The ‘Rethinking Research Partnerships’ seminar series was designed to provide a safe, closed space for a group of academic and NGO participants to critically reflect on and share their experiences of working in partnerships together. To frame these discussions, the series launched with a less restricted ‘context-setting’ event involving a broader range of participants (and will close with an international conference in autumn 2016). The opening event served two purposes: first, it ensured that the series as a whole benefited from a broader input of experiences with research partnerships; and second, it helped to generate a network of individuals and organisations who could accompany the series from afar – who would be interested in following and contributing to the online discussion space, and enable learning and insight to be spread among their relevant organisations and channels.

In this way, the context-setting seminar aimed to:

- Introduce the series and some of the case study partnerships which will be examined in the ‘core seminars’;
- Draw on previous work and experiences from a variety of actors to introduce a range of perspectives, positions and ideas about research partnerships;
- Use this background to develop a way of thinking through partnerships to guide the remainder of the series.

The seminar brought together 38 participants (see Appendix I) from a wide range of UK-based INGOs and universities as well as a selection of broker, training and funder organisations. Others who were unable to attend the event contributed to the design of the agenda and emerging framings of the seminar series by responding to a short survey on the series themes (see Appendix II).

This report summarizes the sessions and discussions of the day and highlights the next steps for the seminar series.
Session 1: Introductions and ice-breakers

In any discussion of ‘partnership’ there are always questions about who ‘the other’ is? What assumptions do we hold of those who work in another sector? How does this influence how we engage and what our expectations and motivations are? If we are to properly understand the types of research partnerships that exist between these two sectors it is important to challenge ourselves to think a bit more deeply about our own histories and backgrounds, how we describe ourselves and characterize others.

The first session of the day invited participants to introduce themselves by positioning themselves in response to different identity-labels and different stereotypes or assumptions about research partnerships.

The session began with participant asked to place themselves at one end of the room if they identified themselves, in their current role, as an academic, and the other end if they considered themselves a practitioner. Participants were free to place themselves anywhere along the spectrum, and invited to share their background, and explain why they placed themselves where they had. Participants were then invited to move, considering the question again in relation to their whole career. It was interesting to note just how many of us did move, and how overlapping our identities and histories were. In this way, the boundaries between these identity labels were quickly eroded and the idea of what it means to be a ‘researcher’ expanded.

We then moved on to unpack some of the assumptions that had been identified through the survey (see Appendix II for full details) This involved exploring the extent to which we agreed (or disagreed) with statements such as: NGOs do research as a means to an end, whereas academics see research as open exploration or an end in itself; academics theorise, NGOs are practical; and Practitioners do not care about evidence, they don’t use it even when it is there. These statements generated lively debate. The group probed the relationship between different types of academic research, evaluation, impact assessment, action research, reflexive learning and other knowledge-producing activities. At the same time, some of the assumptions about academics and practitioners in relation to research practice were felt to have some standing. This reinforced our need to understand the different research contexts in order to appreciate the types of tensions which can create conflicts in research partnerships.

Session 2: Contextualising the seminar series and the evolution of universities and INGOs as research partners

Partnerships between academics and NGOs have existed for decades, but in recent years, changes in both sectors have fuelled new incentives to collaborate. While both NGO and academic participants are aware of agendas and expectations in their own sector, they have had less exposure to each other’s. So before critically engaging with the issues of evidence and participation it was important to share some of the history and changes in each sector, to appreciate some of the drivers, constraints, opportunities and challenges faced by each.
Motivations for participation

Sometimes you start a process and it flies, other times it flops. In developing ‘Rethinking Research Partnerships’ we weren’t sure which category this process would fit into, but have been overwhelmed by how quickly it took off! It was very easy to involve participants, from the academic and NGO sectors, in the emerging thought process around the series. During the bid application we had extensive comments from many of the series participants - people gave up their time (on top of very busy workloads) to contribute to the emerging framing, content and format for the seminar series. Equally surprising and helpful, was the response we had to the pre-workshop survey - with 45 respondents, including people not even able to participate in the workshop taking time to complete. There were a range of reasons given by participants for their interest, including:

- To improve their current practice in research partnerships and to better understand, conceptually, the issues surrounding evidence and participation as they relate to research partnerships.
- To build capacity (in their organisations, teams and with students);
- To develop authoritative outputs and resources that might be shared at high-levels;
- To create a space for dialogue, critical reflection and learning from different sectors;
- To mobilize a common project.

