

Between Ourselves Workshop

*Report from the second meeting of the I-K-Mediary Group
July 2008, Centurion, South Africa*

Edited by Catherine Fisher and Yaso Kunaratnam

About the Strategic Learning Initiative

The Strategic Learning Initiative (SLI) is an IDS programme that works collaboratively with IDS Knowledge Services, their peers and partner organisations. SLI's purpose is to build understanding about the role information, especially research-based information, plays in stimulating positive social change and to help to apply that understanding in practical ways to strengthen knowledge, information and communication programmes, at IDS and across the sector.

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About this publication

This report outlines the key outcomes of the Between Ourselves Workshop held in Centurion, South Africa in 2008. The workshop brought together 30 of the new generation of research intermediaries to share experiences, learn together and reflect on the "Locating the power of in-between" conference which preceded it. While the conference explored the role of information intermediaries in supporting greater use of evidence in policy and practice processes, the workshop enabled those playing this intermediary role to go into more depth into theoretical and practical aspects of their work. This report captures the emerging thinking and ideas for action and collaboration that emerged including: different roles for intermediaries "just in case and just-in-time"; exploration of policy actors and processes; strategies for exploring the impact of participants' work; and how to provide the best possible websites for our stakeholders. Finally the report outlines how participants intend to build on the connections forged during the workshop to create a programme that will support information intermediaries to learn and collaborate together in future. An electronic version of this publication is available as a free download from www.ids.ac.uk/go/ikmediary-group. Please send any comments or questions to sli@ids.ac.uk.

Between Ourselves Workshop
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“ We are living in an information age and we should make our role as information intermediaries known and recognisable. ”

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“ Theories emerged, collaborations were hatched, ideas were blatantly stolen and copyright and ownership happily ignored. It was a rich time. ”

Reflection on the workshop Maria McMillan, DevZone New Zealand

Between Ourselves workshop overview and key outcomes

Origins and rationale

The Between Ourselves workshop was a participatory event which brought together some of the new generation of research intermediaries to share experiences and learn together. These organisations all aim to increase access to and use of research in development contexts by providing portals, gateways or reporting services. Participants included representatives from national portals such as the Social Economic Research Portal – Philippines (SERP-P) and Bangladesh Online Research Network, regional information services such as Southern African Documentation Centre (SARDC) and European network Euforic, as well as initiatives and services with an global scope such as Eldis and GNet (for a full list of intermediary services represented see Appendix 1.) The workshop followed the “Locating the Power of In-Between” conference – a larger event which aimed to shine a spotlight on the role of research brokers, knowledge and information intermediaries and info-mediaries, and the contribution they can make to supporting and enabling evidence based pro poor policy and practice.

Convened by the I-K-Mediary Group which emerged from a workshop held in 2007 in Brighton, this second event served both to expand the membership and deepen connections between members of that group. The aim was to create an ongoing space for interaction and dialogue, peer learning and generation of new ideas, during the workshop and beyond.

Between Ourselves Workshop objectives

- **Reflect** on conference proceedings and identify implications for our work.
- **Strengthen** individual and collective understandings of the role of information and knowledge intermediaries in relation to each other and their contribution to development.
- **Learn** together and identify good practice in the areas of information and knowledge intermediation.
- **Identify** current and future challenges and potential solutions.
- **Broaden and develop** the group into an ongoing platform for collaboration and learning and identify future collective ambitions.

Workshop format

The 2 day workshop was highly participatory, and participant led. It drew heavily on discussions from the preceding “Locating the Power of In-Between” conference and themes emerging from this event shaped the agenda. It was organised both in plenary and in 4 self-organising streams, agreed by the I-K-Mediary group in advance of the workshop. These sought to look at information knowledge and intermediary work in different ways: through a conceptual stream; an editorial and implementation stream, a monitoring, evaluation and impact stream and a technical stream. Streams converged at the end of each session to draw out main points. The workshop closed by looking to the future of this group and the role of information intermediaries more broadly.

Key outcomes from the Between Ourselves workshop

1. Information and knowledge intermediary work is a powerful force for social change

The conference and workshop illustrated the range of roles that intermediaries can play; the diversity of contexts in which the role is being played and the range of stakeholders

affected. Discussions illustrated the potential contributions for intermediaries around enhancing information flows between actors, stimulating demand for information and maintaining access to information over time. Ideas were generated and shared about how intermediaries can broaden and deepen their individual and collective contributions.

