic about when and where they may influence a research user – the research risks going unused.

While many methodologies have surfaced in recent years that help assess progress and changes around mainstreaming climate change into policy and practice (such as Process Tracing, Contribution Analysis, the Performance Story approach, etc.⁶), PRISE opted to use OM to track those 'small steps' in research users to understand if and how attitudes of those key stakeholders were changing in regard to the research and its uptake, and what factors caused or impeded those steps. Through OM, PRISE highlights and assesses changes among key stakeholders and their engagement with PRISE research and researchers; how PRISE itself contributed to these changes; and how to inform and improve PRISE stakeholder engagement and policy influence activities.

2.3 How PRISE developed its OM monitoring system

The development and implementation of the PRISE OM system involved several people. Their roles are explained in Box 2 on page 16.

The process of developing the PRISE OM system is visualised in Figure 2, then explained in greater detail.

⁶ See e.g. Belcher et al. (2017).

Box 2: Roles and responsibilities of developing and implementing the PRISE OM system

M&E Manager/Coordinator

The PRISE M&E Manager, who was based in London, oversaw the overarching PRISE M&E framework including the OM system and logframe reporting. The M&E Manager was closely involved in designing the M&E system and conducted programme-wide analysis of observations.

OM Expert

An external OM specialist was contracted to co-develop the OM system, lead the development of Progress Markers, create guiding documents and templates and provide overall guidance, coaching and feedback for M&E Focal Points throughout the process. The OM expert worked closely with the PRISE M&E Manager in these tasks.

M&E and OM Focal Points

Four M&E and OM Focal Points were based in PRISE member organisations in Senegal, Pakistan, Kenya and Tajikistan (with technical support from individuals based in London and Ottawa) for the duration of the programme. These individuals were a critical part of the PRISE learning system. M&E and OM Focal Point roles and responsibilities are not limited to the routine quantitative monitoring of the implementation of project research and stakeholder engagement activity; they incorporate a strong qualitative analysis of results and a learning dimension through the use of the OM system.

The OM monitoring system assumes this dual function in order to allow tracking and sense-making of M&E information. M&E and OM Focal Point key responsibilities associated with the OM system include:s

- Contribute to the development of the online M&E system and learning system process, and make in-country teams aware of their role doing the same.
- Ongoing identification and revision of key stakeholders ('Boundary Partners' in OM terms) and Progress Markers.
- Track and describe all changes in the online OM system, and coach researchers to do the same.
- Analyse online OM data, and coordinate and lead the sense-making discussion with in-country teams.
- Develop a biannual OM report with lessons learnt and include adaptations to stakeholder engagement strategy based on these lessons.

Identifying stakeholders and defining changes (Steps 1 and 2): At the onset of PRISE, after stakeholder mapping and the selection of key stakeholders ('Boundary Partners' in OM terms), partners developed Outcome Challenges to specify the ultimate desired change they would like to see in Boundary Partner actions and interactions. The first three key stakeholder groups identified were parliamentarians/elected officials, government agencies and the private sector. Later two more were added: academia/research institutes, and NGOs.

Progress Markers were developed to identify a variety of planned behaviours – actions and interactions – to influence research uptake. Progress Markers used the graduated approach of defining 'expect to see', which are basic changes through initial engagement (e.g. stakeholders responding to invitations to attend PRISE meetings); 'like to see', which are changes that show active engagement (e.g. policy-makers cooperating with PRISE requests for information about their strategies and plans); and 'love to see', which are transformative changes of Boundary Partners taking ownership of change themselves. Table 3 gives an example of identified Progress Markers for government agencies and actors.

Figure 2: The process of developing the PRISE OM system



Source: PRISE

Table 3: Examples of Progress Markers for government agencies and actors

Expect to see
Actively participating in PRISE stakeholder events (attendance, questions and comments, dialogue).
Participating in discussions and reflections on the research that reflects their knowledge of the issue and the needs of men and women around the issue.
Inviting researchers to briefings.
Like to see
Organising capacity building and communications for their own staff around climate change and gender-specific needs as a consequence of climate change.
Demanding climate change related research that addresses both women's and men's needs.
Inviting PRISE researchers or other key stakeholders for policy consultation, particularly for policy that addresses gender equality in climate change.
Using PRISE research to influence and formulate policies and investments, particularly those that are gender-just.
Love to see
Influencing external actors (i.e. donors, regional) and using research findings to do so.
Using research findings to take policy action / propose, agree and pass laws, including those with a gender-just dimension.
Changing budget allocations to increase funding for climate change that meets the needs of both men and women equally.