(for more information on motivations and expectations see Appendix II)

As we discussed and discovered over the course of the day, research partnerships take various forms, and emerge in response to a range of motivations and expectations. We contextualized the series through three presentations – the first was a conversation between Jude Fransman and Kate Newman, the co-founders of the series.

Kate and Jude discussed how their meeting, evolving ideas and developing relationship was partly serendipitous, partly due to a set of shared histories, experiences, politics and understandings and partly due to the different agendas and capacities of the two types of institution they came to work for (Kate for Christian Aid, and Jude at the Open University). The process of establishing and building a partnership was mirrored by others who shared their insights and experiences later in the day. In fact the key challenges Kate and Jude faced during the ESRC funding application process also resonated with participants. The ESRC application process can be characterized as demanding and intense – it included five different types of documentation and letters of support from participants, and all had to be collated within a month. In pulling together the application, Jude and Kate struggled with: the differing amounts of professional time allocated to the application process by each of their organisations; tensions between jargons and ways of conceptualizing and communicating the series; and unequal entitlements to resources and editorial access within the application system. The experience of jointly applying for funding had the potential to challenge and undermine the partnership, but given their strong mutual belief in the benefit of the work, and their personal relationship they were able to negotiate the complexities and adjust expectations in their work together. See blog post for further reflection on this.

In the next part of the session, Sarah Mistry from BOND (the UK membership body for NGOs working in International Development)
and Paul Manners from the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (a body set up to support and encourage universities to engage with non-academics to increase the impact of their work) outlined the changing natures of the two sectors in a bid to explain the increasing emphasis on university-IGO partnerships.

First, Sarah took us back to the 18th century to show how ‘international action’ evolved through the work of religious orders, missionary groups and scientific societies into the ‘modern NGO’. The term NGO covers a wide range of organization both in terms of size and scale, but also in relation to their focus and approaches to development – with many organization now both delivering social services and participating in a range of advocacy initiatives. Over the past 30 years the sector has become increasingly professionalized, and the turn of century brought a greater focus on management, performance monitoring and impact measurement. NGOs are now under increasing pressure to show ‘what works’, to produce evidence of the changes their work is making, to identify measurable outcomes at the start of their programme and monitor and evaluate success against these outcomes, to employ research methods in programme design and collect and analyse data throughout implementation. This expectation has various drivers including the professionalization of the sector, the introduction of the millennium development goals as targets of development (leading to a technical understanding of development), an increased participation of NGOs in a range of large scale social service delivery processes, and the rise of an interest in ‘evidence-based policy’ which encouraged NGOs to participate in piloting alternative ways of service delivery and using ‘evidence’ in advocacy and policy influencing work. But equally noteworthy in understanding a focus on evidence in the NGO sector is the response to an increasingly skeptical UK public, who have become doubtful of the benefit of development aid, and to donor attitudes that require ‘proof’ that NGOs are successful in their initiatives. This has led to an increasing focus by NGOs on data analysis and evidence generation, and a recognition that partnerships with academics not only bring insight into the programme design and learning, but can also enable a higher standard of rigour (both actual and perceived) in the evidence produced at the turn of the century (link to Sarah’s presentation)
Paul then introduced a more recent timeline originating at the start of the 21st century to show how universities have responded to accusations of being irrelevant, out of touch, secretive and untrustworthy with a new agenda for ‘impact’ and ‘public engagement’ based on: social responsibility; relevance; trust; and accountability. Highlighting the joint statement on impact by the UK’s key Higher Education and research funders (HEFCE, RCUK and UUK) he showed how the agenda has moved from a focus on better communication of research outputs to better involvement of research beneficiaries and mediators within research processes (e.g. from ‘knowledge transfer’ to ‘knowledge mobilisation’ and ‘co-production’). After highlighting some of the challenges to this agenda, Paul concluded by highlighting the work of the NCCPE as a broker organization which supports research collaborations between academics and practitioners. (Link to Paul’s presentation).

