



Research Technical Assistance Center

USAID DRIVE Convening: Planning for Research Utilization

Thursday, October 7, 2021

· 10:00 – 11:30am

Panelists:

- Ms. Rachael Jackson, Research Scientist, NORC at the University of Chicago; lessons learned from this approach
- Dr. Marlene Lee, Associate Vice President (International Programs), Population Reference Bureau (PRB); R2A methodology

Discussants (PIs):

- Dr. Sangeeta Chopra (Off-grid, clean energy cooling for affordable storage of perishables for bottom-of-the-pyramid farmers)
- Dr. Asri Adisasmitha (Scaling Up Quality Kangaroo Mother Care Practices in Indonesia)
- Dr. Caroline Jaraula (Baselining Persistent and Emerging Organic Contaminant Levels in Environmental and Engineered Systems (PEOPLES) for Healthy Philippines)
- Dr. Basant Giri (Mapping of pesticide residue and oocysts on vegetables and fruits using low-cost field based assays)

Moderator:

- Sutherland Miller III, Project Director, Research Technical Assistance Center (RTAC)

Panelists

- **Research to Action (R2A) discussion**
 - **Dr. Marlene Lee** on R2A approach:
 - Background: RTAC has provided research assistance/technical planning to 12 teams, across 11 countries: Morocco, Tunisia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Columbia, Cameroon, Brazil, Philippines, Mali, India, Nepal, and Indonesia. PRB's primary role is working with USAID, NORC, and in-country research teams to develop communication materials (fact sheets, policy briefs) and research to action (R2A) plans.
 - PRB approach to R2A: provide researchers with tools/knowledge to move their research findings/products to action/policy/administrative changes. The research team works with the RTAC team to recognize the opportunities and barriers regarding the uptake of research using techniques like stakeholder mapping, identifying most relevant stakeholders, and political economy analysis (PEA)- an approach for examining power dynamics in economic and social forces that influence development. Lastly, they develop a timeline for the R2A plan with the research team, which may depend on funding or policy/political benchmarks to which the research is particularly applicable.

- R2A workshop: this is a vehicle through which PRB, NORC and USAID, works with teams to develop a R2A plan by: guiding teams through development of a R2A plan, identifying action goals, identifying stakeholders, distilling key evidence-based messages/results, and selecting user-friendly formats for info dissemination.
 - R2A planning: PRB approach has 3 parts: (1) R2A workshop (interactive); (2) stakeholder interviews to verify what they think they know about stakeholders and fill in knowledge gaps; (3) R2A plan is drafted at end of the workshop and PRB works with researchers 3-4 weeks after to finalize plan (go over how USAID-supported research can have a meaningful uptake at local/regional/national/international levels, identifying critical data and data gaps, suggestions for dissemination of results, finding stakeholders and plans for engagement, and key messages for each stakeholder). Research plans are different across teams depending on the research topic, the capabilities of the teams, and the timeline. COVID has not impacted stakeholder availability. Plans are adaptable for the research teams and stakeholders.
- **Ms. Rachael Jackson** on Lessons Learned from the R2A approach:
- The R2A Plan TA Assessment had 3 goals:
 - Determine overall efficacy and efficiency of the TA process. How effective was each step of the process?
 - Determine the extent to which each R2A plan was implemented
 - Identify the perceived benefits/impacts of the R2A plan TA
 - About the assessment: NORC conducted key informational interviews from Jan-April 2021, with the first four TA recipient teams (interviews were limited to the first four because it takes time to implement these plans and see results). The interviewed groups developed their R2A plans 12-15 months prior to being interviewed.
 - Interviewed 5 types of stakeholders: (1) USAID staff who attended the R2A workshops, (2) PRB staff who facilitated the R2A workshops, (3) Research team members, (4) researcher collaborators, and (5) external stakeholders who were engaged in the R2A plans. Also reviewed progress reports that teams completed about 1yr after developing their R2A plans.

Between Jan-Apr 2021, we conducted 17 KIIs and reviewed progress reports for the first 4 R2A plan recipient teams

Stakeholder Type	# of Key Informants Contacted	# of Key Informants Interviewed
USAID	2	2
PRB	5	5
Research Team Members	10	8
Research Collaborators	2	1
External Stakeholders	6	1
Total	25	17

- Assessment takeaways: Overall, the research teams found the R2A plan TA process was effective and useful for improving stakeholder engagement and increasing R2A activities. Research teams found the workshop and stakeholder interviews were

beneficial and found this was a very effective way for PRB to share their experience translating knowledge to action. Workshops were most impactful when spread out over a long period of time, with fewer hours/day spent in the workshop to accommodate schedules. Research teams said they engaged with stakeholders more after the R2A workshop and developed better R2A attitudes. Two of the research teams said they secured stakeholder agreements to implement policy and program change as a result of their R2A activities.