Source: PRISE

Development of an online system and inputting observations (Steps 3 and 4): Using OM and Progress Markers, PRISE developed a set of tools and processes to design and gather information on these outcomes (or behaviour changes in key stakeholders). A simple, Google-based form and database were set up in a password-protected knowledge management platform that CARIAA had developed to support internal knowledge sharing. Researchers and M&E Focal Points record Progress Marker observations into the online system, which is then regularly analysed and interpreted by the M&E Focal Points as well as research teams. Figure 3 is the first page of the online form.

Analysis, sense-making and reporting (Step 5): Once every six months the M&E Focal Points, working with the in-country teams, convened a face-to-face country meeting to reflect on, analyse and make sense of the data from the online system. PRISE developed a guidance template to support reflection, but project teams could conduct their sessions in whatever way that was most useful for them. Discussion includes what the results and trends mean for the project in terms of their stakeholder engagement, and what next steps are appropriate to take to continue to support the key stakeholders; essentially asking the questions 'what is working?', 'what is not working?' and 'what do we need to be doing differently?' as a basis for discussion to surface learnings and adaptations to stakeholder engagement strategies. These reflections, as well as data on trends, were shared in a simple four-page OM report. Evidence and narrative from this report was then fed into the larger biannual PRISE report to the donors.

The project- and country-level, as well as overarching initiative-wide, analysis and trends were also discussed in PRISE annual meetings and technical reports for donors. Figure 4 provides an example of supporting illustrations presented and discussed in an annual PRISE meeting. It shows how a majority of recorded observations at the beginning of the project occurred at the 'expect to see' level, but later the majority of recorded observations occurred at the 'like to see' level. This indicates that stakeholders are engaging with PRISE in a more active and responsive way. While it is useful to visualise generalised change over time, these diagrams were always accompanied by specific examples of change, so that researchers could learn from the nuances in each context.

Figure 3: PRISE OM monitoring form, page 1

PRISE Outcome Monitoring Form

Your username will be recorded when you submit this form. [Sign out](#)
 * Required

