

Accountability Principles for Research Organisations

Final Technical Report – the journey

Michael Hammer, 22 February 2012

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2 Research goals and objectives

The **long term goal** of the Project is to contribute to a strengthening of accountability of policy oriented research organisations working in developing countries.

The project involved putting to the test and further refining a conceptual framework for the understanding of accountability in the context of policy relevant research¹ (which was developed in phase I of the project), the development of a structured resource with tools and sources enabling research organisations involved in such work to address their individual or shared accountability challenges, and engagement with the community of research and practice to raise awareness for, build credibility and disseminate the key findings of the research process.

The specified objectives of the project were:

1. To test and develop in collaboration with selected policy- and innovation-research organisations a shared understanding of accountability practices, and thereby to “crash-test” the principles through processes of practical implementation;
2. To provide a reference compendium that reinterprets as accountability mechanisms (in accordance with the principles) existing tools in relevant research fields – such as participatory action research, research ethics, research evaluation, advocacy evaluation, and network and partnership good practices;
3. To strengthen awareness of the issues raised by accountability of research and to contribute to the debate on the accountability of policy research institutes through the publication and dissemination of a comprehensive research report and parallel seminars and briefings.

3 Why investigate accountability in policy research?

Evidence is seen by most policy focused researchers and many political decision-makers as a critical element in the formulation and communication of public policy. As a consequence very significant amounts of money are allocated in many countries to research to inform the setting of public policy, including in relation to development aid. A few figures illustrate this: the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research spent US \$506 million in 2007 alone², in its research strategy released in April 2008,³ the UK Department for International Development doubled its commitment to research to £1 billion over five years, and by 2011 the World Bank dispose of 11 separate research programmes to inform its strategy setting, decisions on lending, policy advice and technical assistance⁴. Policy oriented research which is supported in this way does not only reflect a government’s or intergovernmental organisation’s substantive understanding of a certain challenge and pathways to address them, but also determines flows of public funds, progress on a range of other connected policy issues, and the shape and form of programmes that affect many peoples’ lives, often well beyond the immediately visible set of stakeholders. While compared to the budget

¹ ‘policy relevant research’ is used here in the sense of research that is conducted with the intent to inform public policy

² <http://www.cgiar.org/who/index.html>; accessed 28 August 2008.

³ <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/Research-Strategy-08.pdf> : accessed 28 August 2008

⁴ The World Bank, “2Projects: Non-Lending Activities”, accessed online on 7 June 2011

of development aid providing agencies the research budgets are small (for DfiD for instance only 3-4% of its annual budget⁵), their influence is thus large.

Organisations which are, as in house or external providers, tasked with generating policy relevant evidence, and based on it produce strategy and policy advice, can therefore have great impact on the citizens of an individual country or in fact many countries in the case of policies of influential global organisations. As a consequence they are coming under increasing scrutiny and pressure to demonstrate that also they as research organisations are accountable.

Yet the concepts of accountability, and the terminology used in the research community on this issue are as diverse as the subject matters they deal with, or the methods employed by researchers. In particular independent not for profit organisations making contributions to public policy through the provision of evidence find themselves pulled into many different directions as accountability demands are difficult to structure and balance, or are even outright contradictory.

While there have been great leaps forward in a number of areas linked to accountability – such as advances in participatory research methods, evaluation of research and community empowerment – the field lacked a unifying overview. This project sought to provide it through research into a common conceptual framework, and by offering a range of accessible and usable tools for research managers, researchers, and all those with interest in the findings such as policy makers, funders and beneficiaries, to structure the accountability relationships involved in the conduct of policy relevant research, from inception through strategy to uptake in a practical and productive way.

4 Phase I - Building an initial framework

The first phase of the project (APRO I, also funded by the IDRC) conducted research into the nature of accountability relationships, stakeholder expectations, and concepts used within the community of policy oriented researchers across the spectrum of independent not for profit, academic, for profit and government organisations involved in such work. It resulted in a conceptual framework of accountability in the context of public policy oriented research that stressed the holistic, process oriented, and multi-stakeholder nature of accountability challenges and what role accountability played in the different stages of a research process. In particular it addressed the impact of claims to public benefit, or more specific claims of benefit to particular constituencies on accountability demands that organisations and their researchers faced.

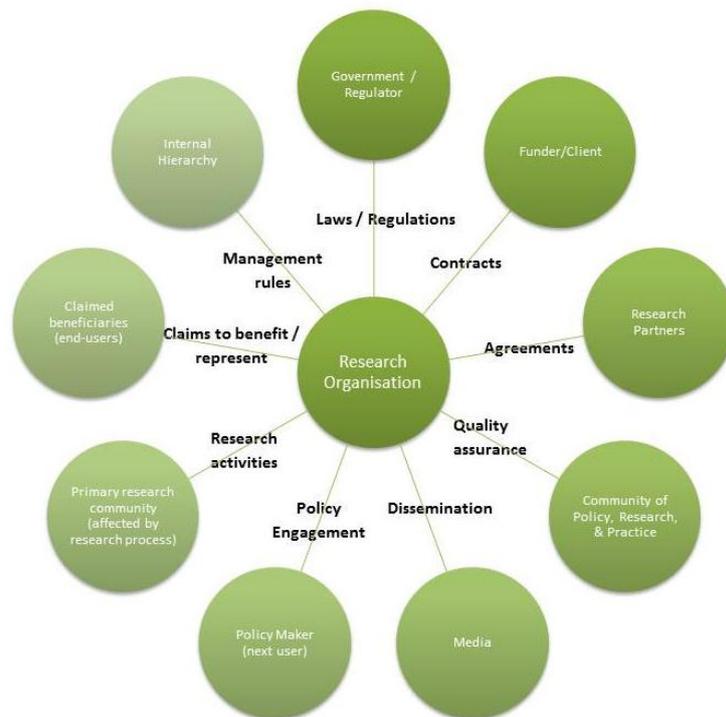
Independent not for profit research was identified as the sector that faced probably the most complex and in many ways contradictory accountability demands, while the drivers for research, the stakeholders, and the resulting accountability relationships for instance in for profit, but also governmental research organisations presented themselves as less complicated, albeit not necessarily weaker or easier to meet in terms of demands.

⁵ DfiD's annual budget for 2011 came to £6.7 billion, with an annual commitment of research investment of around £220 million.

A central challenge for independent not for profit research was thus identified as being the need to balance a multitude of different types of accountability demands and relationships which involve a range of 'harder' and softer' accountability pressures, i.e. uptake of research in policy processes might depend on quality of work, perceptions of legitimacy, acceptance of research methods and topics, as well as access to funding. For this type of research organisations the motivations for undertaking the research, the demands for accountability, and the resulting relationships with external and internal actors proved very much non-aligned with each other. In contrast, in the other types of organisations often single channel traditional patron/agent models of accountability prevailed, supported by a more limited number of drivers (i.e. for-profit research being driven by a monetary gain motive, and external and internal clients for the research work exercise often single and contractually determined accountability pressures). This effectively leads to a greater level of alignment between drivers/motivations, and relevant accountability relationships.

In both cases, mapping of stakeholders and understanding the relationships to them, and the key mechanism used to structure them proved to be a useful starting point for exploring the accountability challenges of organisations in their specific setting.

Figure 1: The 'wheel' of potential stakeholders of policy relevant research and the typical mechanisms used to structure accountability relationships



The figure depicts the different types of stakeholder groups, linked by lines which connect to the source of accountability demands, and the typical mechanisms or vehicle for realising accountability in the relationship. This chart can be interpreted in several different ways.

- First, the different accountability relationships involve different mechanisms: there are formal accountability obligations, set out in and enforceable through written documentation (contracts, laws/regulations, or mutual agreements), while others are more informal obligations arising from commonly observed ethical values, quality assurance through exposure to peer review and disclosure of methods, as well as uptake of findings by next users, such as policy makers.
- Second, the different mechanisms capture different level of power a stakeholder holds over the research organisation (or other stakeholders for that matter). In a variant on notions of “upwards” and “downwards” accountability to stakeholders, the more formally enforceable accountability is in a stakeholder relationship, the higher the stakeholder ranks in a vertical perspective. While the upward/downward terminology is laden with problems arising from

tacit acceptance of questionable hierarchies of stakeholders, it is also instructive as it reveals the role of power and hierarchy in the reality of accountability relationships, often in ways which are obscured or even deliberately reversed in the discourse on motivations and purposes of an organisation's work.

- Third, under the overarching 'accountability' descriptor for stakeholder relationships, those that rely on formal vehicles, such as contracts, could be described as involving 'discipline'⁶, while others are more a function of 'responsiveness' which is, as the research in phase II showed clearly, enacted in ways which are often very specific to the subject matter of the research, the community of research and practice involved, and the complexities of the research.
- Finally, faced with the above mentioned challenge of balancing different stakeholder relationships, research organisations can categorise the demands placed on them along normative and instrumental reasons. The first form expresses the normative or ethical reasons prompting accountability; the second way comprises the instrumental reasons or practical advantages that a research organisation may accrue if it implements the principles of accountability in its key decision-making processes. This way of looking at relationships reaches across all previous differentiations: some accountability demands are of high normative importance (such as abiding by research ethics framework with regards to beneficiary accountability to preserve credibility and legitimacy), but will not require or not be best operationalised with a formal mechanism. In turn, there are instrumental reasons to conform to funder requirements (showing oneself responsive to obtain repeat funding), but the main mechanism to satisfy the accountability demand takes a normative form, a contract.

The following table juxtaposes a normative and instrumental differentiation of the drivers for accountability in a stakeholder relationship, as well as a distinction between 'discipline' and 'responsiveness' to describe the nature of the relationship. The table shows that different perspectives on accountability demands and relationships interact and are for most not mutually exclusive.

Realising accountability in the context of policy relevant research therefore proves to be complex, and also, as mentioned above, highly dependent on the subject matter of the research, and the methodologies used.

Nevertheless, the research process revealed that in addition to an emerging consensus around the definition of common or recurrent stakeholder groups, and the options for multi-layered characterisation and operationalization of accountability relationships, a broad pattern of recurrent stages in policy relevant research processes was observed by most organisations. In most of these stages, research organisations used key techniques to structure accountability relationships.

⁶ In the 2008 report we used instead of 'discipline' the term of 'accountability' in a narrow sense, which eventually confuses as 'accountability' is the overarching descriptor.

Table 1: Drivers for and nature of accountability relationships by main stakeholder types

Stakeholder	Normative (discipline)	Instrumental (responsiveness)
Government / regulator	Legal rules, e.g. accountancy.	Legal sanctions, enforced by state apparatus.
Policy-makers; next-users	Researchers are accountable to the policy-maker (and particularly a public organisation) when they attempt to impact and influence the policy-maker's work.	For research to have an impact, and to ensure the utility and relevance of the research output, researchers must be responsive to the policy-makers, not to say "suplicants". Likewise, innovations should ensure they are tailored for the next-users (insofar as they are the target, rather than end-users), by involving them in the process.
Funder/ Client	The grant, consultancy or other contract creates obligations to the other contract party.	The possibility of repeat funding and the long-term sustainability of the project, programme or organisation urges continued interaction with funders and clients.
Research Partners	The contract or Memorandum of Understanding between partners is a voluntarily incurred source of accountability. Furthermore, local partners in particular are seen as proxies.	Partnerships are a means of harnessing the resources, expertise and knowledge. The disciplinary expertise or the methodological experience of other organisations, can help each to further mutual goals. Furthermore, a partner can give a researcher additional legitimacy, in terms of either academic expertise or local knowledge.
Academic/ policy community, network	None. While there can be an impact, that impact is as between equals, and therefore creates no special duties of accountability.	The impact of research is conditioned by causing the right intermediate impacts such as shaping the debate within an advocacy coalition or the wider policy community, there are strong pragmatic drives for all researchers to interact with the policy community. In the 'innovations system thinking', the responsiveness is determined by the need to harness the expertise within the wider system.
Claimed beneficiary; end-users	A claim to benefit a group (or, much more rarely, a claim to represent a group) incurs a duty to be accountable to the claimed beneficiary.	Links to claimed beneficiaries provide a source of legitimacy and credibility, particularly if the relationship is an ongoing one.
Primary research communities	The unilateral impact of research itself creates an obligation to provide basic opportunities for primary data communities to hold you to account.	The need for this is dependent on the discipline. Where factors such as research fatigue and the need for longitudinal research collection are present, research teams have pragmatic need to be accountable to their primary data community.
(Claimed) Beneficiaries (Policy Subjects/ Citizens)	Normally, none, although some may have greater impact than others. The nexus between research and a policy change is in most cases too abstract, remote and unpredictable to infer a duty between researcher and the "end user".	Increasingly, "policy subjects/citizens" are being accessed through participatory research not only to understand their values, but to harness the information that they possess. There are strong reasons linked to the desire for relevant research and legitimacy why a researcher might be responsive to the needs of specific policy-subjects and citizens.
Media		The media, as noted in the course of the online discussion, are important tools for communicating research, but are not in themselves beneficiaries. Their utility is strictly instrumental. However, they are also actors in their own rights, and must be convinced of the merits of the research.