2. Different roles for knowledge and information intermediaries: ‘just in case’ and ‘just in time’

During the Power of In-between conference, some intermediaries identified the need to go beyond playing a “repository” role for information if they want to achieve their objectives around informing policy and practice processes. They argued that proactive communication and engagement with stakeholders are necessary. Exploration during the workshop found both roles were required; characterised as just in-case and just-in-time. In some cases one organisation can play both roles, in other cases collaboration between people with feet in different camps and skills to match is just as effective.

3. Greater understanding of the actors we serve and their role in policy processes is required

A deep understanding of the actors we seek to reach and the changes we seek to bring for them is necessary if we are to contribute effectively to greater use of evidence in policy and practice. This understanding should drive all of our work, from strategy level thinking, to website design, editorial policy and monitoring and evaluation.

4. Collaboration between people undertaking intermediary work is a central means of achieving our objectives

At both the workshop and conference there was an emerging sense of a sector; one that would be stronger with greater common identity, shared understandings, values and standards, and one whose members collaborate to realise their objectives. From benchmarking our work in comparison to each other, joint investigations into impact to content sharing; collaboration between intermediaries in different spheres was an ongoing theme.

5. Willingness to work together to create structures for shared learning and collaboration

At the end of the workshop, participants affirmed their commitment to continue working together and to creating the means for doing so. We agreed to develop the I-K-Mediary Group from an informal network towards a formal I-K-Mediary Programme. Individuals from 10 organisations volunteered to be part of a Core Group to develop a vision and mission, design a programme that will meet the needs of the broader group and to seek the funding to make it a reality.

“ This year’s workshop really motivated me to put in a more active contribution to the group’s work so that it can be a more potent force to move for social change. ”

Workshop participant evaluation

How we understand the power of in-between: Building a collective understanding of our contribution to development

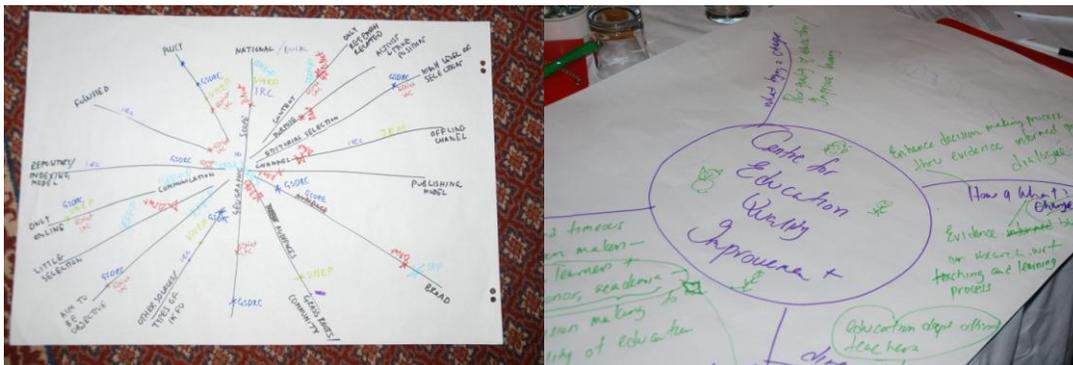
Time to revisit the core assumptions about what we are trying to achieve

As information and knowledge intermediaries we facilitate access to research based information for stakeholders who can use it in their work to support development and social justice. A key workshop objective was to enable us to take a step back from our busy schedules to reflect on and develop our conceptual and practical understandings of our role as intermediaries in development processes. Participants were able to reflect on what their work is hoping to change in the world in the context of the rich discussions that had taken place during the conference.

“ Most useful part of the workshop was...the time to think and reflect and the great people who helped me do that. ”

Workshop participant evaluation

We started by working individually and in small groups to “map” our services. Each participant created a drawing that explored why their services exist and for whom, what problems they are trying to address and what changes they anticipate their work will result in. For many of us these core assumptions are not foremost in our minds on a day to day basis, so some found it very insightful to revisit the fundamentals. One participant declared he was going to go back to his team and partners and rethink aspects of his long established service.