PRISE Outcome Monitoring Form

For PRISE teams to record outcome data regarding changes in stakeholders

Project *

Country *

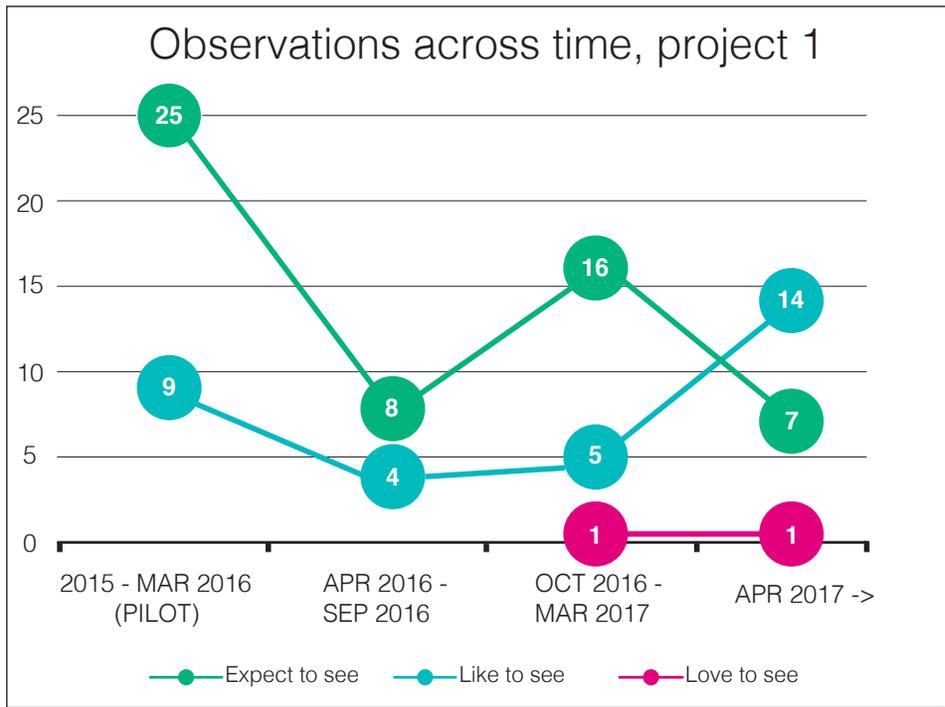
Stakeholder group *



20% completed

Source: PRISE

Figure 4: An example of graph of PRISE observations (Project 1)



Source: PRISE

Adaptation (Step 6): This reflection and sense-making, and the learning that stems from it, feeds into a report that explains the change observed, PRISE's contribution to the change, and the key lessons that PRISE must consider to inform concrete actions in terms of stakeholder engagement approaches.

Indeed, the ultimate aim of the PRISE OM system was not only learn about what influencing strategies worked but also to adapt and improve those activities based on the evidence and analysis. For example, the Project 3 Team in Pakistan continuously monitor stakeholder progress in each quarter and identify missing links that could help them move from 'expect to see' Progress Markers to 'like to see' Progress Markers. The learning captured from the OM data has often led to alterations in both stakeholder engagement strategy and tools, which then proved to be useful in strengthening relationships with key stakeholders. And, in some cases, learning from one project was also used to influence stakeholders of other projects.

3. Challenges and lessons in applying OM in a multi-stakeholder research programme

Defining and tracking outcomes can be challenging for any (research) programme. Moreover, the structure of PRISE – a large, multi-project, multi-country research consortia that tries to influence several stakeholder groups – can amplify and bring additional challenges. Here we discuss some of the challenges we encountered during the implementation of the OM system with some suggested solutions.

3.1 Getting familiar with OM concept and tools

The OM approach uses terminology and concepts that are unique to it (e.g. Progress Markers, Boundary Partners, ‘expect to see’, etc.) which reflect operational realities for the OM approach. In order to fully be able to use the tool, it is crucial to understand the meaning of each of OM concepts.

For example, a common misunderstanding happens around the OM language ‘expect’, ‘like’ and ‘love to see’. In the early stages of the system, many of PRISE researchers recorded changes they were expecting to see, instead of what had already happened. Thus, it is important for people who record the observations to understand the difference between what you want to do (plans) and what has actually already taken place (observations).

OM concepts and tools need to be understood by a range of individuals working on the research team, as OM system tracking needs to be undertaken by researchers, managers and communications specialists as well as M&E Focal Points. Some of these individuals had not previously encountered monitoring, analysis and reflection of stakeholder engagement in their roles or responsibilities, which raised additional challenges in bringing the concept and practice of evaluative thinking.

Due to the need to interpret terminologies, individuals filling in the system and writing the OM reports had to frequently reference back to the guidelines for the right interpretation, thus sometimes taking more time for M&E than originally planned.

3.2 Language

PRISE is being implemented in six countries in Africa and Asia, and is thus maintained in a multilingual environment. The system was created in English, a second language for the majority of consortium participants. Concepts that lie at the heart of OM have been at times misinterpreted and miscommunicated.

For instance, concepts such as ‘expect to see’, ‘like to see’ and ‘love to see’, which are key to the OM system, are difficult to translate from English into French. Thus, PRISE researchers involved in the collection of data or Progress Markers in Burkina Faso have regularly reported their difficulty in understanding the difference between the ‘like’ and ‘love to see’ concepts, which sometimes led to confusion in the characterisation of observed changes.

It is therefore essential that the different learning tools developed by the project take into account such linguistic plurality in order to allow the project team to take ownership of the learning tools and, on the other hand, ease the capitalisation of lessons specific to each geographical context.

3.3 Potential limitations of Progress Markers

While the OM system provides a comprehensive framework to capture changes in the overall attitude of stakeholders to research, initially identified Progress Markers became restrictive when their usefulness and relevance was not reviewed and updated, when needed. For example, it is important to ensure that changes brought by more informal means of stakeholder engagement and relationship building are also captured.