We described the key elements of an accountable research process hence as shown in the textbox below.

The starting point for deepening the conceptual work on accountability principles for policy relevant research organisations therefore hinged on a set of pillars:

**Box 1: The initial accountability framework for policy research (2008)
focusing on work processes and cross cutting policy requirements**

1.1.1.1 Processes

1. Defining strategy
2. Defining programmatic structure
3. Forming partnerships, engaging in networks and coalitions
4. Identifying research projects
5. Planning research projects
6. Evaluating and learning
7. Conducting the research
8. Conducting advocacy and outreach
9. Empowering communities

1.1.1.2 Policies

- Information release
- Complaints handling

1. *Normative v. instrumental accountability:* The initial framework draws a distinction between two different forms of accountability: the first form expresses the normative or ethical reasons prompting accountability, and is supported by elements introducing discipline in terms of options for enforcement in a relationship; the second way comprises the instrumental reasons or practical advantages that a research organisation may accrue if it implements the principles of accountability in its key decision-making processes. Frequently the main means to realise such benefits is through the research organisation showing itself responsive to stakeholder demands (rather than being forced to meet them).
2. *Stakeholder theory:* stakeholders are the groups and organisations to whom accountability is owed. The number of key accountability stakeholders of a research organisation will depend on the degree of alignment of drivers / motivations for the research work on the one hand with the mechanisms used to structure the accountability relationships. The normative or instrumental perspective on types of accountability supports the prominent role given in the framework to the concept of 'claimed beneficiary' as a stakeholder: one on behalf of whom the organisation claims to be working.
3. *Decision-making stages in the research process* were identified which offer the opportunity for a research organisation to be accountable. These included formulating the strategy, identifying projects, etc. and were identified as being common to most research organisations.
4. *Accountability principles:* within each process, we proposed ways in which the key principles of accountability – participation, evaluation, transparency and complaints handling – could be applied to research organisations, in such a way as could overcome the challenges.
5. *Key challenges:* Lastly, we identified key challenges to accountability. These include both the difficult choices necessary when research managers have to balance different stakeholders' conflicting interests, and ensuring that across all stages in a research process the release of

information, and the handling of feedback (be it critical in form a complaints, or focused on improvement and learning) are realised as underlying 'key policies'.

5 Phase II – Refining the framework, challenging assumptions, and providing resources for change

The second phase of the project had the specific aim to take the conceptual work further by 'crash-testing' the first version, and to offer resources that would enable research organisations to begin a process of reflection, identify priorities and undertake reforms. Given the identified complexities of the accountability challenges facing independent not-for-profit research organisations in particular, it was decided to base the further framework development on their case as it would provide greatest explanatory value while capturing the greatest diversity of actors and circumstances. In addition, especially in many developing countries, such research organisations are also exposed to a range of external circumstances which are not conducive to their work such as limited funding, unfavourable or unhelpful regulatory environments, and difficult political climate in which their research activities and findings are not always seen as impartial or welcome contributions by governments or other political actors.

5.1 Key activities

The central steps for the second project phase included the following:

5.1.1 Partner identification and agreement of the basis for collaboration

In this first step we worked to identify a set of six collaborating research organisations from the independent not for profit sector working in a range of different countries, on different topics, with different ambitions, and at different organisational development stages.

The intention was to secure a partnership with these organisations that would allow an in-depth engagement through multiple workshops and collaborative working on arising research issues and documents. The model proposed to support this collaboration sought to draw on lessons learnt from other work by the One World Trust especially with civil society organisations which showed that especially small organisations would face time and budget constraints to participate in collaborative working exercises without funding to do so. In result a budget was set out for the project to provide an incentive to engage to a relevant degree in the proposed research work, and in some cases cover staff time and expenses to a larger degree.

Going back to the typology of organisations researched in phase 1 we decided to open up the selection process by placing advertisements in email circulars and websites, which address areas relevant to the accountability (EBPDN, Outcome Mapping, ECDPM and MandENews) as well as pursuing expressions of interest with organisations we worked with during phase 1, and from other research connections.

We were able to agree partnerships and conclude memoranda of understanding with six organisations. They included:

- the Center for Governance and Development (CGD), Nairobi / Kenya, a policy research and advocacy not-for-profit organization working to institutionalise democratic culture and promote democratic governance and sustainable development;

- the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC), Buenos Aires / Argentina, a private, non-profit organization that strives to create a more just, democratic, and efficient State in Argentina to improve the quality of life for all Argentine citizens;
- ForestAction, Kathmandu / Nepal, a non-governmental organisation in the field of natural resource management, environmental governance and livelihoods;
- Habitat for Humanity (Latin America and Caribbean) San Jose / Costa Rica and Recife, Brazil, a nongovernmental, non-profit organization which promotes community development through housing solutions, including through influencing policy;
- the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London /UK, an independent international research organisation, who specialise in linking local to global. In Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Central and South America, the Middle East and the Pacific, IIED work with some of the world's most vulnerable people to ensure they have a say in the policy arenas that most closely affect them — from village councils to international conventions; and
- the Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural (RIMISP) Santiago / Chile, a regional non-profit organization whose goal is to promote organizational learning and innovation in public and private policies, projects and programs, in ways that advance social inclusion, equity, well-being and vibrant democracies in Latin American rural societies.
- Co-Operation for Peace and Unity (CPAU), Kabul/Afghanistan seeks to facilitate the process of peacebuilding and sustainable development in Afghanistan through systematic and comprehensive capacity development and various programmatic interventions to create an enabling environment for Afghan communities in order for them to actively participate in the promotion of social justice, development and peacebuilding in Afghanistan.

Four of the above partners were new to the research process (HFH, FA, CIPECC, RIMISP), two were continuing from the previous phase (CGD and IIED), and one was engaged based on existing research contacts (CPAU). Unfortunately the collaboration with CPAU could not be carried forward because of the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan.

In order to continue to engage with the specific challenges that research organisations face in conflict / post-conflict situations, of which both Brendan Whitty and Michael Hammer had direct experience through their previous career paths and work at the One World Trust on governance in post conflict situations and international responses to conflict, it was decided to pursue this topic through additional research on issues of accountability and evaluation in and on violently divided societies. This yielded a presentation and paper at Derry / Northern Ireland in May 2011 (see Input into the research and policy discourse).

5.1.2 Building a congruent team of staff, collaborators and advisers

The project progress and success relied to a large extent on the creation of a solid bond between staff, collaborators and advisers, who as the research process showed would not necessarily agree on all issues but share a strong interest in the exploration and conceptualisation of accountability principles for policy oriented research organisations.

On the staff side

- Brendan Whitty worked on the project between 24th June 2007 – 30th June 2011. He was the main project researcher during that period, assisted by staff involved in NGO accountability work such as Robert Lloyd and Christina Laybourn for workshops and conceptual input.
- Michael Hammer, Executive Director of the One World Trust, acted as project lead, and took over as implementing researcher from 30th June 2011 for the final editorial and conceptual phase of the project.
- Reham Hassan and Jonathan Butcher worked on the database between December 2009 and July 2010, and Jonathan Butcher provided essential additional editorial research support between 14th April-1st August 2010.

Key individuals on the side of collaborating partners included

- Maria Luisa Zanelli, Lina Maria Obando (both in San Jose) and Socorro Leite (in Recife) from Habitat for Humanity, Latin America and the Caribbean;
- Julia d'Agostino from the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC) in Argentina.
- Kennedy Masime and Michael Otieno from CGD (Kenya),
- Mirwais Wardakh and Idrees Zaman from CPAU (Afghanistan),
- Naya Sharma Paudel from ForestAction (Nepal),
- and Roberto Iturralde from RIMISP (Chile).

The advisory panel for phase II of the project consisted of

- Goran Buldioski from the Open Society Institute Central and Eastern Europe
- Anabel Cruz from La Sociedad Civile, and over the project period also Chair of CIVICUS
- Harry Jones from the Overseas Development Institute's RAPID programme,
- Stella Ladi from Greek Ministry of the Interior and the International Centre for Black Sea Studies, and
- Peter Taylor from the IDRC's think tank initiative

5.1.3 Gathering evidence: the research workshops and consultations

Given the international and geographically very widespread basis of the community of policy research it was intended to make use of a range of channels to gather data and engage key audiences for the outcomes of the project at the same time. Broadly two main types of engagement were chosen:

In a first step two rounds of workshops, interviews and informal discussion sessions were organised with the collaborating research partners at their location to expose the draft framework (resulting from phase 1) to in-depth peer review and gain deeper insight in concepts of and approaches to accountability used in individual organisations, as well as experiences with practice and the individual challenges they face.

The workshops and on site consultations with the research organisations lasted between 3 and 5 days each time and took place for the first round in September to November 2009, and for the second round in June to August 2010. In particular the first workshop round was used to gather material for an informal assessment of the organisations using the APRO I framework.

The second round of workshops outcomes of this exercise were discussed in terms of where the framework approached produced meaningful results, and where further adaptation was necessary, or where partner experiences involved important challenges to the framework.

The results of the workshops were written up and shared for further commenting and input through the special consultation channels below.

In a second layer the intention was to convene special consultations such as online expert groups, surveying of expert opinions, and a seminar around critical accountability issues arising from the research process to address conceptual challenges as part for the final building of the framework.

The reality showed, however, that in particular maintaining online discussions across a disparate set of interlocutors proved difficult, partly due to language issues, but also due to pressures of day to day work on time needs for the engagement. In contrast, specialist workshops involving face to face interaction worked better, although even here support had to be offered to participants to enable them to join.

5.1.4 Research into accountability tools and sources / creating the database

From the workshops emerged a strong steer for the project to modify its original vision of producing a more or less 'static' compendium of tools and sources for accountability reform towards creating an accessible resource that would use the final framework as a structure allowing identification and providing detailed information on individual accountability tools and sources that were of practical value to research organisations to enable them to begin a process of reflection, identify priorities and undertake reforms.

Creating the database was therefore guided by several thoughts

- *Contextualise, structure and challenge:* the Accountability Tools for Policy Research database should add value by being a unique repository of innovative but also of well-known approaches and tools to accountability in research, but structured along a new conceptual framework that challenged researchers on established assumptions about their duties and ways to engage with others.
- *Support rather than exhort:* Its design should support, rather than dictate, gives ideas, rather than exhort. Not all the tools will be useful for all and should be easy to browse through and allows searches for a range of tools that we believe are relevant to policy-research accountability.
- *It should be practical:* The database should be useful to those working in and with policy-research organisations: It should guide and provide easy access to reference for the researchers and research managers themselves, as well as those supporting processes of organisational change within such organisations.
- *Ensuring best fit on the basis of best practice:* the challenge was to provide a resource that recognises the variety of organisations: some are convening organisations, some grassroots researchers, some academic, some knowledge brokers. Some trend more towards advocacy, others more towards academia. The tools offered, and the way the access to them is structured should point to best practice on accountability while allowing best fit of results for those who use the database.
- *Meet needs of a key target audience while helping others too:* research managers and policy researchers were targeted as the key audiences for this database. But in the same way that the database offers those who implement research a wide array of options and possibilities to

improve accountability at all stages of their work, the tools can also be used to address and explore particular questions that those who use or are affected by the research may wish to use to question the way the research was conducted. The database addresses itself therefore also at the community of users who interface with those involved in the research: donors and funders, policy makers, media, peers, regulators (including ethics boards), beneficiaries and others identified in the stakeholder map on page .