From their different starting points, the two presentations identified many sector-based drivers for increased collaboration in research which frame a range of motivations and expectations in partnerships. However, the clear interest from both sectors in developing partnerships does not mean that partnerships are straight-forward, or that there is shared understanding of what the evidence produced in these partnerships might or should look like. This was the topic of the next session.

Key discussion points responding to the contextual introduction

Participants queried the relationship between research and teaching, and the role of students in evidence production/bridging the gap between practitioners and researchers. They pointed out that while research and teaching is currently funded separately and learning in the different areas is not systematically linked, many students are teaching their lecturers more than any research project does.

The vital issue of researchers in the global south was also raised. How are they included in international development? Is there space for researchers and research in southern academic institutions, or are these bodies just there for teaching and tokenistic participation in northern-led academic initiatives? Linked to this, it was pointed out that in the global south it is often the NGOs that have the research capacities, not the universities, so perhaps a question of who is supporting who, and where the research capacity should lie.

Participants also addressed the idea of a code of conduct to formalise accountability between academics and practitioners, focused on building trust. Attention was drawn to a good example of this from the ‘Connected Communities’ programme (funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council).

Finally, a distinction was drawn between larger INGOs with greater research capacity and smaller INGOs with both less capacity and less opportunity to link/partner with academics. Participants asked how to ensure these organisations are able to access knowledge, establish partnerships and participate in initiatives.
SESSION 3: Evidence Landscapes

In the NGO sector, as shown above, the language of ‘evidence’ has become commonplace. Similarly, academic research is increasingly meant to support evidence-informed policy and practice. But what do we really mean by ‘evidence’ – where and how is it produced and collected? Who controls it, how is it valued and accessed, who defines what good evidence is? And what should good evidence look like?

Given that a major focus of the seminar series is to understand more about the types of evidence that are valued in and produced through partnerships (and what this means for how evidence in development is understood and used more broadly) it was important to spend some time reflecting on what we understand by ‘evidence’, and the different motivations, expectations and uses of evidence.

The initial framing of the research series suggested three key factors that can impact on how evidence is shaped in and through university-NGO partnerships: first, the levels of confidence and understanding that the different actors have in relation to evidence; second, the institutional drivers for evidence; and third, the actual tools and methods used to collect, produce and communicate evidence. For this session it was important to appreciate the different ways NGO staff and academics engage with evidence so we divided into small sector based groups to unpack the questions further, using the analogy of a tree to guide our discussions.

Box 1 The Evidence Tree exercise

**Describing the ‘evidence tree’?**

A tree has roots, a trunk, branches and leaves/fruit and exists in a climate, often alongside other trees. By using this analogy we asked groups to consider the following:

*Roots (rationale for evidence):*

- Agendas (incentives and motivations) that drive the production of evidence
- Values/principles/politics that frame production of evidence

*Trunk (processes of evidence production):*

- Process by which evidence is collected (methods, principles and ethics)
- Resources that support collection of evidence

*Branches/fruit (evidence outputs):*

- Forms that the evidence takes
- How is evidence disseminated
- ‘Reach/influence’ of evidence
Groups thought about these issues in relation to the sector that they were working within (NGOs, academics, brokers – with further division between broad based development NGOs and health NGOs) and identified key issues to design their tree. They were also asked to consider and visualize the environment in which the tree exists - the national and international policy and funding climate that influences how the tree grows - (for example as positive weather, or major risks, such as pests or soil quality).

The aim of using the tree analogy was to get participants to think critically about the types of evidence we value and work with, what makes this evidence valuable and useful to us in our specific institutions, and how this evidence is produced and used.

The group discussions were extremely animated and produced a diversity of trees, which both looked quite different and highlighted different issues. For example, while the NGO trees tended to be littered with post-it notes, identifying concrete uses and forms of evidence, the academic trees tended to be written directly onto the paper, more concerned with the conceptual form of the tree and based on analytical statements about the nature and politics of evidence.
The plenary discussion focused on looking across the trees, asking whether it was possible for them to grow together to form a forest, or would they steal each other's light? We spent some time reflecting on the exercise, and some of the participants challenged the premise of the question – suggesting that rather than ‘evidence’ we should be focused on intelligence, knowledge or data. For some, this distinction was key. For others, and especially those working for INGOs, this challenge to the question was a distraction from the reality they existed in, where they were expected to meet multiple demands for evidence.

