

International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

Integrated Knowledge Translation - Learning Support

A Brief Case Study Synthesis

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Purpose of Study

This document shares insights from an International Development Research Centre (IDRC) commissioned study on Integrated Knowledge Translation (IKT) conducted in 2024, which itself builds on a prior 2023 knowledge translation (KT) evaluation conducted by the same team: [*Knowledge Sharing for a More Sustainable and Inclusive World: An Evaluation of Program Support Models for Knowledge Translation in IDRC-Funded Research.*](#)*

This study is grounded in an understanding that KT refers to the process of moving research into action, while IKT refers to the engagement and participation of knowledge users (e.g., policymakers, practitioners, beneficiaries, etc.) in the research process itself, intent on heightening the likelihood of its use and impact.

With this in mind, the purpose of the study was to:

- Generate learning on the design, outputs, activities and practices of IKT, and on moving integrated and collaborative research into action, towards achieving outcomes and producing impacts.
- Inform continued reflection at IDRC on how best to support IKT in program design, delivery, evaluation and learning.

The study is primarily geared at IDRC staff, while also sharing insights and learning for others who are interested in carrying out or supporting IKT efforts more widely.

*Available at: <https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c09852ac-aca8-48be-abab-4f049644378f/content>

Methodological Dimensions

A methodological approach consisting of a comparative case study design and synthesis was pursued. Case studies were prepared on the following three IDRC Programs:

1. Women RISE: Women's Health and Economic Empowerment for a COVID-19 Recovery that is Inclusive, Sustainable and Equitable
2. GrOW-WA: Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women – West Africa
3. GIST: Gender in STEM Initiative

Analysis was then undertaken across the case studies, identifying common themes that were then crafted into broad learning on IKT.

Specific methods pursued are indicated in boxes 1 and 2.

Box 1: Research Activities

Key Informant Interviews (KII) and/or Focus Group Discussions (FGD) informed the case studies underpinning the overall synthesis. These were undertaken with IDRC Program Officers (POs), select research teams/grantees (Principal Investigators [PIs], team members, etc.), KT providers, and additional knowledge users/beneficiaries

Complementing the insights from the discussions were multiple rounds of document review based on documents provided by IDRC POs, alongside several validation meetings with IDRC, POs, and other IDRC stakeholders.

Box 2: Distribution of Consultations

A total of 56 people were consulted across all three case studies, as follows:

- Women RISE: 18
- GrOW-WA: 21
- GIST: 17

Key Questions

This synthesis focuses on answering the following **guiding questions**:

- How have the three sampled Programs used IKT as a mechanism for legitimating research and positioning knowledge for use?
- How has IKT played out in practice, and what have been the approaches, activities and outputs of IKT, for these sampled Programs?
- What have been key requirements and resources in planning for IKT, as evident in these sampled Programs?
- What outcome pathways are identifiable in the sampled Programs?
- What outcomes have been sought and expected, and what have been the actual outcomes produced in the sampled Programs?
- What role(s) have IKT played in enabling these sample Program outcome pathways?
- What are key Program design factors to be considered in pursuing IKT?
- What role(s) might IDRC assume in enabling, supporting and/or incentivizing IKT?

Case Studies

- **Program 1:** Women's Health and Economic Empowerment for a COVID-19 Recovery that is Inclusive, Sustainable and Equitable (Women RISE)
- **Program 2:** Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women – West Africa (GrOW-WA)
- **Program 3:** Gender in STEM Initiative (GIST)



Case Study Insights – Women RISE



Women RISE is a \$24 million initiative that seeks to support research on the links between women’s health and work, specifically looking at how “women’s health and their work (paid or unpaid) intersect and interact in the context of preparedness, response, and recovery” from the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the key insights generated from the study is on the value of early and continuous engagement with knowledge users and other actors in favouring project relevance and expected results. Engagement is seen, for example, in the form of various formal advisory groups, composed of a range of knowledge users, including beneficiaries. Input from these groups has included providing input into research design, interpretation of findings, and communication of results. Such input is anticipated to enhance the relevance of knowledge produced, as well as buy-in throughout the research process

Strengthening capacities and knowledge of actors can contribute to the IKT process, heightening awareness of and familiarity with the research, increasing ownership over the research itself across a range of actors, and developing skills in KT. Capacity strengthening was variably aimed at researchers and young scholars, decision-makers, beneficiaries, and other knowledge users.