The process of gathering the data to populate the 'APRO database' as we called it began in parallel to the workshop process, and involved a review of 43 key development policy research and evaluation journals⁷ and a wide search on the web and additional mailing and contact work to key experts. It also received a boost from the input received in form of evidence of tools that were being used by partners, but also pointers and suggestions where to source more such accountability initiatives. The final load of work was completed in early autumn 2010, both generating the final framework structure, and a concept for implementing the database. Programming and populating the database took place in September with a formal launch in October 2010 on a special microsite at www.oneworldtrust.org/apro.

Key for the database design was to realise user friendliness by offering different visual and text based search functions and an entry portal that reflected the structure of the final accountability framework without requiring the user to go through a theoretical and technical course before beginning to browse. Reports and database were therefore kept separate.

The design phase involved both the painstaking commissioning, commenting and tweaking of draft designs and wireframes, as well as a number of creative killer sessions, one of which delivered both knock-out blows to all preceding designs and the final concept for the onion or rose-petal portal idea with little more resources than a few cups of tea, a flipchart, key staff in the office and no chairs.

Developing the search methods and classification criteria started from relatively detailed propositions, but building on previous One World Trust experiences with database design and management of data, clustered around three main categories: stakeholders, process and principles. A fourth category for presentation and browsing, by type of research (primary / secondary) was eventually rejected. While significantly used during the data collection phase, a submission of analysis option was eventually not created for the database, while a moderated submission form for tools and sources was set up to encourage external input.

Launched with an initial set of around 150 tools and connected sources in October 2010, the database has been gradually expanded over the life of the project and beyond. 15 months after its launch it currently gives access to a total of 383 annotated references to 219 specific tools, and an additional 164 conceptual resources enabling research organisations and the key next users of their work to inquire into their accountability capabilities and support reform.

5.1.5 Dissemination of findings

The main avenues for dissemination of findings of the project were eventually threefold:

- web-based, in form of the database, the main One World Trust website as well as newsletters and the One World Trust global governance blog to draw attention to new publications, which included 14 papers and reports, the database itself, and two external

⁷ For a full list please review the evaluation framework document

publications, as well as an online video seminar produced at the One World Trust coinciding with the launch of the Guide to framework and database in September 2011;

- specialist conferences were used to disseminate project findings, such as
 - How wide are the ripples? Participatory learning and action from local participation to international organisational learning, IIED, London, March 2010
 - Measuring impact and accountability, Berlin Civil Society Centre, Berlin, June 2011
 - International research and implications for ethics, authorship, data management, reporting – ESRC-DFID SAT Workshop, BIS, London, February 2012;
- and project based contacts to partner organisations and relevant research networks including a seminar on the question of participation and ownership as an accountability challenge for research organisation, organised in January 2011 at the IDS at Sussex University.

Attempts to connect through more or less continuing online forum and survey based engagement with the wider community of research and practice did not meet the expectations.

The video session was the first of its kind produced by the One World Trust and will require greater advertising to receive attention.

The evaluation section of this report details download and web access figures as well as reception in conference of the issues raised.

5.1.6 Development of organisational support capacity

In addition to making a tangible contribution to research in the field of work, and providing incentives for organisational accountability reform, the project, like all projects at the One World Trust, had an aim to build capacity in the team to support other research organisations, especially in developing countries on the basis of the experience and expertise acquired and the framework approach.

A key approach we used was the involvement of key staff members of the One World Trust in the research, either through occasional work n papers (such as accountability of advocacy organisations), or workshops and actual project implementation.

Today the staff base that had exposure to the project remains strong (Christina Laybourn, Michael Hammer, and Jonathan Butcher), and during different field trips associated with other projects such as to Cambodia in June 2011, Dakar in September 2011, options were explored with think tanks and research bodies for the provision of advisory and organisational development services. These will need to mature but form part of the business concept for the One World Trust as an organisation providing also consulting services.

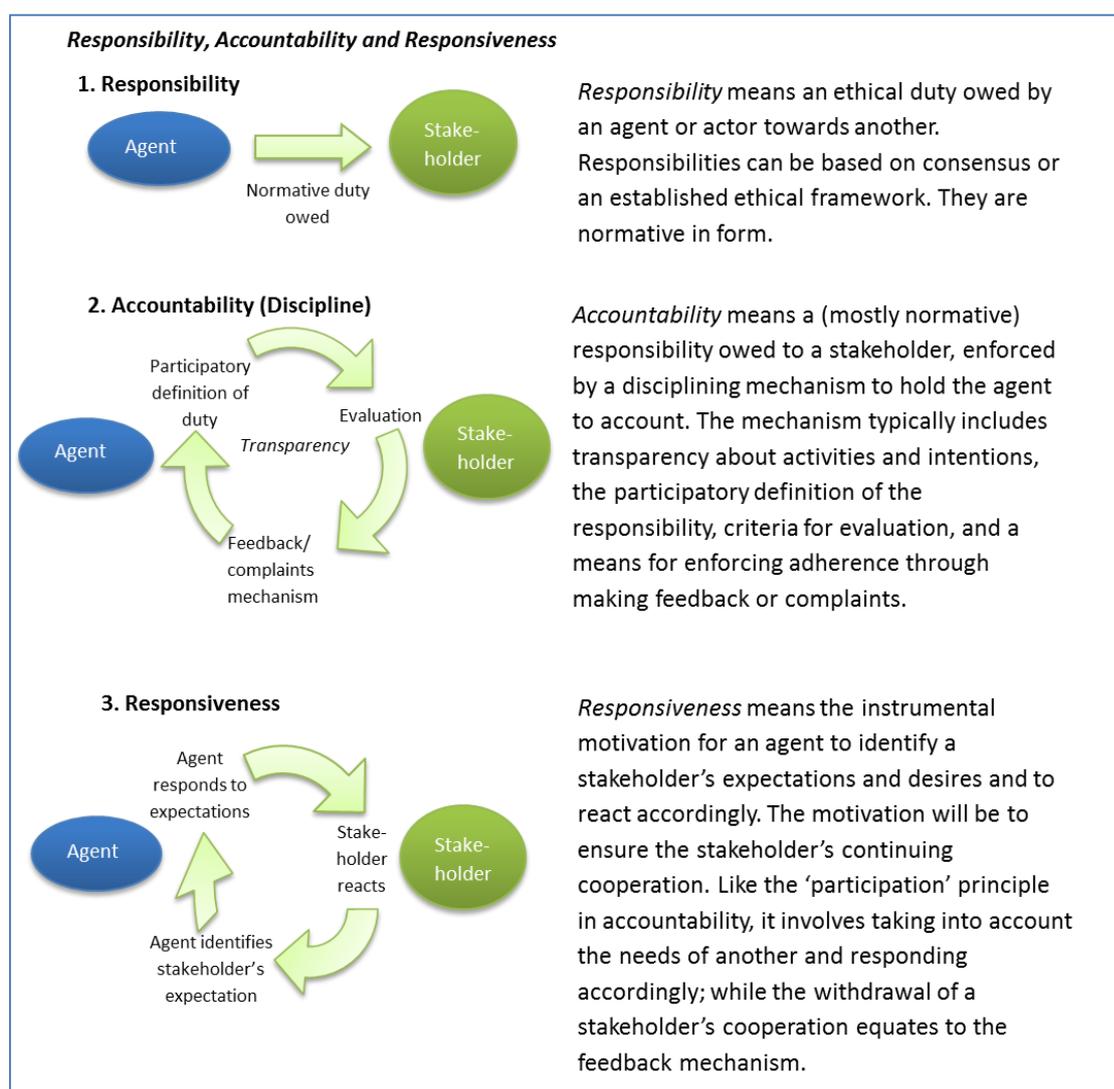
5.2 Key issues arising from the research

A key outcome of the workshops (individual organisational workshops and the seminar) was to capture the differentiated nature of accountability relationships that occur in policy oriented research. While broadly following the initially proposed distinction between normative and instrumental drivers, and the accordingly varying nature of the relationship (based on discipline and less formal incentives to be responsive), the research yielded a better insight into the cycles involved in the relationships, and terminology used at the various stages.

5.2.1 Accountability as a wide and narrow descriptor

First, it became apparent that the research community used a wide range of terminology to describe stakeholder relationships, alongside, or even to the exclusion of accountability as a key term. This was confirmed by a review of 43 key development policy research and evaluation journals where in articles pertaining to policy and research, or to research quality and evaluation research ethics featured as a key term 2175 times, while accountability, an issue largely raised in connection with non-governmental organisations, received just 537 mentions⁸. Figure 2 shows that while the term ‘accountability’ has certainly a place in the vocabulary of the research community to describe some of its relationships, most researchers felt more comfortable with other terms.

Figure 2: The challenge of terminology: responsibility, accountability, and responsiveness



Accountability, it showed itself, was more linked to stakeholder links where enforceable elements were present, even when representing more or less welcome constraints placed on them. While as influential, some more vaguely defined duties, such as arising from wider norms of ethics, were

⁸ Results of an internal review conducted on the full list of target journals as set out in the evaluation framework document

described in another term: responsibilities. Instrumental reasons for connecting with stakeholders, i.e. building relationships whose observance confers benefits which do not follow from enforceable obligations, were largely described as responsiveness.

Interestingly, however, both accountability (in the narrow disciplining sense) and responsiveness, were recognised as involving cycles of mutual engagement with stakeholders, and different supporting elements, such as transparency, evaluation, participatory involvement, or the role of feedback and complaints management.

In particular the exploration of the issue of responsiveness revealed awareness of the role that expectations play in the bigger picture of accountability (writ large), involving elements that the researcher does not control or that may even contradict his / her / the research organisation's perceptions of duties and utility. This element connected strongly with the notion put forward by the draft framework that accountability relationships arise also OUTSIDE the formally defined and mapped links with stakeholders, often linked to CLAIMS made to BENEFIT specific stakeholders, and contain elements of uncertainty for those subject to accountability demands.

5.2.2 The mechanisms of accountability: powers of first-, second- or third-party actors

The above distinction raised the question what actual powers the different stakeholders wield in exacting accountability

Feedback mechanisms can be first-, second- or third-party. This refers to the mechanism by which an organisation is held to account and sanctions exacted. Three main types could be distinguished:

- First-party mechanisms are created internally by the organisation, and consist of complaints mechanisms, i.e. means which the organisation provides to stakeholders to approach it and request answers and claim redress. The sanctions are exacted by the organisation, and power remains in the hands of the organisation. Broadly, the stakeholder only has power insofar as the organisation gives it over.
- Second-party mechanisms consist of the stakeholder holding the actor to account directly by means of engagement or refusal: this could be a policy-maker not reading a policy brief, a research community refusing to answer questions, or a partner withdrawing cooperation. The organisation itself is powerless, and has a strong incentive to avoid use being made of such second-party mechanisms in detrimental ways.
- Third-party mechanisms are familiar in the form of law courts. An independent arbitrator – a third party – holds the policy-research organisation and its stakeholder to account, usually on the basis of regulatory frameworks, which still require interpretation (and some negotiation) in each case. External research ethics committees are another example of these. They may act to protect another stakeholder: in the same way that the state pursues criminal cases, to pursue justice for the victim.

5.2.3 Participation: fundamental principle, practical instrument, and obstacle to accountability

In addition, in particular the issue of participation, posed by much of the literature on organisational accountability, including by the One World Trust, as a principle to be observed as a matter of good practice, came under intense scrutiny. Unlike the aid sector where interventions typically have a

proximate relationship to 'beneficiaries' - in research the idea of 'beneficiaries' carries little traction and research organisations are struggling to operationalize an as such recognised principle such as participation. There are exceptions: in cases like ForestAction where the group is identifiable and relatively specific, and where ForestAction have direct relationships with representatives of the group. The remoteness of these beneficiaries in many organisations' causal model of change, the indistinctness of the group, the logistical challenges in accountability, the need for independence and the overriding requirements of quality and expertise makes 'accountability to research beneficiaries' however unrealistic for many organisations. Where the beneficiaries are participants in the research, however, the responsibilities of research ethics are brought into much more immediate focus, and the principles of do no harm are instantly triggered.