Participants shared reflections on:

1. the extent to whether the trees could co-exist together, or how the environments interact, and the trees grow (or become diseased!).
2. observed tensions within the different trees, where the connections or micro-climates might occur? What is restricting current practice, what assumptions are influencing our trees/the way we have developed these trees?
3. how the trees help us answer the question: ‘what does good evidence look like?’ Is good evidence different for different sectors, and if so, how? What implications might this have for partnerships?
4. whether the trees could come together and form a forest – what might good evidence look like in our forest?

Although we didn’t reach any clear consensus on these questions, they provided space for individual reflection. One key observation was that although the roots of the trees differed extensively across and between the different trees, many of the branches/ fruits were similar. This raised a question of whether it mattered that the roots were so different, or how we could better understand each other’s roots, which led us on nicely to the next session.

Evaluation comments: best thing about the day:

- The evidence tree helped us visualize how different groups perceive evidence and got us to the point of defining evidence
- Tree discussion was useful for structuring discussions and drawing cross-comparisons

NGO participant reflection:

We eyed each other’s trees, trying to guess which was an NGO tree and which was an academic tree, and it wasn’t all that difficult. NGO trees were splattered with post it notes and doubt, the academic trees were much more, and I hesitate to use the word theoretical - but find it best describes one of the trees that was a model of how things work, complex and interlinked, but with a clear direction and rationale.
SESSION 4: Dynamics of Participation

In addition to being critical about the nature of evidence valued in and produced through research partnerships, it is also important to understand the dynamics of participation itself. The presentations in the morning had identified clear ‘instrumental’ reasons why these research partnerships occur. At a very basic level NGOs need research institutes to ensure that their ‘evidence’ is perceived as rigorous and trustworthy. Academic institutions need NGOs to gain access to field data, and to enhance the impact of their research. However, the driver for the seminar series, and a key motivation for many of the participants was to move beyond this instrumental idea of partnership, and focus on partnerships that are transformative, that achieve more than the sum of their parts. But what are the prerequisites for this to occur?

This session began with people working in groups, each led by the participants in one of the research partnership case studies being explored through the series. These participants kicked off the conversation by reflecting on their partnership experience (focusing on what made it work well, why and how). The groups were then asked to complete the following table – identifying criteria for effective partnerships and then deepening the discussion to look at how these criteria might be brought about – and what obstacles might restrict this. The group-based reflections were then shared on cards and the responses were clustered in a plenary session – summarized in the Table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are the top 3 criteria for effective partnership?</th>
<th>How does effective participation in partnership take place?</th>
<th>What are the obstacles to better practice (more effective participation)?</th>
<th>What can we do to overcome these obstacles?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Flexibility</td>
<td>Upfront relationship building</td>
<td>Power Relations (resources, ownership, status, methodologies, contextual knowledge)</td>
<td>Long-term relationships (beyond funded partnerships) Mutual respect Sharing experiences beyond the funded partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Willingness to compromise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being open to go with things you didn’t predict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evolving and serendipitous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shared understanding (politics and values)</td>
<td>Agreeing scope and expectations</td>
<td>Lack of time/resources for a learning process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shared interests (not just outputs)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Failure to appreciate role of other partner Where/how to find partners</td>
<td>Influencing funders to recognise that there are issues in the partnership they are funding Advocacy (to funders) for a long inception period – see this as an investment not a cost – to build understanding and define partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a broker</td>
<td>Early funding (i.e. early on in the)</td>
<td>Differing time commitments/time frames</td>
<td>Brokering role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes:
- **Having a broker**
  - Early funding (i.e. early on in the partnership)
In the plenary, participants looked across these clusters to explore the connections between the four headings. Two issues that were consistently highlighted as imported were: firstly, the role of brokers in successfully mediating partnerships (and the ways that this might be recognized and formalized within institutions); and secondly, the appeal of sustainable and established partnerships (which are not solely tied to specific projects and time-bound funding but extend to longer-term commitment by institutions and individuals).