PRISE, recognising the complexity and diversity of relationships that can be established between stakeholders, has hence kept the OM system quite flexible. Reviewing Progress Markers not only helped in defining future courses of action in terms of stakeholder engagement, but also in identifying and incorporating changing stakeholder dynamics. The Progress Markers and the type of actors were updated according to research needs and existing relationship dynamics with the stakeholders. For example, new stakeholder groups such as NGOs and academia/research institutes were added later on as requested by partners, and additional country- or global-level indicators could be added by users to capture emerging changes.

3.4 Capturing stakeholder-specific observations

Most of the data sources for observations emerge from the stakeholder events or encounters, such as one-on-one dialogues/interviews, workshops, formal research presentations, focus groups discussions, email communications, phone calls, community events, and so on.

In some instances, the interpretation of the OM terminologies is stakeholder specific or even context specific, depending on the event. For example, it was easier to capture or record the influence from a dialogue or an email with one stakeholder as compared to determining a single observation (in other words, identifying a single Progress Marker) in a workshop setting where there are many stakeholders represented. In a group of stakeholders, discussions can raise several issues; different examples of an action or interaction related to a Progress Marker may surface, and it is thus difficult to pinpoint one Progress Marker to a single stakeholder, and if many actions or interactions are observed that related to several Progress Markers, a form for each of those Progress Markers would have to be filled out in the online system.

3.5 Frequency of observations can vary

Observing and recording changes in stakeholders' actions and behaviours happens frequently, but the frequency rate can vary greatly depending on the thematic area, the country, and the stage of the project. For example, it may be that when a project is at the data collection and stakeholder engagement phase, there are more entries than the phase when the final reports are being written. Thus, in the biannual sense-making sessions, it is important to identify reasons for any potential lack of observations to ensure that the current engagement strategies are still relevant and appropriate.

3.6 Time management dilemma

Monitoring can be time-intensive and requires dedicated personnel, tools and space for reflection, just like research. Many times, where M&E or policy-influencing activities are not separately budgeted, there arises a challenge of allocating human resources for managing the monitoring system. The answer comes down to two possible arrangements: each researcher is responsible for his/her own data entry, where the M&E Focal Point just ensures the timely input of data and review, or there is one Focal Point solely there for system management.

PRISE experimented with both approaches. M&E Focal Points were made responsible for data entry in the OM system. Researchers were requested to share their observations with the in-country Focal Points who then uploaded the data into the OM system. This, however, proved to be ineffective whereby researchers were either sharing data too early to be considered as an observation, or very late. This was partly due to researchers' initial lack of understanding of the OM system, which was particularly visible in the cases of Pakistan and Kenya where, at later stages, the responsibility of data entry on the OM system was gradually transferred to researchers. Quarterly meetings were held with researchers to share observations, general engagement trends and number of inputs per researcher. This gave rise to a healthy competition between researchers to engage more with stakeholders and have more evidence registered in the OM system in the next quarter. However, as noted in the Kenya, this option did not maximise, or get full details from, various stakeholder encounters. This was attributed to the fact that most researchers are experts when it comes to their field but not when it comes to tracking stakeholder influence. Thus, many instances were not recorded. For example, a researcher may not 'remember' to record details about a phone conversation held after a workshop but will be able to record data from a key informant interview.

Box 3: Using OM to monitor gender dimensions

Gender-sensitive monitoring systems are increasingly used in development projects, which now recognise that gender-blind development interventions do not effectively deliver desired results.

Gender is an integral element of the PRISE programme, whereby research aims to highlight gendered dimensions of climate change and adaptation at scales. Gender dimensions are embedded into research and thus into M&E systems, in part to help capture the stakeholder demand for gender-focused research and the policy space for research uptake (i.e. which policy stakeholders are more responsive towards gender findings for policy change).