So while it was for instance confirmed that participation by stakeholders made sense at some stages of research, and could in many cases indeed be applied as a principle of accountability to the broader range of stakeholders, circumstances were also identified in which participation could well fulfil a role more as an optional tool to involve subsets of stakeholders for specific purposes. Finally cases were raised where participation did not prove to be an accountability enhancing approach, potentially even reducing accountability by counteracting the benefits of integrity conferred upon the research through scrutiny and quality assurance mechanisms which largely happen within the narrower epistemological community.

A special seminar explored this issue further in January 2011, exposing several angles of view:

For one, participation, especially from outside the epistemological community, may, and in many cases will, involve inconveniences for the professionals: jargon will need to be made more intelligible, some fundamentals repeated, long standing assumptions revisited and exposed to critique from unexpected perspectives. In terms of advancing research, this may seem as time consuming, and eventually unproductive.

Second, from the other side there are, however, concerns that participation is not used as it could be to narrow the gap between the research, those being "researched", and the claimed beneficiaries. We noted that the 'claimed beneficiaries' and the 'researched' often lack the ability to generate and/or communicate 'legitimate' knowledge that articulates their own perspectives, and therefore lack a voice when determining the research and policy agenda. Building stronger links with these stakeholders, and structuring their organisation to respond to their needs, offers a way to rebalance the research organisations' accountability.

Finally, while time consuming and inconveniencing those deeply ensconced in the production of knowledge, participation has shown itself to be a fundamental element of accountability mechanisms which are likely to run 'against the grain' of power relations. Such mechanisms are not easy to handle: merely instituting new accountability mechanisms to 'downwards' stakeholders will not change the fact that the research manager must still respect the needs of those with leverage and with power. So many may argue that they are unlikely to work.

Yet participation mechanisms force a conflict on power issues into the open conscious debate:

"Participation goes with changing power relations and behaviours, and sharing; ... [in] this paradigm, it is the experience, conditions and realities of poor people, and their analysis and expression of these, that come first." (Chambers, R. (1997): *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*, London, Intermediate Technology Publications, p. 23)

So should policy researchers indeed resign themselves to a role of ‘supplicants’ to policy decision makers, or perform a role often expressed in their claims to benefit: giving voice and advancing interests of those in marginalised positions of power? In much of the development discourse the paradigm-shift towards participatory definition of activities is central to the push for ‘downwards’ accountability, and aims to redistribute power to communities by giving them voice and control over the development interventions done in their name and for their benefit. Thus literature in the NGO sector widens the focus from ‘holding to account’ to ‘taking into account’.

From a critical point of view most researchers we engaged with shunned this controversy and addressed accountability increasingly from a perspective of containing risks: to their methods, to their findings, to the sustainability of their resource basis. Yet some basic questions and principles for participation of communities, as the most difficult type of stakeholder group to involve, still emerged:

1. **Intentional design:** It is important to be clear about what researchers are trying to achieve through participation through clearly defined principles. There is no set formula for designing such principles of as it depends on context. It is important to recognise both the normative and instrumental potential of participatory involvement: normative, since there are ethical drivers for participation; instrumental, since it will make the work more relevant and possibly more legitimate. The desire to generate ownership is only one driver.
2. **Long term:** involvement has to be built over time. IIED noted an example where over time participation was developed with the community, as part of a long-term programme – over ten years. A process of development.
3. **Active/passive participation:** Participation doesn’t have to mean that everyone has ‘sat under the same decision tree’. Participation can be about opening up channels through which participation is possible.
4. **Space for participation/accountability intermediaries:** Someone needs to actively work to stimulate demand, and programmatic space needs to be allocated for this purpose. Could this be a space for accountability intermediaries?
5. **Do no harm:** At the same time, the principle of “do no harm” should be respected, so that the processes of engagement do not harm the participants (an issue in violently divided societies and politically challenging environments, for example).
6. **Empowering:** Where claiming to benefit participants, there may be a positive responsibility to bring research to public attention, and to allow them to use the research findings for advocacy purposes. Creating informed stakeholder communities equips potential participators with valuable knowledge. Deciding who possesses this responsibility is a matter of debate and is likely to depend on the context.

5.2.4 The good, the bad, and the ugly: principles, strategies and organisational type

In view of the above challenges the finalisation of the accountability framework for policy relevant research proved to be difficult: many organisations we worked with responded to the challenge of resource pressures with organisational strategies that were ‘ad hoc’, leaving them nimble to respond to opportunity, but largely subject to power of funders as opposed to being, from an organisational point of view, a principles of stiff strategy led actor, although this may be desired (CDG, RIMISP). Others, worked with a principles inspired discourse, but effectively still secured their sustainable resource basis through the negotiation of content of work and credibility and influence securing

relationships (IIED, CIPPEC). In much simplified contrast we also were able to see cases in which emphasis of grassroots accountability generated both a lot of social credibility and problems of growth and sustainability (HFH, FA).

In some ways this categorisation suggest that one should respect but deep down loathe the (ostensibly successful but also) ugly, admire the ability to survive of the (superficially, but not really) bad, and love but commiserate with the (on a larger scale ineffective) good.

Mintzberg⁹ suggests a typology of paradigms for strategy making corresponding to deliberate or emergent organisational types. His main argument is that while a strategy may be understood as a **plan** for future action which takes stock of the context and maps out the organisation’s direction given its mission – the traditional understanding of a strategy given above – it can also be a **pattern** discerned from the observation of past behaviour, rather than a plan. In this view, the strategy emerges from the behaviour of the organisation and its staff. More traditional views of strategy tend in contrast to see them as plans, i.e. a representation of a deliberately cast future desired reality.

This has implications for the type of process determining the strategy, beyond deliberative **planning**: as these may include **learning**, which is a reflection on past successes; **visioning**, which is directive and deliberate, but typically allows room for creativity in implementation by staff within a broad perspective; **venturing** which controls the inputs but is not prescriptive about their use, or combinations of these.

Typically, any organisations will be characterised by more than one form of strategy, and in addition to elements that can be freely determined by leaders of an organisation, external variables play an important role too. According to Mintzberg this gives rise to broadly four types of organisations which are of interest here, with the four above strategy setting models driving their approach to work.

Figure 4: Emergent and deliberate strategy setting

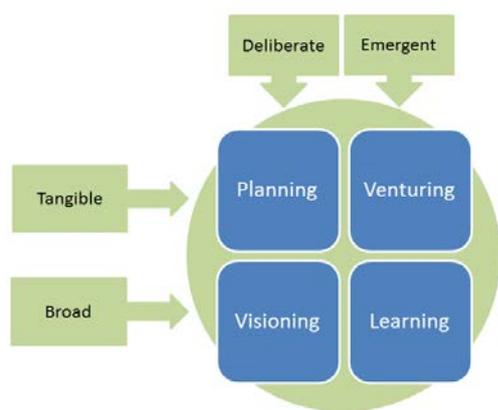
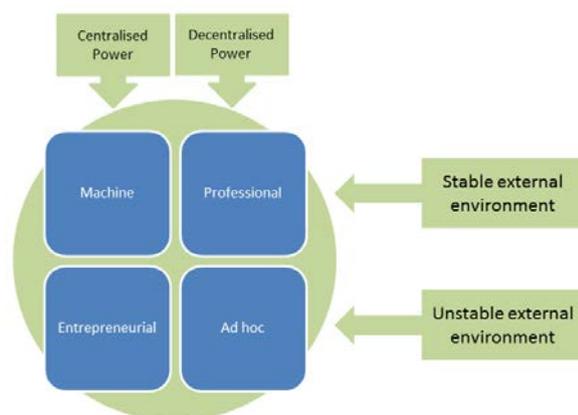


Figure 3: Strategy types of organisations



⁹ Mintzberg, H. (2007): Tracking strategy. Towards a general theory, Oxford, Oxford University Press

- A **machine organisation** works in stable mass-production or mass-services environment with strong position in the environment. In this environment, plans are formalised and forward looking, and outputs are similar – although occasionally changed to respond to external demand.
- An **entrepreneurial organisation** is dominated by a centralized leadership who steers the organisation through a dynamic environment. A ‘visioning’ strategy is driven by this leader. It is ‘deliberately emergent’: it expressly sets a broad direction, but allows specific strategic positions to be elaborated within it by staff.
- A **professional organisation** is where ‘a group of individuals pursue their own professional interests under the banner of a common organisation’. The organisation creates the environment for these individuals to function – and change is managed by these individuals, not by the central organisation. Thus each individual professional creates their own strategy, often in the form of an entrepreneur although in general, there is limited innovation.
- An **adhocracy** is characterised by continuous creative venturing, a strongly decentralized system, and innovation. As a hot-bed of innovation, single projects can spark precedents, which inspire further work. Learning dominates.

The form of organisation therefore is both driven but also in itself determines the strategy as well and has consequences for other internal elements by which individuals are controlled such as project identification and design. An appropriate strategy is a core element in creating an environment that enables staff to pursue a research organisations’ mission. It also determines the nature of the theory of change that can be cited.

Table 2: Impact of organisational type on strategy setting

	Centralised	Decentralised
Stable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forward-looking planning process • Process oriented towards understanding context, and plotting course and identifying specific outputs • Plan is directive and identifies specific goals for which compliance can be expected • Articulate clear and detailed theories of change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy defines values, processes and standards that staff are expected to adhere to (e.g. research standards, themes and disciplines) but not outcomes or outputs • Theories of change are not articulated beyond very broad statements on value of research: staff empowered to develop, consistent with values and standards
Unstable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan is forward-looking and directive, relying on craft and expertise of drafter, drawing on past lessons, to steer course in dynamic context • Plan outlines umbrella objectives and broad theories of change and outcomes, but allows room for staff to develop own theories • Broad outcomes identified, but staff empowered to decide how they will be reached 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on identifying past lessons, patterns, and successful theories of change • Seek to adopt them, while managing expectations of their ongoing validity • Articulate values and minimum standards, and empower staff • Avoid compliance, in favour of learning

5.2.5 The value of formality and informality

We argue that accountability is essentially a bundle of processes – or at least, values and principles which qualify an ongoing interaction between organisations and their stakeholders. This may be so, but especially in smaller non bureaucratic organisations, says little about the formality of the

processes. While formal processes can signal the importance of a value (and may be, in larger organisations essential to shape practice and give visibility to the desired culture, accountability is fundamentally about the day to day practice of members of staff. No formal process can replace this.

Indeed, respondents from smaller and less formalised organisations argued that formal processes can choke up an organisation, reduce flexibility, and offer little by way of benefits. For example, some researchers stated that they were confident that the culture and practice of the organisation to ensure research ethics, and did not want to see a formal process. Whether a means of ensuring adherence to a key standard or process is formal or informal therefore depends on a number of factors. These may include

- *External checks:* If the accountability concerns an external check rather than an internal process, then the external context and culture may be important. Some senior researchers emphasised the importance of the informal culture rather than formal tick-box processes. An informal chat over a cup of tea or dinner can be more effective at understanding a perspective than any number of formal questionnaires.
- *The internal context:* an organisation with autonomous staff whose job requires independence may require operating independently. At the same time, it is precisely those with autonomous staff who need to make sure the core values are shared and that the basic rules respected, particularly where there are real risks of harm. In these circumstances, a mix of ex post and ex ante checks may be useful.
- *Confidence in shared values:* The size of the organisation and the familiarity of all the staff with the organisation and its values is an important element in designing the processes. Staff in smaller organisations were sure that their researchers shared the same values. In more institutionalised environments and much bigger organisations senior managers were more likely to entertain more formal checks, and this was expected by staff.
- *The risks of harm:* this may include the severity of likely harm - where harm is more likely, a greater degree of formality may be required – but also the speed through which harm is done may also be relevant: if after the event checks can stop harm happening, this can prevent wearying prior approvals.

In the end, accountability was described as being, in shifting ratios about a) minimising the likelihood of doing harm to all stakeholders, b) maximising the likelihood of gain, and c) ensuring accountability. Whether this is to be formal or informal was seen to depend on various factors. Designing appropriate accountability systems was described a craft, not a science, and about pay-off: freedom and flexibility should be weighed against assurance and the need for checks.