Participants were then invited to indicate which of these ‘criteria’ they felt they had the most power to act on (as individuals in their current institutional roles). Six areas in particular received the most ‘votes’ (see Box below)

**Box 2 Criteria participants have most control to act on as individuals**

1. Upfront relationship-building and advocating for a long inception period (to build understanding and trust, define roles and focus on long-term investment rather than short-term costs)
2. Ensure a flexible process (grounded in a commitment to dialogue and learning)
3. Ensure that brokering is recognized and formalized as a key role
4. Share experience and learning beyond individual research partnerships (and facilitate this through development of ‘good practice’ checklists and practical tools)
5. Invest in partnerships beyond short-term funding
6. Influence funders to recognize these criteria in their funding structures

A key reflection from the plenary discussion was the difficulty of capturing the depth and nuance in these partnership discussions. As soon as the criteria were
identified as a few words on a post-it they lost their meaning. Moreover, the criteria could have applied to any partnership – whether or not it was between an academic and an NGO practitioner, and whether or not it was concerned with producing evidence. The participants agreed that only by linking the discussion of partnership criteria, with the earlier discussion on the drivers for and nature of evidence would we start to really understand the politics of participation in these partnerships, and, in turn, what these politics might mean for how evidence is understood, valued produced and used.

SESSION 5: Moving forward

A first step in transforming research partnerships involves understanding how we as individuals can affect change within our own practice and in the ways that our institutions enable and support partnerships. However, there is only so much that we can do as individuals. The final session considered how we might draw on the collective learning of the day and our emerging network to affect change in three ways: firstly, by using the discussions to help frame the remainder of the seminar series; secondly, through the support of key brokering organisations; and thirdly, through our broader network and related initiatives.

The session began by exploring how the subsequent seminars in the series might draw on the day's discussions around evidence and participation to frame analysis of the eight partnership case studies. We examined two possible ways of bringing together the two topics. The first framework (see Box on the left) was developed for the funding application process and helps us to think about how both evidence and participation in research partnerships are influenced by three factors: institutions, research practices or 'literacies', and artefacts. Participants reflected on this framework and discussed how it might be expanded to account for issues of context and power (running across all three areas of the framework) and agency (including our personal histories, accounts and reflection).

The second framework focuses on levels of transformation and helps us to think about how the relationship between evidence and participation in partnerships firstly, is influenced by the various structures/processes/agendas/practices at these different levels and secondly, can be transformed through changes in structures/processes/agendas/practices at these different levels (see Diagram below).
A third framework (see Appendix III) has been developed following feedback from the seminar and ongoing discussions and attempts to incorporate the additional input from participants.

Key to affecting change at levels beyond ourselves and our own organisations are the relevant ‘broker’ organisations who bring together networks and play crucial mediating roles between specific sectors, funders and policy-makers. Several of these organisations have already committed to supporting the seminar series by participating in events, sharing resources across their networks and developing resources which respond to the outcomes of our discussions. As well as BOND and NCCPE (see Session 1) these include the London International Development Centre (LIDC) which matches up partners with five of the London university colleges: Birkbeck, UCL Institute of Education, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Royal Veterinary College, SOAS, University of London. For London-based readers, their ‘open-mic night’ is an opportunity for researchers and donors to meet for networking. Similarly, ELHRA provides resources including a research matching platform to connect practitioners with researchers for effective humanitarian programming. And finally, the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) supports INGOs to build capacity through research and training and has created resources on INGO’s generation and use of evidence and on collaboration between researchers and practitioners.

In the final discussion of the day, participants were asked about other ways that they might contribute to the seminar series or help link the series to other relevant ongoing initiatives. As well as a general interest in contributing to the project’s website through organizational or individual blog posts, other ideas included establishing smaller ‘working groups’ on various themes related to the seminar series. One of these would focus on the experience of PhD students as ‘hybrid’ academic-practitioners who inhabit both sectors simultaneously and so offer a unique insight into the relationship between the two worlds. Another might explore the relationship between research and teaching/learning. And a third might focus on the specific role of brokers – particularly within INGOs. It is hoped that these working groups would operate in dialogue with the ongoing seminar series.