Recognising this need, and in order to devise a gender-sensitive monitoring system, the M&E team developed gender-specific Progress Markers under each of the Progress Marker categories of 'expect to see', 'like to see' and 'love to see'. Examples of gender-related Progress Markers that developed for the OM system include:

Progress Markers developed for the private sector:

Like to see: Co-financing adaptation projects/investing in climate change and investment projects, with an understanding of risks and opportunities for climate change from different gender perspectives.

Love to see: Developing or implementing climate-resilient strategies and practices that target women and men appropriately and equally.

The PRISE OM tool has prompted learning around stakeholder engagement and research into use as it relates to gender-related research findings. For instance one of the PRISE countries, Pakistan, is doing this is to create allies with gender experts with extensive experience and knowledge on climate change as it relates to gender. They have begun a series of conversations with the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, who have requested information on PRISE findings and how it complements their own research. The need for further gender-sensitive research was also expressed by the Social Sector and Devolution at the Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform. And in Kenya, women entrepreneurs in Narok requested that PRISE's work on gender and SMEs' climate experience inform and lobby the government to consider supporting climate-resilient investments especially for women.

Development of these indicators also allowed in-country M&E Focal Points and researchers to generate debates around gender issues at wider policy and practice levels. Not only this, the focus shifted towards a more gendered approach in identifying and engaging stakeholders; an increasing number of women were engaged as key stakeholders who could relate to the research findings and take the research agenda forward. For example, in Pakistan, focus on gender-sensitive research also led to the identification of a female 'Champion of change' who helped voice gender-based vulnerabilities, coming out of PRISE work, in various high-level national and international forums. As a result, women had higher levels of representation at stakeholder engagement events.

3.7 Using lessons learnt to review and adapt engagement processes in real-time

OM system favours learning and adaptation throughout a project's lifetime. Indeed, a key dimension of learning is the possibility to 'use' or 'invest' lessons learnt to adapt or revise your engagement process in real-time, making it more effective. This is an important practice to save time and resources.

In Senegal, based on key learning from OM quarterly reports and data collected through the OM system, the Project 4 Team revised its engagement strategy with the private sector and developed a new engagement plan aiming at stimulating greater private sector awareness about the impacts of climate change on their businesses. The added value of this reflection process, which is based on the use of lessons learnt from experiences, is that the project team was able to learn from what worked well and what didn't work well to revise its engagement strategy. Thus, instead of working with large companies that were not very interested in climate change and were not receptive to PRISE's request during the inception phase of the project, the Project 4 Team decided to focus on engaging with SMEs, which are more vulnerable to climate change and whose contribution to the national economy is very important. This allows the Project 4 Team to increase the involvement of the private sector on climate-related issues and, through a snowball effect, reach more and more private sector stakeholders.

3.8 Situating the OM system as a part of wider learning aims and processes

It is important that the OM system doesn't operate in a silo but that it is a part of wider monitoring, evaluation and learning aims and processes. As PRISE was a part of an even bigger consortium, CARIAA, its learning mechanisms had to be aligned with CARIAA's objectives and processes to some extent, too. CARIAA developed an overall vision and theory of change that was supported by specific indicators and tools to facilitate data collection and the extraction of lessons to promote cross-consortia learning. During the inception phase, each consortium developed its own theory of change to achieve its objectives and set up its own processes and activities to promote and facilitate learning and track progress. While some consistency across initiatives was needed, CARIAA also encouraged consortia to design and shape the systems which met their own needs. Box 4 gives further details on CARIAA's approach to learning and the type of learning mechanisms it set up.

Box 4: CARIAA's internal reflection and learning mechanisms and processes⁷

CARIAA, in collaboration with consortia, developed the Research-into-Use (RiU) Learning Framework to support the programme's M&E activities that track and learn from RiU processes. It draws on best practice from other consortia and networks, and offers consortia a flexible and adaptable set of tools to facilitate reflection and learning periodically throughout the year.

The framework includes guidance for how to build these learning opportunities into existing RiU and programme delivery processes in order to streamline the programme and make information usable to the various working groups/specialists, e.g. M&E teams. Whilst the consortia in the CARIAA programme are diverse in terms of their objectives, geographical coverage, and operational processes, there are regular set periods when they undertake similar stock-taking activities that coincide with reporting timeframes and annual meetings.