5.2.6 Positioning the organisation: finding the balance between intentions and pressures

The above reflections are helpful when considering the pros and cons of a framework of accountability, which, as part of the organisational strategy, is ideally strongly aligned with the type the organisation sees itself to be (emergent or deliberate), and which supports its development along a chosen path. Yet, as discussed above, not all influences on accountability strategy are controlled by the organisation. In particular disciplining elements constitute strong external environment variables to which organisations need to respond, as do instrumental reasons for accountability which could if not observed seriously damage the future of the organisation.

Organisations are thus not free in setting their organisational accountability strategy, but, a point reiterated during the research, have every interest to make it work as much as possible in their interest and align it with their values.

A key way to exercise as much control over the accountability strategy and ensure fit with organisational outlook while meeting demand, emerged as what we termed ‘organisational positioning’:

By ‘positioning’, we mean the claims an organisation makes about its purpose – understood as the changes it seeks to bring about and why these changes are valuable – and the means by which the changes will occur. In difference to the term ‘strategy’, which reflects either deliberately chosen or emergent priorities for work, mostly but not necessarily within a chosen time horizon, ‘positioning’ refers to a more fundamental definition of attitudes to the world around the organisation, and to problematic issues it wishes to address or changes that it may want effect.

While some organisations’ sole purpose is to produce knowledge without reference to the change, typically, these are not policy oriented research organisations. We argue that policy oriented research organisations seek a change that is desirable, whether to further an abstract cause (equity, democracy, human rights) or to benefit a group in society, or to improve how we do things.

Box 2: key interacting elements affecting organisational accountability outlook

Positioning: Positioning is the definition by the researcher (or the research organisation) of attitudes to the world around them, and of the role that they seek within the public sphere, including regarding how others should understand their legitimacy. Much of the discussion in this guide will centre on how organisations actively seek to position themselves and manage these perceptions.

Theory of change: theory of change is defined as the understanding of causal links. In particular, it refers to the understanding by which activities conducted by a research organisation will contribute to changes in the world. As such, a theory of change need not be stated, and it may be more or less coherent, evidence-based or plausible. Understandings of how change happens (‘theories of change’), whether implicit or explicit, will frequently be at the root of the strategy.

Strategy: Strategy can refer to planning documents which deliberately state what an organisation intends to do and can also emerge from the pattern of activities of an organisation. For the purposes of this guide, the strategy of an organisation is the combined set of stated and unstated intentions and practices that define and reflect how an organisation structures its future.

The position that a research organisation adopts, out of choice, is therefore an important starting point for understanding and driving the way the organisation, from its own perspective, would seek to realise accountability towards its stakeholders. However, organisations have different missions, and therefore seek to position themselves differently by managing their environment and their relationships with stakeholders. They do this through a set of recurrent processes.

- The definition of an organisational values and vision statement mostly involves the explicit formulation of a purpose or mission, which will refer to a desired change, or circumstances which the organisation seeks to address with its work. This mission is likely to be developed, refined and altered over time.
- By referring to a desired change, the organisation’s mission suggests the existence of a ‘theory of change’. Many organisations will leave this theory of change unsaid, and often the

causal links are implicit, or not fully articulated. They may even be subconscious and will often be different from person to person or programme to programme.

- The formulation of mission and theories of change will be refined and developed through strategies which impact on the structure of the organisation, the staff, the way it builds a network, and the quality of the connections the organisation has in its network. It includes the nature of the accountability relationships that exist, and the degree to which the stakeholders are prioritised.
- Importantly, positioning, as a result of a conscious development of mission, theory and theories of change, and strategy, are both designed and emergent. It is designed in the sense that an organisation can develop deliberate strategies which place it within a public context and which manage the relationship with stakeholders. It can be emergent, in that an organisation's strategy results from its research practice and constant discussion and negotiation with stakeholders, as it balances different demands, aspirations, and pressures.

Positioning is thus a composite process which through programme documents and projects is gradually refined to greater details at different levels. In turn, accountability relationships are informed by the positioning of an organisation, including its purpose.

The research also showed that periods of institutional reform entail shifts in positioning, and show clearly the corresponding need to reform accountability processes. As a consequence organisations position themselves very differently, and therefore there is no single set of accountability tools or mechanisms that will work for every organisation. Claims differ vastly and imply different accountability profiles and stakeholders.

5.2.6.1 Cases studies: How the partners position themselves

Our case studies positioned themselves differently vis-a-vis key stakeholder groups in particular: the research community, policy-makers and their 'ultimate beneficiaries' (those whom they identify in the mission as benefiting from their work). The reputation, and the positioning they adopt, will also impact on their ability to generate funds, and thus their relationship with a fourth stakeholder group: the funders.

5.2.6.1.1 Center for Governance and Development (CGD)

CGD is registered in Kenya and has its offices in Nairobi. A self-identified research and policy organisation, its mission is to promote democratic governance and sustainable development, which in the mission is to be pursued through a range of different activities. The research takes place primarily in the form of convening and supporting community groups to monitor the government activities, although CGD staff also monitor the performance of government institutions at the central level, and provide technical assistance to strengthen government institutions. As one core donor noted, "I'd see them more as an advocacy organisation, with research as the back end of it". Indeed, they have in the past been challenged on the academic rigour of their analysis, and although research is identified as a core activity, the academic or research community was not identified by the CGD as a primary stakeholder.

CGD position themselves differently: in particular, they rely on mobilisation of wider structures through which aid is generated to support the legitimacy of the information they systematise. Thus structurally, CGD works extensively through two networks in particular, for which it remains the secretariat: the National Taxpayers Association (a network of community organisations created for

the purpose) and KEPKO (agricultural producers' network). Both of these bring together a range of civil society actors and other stakeholders (respectively, taxpayers and farmers' cooperatives). The NTA was created to generate a coalition which would be able to critique the government of Kenya effectively, while protecting individual members from possible consequences. External stakeholders emphasised for CGD's legitimacy that these groups are completely incorporated through accountable processes into the structures of the coalitions.

5.2.6.1.2 Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC)

CIPPEC is a relatively large (80 plus staff) non-profit organization based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Its mission is "to create a more just, democratic, and efficient State in Argentina to improve the quality of life for all Argentine citizens". Research is identified as one means to achieve this, but is arrayed alongside other activities (the provision of expertise as a resource for policy-makers, developing tools to build the capacity of civil society and providing innovative resources to government). One consequence is that research is not necessarily a key component in many projects, and the researchers indicate that they engage primarily in secondary research for policy-makers than primary.

They are highly respected from the outside, one respondent noting that they are the: "referent in the area with a clearly established reputation" – and that they "contribute at the macro level".

In a workshop ranking stakeholders, CIPPEC staff members identified the primary stakeholders to be the policy-makers, then the government officials who implement policy, and then the poor and vulnerable, with whom they do not have close links. While this 'ranking' depends on the team and project, CIPPEC's links to government are extremely close: physically, it is within a hundred meters of the Parliament. Its staff members are highly sensitive to the political and media timetables, with strong links and access to key decision-making at the management and researcher level - with dedicated staff managing relations with key policy actors and outputs provided in a timely fashion to address the policy-makers' concerns and interests.

Several CIPPEC staff members acknowledged that there was a tension between the policy-makers' needs and the respect for academic standards, and that the policy-maker would tend to be prioritised in this circumstance. This tension was reflected in outputs, timing and the approach to the research. For example, "we have done 'surveys' which do not meet highest methodological standards, but our name carries us through". At the same time, They do not meet the standards of their brand, which is very high. 'Humility as a strategy.'

They seek to plot a path of political plurality and neutrality, treading on no single side of the political spectrum. This it seems they have done with some success, although it is a thin line, particularly when their watchdog functions comes into conflict with capacity or technical support to the government – possibly even with projects targeting the same people.

5.2.6.1.3 ForestAction Nepal

ForestAction is an NGO registered in Nepal with its offices in Kathmandu. Self-identified as a policy think-tank, its high-level mission is "policy, institutional and technical innovations to promote equitable, sustainable and effective management of natural resources", pursued through action research, community mobilisation and civil society activism. They therefore have close links with the communities. The staff has found challenges building ongoing programmes due to the donor context and has been shaped by the donors' interests in the "global knowledge pool" and "less the concern

for immediate policy outcomes or action outcomes at the field level, dominant nature of informal approach of institutions, communication and transactions”.

Their agenda is therefore developed through a “negotiated, mediated and compromised activities neither fully that of donor priority nor that of ForestAction agenda”. They build their identity, agenda and positioning on common threads: a focus on certain geographic area, communities, for any upcoming project and not frequently change the sites which they argue “helps us maintain a long term credibility and also puts us pressure to become more accountable to the communities” combined with – action research, research–policy link, and knowledge based advocacy broadly within governance of environmental resources.

Accountability is built on informal dialogue and relationships, rather than formal ‘mechanisms’, which was consistent with the Nepalese culture. At the same time, ForestAction engages wider civil society, academia and forestry officials through its governance and a small number of members. Its goal is to contribute to “an environmentally sustainable society free from poverty and injustice”. In particular it supports forest dependent communities, through promoting inclusive and deliberative governance, sustainable management of natural resources, transformative learning and partnerships. In terms of numbers of staff, it is the smallest of our partners. They are still looking to develop links to policy-makers and to have a more policy-driven (rather than donor-led and ‘global-knowledge-pool’ focused) approach.

5.2.6.1.4 International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED)

IIED is a London-based independent international research organisation which works to combat challenges in sustainable development in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Central and South America, the Middle East and the Pacific. IIED does this through 'prioritising rigorous evidence-based research, communications and influence'. IIED is an organisation therefore with links across the world. Their policy influence model is founded on a tripartite approach, founded on building effective knowledge and ensuring its transfer, identifying and working with the appropriate actors, and developing or operating in spaces where knowledge and actors can be brought together to shape and change policy. To do all this, they acknowledge understanding and working with the relationships that connect these elements. Using this model, the focus on working in different spaces and with different actors.

This has caused the drive for academic quality to be supplemented by linkages with building partnerships, and collaborate with grassroots partners to make the research and advocacy relevant to their needs and alive to their realities. Sometimes this is accompanied by building long-term relationships with communities, and inviting feedback.

IIED therefore uses different models, prioritising different stakeholders, and using research alongside a combination of different models, including advocacy, a convening function, building networks and links, innovation and capacity-building to further its goals.

5.2.6.1.5 Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP)

RIMISP was set up in 1986 and has gone through changes in its structure since its creation. In its current incarnation, it is a regional non-profit organisation with a base in Chile and three sub-offices. It works extensively through a network of think-tanks and research institutes and these relationships are seen as being fundamental to the legitimacy of RIMISP. It acts as a channel of funds, a supporter and coordinator of research and a research organisation in its own right.

“The breadth of activities has lead observers to view RIMISP in quite different ways – some see it as a development NGO, some as an organization that funds development, and others see it as a research centre and “think-tank”. RIMISP is a hybrid institution.” Bebbington Evaluation 2006.

This breadth, Bebbington goes on to note, reflects donor preferences. RIMISP has built multi-phase long-term donor relationships based in part of their unique shape: an ability to coordinate work across many countries, through a regional research network, the quality of their work, and the nature of their social capital, which is founded more on personal relationships and trust than on formal ties. Any abandonment of this fluid but close relationship was strongly rejected by the RIMISP stakeholders – the partners interviewed in this research in general confirmed the strength of RIMISP, limited engagement possible at national level, and dominated by the partners.

Their partnerships are core to their work and to their legitimacy. However, they vary substantially in type, depending on the quality of the organisation. While RIMISP has *“signed a range of collaboration agreements with more than 130 organisations in Latin America and other regions”*, these differ in nature from long-standing and very close ‘horizontal’ relationships, to much more vertical relationships where partners act as contracted implementers.

5.2.6.1.6 Habitat for Humanity (Brasil)

Habitat for Humanity is a global organisation whose mission is to provide shelter. They are an explicitly Christian group, with offices around the world. We worked with Habitat for Humanity Brazil, specifically, but considered the links to HFH LAC (Latin- and Central Americas), and HFHI (HFH International). HFH Brazil’s function has traditionally been to deliver a limited range of housing solutions and they are therefore structured around a limited range of activities,

Advocacy work is underpinned by the respected practical know-how and field experience, combined with the seat on national, state and municipal forums. Knowledge management involves the systematisation of the learning gained through your work. HFH also use external expertise to gather evidence: so HFH LAC brings in external consultants (in the case of Peru) and universities, as well as supplementing their own expertise with civil society organisations with complementary focuses. However in HFH Brasil this rarely happened.