**EVALUATION**

Feedback from the participants was overwhelmingly positive, both appreciating the ‘relaxed and informal/conversational process’ as well as the thought-provoking content. According to participants, this provided space for reflection on evidence and partnership, in addition to encouraging honest sharing, insights from practice and critical engagement with many of the issues and terminology we were discussing. The introductory section where we explored our own

![Diagram 1 Levels of Influence in Partnerships](image)
research identities, and the ‘evidence tree’ exercise where we focused on drivers and uses of evidence were particularly popular. Many participants also stressed how interesting it was to get a better sense of the preoccupations of the ‘other’ sector – facing both similar and distinct challenges to their own. Other positive comments focused on the nature of the group (with its rich diversity of backgrounds and experiences and the lively discussions generated) and the general enthusiasm around working together to develop a communal project and network.

However, there was also some critique and questions about whether as a group we were critical enough: did we really engage properly with questions of power, or go far enough in exploring differences between academic and NGO approaches to research; or in unpacking of ‘roles and responsibilities’ in partnerships? There was also a slight frustration that we didn’t spend longer sharing the concrete experiences of the partnerships that will form the basis of the rest of the seminar series – in the planning of the day, a ‘market-place’ exercise had been included to give participants a chance to hear more about the partnership case-studies. Unfortunately, sessions over-ran, and time was limited so that the market place session was squeezed.

One very positive aspect of the more critical comments was the recurring observation that there was simply not enough time to do justice to the wealth of issues raised in each of the sessions. We are very fortunate to have the remainder of the series to continue to explore these issues with a view to informing useful resources that might ultimately influence practice. We very much hope that all of those who contributed to this first context-setting seminar (either by attending in person or by contributing to our survey and/or website resources) will join us on this journey.

**Insight into issues**
- Importance of relationship-building for good collaboration
- The importance of management of research projects
- The role of ‘brokers’ (and realizing I can contribute to this)
- Importance of the ‘broker’ role
- Brokering is the new cool!
- The need for research partnerships to be based on more than funding alone
- I will take away with me an impetus to establish longer-term relationships/partnerships outside of a particular funded project
- Dissemination and access to research findings still not being discussed much – and it should be!
- Opportunity to use academic-NGO partnership to deal with complexity (as opposed to well-defined end objectives)
- Thinking about systems and ‘partnership polygamy’
APPENDIX I: Participant List: Context-Setting Seminar

Kate Bingley (Christian Aid)
Danny Burns (Institute of Development Studies)
Ann Canavan (International Medical Corps, US)
Christian Carlbaum (SIPU, Sweden)
Kate Carroll (ActionAid International)
Andrew Clenaghan (Practical Action)
Chik Collins (University of the West of Scotland)
Flora Cornish (London School of Economics)
Catriona Dejean (Tearfund)
Nimesh Dhungana (London School of Economics)
Rachel Eager (Save the Children)
Jude Fransman (Open University)
Alex Frediani (UCL)
Rachel Hayman (International NGO Training and Research Centre)
Jade Vu Henry (UCL Institute of Education)
Jo Heslop (UCL Institute of Education)
Jon Hopkins (International Planned Parenthood Federation)
Shelly Makleff (International Planned Parenthood Federation, Netherlands)
Paul Manners (National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement)
Sam Mardell (London International Development Centre)
Susannah Mayhew (London School of Health and Tropical Medicine)
Alison McKinley (International Planned Parenthood Federation)
Sarah Mistry (BOND)
Cristian Montenegro (London School of Economics)
Lucy Morris (EveryChild)
Helen Murray (Open Society Institute)
Kate Newman (Christian Aid)
Amy North (UCL Institute of Education)
Olivia Nuccio (Marie Stopes International)
Andy Pask (Cord)
Jethro Pettit (Institute of Development Studies)
Amelia Reese-Masterson (International Medical Corps)
Jill Russell (International HIV/AIDS Alliance)
Cathy Shutt (Institute of Development Studies)
Erla Thrandardottir (City University, London)
Katie Turner (Voluntary Service Oversees)
Elaine Unterhalter (UCL Institute of Education)
Julian Walker (UCL)
Helen Yanacopulos (Open University)
APPENDIX II: SURVEY ANALYSIS – thematic clusters

Q.1-3 (Identifiers – name/job title/organisation)