Research teams have had to balance short project timelines with knowledge production and translation activities, including important project components such as the development of partnerships and trust. In this regard, pre-existing partnerships, the overall strength of partnerships, and trust among actors are important considerations.

Box 3: Contextual and IKT Information

Women RISE is a two-year, 23-research team initiative. At the time of writing, projects are still underway, and a six-month no-cost extension has been made available.

Program Level

Women RISE’s IKT design centred around the formal inclusion of knowledge users (specifically, decision-makers) within research teams as co-Principal Investigators (co-PIs). Additionally, a Health Policy and Research Organization (HPRO) was engaged to facilitate KT, capacity strengthening, and networking among research teams.

Project Level

Knowledge users were engaged at several levels, in addition to the decision-maker co-PI role. Moreover, some projects saw greater engagement of beneficiaries in the research teams.

Case Study Insights – GrOW-WA



Box 4: Contextual and IKT Information

GrOW-WA is a three-year, 6-research team Program.

Program Level

At Program level, a KT expert accompanied the cohort through peer-to-peer learning and the development of KT approaches. The KT expert was based in West Africa, which facilitated IKT approaches because of pre-existing connections with research users in the region. The KT expert also supported research synthesis and dissemination activities at Program level, with an intent to drive outcomes both regionally and globally.

Project level

IKT approaches focused on multi-stakeholder engagement during design and implementation with researchers, decision-makers, service providers, and beneficiaries. Research questions, data collection tools and solutions were conceptualized jointly through integrated approaches. Pre-existing relationships between decision-makers and research users facilitated joint collaboration during the IKT process.

GrOW-WA is comprised of six action-oriented research projects in four Western African countries. The focus of the projects is to position innovative solutions for scale for addressing barriers to women's economic empowerment. For half of the projects, this takes form through increasing women's access to childcare services and thereby reducing the burden of unpaid labour. The other half seek to identify innovative solutions that help reduce domestic labour work for women.

One key design element across the projects is multi-stakeholder engagement that informed research design and implementation. In the beginning stages, policy-makers shared their data needs, thereby informing the design of data collection tools. Projects also created a feedback loop with service providers and women beneficiaries consistently throughout, which ensured that the technical solutions remained relevant throughout the projects, therefore positioning them for use.

A strategic partnership was developed between Consortium pour la Recherche Économique et Sociale (CRES) and UN Women, which allowed for the co-creation of knowledge products that could serve, specifically, the advocacy needs of UN Women to move its agenda on unpaid care work forward. In addition, this strategic partnership allowed CRES to capitalize on UN Women's comparative advantage in advocacy and policy work, which helped mobilize national stakeholders in the Senegal universal childcare project in pursuit of IKT approaches.

Challenges hindering the conditions for scaling were observed, on the one hand because of enabling environments that are unfavorable to private sector investment and, on the other hand, because of lack of resources to support scaling. Interviews indicated that more time and effort would be required to enhance receptivity to the research across a range of potential users in the IKT process, including Ministries of Economy to influence the enabling environment and development partners to support scaling.

Case Study Insights – GIST



GIST is a program focused on breaking the systemic barriers that women face in STEM. The Program evolved out of the Breaking Barriers (BB) initiative, two projects of which were a part of the current study's analysis, such that insights are drawn from both Program phases. The main goal of the projects analysed is to advance policy and practice outcomes and to advance women in STEM into leadership positions, leveraging IKT mechanisms.