These provided opportunities for consortia, individual project teams or RiU leads to reflect on, for example, what mechanisms, tools and communication channels work in promoting uptake of research findings amongst different stakeholder groups in different geographical regions; or how the skills and capacities of consortia members and target stakeholders can be built.

⁷ For more information see CARIAA 2017a, 2017b, 2017c.

CARIAA developed numerous other learning mechanisms and processes that also form part of the M&E and Learning Strategy. These include annual learning reviews that bring all consortia together, for example to co-develop regional engagement strategies, to share early research findings, or to brainstorm business development ideas and potential partnerships for future programming. While these meetings were seen as a valuable and necessary mechanism for cross-consortia learning, they were not without challenges. Persistent questions remain on how to ensure the right people are in the room (whilst also trying to give new people in different positions exposure and opportunities to participate and collaborate with consortia), and how to utilise the opportunities and outcomes of these meetings.

In addition, there are numerous cross-consortia working groups that were set up to share knowledge, explore opportunities for common activities, compare research approaches, train each other, and jointly organise workshops and events (particularly where countries in which consortia operate overlap). The scope, aims and amount of interaction of these groups varies.

CARIAA provided additional funding in the form of Opportunities and Synergies Funds to support and promote cross-consortia collaboration. Furthermore, experimental learning workshops were organised between CARIAA and other consortia and networks, such as BRACED, to explore examples of experimental learning methodologies and approaches that support adaptation processes in different contexts, e.g. interactive games and facilitation techniques.

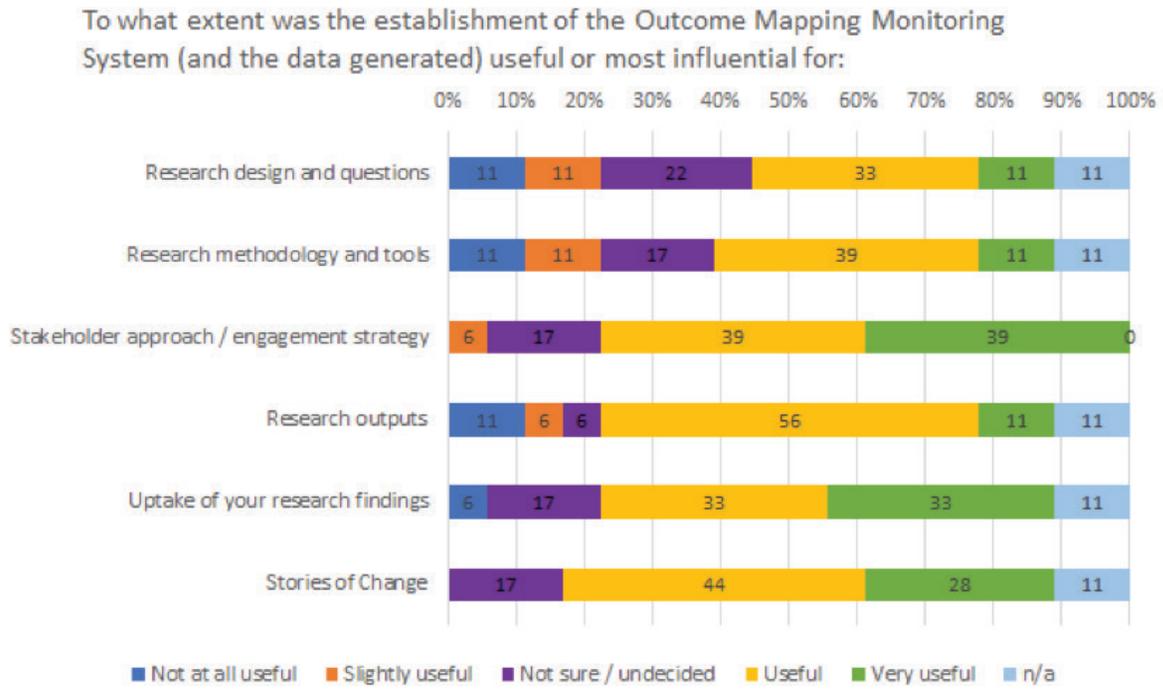
3.9 Uptake and perceived usefulness of OM can vary

It is expected that not all partners and organisations in large multi-project programmes may see the value of spending their time and resources in an outcome monitoring system such as this. For example, for academic research institutions measuring and understanding stakeholders' gradual changes might not come across as essential as for more policy-focused research institutions. At PRISE, the uptake of the system, its perceived value, and engagement with the M&E team varied across institutions and researchers. Motivating and engaging M&E Focal Points and getting senior management to buy-in were crucial factors that affected the uptake of the system on an organisational level.