Comparing our interventions

Participants then collectively mapped where our services stood in relation to characteristics of the intermediary role that the I-K-Mediary group had identified in 2007¹ these included issues

¹ Characteristics explored at the workshop were from the I-K-Mediary Group Purpose and Description Statement 2007. Members of the group occupy different spaces on the following spectrums which describe different characteristics of the various service models:

- Indexing model ↔ Publishing model
- Cover only research findings ↔ Feature range of content
- Online communication channels ↔ Offline channels
- National ↔ Global
- Selective audience ↔ Wider audience
- High level of editorial selection ↔ Little editorial selection
- Policy audience ↔ Grassroots audience

around types of audience that services aim to serve – from grassroots audiences to policy audiences, nature of the content included, and the type of role that the providers of the service play. Participants felt this was useful for spotting connections, defining ourselves and identifying our niche. So while some kind of “mapping” holds potential, we agreed that more work needs to be done on clarifying the key characteristics of our role, understanding and breaking down who we are trying to influence, and indicating points and ranges of elements of our work.

This sense of building a deeper understanding of our individual and collective contributions to development and social change was a theme that ran throughout the workshop, occurring in most of the thematic streams and emerging as a core driver of the I-K-Mediary group as it moves forward.

Identifying actors in policy and practice – who are we aiming to influence and how?

A major theme that emerged through the Power of In-Between conference and that ran throughout the workshop was an explicit focus on understanding policy processes; in particular the behaviours, motivations and connections between the constellation of actors within those processes. Many of our services identify “policymakers” as a group we are hoping to serve. Yet the blanket term risks masking the reality of the range of people who fall under that label- many of whom we may actually know!

Suggestions emerging in the early discussion were:

- We should try to move away from the term policymakers and focus on policy influencers and policy processes
- We need to be aware of the different levels and connections associated in policy e.g. international, national, district, provincial and local
- Policy influencers are not just people making decisions, but those that influence *them*, such as journalists or advisors

“ In Vietnam, we involve Ministers such as the Minister of Planning & Investment in research information work. We work with them directly, but also convene through online conferences. ”

Tran Minh, Vietnam Economic Policy Portal (VNEP), Vietnam

“ For us, one of our policymakers is the Chair of the AMREF International Board. For example they were developing a strategy on HIV/AIDS, so we started a paper and put outlines from around the world. It needed active engagement to influence from the resource centre. ”

Jane Ireri, AMREF, Kenya

We agreed we need to identify clear linkages between “pro-poor” policy making and research intermediation. A more nuanced and subtle understanding about the individuals involved in policy and practice will help us to develop more targeted approaches and understand who, what and when to influence. A few important themes emerged:

- We need to be more aware of windows of influence – timeliness is a crucial factor in our role and we need identify when to engage in key debates.
- Playing a repository role may not be enough to make a difference to information flows in policy and practice – a more proactive role may be required – this was expanded more by the conceptual group in the “just-in-case” and “just-in-time” discussion.
- It is important that services are tailored to specific audiences; this may require working with particular audiences/niches, we should match our products with change processes in order to influence them.

“ *The debates [about] the policy making process pointed out a lot of potential tasks for me to look into.* ”

Workshop participant evaluation

Other themes emerging from the Power of In-between conference

The issue of understanding policy and our contribution to it was the overriding theme emerging from the conference. Other themes with significance for our work emerged as:

- *Importance of collaboration between intermediaries* – the conference highlighted the range of intermediary work being undertaken in different sectors, with different stakeholders and in different parts of the world. We identified the importance of making connections between intermediaries operating in these different spheres to ensure greater information flows, addressing any duplication and overlap in our work.
- *Standards and principles for intermediary work* - a theme emerging from the conference can be summarised as the need for greater “professionalisation” within the “intermediary sector” which could emerge in different ways such as common standards and principles, common understandings about the nature of our contribution and how to play it, and benchmarking between us.
- *Enabling innovation* – how do we ensure innovation within our work and the “intermediary sector”? Can we work together to identify new mechanisms and strategies to achieve our aims, in areas such as ensuring information flows from grassroots to policy or harnessing web 2.0 technologies?
- *Information Literacy* – a key issue that emerged from the conference is the motivations and capabilities of our stakeholders to engage with research based information. We asked how we can move beyond thinking about information consumption and stir up critical thinking and dynamism amongst users of research information.

Many of these issues were developed in the thematic streams, for example the Monitoring and Evaluation group discussed benchmarking, the Editorial group looked at collaboration, and the conceptual group discussed building common understandings about the nature of our contribution. However these areas need to be revisited as the I-K-Mediary group develops over the coming years.

Just in case and just in time: How intermediaries contribute to policy processes

Notes from the conceptual stream

Why explore conceptual aspects of our work?

