CONTEXT

The Policy Engagement and Communications (PEC) Programme of the multi-donor Think Tank Initiative (www.thinktankinitiative.org) endeavours to strengthen communication capacities and resources of Think Tanks (TTs) around the world for effective translation of research findings towards policy influence. For this, the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) has partnered with the United Kingdom-based Institute of Development Studies and Practical Action Consultancy to (a) map out capacity needs; (b) generate PEC resources; and (c) hold capacity building workshops.

This Behaviour Change (BC) workshop is one such effort in response to the articulated need of TT Public Affairs Centre (www.pacindia.org), Bangalore, India. The 3-day workshop was joined through skype by researchers from Think Tank Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC), Karachi, Pakistan. Also joining were three Facilitators, one each from Karachi, Colombo (Sri Lanka) and New Delhi (India).

This report is a learning tool and is to be read with the accompanying power point presentation and the 3-day workshop agenda. This document can serve as a guide for facilitators who want to do similar workshops.

For further enquiries please contact TT PAC at mail@pacindia.org.

OBJECTIVE

The decision to hold this workshop was the outcome of self-assessment by PAC. It forms part of PAC’s Capacity Building Workplan, the later made as part of the PEC Programme.

The specific objective of the workshop was ‘to change the ways of the researchers so that they consider PEC on par with their research work, willing to invest the required resources including finance, time and skills. The above
objective was articulated in the workshop title: ‘Is PEC as Critical to Change as Research?’

**SESSION 1: LINKING UP**

After the customary welcome and introductions, the rationale for holding this workshop was given by the institutional head - PAC Director R. Suresh.

Suresh emphasized that good communication is the need of the hour and is essential to influence policy. He pointed out that both high quality research and its effective communication will now be measured to make a change within PAC as well as in the larger world outside.

He urged the attendees to make this a participatory workshop with ideas that would both help PAC move forward and also lead into the two subsequent communication workshops on media skills and policy advocacy skills respectively.

The first discussion was inward looking. It assessed PAC’s own understanding of its PEC profile and where it wanted to go. This was done in two parts.

In the first instance, participants were asked to plot (using stick-ons) their institution’s PEC profile on a quadrant (drawn on a flip chart) depicting different kinds of policy engagement – activism, lobbying, advocacy and advising. The exercise was reflective, encouraging participants to use multiple stick-ons in more than one quadrant if PAC simultaneously undertook different kinds of PEC activities. The exercise required participants to think for not more than 2 minutes and then walk up to the flip chart to do the needful – energizing them and requiring them to literally think on their feet.

The results were interesting. Stick-ons stood grouped together in two of the quadrants, a handful lay in the third while the fourth one was as if abandoned.

The discussion that followed explored the meaning of each of the PEC types, what could be done from within the government system - like advising – and from outside the system – like activism. The conversation flagged the need to understand advocacy better and the need to look at the differences between lobbying and advocacy. This will be picked up in the workshop on policy advocacy skills. Participants also debated what kind of PEC activities PAC was presently more involved in across projects.

There were two interesting conclusions. One, that over time, PAC has changed from being a more activist PEC actor to being an advisor and an advocate for promoting better governance; and two, that all the different kinds of PEC activities need to be taken up at different participating organisations.
times and for different purposes to bring about a change in policies and programmes that affect the lives of citizens.

An interesting debate occurred on whether donors – government, national and international – are willing to fund lobbying or advocacy or any of the different PEC activities; and if this is sometimes seen as undesired ‘political’ activity.

Participants finally agreed that all donors wanted change and PEC activities are willy-nilly part of any research that aims to change public policy or its implementation. Thus, the participants concluded that PEC activities, and resources for these, need to be part of the research design so that the research can bring about the desired impact. Budgets for roundtables, policy briefs and media advisories can be built into the research, together with time and skills needed for communicating to the target audiences.

In the second instance, a summary of the needs assessment survey completed by all PAC researchers prior to this workshop was shared with the participants. The needs assessment was a tool that (a) reflected participants’ own understanding of PEC and (b) laid out their expectations from the workshop.

Care was taken that, in the presentation of the summary of the needs assessment, (a) all the key points raised in the survey sheets were presented (under different categories); (b) participants knew what to expect from this workshop; and (c) they knew which expectations would be addressed in subsequent workshops or by the organization itself. The workshop design itself grew out of the needs assessment exercise, a kind of a ‘back to the future’ experience for the participants.