The key feature of GIST is that the research teams are composed of women in STEM, who are the end beneficiary group of the project. They have assumed the role of researcher-advocates. Researcher-advocates can be effective at advancing change from within the systems they operate. The project teams bring in knowledge about the universities they are engaging with and, in some cases, established networks within these universities. Their role as researcher-advocates transforms research fundamentals, such as ethics approval, into opportunities to raise awareness about the research topic. Several projects also involved a mentorship element that drove IKT efforts.

In many cases, researchers' professional and personal networks drove local change, however, projects required more KT support from outside of their local context. Within the local context, project teams' relationships with university and government policymakers, and ultimate beneficiaries, women in STEM, were needed for advancing change within institutions and nationally. When scaling this work, elements such as institutional networks, robust academic methodology and publishing, and conference/workshop presentations became more important for driving change.

A highly effective KT role that IDRC can play is one that complements existing efforts of research teams by targeting different users at a global level. IDRC has done so by contracting the services of Gender at Work, an external KT expert. IDRC continues to support GIST project teams in these scaling efforts by complementing existing capacities and multiplying networks, enabling impactful policy change both locally and globally.

Box 5: Contextual and IKT Information

GIST is a collection of six projects across Africa, Asia, Latin American and the Caribbean, which evolved out of BB.

Program Level

One of the key goals of at the Program level is to translate findings from projects into generalizable lessons that can be applied globally. To facilitate this, Gender At Work was hired as an external KT expert service provider.

Project Level

At the project level, researchers are themselves members of the ultimate beneficiary group - Women in STEM. For some projects, inclusion of decision-makers at all stages of the project life-cycle, and participation of end beneficiaries within the research are the central IKT design features that drive impact locally.

Synthesis Observations

Overview

A review and synthesis of the case studies has produced a series of insights that cover Outcomes, Outcome Pathways, Design Considerations, the Importance of Context, and the Role of IDRC as a Research-for-Development (R4D) Funder. The diagram on the next page visually captures the points raised here and in subsequent pages, based on the three case studies.

Outcomes

Across the case studies, three high-level Outcomes have been identified:

1. Policy Change
2. Practice Change
3. Leadership

Outcome Pathways

Four Outcome Pathways have been identified, which separately and more frequently together, contribute to producing the three identified Outcomes above. They are:

- A. Partnership
- B. Engagement
- C. Advocacy
- D. Capacity Strengthening

Design Consideration

Research design and methodology are central to the pursuit of IKT. A fundamental guiding principle is that research which includes research users on research teams, variably informing research design and direction, encouraging the uptake of research, generating additional use opportunities.

Importance of Context

Contextual factors merit serious consideration when pursuing IKT, on multiple levels. First, social, political, cultural and other contexts within which IKT is pursued will shape the type of research, its design, the composition of research team, obstacles to and opportunities of the research, and in other ways. Second, research participants are themselves 'gateways' to contextual knowledge and networks, which can facilitate activities and outputs with diverse knowledge-users operating at multiple scales, as strategic means for driving impact.

Role of IDRC as R4D Funder

As R4D funder, IDRC plays many roles that contribute to outcome generation. Among them, it can contribute to producing the conditions for scaling research, leveraging its capacities, networks and more to enable projects and Programs to engage additional research users identified beyond their existing sphere of influence.