- Challenges and barriers teams faced when trying to implement the R2A plans: COVID limited the ability of research teams to engage with stakeholders for travel reasons and because stakeholders were focused on COVID issues. COVID also took away funding that could have been used to implement recommendations. In some cases, COVID also interrupted supply chains and the research itself. Teams successfully adapted their plans, but not on the same timeline they originally envisioned. Plans did not adequately factor in research team's time; many stakeholders felt the R2A plans were overly ambitious and relied on researchers being able to dedicate a substantial amount of time to stakeholder engagement.
- Changes to make to the R2A TA:
 - As a result of the assessment findings, we developed 5 major recommendations: (1) better preparing research teams for the R2A workshops; (2) better prepare teams for plan implementation and think more realistically about timeline and goals; (3) continue providing TA beyond developing the plan and help address challenges/barriers as they occur; (4) scale up the R2A TA; (5) adjust policy/program change timeline expectations. Many of these have already been implemented in later R2A plans.
- **Panel remarks from research team principal investigators (PIs):**
 - **Dr. Asri Adisasmita:**
 - R2A plan: Goals included strengthening Kangaroo mother care in other hospitals outside of North Jakarta, specifically in East Jakarta. Previous research findings in North Jakarta resulted in better weight gain in small infants and shorter length of stay in the hospital. Previous research yielded adopting policies in the hospitals and in the community, as well as investment in hospital wards to be dedicated specifically to Kangaroo mother care. The team is hoping that they can facilitate these changes in East Jakarta as well.
 - Identifying stakeholders: They mapped stakeholders, identified key stakeholders and engaged with them. These stakeholders included the implementing partners at the hospitals, the district and provincial health offices, minister of health, and others.
 - Outcomes: They disseminated research findings with partners and did stakeholder interviews, but budget approval happened at a more superior provincial level. The team's goal was not included in the budget plan at the time, but they might have goals included in the budget two years after they had originally planned.
 - Overall, there was a lot of enthusiasm to use the research findings, but it was hard to get money to implement actionable changes. The superior of the

- implementing partners wanted to implement the research findings in other locations instead.
 - Lessons learned: Engage higher level stakeholders first, before going to the implementing partners.
- **Dr. Sangeeta Chopra:**
 - Outcomes:
 - Learned how to identify stakeholders and communicate with policymakers and farmers better. The research became more practical as a result. Some policymakers even came to see the research team's technology!
 - Received funding from another organization that was not included in the initial plan, but this was still good.
 - Challenges: COVID delayed start, but overall, the plan worked very well
- **Dr. Caroline Jaraula:**
 - Outcomes:
 - The experience helped lay a framework on how research ideas could be manifested into an actual solid action plan that could benefit stakeholders.
 - The training shifted the focus of utilization of this research to the stakeholders.
 - Communication skills opened more possibilities and connected the research team to different layers of society.
 - This training also helped to combine the research timeline with the RTAC timeline and encouraged them to reach out to stakeholders throughout the research project and afterwards.
 - Challenges: Work took place during monsoon season (meetings were cut), but things still fell into place. Also, resources were diverted due to pandemic and climate issues.
 - Key takeaways: Reaching out to stakeholders should happen throughout the duration of the research project, from start to end and afterwards.
- **Dr. Basant Giri:**
 - R2A workshop experience: Research during the workshop was focused on developing two technologies: (1) a paper-based analytical device to test pesticides in produce and (2) a smartphone microscope. The team learned how to identify appropriate stakeholders and funding and better communication. Talking to stakeholders was useful because they have unique insight for implementing the R2A plan that the team did not want to miss. If stakeholders are on-board, people are more on-board, so engagement helps with publicity of the research product. Communication is important for this team especially because when developing a research product, it is very important getting peoples' perception so that users will make use of it.
 - Challenges/takeaways: Team has not yet implemented their R2A plan but are still communicating with stakeholders for new agreements. Funding is a challenge because they rely on external funding at their research organization. In this case the R2A plan was developed after completion of the research project, but they wished they had developed the R2A plan earlier, while developing the project itself.