More recently, however, a major process of reform has moved them beyond focusing on narrow speciality Housing ‘problems’ towards a wide range of activities, and in particular advocacy, using their knowledge and links to community and experience – and the legitimacy that this generates – to generate policy change. From a ‘do it alone’ perspective they increasingly work through partnerships and networks, including NGOs, the government, social movements. This is reflected in a move from HFHI programme funding, to increasingly generating projects on the ground.

5.3 The final framework

5.3.1 Choices and minimum requirements

The final framework therefore had to primarily put forward a way of structuring accountability processes to meet both organisational and external demands in the best possible way, rather than prescribing a set of diverse organisations how to do it across the board. Yet from our interaction with partners and wider research we recommended a minimum set of issues to consider:

- Given that policy oriented research organisations seek to persuade and influence based on evidence and communications strategies, they should, at the very least, be accountable for the claims they make to benefit to the wider public or specific constituencies.
- In addition, recognising the reciprocal effect of positioning and accountability on each other, we encourage that as early as possible the theory or theories of change are explicitly recognised, both for practical and ethical reasons as they impact on the stakeholder relationships an organisation seeks and declares as relevant.
- Finally, reflecting the iterative nature of developing an organisation’s mission and progressive conduct of research, we recommend that a commitment to accountability should be demonstrated through regular processes of reflection on the mission, research direction and practice, and the existing accountability mechanisms, with the aim to ensure their mutual fit and alignment with good practice.

These three points are directly reflected in the main approaches to accountability put forward in the final framework, intended to promote inquiry into

- the **principles of accountability** that can most usefully inform the structuring of relationships with stakeholders.
- the opportunities for proffering accountability opportunities to their stakeholders in the recurring **processes** that research organisations use from defining strategy to closing the loop on research, and
- the wider landscape of **stakeholders** and specific accountability duties that may arise in explicit and tacit relationships with them,

The framework shows these in the form of rings¹⁰, each of which identifies a subset of categories research organisations are invited to reflect on:

Figure 5: Accountability Principles for policy oriented research organisations: the final framework

5.3.2 Principles

The inner ring comprises four key principles of accountability which comprise the key elements of accountability. These will apply differently depending on the organisation, but form the core of accountability.

- **Transparency:** Transparency describes the way in which an organisation makes available information about their activities and aims to stakeholders. Transparency is the centre of what it means to be accountable for a research organisation whose power is rooted in the ability to influence and persuasion. The grounds for influence must be clearly communicated for the persuasion to be legitimate. It therefore encompasses responsibilities to articulate the theory of change of the organisation, the values, evidence and purpose of the organisation and the research itself.



¹⁰ Internally described either as ‘onion layers’ or ‘rose petals’.

- **Participation:** Participation concerns the way in which the organisation involves stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities and gives them a voice in the activities of the organisation. The value of this depends on the organisation, its mission and positioning. As discussed above there are strong instrumental and normative issues to consider when applying this principle.
- **Evaluation:** Evaluation allows a research organisation to reflect on and learn from past experiences and provides evidence-based support for the reporting of progress and impact.
- **Complaint & Response:** This describes ways in which an organisation invites feedback, comments and critique of its activities. It captures how an organisation is answerable to stakeholders. It implies a first-party system.

To realise accountability, an organisation must therefore embed the principles into the day-to-day processes of an organisation through building a culture which recognises the importance of accountability and which reflects on accountability in a holistic way. Thus the processes may be transparent to a stakeholder or encourage their participation; each offers a space for evaluation, or an opportunity to incorporate feedback.

5.3.3 Processes

Accountability is a characteristic of a relationship, referring to the way in which one actor relates to another. In the case of the accountability of an organisation, the relationship unfolds in the course of key work processes. For the purposes of the database, we identify five work processes which offer the arenas for research organisations:

- **Institutional governance:** all organisations have governance processes, which include the meeting schedules of supervisory boards, management meetings, annual general meetings.
- **Strategy setting:** while the process by which strategies are formulated may centre on a pre-ordained plan, the strategy-making process may equally be an organic process where inspired researchers react to their surroundings, and the active steps simply comprise discussing the values to be sought. Organisations differ. Even within an organisation, different programmes can have different processes through which strategies are formulated and implemented.
- **Project identification and design:** the process of identifying and designing projects happens at a lower level to the strategy-setting, which we argue happens at a programme or institutional level, and which is designed to shape researcher decisions when they identify and design their projects.
- **Project implementation: conducting** the research itself is an ongoing process, which may – depending on the project – offer opportunities for accountability and engagement of stakeholders.
- **Project closure:** projects come and go, but there are opportunities for accountability in the means through which projects are concluded, lessons identified, systematised and communicated, findings generated and transmitted.

5.3.4 Stakeholders

While policy research organisations position themselves differently, there are common typical stakeholders. The framework identifies several such groups. Each of these is likely to have different expectations, and different forms of responsiveness and accountability.

- **Claimed beneficiaries:** when positioning themselves and their purpose, organisations who claim positive change often claim that groups within society will be benefitted. These are the ‘claimed beneficiaries’. Responsibilities to them depend on the organisation’s positioning.
- **Policy-makers:** the policy-makers are the target, the people whose behaviour must change, for the policy researcher to be effective. Responsiveness to their needs is vital, or they will hold you to account by simply not taking on board your messaging.
- **Research community:** both similar and dissimilar to policy-makers, depending on the positioning and theory of change for the research: they are the arbiters of research quality, and therefore hold in their hands the keys to the legitimacy of the evidence-basis.
- **Donors:** by this we mean clients, grantors, and any stakeholder that pays the organisation to do its work. Accountability will often be governed by the contract. We also mean potential donors, with whom there is no existing formal relationship.
- **Research participants:** for organisations involved in primary research, the participants in that research are conducting. They may or may not overlap with the claimed beneficiaries, but are distinct: they are identified by involvement in the research, rather than the beneficiaries of the outcomes from the research.
- **Partners:** partners are those with whom an organisation has made a specific effort to relate to, and with whom they have a special relationship.
- **Staff:** of course, the staff of an organisation is core (if not the only factor) in its success. Taking accountability to staff seriously is a core element of
- **Media:** comprising excellent means of getting across to the public, – whether ‘old’ or ‘new’ – forms tools for managing the media
- **Regulatory bodies:** whether incorporated as an NGO or company, organisations are regulated and must meet standards of financial probity.

5.3.5 Measuring openness to change and innovation rather than ‘performance’

In difference to a standard setting framework, which involves the definition of fixed benchmarks that organisations could eventually be tested against, the project proposed to use the collection of tools and conceptual approaches collated in the database as the main incentive for reform.

The quality of a research organisation’s accountability approach would therefore not be demonstrated through meeting a set of fixed criteria that would be similarly applied to many organisations, but rather through a demonstration of considered responses offered in view of the challenge put forward by the framework, including through take-up of the tools and sources provided, or development of additional innovative ways of addressing the challenges.

5.4 Evaluating the project

5.4.1 The evaluation framework: main features and some experiences with it

In January 2010, following consultation with key stakeholders of the project, we finalised an evaluation framework. Using the outcome mapping methodology it sought to capture the potential reach of the project way and set out relevant measurable indicators.

Key to the formulation of the evaluation framework was to identify, in analogy to organisational strategy, a vision and mission for the project and a ‘theory of change’. Building on this the boundary partners whom the project must influence to bring about change were mapped out, the outcome

challenges to be reached, and necessary activities to support these changes set out alongside priorities for monitoring progress.

The following box, chart and table, show the key elements of the full evaluation framework: vision, mission, boundary partners and monitoring priorities and theory of change.

The work with the outcome mapping methodology proved useful from the point of view of thinking through the project in all relevant detail in a rigorous process. Looking back it did not, however, protect us sufficiently from overestimating the traceable effect that APRO as an ambitious yet individual project could have in the research community and its stakeholders, making mistakes in judgment on the boundary partners that mattered, and also setting some monitoring priorities which were effectively not manageable for us as a small research organisation, or simply the wrong indicator to show progress.

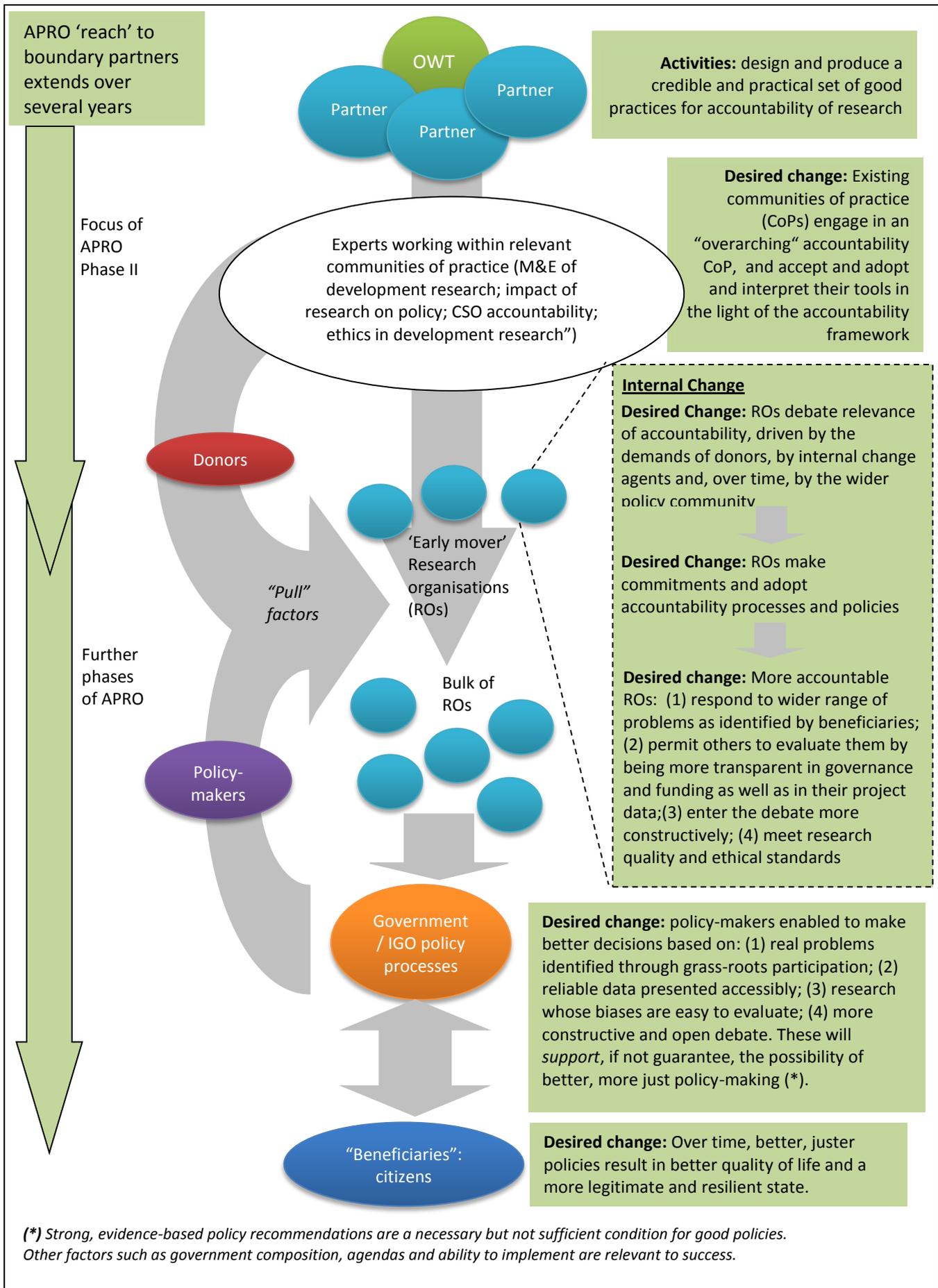
Box 3: Project vision and mission

Vision	Mission
<p>Policy processes in developing countries are increasingly inclusive and informed by robust evidence generated by research organisations which are accountable to all their stakeholders.</p> <p>This results in a more robust and legitimate state more able to design activities delivering services to its citizens, more able to make their voice heard, thereby creating a virtuous cycle.</p> <p>The increased accountability means organisations are more ethical, financially sustainable, relevant to their intended beneficiaries, their policy-makers and their research users, and thereby more effective at fostering positive change.</p>	<p>In supporting the vision, the project will prepare a robust, practical and tested set of accountability tools for research organisations, which, while practical, also gain widespread theoretical support from the academic and organizational development communities. The tools will draw on existing communities of practice – monitoring and evaluation of complex projects (particularly research), bridging research and policy, civil society accountability and ethics in development research – and will interpret and apply these existing, accepted areas to the relatively new area of research accountability.</p> <p>The project will persuade members of existing communities of practice to view their disciplines in the light of accountability concepts, drawing on the value of accountability as an overarching framework which combines, contextualises and reinterprets existing tools from a number of existing communities of practice. This group, which comprises organisational development experts and consultants, will introduce accountability in their work with developing country research organisations. We will also work to persuade funders of development research to adapt their own accountability requirements, to encourage policy-relevant research organisations to adopt the accountability principles.</p>