Q.4 Identity labels
- Diverse range of academics (15)/practitioners (15)/brokers (9)/funders (2) plus Other – evaluation manager/activist/student/learning facilitator/researcher-practitioner/pracademic
- Overlapping/fragmented identity-categories

Q.5 (Diverse range of development sectors)

Q.6 (Diverse range of evidence generated/used)

Q.7 Most valuable types of evidence
Interviews/focus groups (47)
Evaluation reports (38)
Academic research (33)
Personal testimony/direct experience/observation (17)
Policy Briefs (16)
Statistical databases (15)
Systematic reviews (9)
Collaborative Action Research (8)
Newsletters/bulletins (4)
Public archives (3)
Visual data (2)
Media articles (2)
Research resources – supporting methodology (1)
Workshop documentation (1)

Q.8 Least useful types of evidence
Statistical databases
- messy/unreliable
- reductionist/miss nuance
- decontextualized/depoliticized
- obscure voices /
- inaccessible without advanced skills
- (but useful as ‘background data’)

Personal testimony/anecdote
- not seen as legitimate/rigorous
- needs additional research to back-up
- less useful to central offices though can provide ‘powerful stories’

Public archives
- takes time to access
- no ‘quality control’
- less relevant to contemporary research

Media articles
• developed for other purposes (different agenda) so not research
• “fiction agents” / biased
• over-simplistic
• (though may help to identify emerging issues)

Academic research
• can be detached from practice and over-theoretical
• lack of time to read lengthy articles
• inaccessible

Evaluation
• makes grand claims/ too much focus on the positive (fundraising agendas)
• not generalizable
• often lack rigour
• Is this research???

Newsletters/bulletins
• not research
• “too slick”
• but can provide helpful links to other resources

Visual data
• not compatible with report format

Interview/FG
• no capacity (“time and academic skill”) to collect/analyse

GENERAL COMMENTS:
• Need for triangulation across different sources of evidence
• Type of evidence will depend on nature of task

Q.9 Good participation in partnerships

Common goals/understandings
• clear/shared understandings of terms/language/ideas
• clear/shared/tangible agenda
• shared politics/values
• clear/shared understanding of roles/responsibilities

Explicit participatory process :
• commitment to co-production
• shared credit for partnership’s accomplishments
• shared ownership of branding and outputs
• good communication
• critical reflection throughout
• explicit recognition of power dynamics
• openness to learning
• willingness to admit mistakes/compromise

Good relations
• Trust
• Respect
• Honesty
• Face-to-face contact
• Understanding of different institutional constraints on both sides

Commitment
• Interest and enthusiasm on both sides
• Time to commit
• Adequate (and equitable) funding
• Delivering on objectives
• Institutional support so that the work is valued

Appropriate skills
• Professionalism
• good management/planning/experienced coordinator
• appropriate research skills

A learning/training/capacity-building component

**Q.10 Challenges to participation in partnerships**

Conflicting goals/understandings/languages/values

Poor communication/relations
• lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities
• insufficient/irregular/unstructured communication
• failure to re-think
• bad relations/mistrust

Power imbalances
• hierarchies of ‘expertise’
• unequal ownership of partnership
• tokenistic partner involvement (e.g. invitations to potential Southern partners after project has started)

Lack of commitment
• lack of enthusiasm
• lack of time to commit

Logistics
• conflicting time-scales
• different institutional capacities/infrastructures (e.g. internet)
• different time zones
• inadequate funding

Rigid funding requirements
• outputs preempting research design
• partnership based on opportunistic funding rather than genuine need
• Inequitable allocation of resources
• Micro-management by funders/donors
• ‘consultancy culture’ or ‘subcontracting’ types of partnerships favour alienated/individual ways of working and focus more on deliverables than process
Lack of skills/capacity
- Unqualified/underperforming partners
- lack of research capacity/skills/rigour
- bad management/poor planning

Q.11 Assumptions/stereotypes about research partnerships to unpack

Labels
- the terms ‘academics’ and ‘practitioners’ (and policy makers) are meaningful (clear, homogenous etc.)