**Session 2: it’s greek to me!**

*This and the next session were a time for participants to think about their research findings and identify what policy changes these had led to.*

This session was for participants to understand PEC components of their own research. Each group selected a research topic with which they were familiar – care was taken to break up research teams so that subjective and objective perspectives could be gathered on the selected research case study. The session had four groups of 4 members each.

The task was explained to them – to cull out 1-2 main research findings, identify what PEC activity was undertaken to communicate that finding(s) and what impact it had on policy influencing or implementation. Groups were also asked to share evidences of where their findings had brought about a change either in policy creation, reform or implementation.

The following matrix was given to the participants to fill.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Finding (s)</th>
<th>Sharing externally – PEC actions</th>
<th>Policy change / Result</th>
<th>No change? Un-intended change?</th>
<th>Evidence for change</th>
</tr>
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Workshop design: Aditi Kapoor, PEC Programme Facilitator, India.
SESSION 3: show us what you have

The group presentations illustrated how PEC was really being implemented by researchers. The four case studies selected were (a) better implementation of maternal health services in the State of Karnataka; (b) evaluation of the Karnataka Knowledge Commission for its efficacy in policy reform and policy implementation; (c) assessment of the State’s electricity supply services; and (d) economic contribution of urban poor in the cities of Bangalore and Chennai.

Each group shared their PEC journey. There were press briefings, high-level lobby meetings, advocacy initiatives, spaces on advisory panels and public meetings. PEC products used included media releases, policy briefings, ‘easy-to-understand’ presentations and infographics, reports and new media products.

PAC’s ‘USP’ - that several of the research projects are demand-driven and requested by government departments - enables researchers to reach policy spaces and communicate that much more easily. There were evidences of change in the form of guidelines, citations in government documents, uploading of research findings on official websites, changes in implementation of programmes and offers of more demand-led research projects. Researchers, however, acknowledged that evidences of research findings linked to policy-level changes were not always clear; nor captured through appropriate documentation and dissemination.

In fact, each group shared that research findings did not always yield expected policy-level changes. So it was difficult to say what the impact was. Also, the changes expected were seldom clearly articulated at the time of taking up research. Where research was undertaken at the behest of a government agency, research findings often supported a given change process, not necessarily initiating a new change process. Thus, there were times when changes were unexpected, inadvertent or accidental following sharing of their research findings with government agencies. The magnitude of change was also often small, or ad hoc or ‘one-off.’

At another level, the homework was not always complete so there were instances of media running away with messages which were not the main research findings but ancillary findings. Follow-ups, including consistent meetings with relevant people in the corridors of power, were not done so advocacy/ advisory efforts yielded limited results or no results.

Significantly, researchers said they expected more changes than those which occurred. They also said they realize they have limited ‘authority’ to bring about a change because policy making often follows illogical pathways despite there being an accepted, logical process.
of policy making and policy implementation. Researchers then said ‘donors are (often) obsessed with policy’ and they may set the agenda for research but research objectives do not always focus on effecting policy changes.

The exercise ended with each group identifying the PEC style followed by their research projects on the four quadrants. Between them, they had engaged in all four types of PEC styles.

There was an agreement that there was much more that could be done on PEC - to further their agenda with policy makers and the larger community in their goal of improving governance. There was also a need to strategically use communication products and avenues to reflect evidences of change effected by their research findings. To achieve this, metrics to track and assess the impact of research could assist the research teams to evaluate its efficacy and reach.

**Session 4: tricks of the trade**

*This session focused on visualization of research outputs through creative use of digital technology and infographics.*

An external resource person for this session highlighted the fact that the ‘power of visualization’ for research outcomes often provided a very effective way of dealing with information overload and of attracting a variety of audiences. Use of pie-charts and other forms of graphs, which form part of what is known as ‘information design’ goes beyond ‘beautifying’ the pages of a report; they may contain all the information you need to make the right sense to the reader/viewer. Indeed, the form in which information is presented is closely linked to the content and this must resonate with the audience of the research findings. For example, information design through cartoons might not give much information but it may be useful to sometimes poke people to get them attracted to an issue.

The session touched upon the need to benefit from the use of social media, including tweeting, to reach out to a large proportion of people - not just within the geographies defined by the research activities but all over the world. Internet offers far more potential for dialogue and conversation than the print media. And using geospatial technology for interpreting data is a new opportunity that researchers can now use effectively.

The session’s main message was to think of audiences while designing PEC products. This included the ability to prioritise research findings for different audiences.

An additional area of consideration that emerged was identifying and using available PEC talent within the organization, across research teams, by using management tools like mentoring, coaching, supporting and advising.