We felt that a greater conceptual understanding of our work, in particular the changes we are trying to make and the contexts in which we are operating, will help in a practical sense to help us to achieve greater impact. We also felt it was important to identify and understand the assumptions behind our work, recognising that this might move us out of our ideological or organisational comfort zones. In some cases there may be a gap in the rhetoric about our work and what we are actually achieving; this is important because it could be a barrier to them becoming as effective as possible.

There is a huge range of intermediaries and activity and a greater understanding of this and the differences and complementarities of activities can only help our work. Intermediation is there and happening so we need to keep an eye on it and understand it. Having a better idea of policy processes and the potential contribution of intermediaries will help us both make a case for our work and to do it better.

Intermediary roles 'just in case' and 'just in time'

We identified that there are different roles and connections between the 'information world' and 'policy world', with different layers in these worlds. Through discussion we identified two influential intermediary roles: 'just in case' and 'just in time'.

'Just in case'	'Just in time'
<p>Some intermediaries play a 'just in case' role: that is they organise information, make sure it is in the public domain and accessible 'just in case' somebody needs to use it. The focus of activity is not in the 'use' of the information but in enabling 'use'.</p> <p>Case study : <i>Richard Humphries of SAPRN heard about a document produced by a friend working on flood mitigation in Mozambique, he obtained a copy of the document, AND made it available online on the SAPRN database. Two years later someone was looking for materials related to flood mitigation – found this document and used it to develop a policy.</i></p>	<p>Some intermediaries play a more active 'just in time' role: identifying opportunities for influence, convening within and around those opportunities; drawing together materials, repurposing them for particular audiences and engaging directly with stakeholders.</p> <p>Case study: <i>When a discussion about national policy on minimum wage was taking place in the Bangladeshi parliament, DNet were able to identify relevant material from a range of research institutes available on their Bangladesh Online Research Network service. They packaged it for the key actors involved in debates and used their connections to these actors to share the material.</i></p>
<p>Characteristics and connections between 'just in case' and 'just in time' roles</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Just in time' relies on 'just in case' - the roles are complementary • 'Just in time' roles are likely to be closer to decision making processes, moving in and out of different circles of power and with personal relationships with key stakeholders 	

- The skills, profile and location of actors involved in 'just in case' work is likely to be different from those involved in 'just in time' work.
- There may be a series of 'just in case' and 'just in time' roles involved in any decision making process

Decision making processes and the roles of intermediaries within them

The term policymaker is misleading as it makes policy processes sound simple with only a few actors involved. For our work to be more effective we need to really engage with the kinds of processes we are trying to influence - the art or science of policy. We need to recognise that it is a messy business and understand the nature of our various roles within them and the value we can add. One problem we face as intermediaries is reconciling the messy realities with the linear certainties needed for funding proposals.

In every policy process there is an ocean of actors involved in different ways in the formulation, decision making and implementation of decisions. For all decisions it becomes clear that many different actors wade into that ocean to try to shape either the policy or the process². Some actors will be right at the epicentre of processes, others will be further out in supporting roles. We wondered if it is possible to map the positions of different kinds of actors, particularly those playing 'intermediary' roles within that ocean.

Theoretical underpinnings of intermediary work: intermediary evolution tree

We began a discussion looking at the different backgrounds we come from and the assumptions that underpin our worldview and how that plays out in our work. A few participants agreed that an activity at the beginning of the workshop that asked participants to get into groups according to profession did not recognise the multiple/hybrid identities that many people feel³. Catherine Fisher shared some emerging thinking about the different theories surrounding information, communication and knowledge (e.g. library and information science, popular education, knowledge management) and the kinds of activities they have generated. This is currently expressed as a map and conceptualised as 'an ecology'.

This discussion moved on to explore the background to information, knowledge and communication work, from origins back in ancient religious texts, through the Alexandrian Library right up to the modern day. We discussed trying to create a 'family tree' of Information, Communication and Knowledge theory and action going right through to the present day. Biological scientists questioned the accuracy of this analogy; but suggested that an evolution tree could look at where different species stopped and where external shocks (such as the invention of the printing press or the internet) had impacted on species and led to parallel evolution⁴.

The group thought that a greater understanding of the different tenets and principles of different theories and ideas around information, communication and knowledge would help

² Or are unwilling actors in a process, e.g. people who will be affected by a decision

³ This idea of a hybrid identity being a fundamental part of the intermediary role is a discussion that colleagues at IDS have had

⁴ An example of the parallel evolution is the emergence of the ability to fly in unrelated species, and an example in the world of ideas is the emergence of agriculture in different parts of the world with no apparent communication between them.

modern day intermediaries to locate themselves in relation to other ideas and approaches could inspire innovation.