Towards the end of the project, PRISE conducted a survey to capture the usefulness and value of different aspects and components of the PRISE model, including its OM system. According to a survey conducted in July and August 2018,⁸ a majority of PRISE respondents found the OM system and the data it generated useful for a number of purposes. The OM system was found most useful for developing and adapting or updating their stakeholder approach/engagement strategy (78% found it either useful or very useful) and for developing Stories of Change (72% found it either useful or very useful). It was found less useful for research questions and methodology (see Figure 5).

⁸This online survey was sent out in June 2018, and 18 people answered questions about OM, which represents approximately 40% of the PRISE staff (not including short-term consultants).

Figure 5: Usefulness of the OM system



Source: PRISE end-programme survey

Answers to open questions mirrored these responses. For example, someone who found the system useful mentioned that the OM system ‘provided a map translating PRISE’s theory of change into something easily actioned by individual researchers’. Another person wrote that the OM system ‘pushed us constructively to reflect on the means of communicating our research results and conducting the policy-influencing process.’ Those who didn’t find it useful were generally unsure of its usefulness (for example, they hadn’t been working for PRISE for a long time) or didn’t find it particularly relevant for academic research.

4. Key take-aways and recommendations

4.1 Key take-aways from the PRISE experience

Based on our experiences in developing and implementing the OM system at PRISE, we identified a number of lessons and recommendations for programmes that hope to build a similar system to monitor and understand stakeholders' behaviour and actions. The take-aways are:

OM encourages continuous stakeholder mapping: Stakeholder mapping should not be a one-off exercise done at the onset of a project but an ongoing process of strategising who the key audiences are and how to influence them. For example, if you want to influence a minister, you need to map out who her/his connections, allies and influencers are. It may also require a conscious effort to follow-up with specific stakeholders, especially in cases where they are recognised as great influencers who can help push the policy agenda forward. At PRISE, this continuous stakeholder mapping varied across partners.

OM recognises the complexity of policy influencing: OM recognises that we work in complex environments and influencing stakeholders is a dynamic and non-linear process with multiple possible outcomes. By categorising potential outcomes into 'expect', 'like' and 'love to see', we avoided the need for precise predictions about the pace of change at the beginning of the programme (for example, sometimes partners observed a 'love to see' change very early on in the process). Moreover, it allowed research teams to recognise and appreciate smaller changes, which can ultimately lead to changes in policy and practice, by providing a foundation for policy change to take place, and even be sustained.

OM helps to create a shared and long-term vision: The development and use of the OM system translated PRISE's vision into a set of behavioural changes that represented pathways of change. It also created a sense of responsibility and empowerment in PRISE researchers (though the uptake and use of the system varied significantly across partners). It encouraged PRISE to assess the outcome of its research, and researchers could recognise their own role in the outcomes of PRISE.

OM supports collaborative sense-making and learning: OM is a participatory tool – the data represented more than one person's opinion – and the collaborative sense-making was a key for learning and adapting our stakeholder engagement strategies and activities. Having an online database means that observations are stored in a shared place for everyone to see and review.

OM, and learning from OM data, requires time, personnel and resources both at the in-country and consortia levels, from the beginning until the end of the programme. OM is a process which requires strong participation (this can be defined as narrowly or as broadly as a programme wishes, depending on the data and learning needs). Thus, a substantial time investment on the part of the research team and M&E leads is needed to become familiar with the OM process, concepts and tools. Moreover, the ongoing reflection and learning requires time and commitment, especially from in-country M&E Focal Points, but needs to be supported at the consortia level, too. Though the online system at PRISE was very simple, it still needed facilitation, encouragement and coaching, all of which took more time than perhaps initially expected. Organisations usually have their own monitoring systems and a new system can duplicate or bring additional monitoring activities, so this is also something to be of which to be aware.