Theoretical Model of IKT Pathways of Change

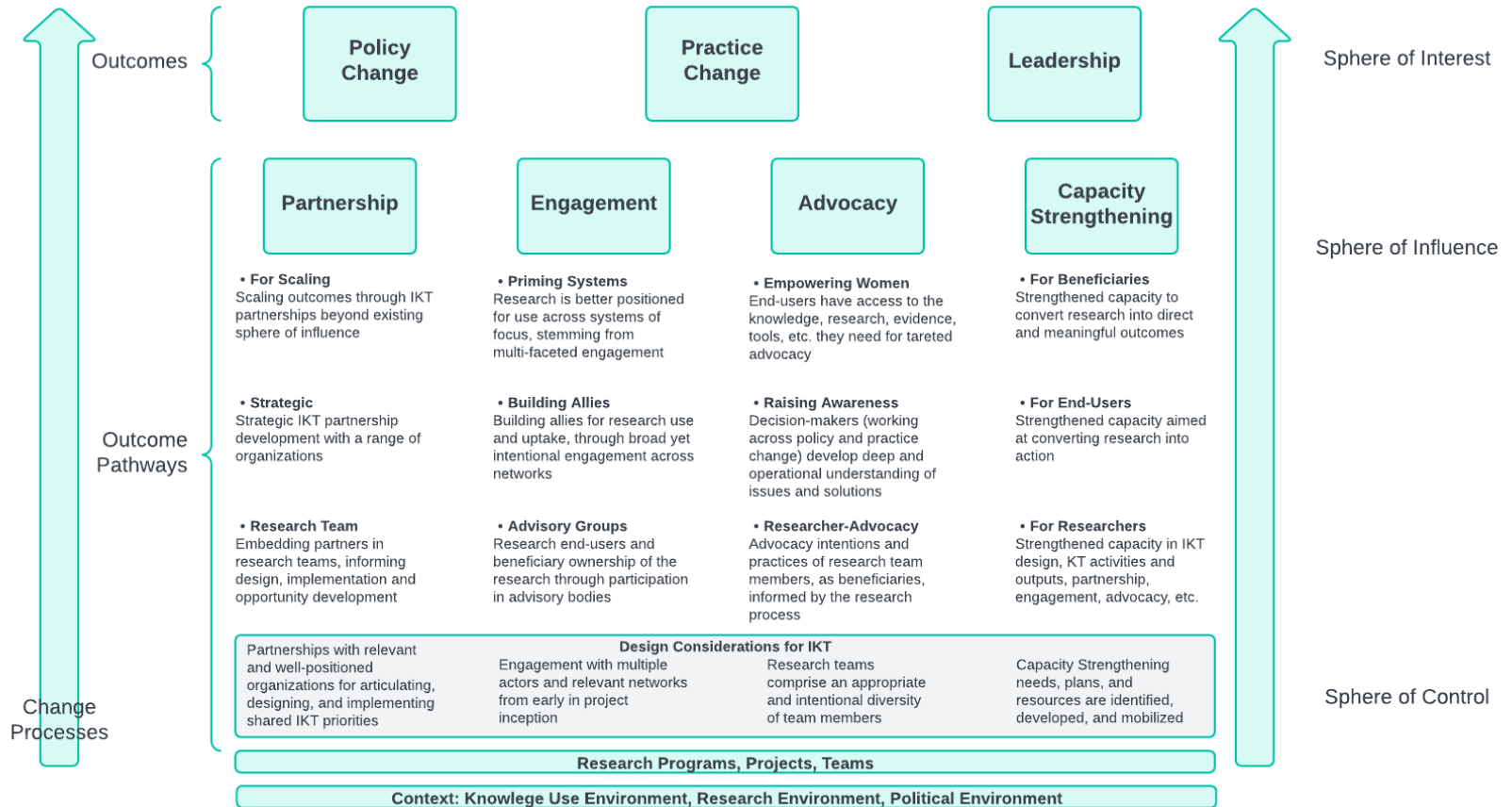


Fig. 1:
Theoretical Model of IKT Pathways of Change

Partnership

Developing research partnerships at Program level establishes the (inter-) institutional landscape within which projects will operate and the knowledge produced circulated. Developing a range of strategic, cooperative partnerships with key stakeholder over the life-cycle of a Program and its constitutive projects serves as an IKT pathway for driving research outcomes.