Good Practice Proposal

The conceptual group made a proposal to the rest of the I-K-Mediary Group:

- **Think of policy as a process not an event:** this will help us to identify multiple actors and multiple points of influence with whom we should be connecting.
- **Replace the term ‘policy makers’ with decision makers:** this will encourage us to think about what kind of decisions we are seeking to influence.
- **Think about ‘uses’ of your services not ‘users’⁵:** this will help us think about the actions we want people to take as a result of using your service and will discourage generalisations of people by job type.

Whilst it may be premature to be adopting common positions like this (even just between ourselves), conceptual group members would like to encourage others to consider these ideas for future discussion.

What next for the conceptual group?

We proposed the following activities to build on and develop the discussions – they cannot be undertaken all at once but are food for thought for future work:

1) Compile a collection of case studies illustrating the contribution of intermediaries in policy processes and use to map the policy – intermediation process

It would strengthen our practice and build greater appreciation of our work amongst our stakeholders if we were able to illustrate different ways in which intermediary work can influence policy processes. We propose compiling a collection of case studies from across our different projects using a common format to enable comparison. Interestingly the monitoring and evaluation group came up with a very similar proposal.

2) Encourage others to undertake research into the role of intermediaries in policy processes

The group discussed ideas for an investigation into the role of intermediaries but felt it was too large in scope for the group to take forward collectively or individually at this point. However participants felt that there was a lot of research into policy processes happening and that maybe some researchers could consider this as part of a broader proposal (see Appendix 1 for further details on this idea).

3) Co-create an intermediary evolution tree

The group agreed to explore the idea of an intermediary evolution tree further. Different members would populate different parts based on their relative strengths. In some way this is an intellectual experiment but it may be useful to use this to create an ‘intermediary primer’ with a bit of introduction on related disciplines which could be used in the induction of people new to the intermediary role.

⁵ See discussions from the technical strand about usability – this is a complementary concept but at a slightly higher level : –the trinity of usability is 1) users 2) goal 3) environment - this idea encourages us to focus on the broader goal of people we are seeking to influence and how we try to support that

Providing for our users without making them think

Notes from the technical stream

Why explore the technical side of our work?

All of us run a website as a central part of our service, so participants in this group wanted to take this opportunity to learn more about how we could improve this core part of our work. The focus of the session was on ensuring that our services are as easy to use as possible for our intended stakeholders. The session was led by Adrian Bannister from BRIDGE, one of the IDS Knowledge Services, who was drawing on experiences from recent usability training he had attended and how he attempted to implement his learning⁶. However like all sessions it was highly participatory, drawing on the experience of all participants.

Discussions aimed to be as 'un-technical' as possible, and focussed more on sharing experiences as people engaged in managing and implementing intermediary services (both online and offline) and the challenges faced when using technology to achieve our goals.

Some of the day to day challenges of web work we face are:

- Thinking through the steps involved in producing a web product
- Becoming a web expert within an organisation without having a technical background
- Developing websites which feature interactive areas, especially those using web 2.0 tools and functions
- Reviewing and changing a website once it has been built. For example, Dev-Zone is involved in a process of improving and re-branding the site. They are trying to manage this process within the bounds of their limited ICT capacity, and at the same time taking into account original thinking and historical evolution behind the current website design.

What do we mean when we talk about usability?

Participants spent time discussing what they thought web usability meant. Suggestions included:

- Being able to get information as easily and quickly as possible (usability and accessibility go hand-in-hand)
- Providing lots of different routes to information and responding to different needs
- "A website should mean that I don't have to think" – *Don't make me think* is the evocative title of a leading book on designing usable websites by Steve Krug⁷
- Ensuring the right technology is used in the appropriate way

Definition of usability

The International Organisation for Standards (ISO) has identified three key concepts of usability:

- a. Effectiveness – the accuracy and completeness with which users achieve specified goals
- b. Efficiency – the accuracy and completeness of goals achieved in relation to resources
- c. Satisfaction – freedom from discomfort, and positive attitudes towards the use of the system

⁶ Adrian attended a two day Web Usability Training course run by "The Usability Training Centre" in the UK, for details see <http://www.userfocus.co.uk/training/webusability.html>

⁷ Krug, S (2002) *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability*, 2nd Edition

- Considering minimum standards to avoid excluding certain user groups e.g. those using low bandwidth connections
- Balancing the usability of site technology with the content itself
- Situating websites within a wider range of tools e.g. for marketing and monitoring and evaluation