Skills/knowledge
- Practitioners can’t be researchers (don’t have research skills/knowledge)
- NGOs provide the data and universities the theory – or NGOs provide the populations under study and academics provide the brains.
- Academics can solve NGOs problems surrounding evidence
- Practitioners respond to academic knowledge as if it is superior to their own, even if they have lots of experiential evidence that their knowledge is valid.
- Northern institutions have a stronger academic discipline than southern institutions

Theory/practice
- Theory is academic and abstract, it is separate from practice and does not emerge through or from practice (or underlie practice), it is an absolute.
- Academics down-play theory when working with NGOs
- Academic research is too theoretical to be useful

Language
- NGOs and academics speak different languages
- NGOs (and donors) simplify the research questions, whereas academics are more comfortable with complexity

Ways of working/relationships/personalities
- Academics are ego driven, NGO staff collaborative
- NGOs are closer to people on the ground, and understand local people and their context, whereas academics are distance and detached
- Academics are in the driving seat of these ‘research’ partnerships
- Academics are so slow, NGOs are just go go go

Agendas/values
- NGOs do research as a means to an end, whereas academics see research as open exploration or an end in itself.
- NGOs care about social change, academics only care about the research question
- Evaluation and research are distinct

Partnership
- That partnerships are always positive
- The differences in agenda, time-frames, motivations etc. are insurmountable

Q.12 Why are you interested in this seminar series?

Improving current practice
• identifying good practice/principles for partnership
• reflecting on previous practice
• learning from different perspectives (across organisations and sectors)

Conceptual interest in the topic
• unpacking hierarchies of knowledge/evidence regimes
• concern about what evidence is valued
• concern with misuses of evidence
• interest in dominance of Northern-led evidence
• interest in dynamics of participation
• interest in interdisciplinarity
• interest in the role of Higher Education in development

Interest in capacity building
• improving the organisation’s research portfolio
• identifying key research literacies/skills
• knowing where to invest research
• understanding different ways of disseminating (e.g. academic publication v policy brief)
• improving impact/civil-society engagement in Higher Education
• supporting students

Q.13 What are your expectations/hopes for this seminar series?

Better conceptual understanding of partnerships
• identifying challenges
• identifying markers of success
• identifying the full range of evidence its possible to produce
• understanding of role of partnership in wider debates around HE/impact

Mobilising a common project
• becoming part of a new network/community of interest
• feeling solidarity with others struggling with similar issues
• developing a collective response to common challenge

Dialogue
• Space for critical reflection
• Understanding expectations of other partners
• Learning from different sectors

Outputs
• developing a "how to" of partnership
• developing resources to share with policy-makers to inspire/focus attention and contribute to 'high level dialogue'
**APPENDIX III: New framework for understanding evidence and participation in research partnerships**

### TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS
*(Context and Purpose)*

- Rationale for partnership (influencing ‘measures of success’)
- Funding source(s) (influencing research outcomes)
- Duration (short-term or sustained)
- Scale
- Nature and locations of partner organizations and levels of involvement
- Position of partners within their organizations (institutional or individual buy-in)
- Accountability (to whom?)
- Emphasis on reflection/learning and room for formative evaluation to improve partnership itself as well as outcome

### INFLUENCES ON PARTICIPATION AND TYPES OF EVIDENCE VALUED IN PARTNERSHIPS
*(Power in Research Partnerships)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Artefacts</th>
<th>Accounts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Histories</td>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Tools/templates for generating evidence</td>
<td>Personal and institutional biographies of partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agendas</td>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Tools/templates for generating evidence</td>
<td>Values/ideologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structures and processes (e.g. around funding and careers)</td>
<td>Research capacity/literacies/skills</td>
<td>Texts for disseminating evidence</td>
<td>Emotive responses to partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values/ideologies</td>
<td>Methods and approaches (theory)</td>
<td>Technologies for supporting research design/implementation/communication</td>
<td>Individual and collaborative reflection on partnerships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Standards of validity/quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time-scales</td>
<td>Collective values and ideologies</td>
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### EFFECTS AND AFFECTS OF PARTNERSHIPS
*(Power through Research Partnerships)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Artefacts</th>
<th>Accounts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes to policy, structures and processes, values and ideologies, agendas and strategy</td>
<td>Changes to skills, language, literacies, methods and approaches and standards/norms</td>
<td>Changes to templates/texts/Technologies/techniques</td>
<td>Changes to sense of self as researcher, personal values and ideologies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>