Strategy Maps: In order to keep the OM system as simple as possible, and therefore user-friendly, PRISE opted to focus on the collection of Progress Markers (the changes of key stakeholders, or Boundary Partners) rather than additionally and systematically tracking strategies (the actions of the project) using the Strategy Map function of OM. Part of this was to ensure that teams understood the difference between the actions and interactions of a stakeholder versus the actions of a team (e.g. project activities, outputs). While strategies were included in the six-month discussion and reflection that fed into adjusted stakeholder strategies, in retrospect more systematised learning could have been gained to include a section on Strategy Maps in the online system.

4.2 Recommendations for future programmes

Our key recommendations for future programmes are:

Understand what research team capacities are for influencing policy: Not everyone involved in a research program may think they have a role or a responsibility to influence policy, and certainly not everyone has the skill set and a repertoire of communication tools to do so. However, each member of a research team should be aligned with a common vision of policy influence and determine what their role is, even if it is taking on the responsibility to observe changes in the stakeholders they are often in contact with and to record those changes. As stated above, this may mean a certain degree of capacity-building, coaching and ensuring active participation in reflection sessions as well as developing and adjusting stakeholder engagement plans.

Ensure clarity between actions of stakeholders v. actions of the project: The aim is to have the stakeholders' actions 'drive' the change, while the actions of the project support that change, however this is a chicken/egg scenario. In some instances, stakeholder actions do prompt the project activities to take a particular direction. While in other instances, project actions determine and dictate the kind of influence and actions stakeholders take. For example, in Kenya, the Narok County government learnt about the PRISE project from its onset during stakeholder engagement forums. During the subsequent research phases, they became a major stakeholder, to the extent of seeking data and information relating to climate change to be included in their five-year county development plans. They organised various engagement events, which they invited PRISE to run. PRISE shared information on climate change specific to Narok County. In this case, stakeholder actions prompted the project team to create a tailored influence to the stakeholder's needs. However, there have been instances where the project has made an effort to create an action to trigger the stakeholders to respond or influence. For example, during one six-month recording period in Kenya, it was noted that observations on parliamentarians were low. Though being in office only for a limited time period, parliamentarians can have significant policy influence. Thus, the project made a conscious effort to engage with them.

Mandatory reflection is necessary for adaptation: While it is important to introduce OM thinking and tools from the outset of the programme, it is as important to keep the system flexible. For example, adjust Progress Markers and tools to a changing socio-political context and arising needs. Having a 'piloting' period where projects and teams are getting familiar with the system may be a good idea, too. Making six-month reflection sessions a mandatory part of the process allows opportunity for these adjustments. It is important that learning and reflection happens on a regular basis and in a structured manner.

Participation should happen at each stage: It is important to dedicate staff to the development and implementation of the OM system, but getting more people involved is essential for sustained country and project ownership. Indeed, the joint reflection is not the only place where participation is meant to happen. For example, the development of Progress Markers needs to be a participatory process, too, in order to build a shared, long-term vision across all partners and projects. Experience from Pakistan shows that reflection sessions with all the team members allowed every researcher to share their 'unique' learnings and lessons that helped the rest of the team devise a comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategy for the next quarter. Just like we need to constantly rethink who our stakeholders are, we also need to reflect on who should be part of analysis and sense-making.

And finally – it doesn't need to be complicated: While policy influencing is complex, monitoring it and learning from it to adapt and adjust strategies doesn't have to be complicated. Though outcome monitoring in a large consortium with multiple partners and stakeholder groups requires resources, time and coordination, the system itself can be relatively simple. By focusing on key stakeholder groups and utilising free and simple online tools, we can keep the process manageable. Progress Markers don't necessarily have to be complicated either, they can be as straightforward as requesting data from the project or inviting researchers to speak in an event. In the reflection sessions, asking simple questions to guide analysis and discussion can often be sufficient, for example: What worked in the past six months in terms of stakeholder engagement? What didn't work? What do we need to change in our stakeholder engagement strategy?

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Research for climate-resilient futures

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