In particular several issues emerged that may be relevant when taking a view on the project results:

- Even smaller organisation, such as our partners, but in particular donors and other research organisations at large prove relatively inert: while there may be intellectual receptiveness to the project content and outcome amongst concerned individuals or even the leadership (one outcome challenge), the change that happens or does not happen in these organisation (another outcome challenge) is the result of a raft of factors affecting the organisational development path all competing for attention. In particular the significantly deteriorating resource climate for independently funded research organisations reduced time partners were able to commit to the project and follow up. → *The expectation of traceable organisational change within partners within the project lifetime was unrealistic both in terms of time line but also assumptions about the motivations of organisational strategy.*

Figure 7: Project theory of change and stakeholders



- In particular since 2010 the resource squeeze also led to a significant change in how many especially bilateral donors looked at accountability: while maintaining a multi-stakeholder discourse, especially (often ill defined) research impact and efficiency criteria rose to dominance and negatively affected donor (and their grantees) interest in some of the complexities the project outcome involves in terms of multiple accountabilities or moved into a conceptually different, often more 'patron – agent' type of accountability paradigm. → *The expectation to be able to influence donors in ways that could be tracked and aligned with the project outcomes was a bridge to far in the first place, based on a simplistic understanding on how and on what grounds major and politically led institutions define policy, including accountability policies.*
- Academic publications but also some grey literature involve significant time lags (occasionally years) with regards to turning uptake of new developments in research into citations, which then also need to be tracked at significant time cost. → *Monitoring priorities focusing on a systematic capture of citation of APRO work in academic literature and at conferences was a futile indicator in that it was unlikely to produce results within the project cycle, could effectively not be influenced by the project, nor managed in a small organisation such as the One World Trust.¹¹*
- Only one boundary partner was identified as being only within partial reach during the project ((iv) Other research organisations)). Effectively, however, several of the defined outcome challenges across all boundary partners, including (i) (Experts), were only in partial reach of the project during the project lifetime. → *The theory of change formulated for the project, while cogent in itself, was developed in a time void with no benchmarks.*
- The detail to which our exercise led us when drafting the evaluation framework, created unhelpful expectations and burdens, and we missed the crucial difference between a potential long term impact that a project can have through its contribution to a wider discourse, and measurable and traceable effects on others in the short term. → *The evaluation framework, while conclusive in its own way, erred exactly where the project made one of its most important points: informing or influencing policy, as the ultimate aim of policy oriented research, is not a linear process, and subject to a variety of factors most of which are outside the control of the research organisation that produces evidence and promotes its findings. Indicators based on 'uptake' (here: reflection in discourse and organisational change) are therefore not always the most helpful. The evaluation framework was not sensitive or flexible to (likely) variances and contingencies arising as work progressed.*
- Overall a question remained whether to some extent the concept of the boundary partner was correctly applied. While boundary partners (i) Experts, (ii) Partners, and also (iv) Change Agents (in ROs), are arguably the right *initial* vectors, and credibility for the research results in the community of development policy research, as well as in organisational development, evaluation systems and research ethics was critical, the project did not cater for the different communications needs of another boundary partner (iii) donors. Other important boundary partners which are salient in the theory of change are not addressed at all

¹¹ This is not to say that the indicator itself is not useful, but it is a long term tracer of impact rather than a progress marker as the project itself cannot control editorial priorities of journals or conferences, review timelines, paper acceptance and finalisation, etc.

(governments/IGOs as policy research clients for the purpose of policy setting in difference to donors (there may well be overlap) as research funders whose main interest is quality assurance and influence), and organisations that act as a conduit for the interest of citizens (as beneficiaries of policy relevant research). → *The evaluation framework, which through definition of target audiences guided formats of outputs, neglected key routes to impact.*

- In consequence of misjudging the priorities and overall set of boundary partners the evaluation framework set a raft of detailed expectations and monitoring priorities for boundary partners (i) Experts, (ii) - Partners, and (iv) Other Research Organisations, which targeted and tested issues where no tangible progress could be measured, and did not set out or drive the project sufficiently towards the more important impact vectors (donors), but also policy research clients such as governments, and targets such as major NGOs (acting as conduits for citizens interests). → *This lead to considerable, albeit partly self-made frustration in the project team.*

Table 3: Boundary partners, outcome challenges and monitoring priorities (summary)

Boundary Partner	Outcome challenge	Monitoring priorities
<p>i) Experts in existing communities of practice</p> <p><i>“the gatekeepers of ‘good practice’”</i></p>	<p>Experts in the communities of practice acknowledge the value of accountability to research organisations, and actively participate in project activities such as the workshops.</p> <p>They promote and support the tools developed, interpret their own tools in the light of theories of accountability and in their engagement in the discourse, they frame their discussions in terms of accountability.</p> <p>Over time, when working directly with research organisations in developing countries – in consultancies, workshops or research projects – they frame good practices in terms of accountability.</p>	<p>Traffic on APRO online website</p> <p>Respondents to a running online survey</p> <p>Members contribute to APRO by posting documentation and links, reinterpreting their own CoP’s work to the field of accountability</p> <p>Accountability increasingly cited in identified communities of practice on the increase</p> <p>“accountability” and the APRO framework referred to increasingly in relevant conferences and workshops</p>
<p>ii. Project partners</p> <p><i>The five research organisations with whom we work directly</i></p>	<p>Project partners engage in and drive forward the discourse on accountability of research, make commitments to accountability, and adopt accountability processes</p>	<p>Monitoring activities and project milestones</p> <p>Partner reports back on progress of the discussion and debate within their own organisation</p> <p>public commitments to one or more accountability principles</p> <p>policies and processes reflect accountability principles</p> <p>Partners report the creation of links with other ROs based on the project</p> <p>Partners report their own efforts to push for accountability in their own national context</p>

<p>iii. Donors funding research</p> <p><i>Specific representatives within bilateral donors and private foundations who fund research in developing countries</i></p>	<p>As actors who exert important pulls on research organisations, donors funding research pick up the importance of the issue of research accountability, participate in the network, develop their own frameworks of accountability, and encourage their grantees to adopt the accountability frameworks</p>	<p>Donors express interest in APRO through online forums and in workshops</p> <p>Key donors make commitments to accountability, make appropriate accountability minimum standards a condition for grants, develop their own frameworks of accountability</p> <p>Donors refer to APRO standards explicitly</p> <p>Funding of future APRO projects</p> <p>Broaden reach to an ever-greater range of research organisations</p>
<p>iv. Change agents and members of progressive ROs</p> <p><i>Senior management staff and senior researchers within policy-relevant research organisations</i></p> <p>(This boundary partner will be only partially addressed in this phase of the project)</p>	<p>Leaders within policy-relevant research organisations accept the value of accountability principles within their organisation, engage in the network formulating accountability principles and encourage their organisation to adopt the new frameworks.</p> <p>Their organisations increasingly make commitments to accountability and show evidence that they are adopting the principles through their internal processes and their practice.</p>	<p>Online resources are accessed by increasing number of users</p> <p>Respondents to a running online survey</p> <p>A sample of 40 ROs from Latin America, Asia and Africa make public commitments to transparency, participation, evaluation or complaints handling</p> <p>Further projects / partners obtained to address regional dimensions of accountability</p>

In the above points we are quite critical of our own evaluation framework and how it influenced the course of the project and there are a lot of internal and potentially external learning points. In the end we ended up with a cogent but on pragmatic terms unrealistic and unmanageable evaluation framework which proved to be a corset rather than an enabling instrument. Arguably it put too many eggs into the one basket of research organisations as the chief vector for change to be able to have tangible impact with those vectors for change that eventually matter. This does not mean that setting out plans for evaluation of research impact is a dud exercise, but that for planning and evaluating policy relevant research thought must be given to how incorporate the impact of changes in external parameters (financial crisis, improving understanding of vectors of change at a given time, responsiveness to multiple audiences).

In some ways the ill fitting nature of the evaluation framework (for which we are of course responsible) also contributed (together with a key staff change mid 2011) to a series of time extension needs (overall 12 months) as we struggled to cope with the substantive follow up demands placed upon the project by the evaluation framework's ambitions to explore and achieve impact with the identified boundary partners and along indicators that proved unrealistic as progress markers.

We are very grateful to the IDRC to have granted the necessary extensions as they allowed us to get to the point where we are.

5.4.2 So what did the project achieve?

5.4.2.1 *Input into the research and policy discourse*

Overall it is fair to say that the project made a tangible contribution to the research literature on concepts of accountability in the field of policy oriented research, primarily by means of the main

APRO Report 2008, occasional papers, and the Guide to framework and database (2011). The database itself is a hitherto non-existent and unique resource for researchers in form of the database structured along the lines of the final framework.

Since inception the project has produced has produced 14 documentary outputs, plus the database as a major resource. These documents, which are all available on the One World Trust website, include the following One World Trust publications

- Whitty, B. (2008): Stretched in all directions. The demands, pulls and pressures acting on policy research organisations, One World Trust Working paper
- Johnson, C.; Whitty, B.; Hammer, M. (2008): Who do you work for? Establishing a better match between justifications of research and effective accountability to claimed beneficiaries, One World Trust Working paper
- Whitty, B. (2008): Accountability Principles for Research Organisations. A framework to understand and implement accountability good practices for research organisations working in developing countries – Executive Summary, One World Trust Briefing paper number 113, December 2008
- Whitty, B. (2008): Accountability Principles for Research Organisations. Report, London One World Trust
- Whitty, B. (2008): Accountability Principles for Research Organisations. Toolkit, London One World Trust
- Whitty, B. (2009): Accountable lobbying of Parliament. A reaction to the Select Committee Report on Lobbying in Whitehall - supporting transparency and limiting opportunity for inappropriate lobbying, One World Trust Briefing paper number 115, January 2009
- Accountable Lobbying of Parliament (Jan 2009)
- One World Trust (2009): APRO Phase II Project Brief, Working paper
- Whitty, B.; Gersten, J.; Poskakukhina, Y. (2010): Accountability of Innovation. A literature review, framework and guidelines to strengthen accountability of organisations engaged in technological innovation, One World Trust Briefing paper No 124, February 2010
- Hammer, M.; Rooney, C.; Warren, S. (2010): Addressing accountability in NGO advocacy. Practice, principles and prospects of self-regulation, One World Trust Briefing paper number 125, March 2010
- One World Trust (2010): APRO Evaluation Framework, Working paper
- Hammer, M.; Whitty B. (2011): Accountability principles for policy oriented research organisations. A guide to the framework and online database APRO Guide to the framework and online database, London, One World Trust

In addition the project produced a couple of external publications:

- Whitty, B. (2010): An accountability framework for technological innovation, ILAC Brief 24, February 2010 (http://www.cgiar-ilac.org/files/publications/briefs/ILAC_Brief24_Accountability.pdf)
- Whitty, B. (2011): The role of accountability and evaluation of research on/in violently divided societies, paper at the INCORE workshop at Derry, February 2010, which is expected to form part of a book project (http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/pdfs/projects/Eval_Res_in_VDS_2-pager.pdf)

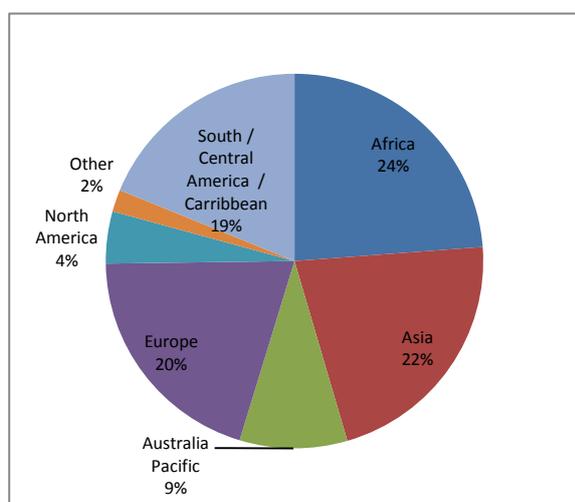
A final document, a One World Trust briefing paper on the question of participation as an accountability tool in research and advocacy, originally prepared for and refined on the basis of the January 2011 project workshop, is forthcoming and has not yet been made available on the website.