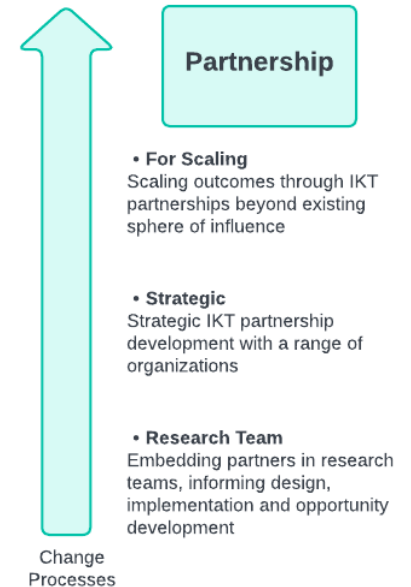
Project-level partnerships developed right from design phase can allow for researchers and a host of knowledge users (e.g., decision-makers) to articulate and implement shared IKT objectives, thereby establishing conditions for quality and impact. Partnerships can structure research teams to include diverse actors as co-PIs or in other ways (e.g. as members of advisory boards), drawing on multiple perspectives across a broad spectrum of IKT opportunities and activities.

As projects advance, strategic cooperative partnerships with a range of organizations can serve multiple and specific KT intentions matched with specific policy, practice and/or leadership outcomes. They are vital for positioning project outputs and scaling outcomes, beyond research teams' existing sphere of influence, thereby creating new pathways of influence. Research teams are more typically well situated to drive change within familiar operating contexts; partnering with organizations operating in different contexts or at different scales (e.g., from the local to the global, across regions, etc.) can multiply pathways of influence and opportunities for change.

Box 6: Example from GrOW-WA Case Study

'Toward universal access to childcare services in Senegal' project: UN Women forged a formal partnership with IDRC, seeing synergies with their Reduce, Recognize, and Redistribute (3R) project. Both projects focused on unpaid care work. The parties co-created a joint workplan that included activities such as joint national policy advocacy and high-level policy dialogue on women's unpaid care work in Senegal; joint collaboration for GrOW – WA's regional forum on women's economic empowerment; the sharing of knowledge on unpaid care work and co-production of policy briefs; and joint resource mobilization efforts.

Fig. 2: Partnership Outcome Pathway



Engagement

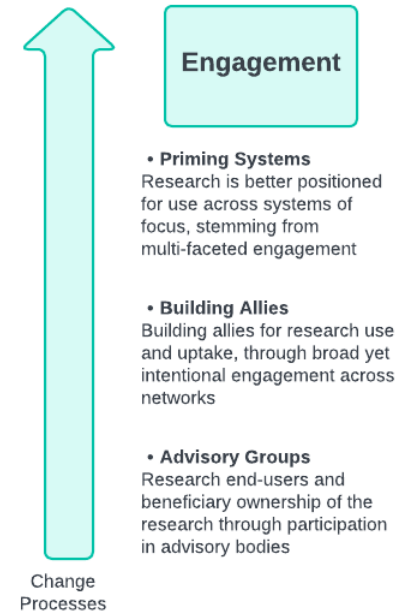
Intentional, targeted, systematic and sustained IKT-based engagement of research teams with a range of actors can favour the realisation of shared outcomes. Engaging decision-makers, practitioners, diverse knowledge users, and other key actors can drive outcomes by means of recognising and incorporating their perspectives at key moments in project cycles, particularly from early in the process and then communicating around progress, successes, challenges and opportunities throughout. Engagement with end beneficiaries and other knowledge users early in the research process, especially on advisory boards, serves to build ownership over the research, research outputs, and outcomes amongst these key stakeholders. Such ownership can drive a heightened adoption of research outputs and solutions.

Over the course of projects, engagement with key allies across systems in which change is sought is a component of successful IKT. Early and sustained efforts to engage decision-makers and policymakers create and build key allies in the targeted systems. Key allies can both support future dissemination of research outputs and can drive change themselves throughout their networks. In this way, engagement can prime networks and systems for greater receptivity, use and uptake of research.

Box 7: Example from Women RISE Case Study

‘Addressing the challenges and constraints of social protection policies for Peruvian women domestic workers’ (ANITA) project: Domestic workers are involved in this project in a formal advisory capacity. The Advisory Committee, and a Co-Researcher Committee included domestic workers and leaders as key members. The role of both committees was to provide domestic workers with an opportunity to engage in the production, interpretation and ultimately use of research results.