Q&A:

- **Questions**

- **Sutherland Miller III:** What was the response from stakeholders? Were they surprised/welcoming of the R2A approach?
 - **Dr. Sangeeta Chopra:** We have done this research for a long time but there was limited awareness. Once interviews were conducted, people started to pay attention and interest grew fast among farmers and policymakers. The profile of the research really rose, and this wasn't something the team did before.
 - **Dr. Basant Giri:** Most of the stakeholders approached were happy to see the research product and impressed with the value it brings. When asking them for funding, his team typically see a lot of hesitation but here it was lower and more commitment (to be confirmed in practice) was observed.
 - **Dr. Asri Adisasmita:** It was her first experience doing this R2A and approaching high-level stakeholders. They were happy in general, but at the same time in Jakarta they said that they don't have the budget right now. Approaching another district and going beyond the health office and talking to the mayor and the legislative team led to a decree by the mayor to facilitate funding.
 - **Dr. Marlene Lee:** A common theme is that it is important to think about R2A at the beginning of research planning to help identify stakeholders and ensure you are thinking about budgeting from the start of the project.
 - **Dr. Caroline Jaraula:** We had to decide if we should go to the national or local agency. The workshop helped guide that decision. RTAC and USAID provided contact people within the health field, which is outside of the network that her team has, as they are focused on environmental research. As part of engaging these people, new contacts and people to approach were identified. By the time the team got to the interview, they had solid connections and network
- **Sutherland Miller III:** Marlene, what are the takeaways for you?
 - **Dr. Marlene Lee:** The training helped research teams with communication, and now they are more comfortable speaking about their research and its potential impact across a range of stakeholders. She's not surprised that the R2A timeline remains a challenge; however, it seems that it is important to start this work on the front end to help with research planning. Otherwise, it might be more challenging to ensure the research is meeting stakeholder goals and it's easy to fall out of sync if policy priorities change or if research changes.
 - **Megan Miller:** The TA is an amazing value add, but resources and incentives needed are lacking. What she learned at USAID during this project and process is that it's difficult to implement. Academic institutions and systems tend to not focus on this as much as they could, and USAID as funder has a responsibility to help. Other fundings should also acknowledge this gap and aim to fill it, moving forward.
 - **Arkeisha Amissah-Arthur:** How to go about interactions with the private sector?
 - **Dr. Basant Giri:** Basant: In terms of private sector engagement, the paper test for pesticide residues is a good candidate. A strawberry producer showed interest in using it as part of bringing the fruits to the market. They're not a big company, so although they're interested, they cannot bring the funding to manufacture the tests. But it

- doesn't mean it's not worth engaging them. His team had a stakeholder dissemination event and that's how they identified some private sector options.
- **Marlene Lee:** Caroline, please discuss how your research team had to change their R2A approach based on the capabilities of stakeholders.
 - **Dr. Caroline Jaraula:** Her team's research found pharma residues in water. Capabilities in wastewater management in the Philippines are limited and so the research and discussions focused on sources. Then the approach used needs to be determined – penalties and fines, incentives, etc. Many key sources (manufacturers, hospitals) are already regulated on this, but the guidelines had missing pieces so the team suggested ways to adjust them in a fairly simple way. The USAID consultants working with the team played a key role on the health approach, as this was not her team's expertise.
 - **Sutherland Miller III:** What are some other ways to amplify the experience and lessons learned to other research teams?
 - **Dr. Marlene Lee:** Peer-to-peer coaching led by R2A research PIs
 - **Rachael Jackson:** Using the USAID Research Translation Toolkit.
 - Questions in the chat:
 - **Ann Green:** Just to confirm, is the TA provided by NORC? RTAC? PRB? Or all of the above?
 - **Marlene Lee:** PRB is the main implementer, under RTAC
 - **Varuni Dayaratna:** Small clarification. NORC is the prime for the RTAC contract. PRB, one of the RTAC core consortium members, led the R2A work. The internal R2A assessments, also conducted under RTAC, are led by NORC. So, a team effort!
 - **Ann Green:** Thanks for the clarification - so regarding the recommendation to expand TA that was referring to having further assistance from NORC during the implementation phase of the PRB R2A plan?
 - **Sutherland Miller III:** We are discussing the possibilities of how to further support research teams with USAID- stay tuned!
 - **Ann Green:** In terms of the dissemination of results, did folks typically budget for meetings/communication products with result summaries, or did they also budget for continued advocacy for policy change?
 - **Dr. Marlene Lee:** The approach to budgeting varied. Most teams did not do explicit budgets in the R2A planning. The teams did think about what resources they needed even if they did not put monetary values down.
 - **Katie Mark:** It has been valuable to hear the insights directly from the researchers. Has any thought been given to use those who have gone through the process to give advice to other researchers in the future?
 - **Dr. Marlene Lee:** Excellent idea. We are always careful about how much we ask of researchers. We suggest peer-to-peer coaching led by R2A research PIs.
 - **Rachael Jackson:** Using the USAID Research Translation Toolkit

Introducing the Research Translation Toolkit:

- This toolkit is an attempt to share the lessons learned and R2A techniques with other research teams.
- The toolkit is organized in 3 sections and is designed around the R2A process. It's made with the end user in mind. Each section guides researchers through a series of steps and each folder has worksheets and other support material (e.g., troubleshooting).
 - Section 1: communications- how to write a policy brief

- Section 2: stakeholder analysis- who and how to find them
- Section 3: research action plan- development of a plan to identify research translation goals