5.4.2.2 Uptake

Beyond practitioners (boundary partner 1), and partners (boundary partner 2) however the immediate impact still lies in the future as in particular uptake in relevant literature repositories (such as CIGILibrary and CGIAR-ILAC) is very slow. For example citations of outputs of phase 1 (2008) are only beginning to surface in 2010 and 2011. As discussed earlier, the continuing monitoring of publications and citations in academic journals and the wider grey literature in the community of research and practice is likely to yield further traces, but in itself is an unmanageable burden in our organisation.

The online engagement with the database, however, proved to be more immediate and suggests that there is an encouraging level of interest from supposedly also within the community of boundary partners 3 (donors) and 4 (change agents in other research organisations).

Figure 8: Database hits by November 2011 by world region



By November 2011 the database itself registered 31,474 hits, and the One World Trust main website registered an additional 15,049 hits on webpages dedicated to the project. This compares favourably with the interest garnered by another One World Trust sub-site on civil society self-regulation, which clocks around 46,000 hits since inception a year earlier. The balance of our visitors by region has begun to be more even than initially, as shown in Figure 8. In comparison the One World Trust main site (measured separately) records more than 94,000 visits annually.

In addition, the download figures for individual documents published under the project shown in Figure 9, reached in February 2012 a total of 41,681¹². This shows increasing interest, and the recently published Guide to the Framework and Database alone has seen a continuing demand of around 1,000 additional hits per month since publication. Older publications are progressing at a slower pace.

Project results have also been disseminated in particular at a number of conferences and events

- How wide are the ripples? Participatory learning and action from local participation to international organisational learning, IIED, London, March 2010
- Measuring impact and accountability, Berlin Civil Society Centre, Berlin, June 2011
- International research and implications for ethics, authorship, data management, reporting – ESRC-DFID SAT Workshop, BIS, London, February 2012

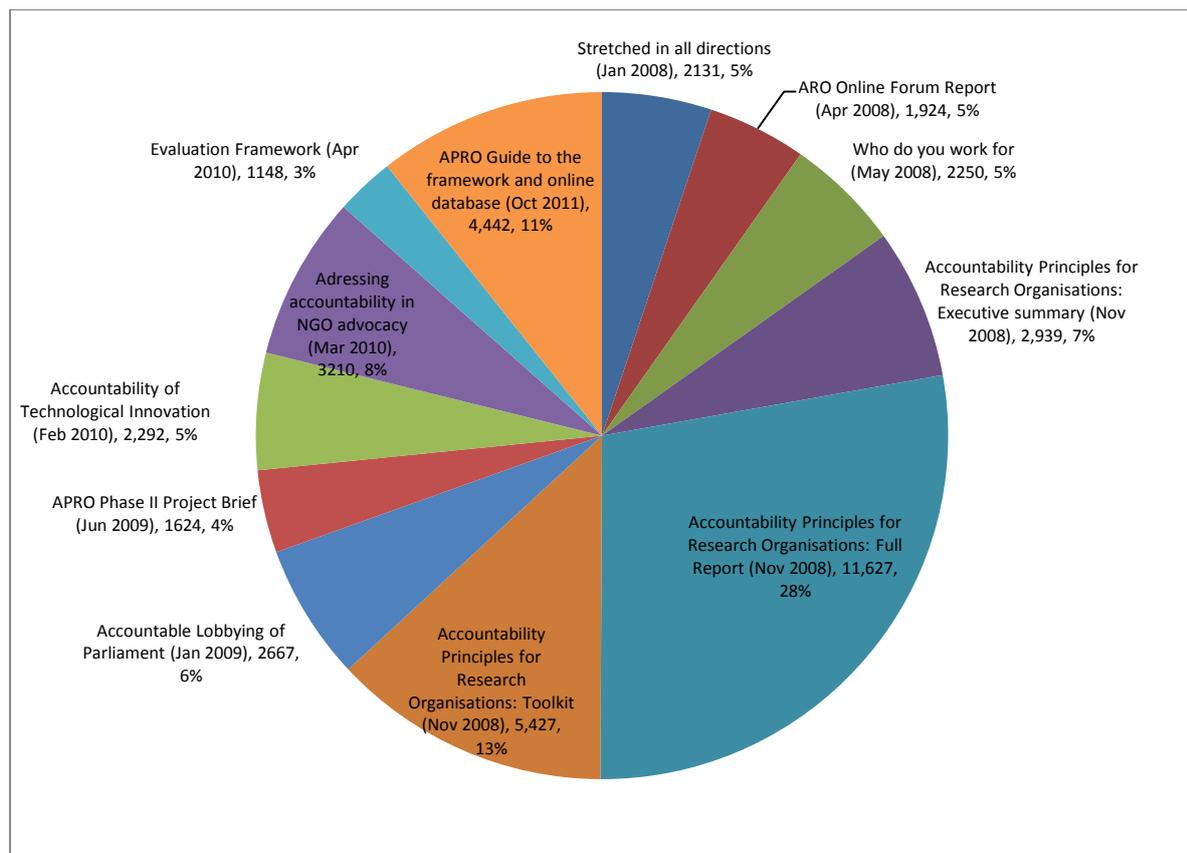
In particular the Berlin and London events show that accountability is rising significantly on some donors' agenda, and despite a currently dominant focus on resource efficiency ('value for money' to some), this also offers some opportunities for the promotion of more heretic concepts around multi-stakeholder accountability in research. Overall researchers and advocacy staff highlighted the importance of having an aligned understanding between donors and researchers about the

¹² Document downloads are recorded separate from page hits

dynamics that achieving ‘impact’ is subject to also in the case of policy oriented research, and criticised that this was currently being broken up by the ‘value for money’ and a not sufficiently thought through ‘impact’ requirement applied on research. This echoes a point made quite early in the wider debate:

“Accountability implies both a shared set of expectations and a common currency of justifications. There has to be agreement about the context, the reason why one actor gives explanation since it precisely this sense of obligation which translates the giving of accounts into accountability...If there is no such agreement...we talk not about accountability, but about excuses, apologies or pretexts.”
 (Day, P; Klein, R. (1987): Accountabilities: Five public services, London, Tavistock, p, 5).

Figure 9: Download figures for APRO based One World Trust publications since 2008



5.4.2.3 Change

Feedback from partners about the immediate application of findings from the project remains sceptical about the chances of very tangible changes in terms of integration of accountability issues in strategy and policy of the organisations within a short project lifetime. The main reasons cited for slow progress are the competing pressures on researchers and management to ensure above all growth and in some cases survival of the organisation, a point which says a lot in itself about the chances for accountability to multiple stakeholders in difficult times.

Yet a few case studies from our research partners demonstrate that while not necessarily structured along the new framework, organisations do by themselves respond to challenges with periods of

institutional reform involving a more or less conscious repositioning, modifications to their stakeholder relationships, and rebuilding of theory of change, all points which show clearly the corresponding need to reform accountability processes.

Box 4: stories of change: RIMISP and Habitat for Humanity Brasil

While **RIMISP** bears several characteristics of a professional organisation, whether the Principal Investigators are given a great deal of freedom to operate independently, at the same time RIMISP has undergone sudden and significant reforms. Its current structure has emerged from its history, as various reforms have been initiated, constituting significant evolutions but retaining key elements of previous manifestations. Thus RIMISP changed from an IDRC funded research network in 1986, to a stand-alone organisation when IDRC funding abruptly ended in 1994 whose focus to “manage learning-oriented research and grants”. This corresponds to a change in focus for the operations.

“The early emphasis on methodology (farming systems research methods, in particular) has declined significantly, and been replaced with a growing emphasis on building learning capacity in rural development and coordinating and conducting applied research on different dimensions of rural development.” A. Bebbington, RIMISP – an internal evaluation 2006.

RIMISP is still evolving, and at the time of the first report (December 2009), it was at a ‘fork in the road’. RIMISP is launching a partial rethink of its ‘traditional’ approach, which ideally would retain the strengths of its network structure, while also drawing on some of the strengths of what was described as the ‘think-tank model’ in delivering relevant policy recommendations. A third deliberate evolution has taken place over the past year triggered by a recognised need to develop greater policy-influence and to generate research products that are directed to reforming policy.

By our first trip in 2009, RIMISP was already building the capacities and systems, and by the second many of the changes were in train – at Director was hired, the governance changes had been implemented and the communications team had been expanded. Even by the time of the first workshop, RIMISP was making strides to develop its capabilities, through revamping its governance structure and developing its M&E.

Habitat for Humanity, Brasil similarly was undergoing a significant organisational change, a change that has been ongoing for several years since its founder and long-term head handed over the reins. While the nature and extent of the reforms were still under debate within the organisation, they included a move from very limited models of housing provision to a much wider set of activities in the shelter and housing sector, including advocacy and policy-change.

This shift in focus meant that, while HFH’s culture was acclaimed by external stakeholders as being accountable, transparent and participative with strong evaluation and reporting, the specific tools and mechanisms it uses to guarantee accountability are oriented towards traditional activities. Thus for example, the evaluation indicators set at the headquarters level are limited to traditional models which cannot take into account the more complex advocacy/multi-sectoral projects. A strong tradition of participation is focused on projects defining a limited number of good housing solutions but not the wider and systematic engagement of families in advocacy activities.

HfH Brazil had made significant progress in repositioning itself, and had created strong links to civil society, as well as engaging in key policy-making forums. They were still balancing claims to political party neutrality, to inclusive advocacy work bringing in social movements and communities, and to good governance should be supported by accountability mechanisms.

6 Conclusion

The project has yielded a significant amount of new insights and conceptual thinking on the question of research accountability. In that sense it has been productive and very much worthwhile undertaking. The output is, and not just from the perspective of the implementing organisation, substantial and even impressive: not only are there a number of key conceptual reports and papers that are attracting interest, but also the framework and database and underpinning framework is a unique resource with great potential to structure thought and practice on accountability in policy research.

However, one of the goals set out in our theory of change could not be practically achieved in the project duration: affecting real organisational change along the framework concept.

The main reasons for this are on the one hand a misjudgement on our side of the speed and linearity of change that could be brought about on a systemic and strategic level even in smaller organisations (a mistake that could have been avoided simply by drawing more consciously on existing experience with organisational change from previous research at the One World Trust), and of not fully appreciating which actors deserved more attention as change agents and hence as targeted boundary partners. While we identified donors as a boundary partner, we missed governments and IGOs, and overall we focused far too much on communication with the research and evaluation community, which, while essential for credibility of the conceptual output, are in many ways just intermediary vectors for change.

The capacity for the framework to support change will therefore lie in the ability of the One World Trust and organisational development specialists to offer it as a practical and worthwhile approach to address not only the challenges forcing for instance a repositioning, but address and take the opportunity to respond proactively the resulting accountability questions.

In addition it will be critical to engage other important change agents, which were not identified as key boundary partners: governments, parliamentarians, as well as IGOs and powerful international research based advocacy NGOs not just as donors but as policy makers and policy influencers. The foundations for this influence to be exercised are being laid.