Fig. 3: Engagement Outcome Pathway



Advocacy

Advocacy is an important IKT outcome pathway that can act as a lever to drive policy and practice change and build future leaders across various fields. The outcome pathway is anchored in a team building and design phase, where project teams are intentionally inclusive, frequently include end-beneficiary advocates, and even articulate shared purpose in advocating for change. Where end-beneficiaries are part of project teams, IKT may be anchored in their advocacy intentions, empowering them as researcher-advocates intent on driving meaningful and effective outcomes.

Researcher-advocates, wholly or partially constitutive of research teams, may focus on raising awareness of issues at stake with a broader group of decision-makers and practitioners to develop and/or deepen operational understanding of research issues and solutions.

When research results, and policy and practice recommendations are effectively communicated outward to different actors, preferably informed methodologically by those who are themselves from among such actor groups, such advocacy creates conditions and possibilities for change. Targeted, sustainable and scaled impact are favoured when end-users are empowered to access the knowledge, research, evidence and tools for targeted advocacy.

Box 8: Example from GIST Case Study

‘Eliminating Barriers to Women’s Participation in Science – A Study of the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA)’ project: The research team directly reported results of their research to ARUA members. Throughout their research, the team found many gender policies in place, but also a clear implementation gap. During a presentation to ARUA in the later stages of the project, the team indicated that implementation gap needed addressing, pressing that doing so started with ARUA drafting their own gender policy.

Fig. 4: Advocacy Outcome Pathway



Capacity Strengthening

Capacity strengthening is proven to be a vital component of successful IKT. Closest to the research practice itself, capacity strengthening of research teams and their partners can expand and deepen skills and capacities of the research teams related to IKT design, KT activities and outputs, partnership, engagement, advocacy and more, possibly in the form of training, direct coaching and even institutional development.

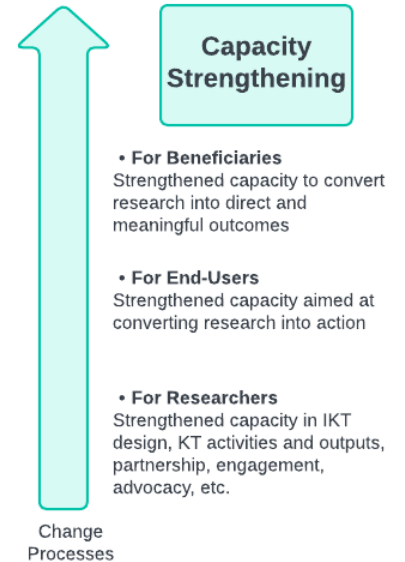
Capacity strengthening may also reach ever outwards, to end-users and beneficiaries, including community members, decision-makers, policymaker, and others. Here, capacity strengthening cuts across a broad swathe of possibilities. For end-users, capacity strengthening may focus on converting research into action, from advancing familiarity and ownership over the research, to planning and advancing impactful actions.

For end-beneficiaries, capacity strengthening may focus on integrating research results and processes into direct and meaningful outcomes. It may lean towards leadership development, transforming inequitable power dynamics and structures, and ultimately the overall enabling environment in which practitioners operate.

Box 9: Example from GrOW-WA Case Study

In projects that addressed fuel efficiency: The research teams strengthened the capacity of women (the end-beneficiary) to utilize, maintain and ensure the sustainable functioning and use of solar stoves. Research teams consulted with women beneficiaries on the development of possible revenue generating activities, given time saved by using the stoves rather than using other energy sources to meet their needs.

Fig. 5: Capacity Strengthening Outcome Pathway



Design Considerations

The importance of Program and project design cannot be overstated; they are foundational features within the sphere of control. At the highest level, the research funder (i.e., IDRC) has the authority and responsibility through programmatic design for setting the course of projects that themselves favour and pursue IKT approaches.

At project level, informing, supporting, and cutting across each of the specific outcome pathways, it is clear that partnerships play a key role in project and research design, such that relevant and well-positioned organisations are included, able to articulate, design and implement shared IKT priorities. From design stage, projects may favour, plan and pursue engagement with multiple and relevant actors and networks, anchored in a strong contextual analysis and matched with intended outcomes and systems change.

An appropriate and intentional composition of research teams, notably as related to outcome areas and systems change proves an important contributor to bringing about such meaningful change. Of note, the pursuit of gendered outcomes (in terms of policy, practice and leadership) finds support in research teams (e.g., of PIs) and designs (i.e., methodologically; with advisory boards, etc.) that are appropriately inclusive (e.g., of women). Finally, as part of research designs, capacity strengthening needs, plans and resources may be identified, developed and mobilised, matched to the different actors (and their institutions) and the outcomes favoured.

Such project level design considerations are variably led, mirrored and supported at the Program level, from the development of partnerships, to the diversity of supported research teams, capacity strengthening support provided, the availability of and access to networks, and more. Providing flexible and responsive support throughout Program cycles proves essential to maximising the likelihood of favourable outcomes.

Importance of Context

Context matters, fundamentally. Drawing on IDRC's *Research Quality Plus for Co-Production** assessment instrument, analysis of context may be undertaken to bring to light IKT-relevant insights on the: (1) **Knowledge Use Environment**; (2) **Research Environment**; (3) **Capacities for Co-Production**.

Drawing on this framework, it is important to situate, design and pursue research Programs and projects, and their IKT approaches and components, with consideration for the openness and receptivity of different actors in diversified contexts, i.e., **the knowledge use environment**. What may work in producing knowledge use and uptake in one knowledge use environment may have quite different outcomes in another. Thus, social, political, cultural and other contextual factors merit explicit consideration, with implications for research teams, design, partnerships, methodological approaches, and other related IKT dimensions. For instance, changing political and/or institutional priority change may require adjustments in design.

With respect to the research environment, it is important to turn towards research teams, partners, advisory boards, beneficiaries, end users, and other implicated parties, and consider the implications and possibilities of diverse IKT approaches, with attention to methodological matching. For instance, the extent to which timelines and resources are allocated for IKT projects will have significant implications for the suitability of approaches used for engaging different types of actors.

Pursuing IKT in one or other context may benefit from a **capacity assessment** of research team members for doing so and identifying if a strengthening of capacities (of some or myriad actors) might further favour outcome production. This is based on the simple yet powerful notion that such actors (including research participants, partners and other implicated parties) are themselves gateways of varying spheres of influence, that can be strengthened. Thus, while research projects may be situated within particular contexts, producing outcomes in quite different contexts or at different scales could well entail capacity strengthening of certain actors. In so doing, the mobilization of KT support requires ensuring that it is suitably sensitive to contextual realities, networks, and objectives.

* McLean et al. (2023) 'Evaluating the quality of research co-production: Research Quality Plus for Co-Production (RQ+4Co-Pro)' *Health Research Policy and Systems* 21:51.

Role(s) of IDRC

IDRC has been recognised as having pursued the following three roles on the Programs and projects examined, as follows: (1) Funder; (2) Provider of KT Support; and (2) Connector. In so doing, IDRC has played a key catalytic role in supporting IKT and outcomes along the four outcome pathways.

- **As Funder**, IDRC plays a fundamental role in setting the parameters of Calls for Proposals, expectations around IKT research design, team composition, timelines, resources, flexibility, and in other ways.
- **As Provider of KT support**, IDRC ensures that research teams receive accompaniment that supports IKT approaches and dimensions of projects. Further, IDRC may help mobilise supplementary KT expertise, providing direct methodological support, creating capacity strengthening opportunities, and more.
- **As Connector**, IDRC creates opportunities for IKT-guided engagement beyond the sphere of influence of projects themselves, often at scale, across regions, and with diverse actors, through networking, enabling access to networks and events, and in other ways.



Fig. 6: Role(s) of IDRC