What we see as barriers to usability

Examples of barriers to usability identified by participants included:

- *Asking users to register on a website* - This could be a barrier for users who just want to download a document. It may prompt them to go elsewhere to get the information they need.
- *Breakdown in quality control of content* - Dev-Zone set up a directory where users could add their own content. Unfortunately it generated lots of spam, irrelevant content additions and required ongoing resources to maintain editorial control.
- *Non-essential bells and whistles* - just because it is fun it does not mean it will be user friendly or going to help what they do or you want to achieve
- *Language and semantics* - this can be a barrier to people using information. For example Siyanda put a message board with news about funding and events but the main heading bar was called 'Contribute' which meant anyone seeking that information was not going to go to it!
- *Conflicts between organisational goals and users needs* - there can be great divergences between what organisations think is important and what users want. Some organisations find it hard to prioritise the goals of their users over their own.

The usability trinity: putting usability into practice

The 'usability trinity' encourages those working with websites to look at three factors when thinking about usability:

- 1) **Users** – who are the sites users? What are their key characteristics? For example, are they a politician, an activist or are they an NGO worker?
- 2) **Goals** - what are their goals? Why have they come to the site, and how does their visit relate to broader tasks?
- 3) **Environment** - what is their environment – do they have good connectivity, physical space?

Adapted from *The Usability Training Centre*

The importance of personas as a usability tool

Personas are a key tool in making design decisions. A persona is a short engaging summary of a key user – they describe user archetypes – neither an “average” nor a real user but a stereotypical one. Personas aim to bring the user to life. They should look at what people do (their behaviour) and why they do them (goals and motivations)⁸.

⁸ Description adapted from notes from the Usability Training Centre as before, For more information on personas see <http://www.practicalpersonas.com/>

Personas can help designers imagine scenarios for key functions of a site. They prompt questions such as: What are key tools we are providing on the website? Do they relate to what is known about users, their goals and their environments? In particular, working with user profiles and scenarios enables designers to prioritise and focus on only the details that would make the most impact.

We attempted to profile a user of our own sites in detail, using the usability trinity model and discussed how it was likely that for each site there could be a number of different personas, combining particular user traits. For example users might:

- not be particularly technically proficient but interested in the web for finding information;
- have problems understanding academic language;
- have limited bandwidth;

Two specific examples that the technical group identified are shown below.

Dev-Zone	BRIDGE
<p>User: Private sector development practitioner – new field contract</p> <p>Goals: Overview of country, overview of topic, speed, most recent research on a particular topic</p> <p>Environment: High tech, connected, might not be <u>that</u> web savvy</p>	<p>User: advisors within in National Women’s Machineries (Government)</p> <p>Goals: influencing policy (high level, want policy information (website)</p> <p>Environment: poor access to computers, poor internet connectivity (isolated from information), more interested in print</p>

Understanding target users and designing for them

This focus on personas helped us identify some key questions that we need to explore in relation to our web based services:

- How do we know how usable our website/tool is?
- What is the user experience?
- How do we find out why ‘one click’ users never come back?
- Does it matter who else is using the website if you are reaching your primary audience?

Participants did not come up with immediate answers to these questions (maybe the Monitoring & Evaluation group can help!) but shared some thoughts and examples of how they have tried to find out more about users.

- The first step would be to gather information about users to inform measures of usability and design decisions e.g. by doing focus groups and market research on target audiences and actual users. This information can be used to create user profiles to decide what changes to make and for who.
- It is not worthwhile to try to control who else uses a service as long as primary target audiences do.
- Developing an understanding about repeat visitors to a website is key.
- Baselines need to be established to measure the changing user base as the service develops. It is an important way of informing design and marketing decisions.

Key points on website usability

- 'Don't make me think' is a useful phrase to remember throughout a web design process
- Non techies can become web design experts by mainstreaming usability and user-led approaches in their organisations - it is a great empowerment tool
- Developing information services from a 'uses' perspective is most useful once designers have considered the other two elements of the usability trinity: users and environments⁹

What next for the technical group?

The group were interested in understanding and getting together around principles of and practical routes to greater collaboration.

The proposition: moving towards openness, best practice

The group made the case for collaborative work, and outlined what the group should aim to do, and why. It should:

- Work towards principles of openness e.g. use more open access tools that others within and outside the group could benefit from
- Think about developing best practice approaches for sharing (this could relate to externally-focused services and / or internal tools and knowledge / skills / capacities). This is particularly important for technology-related work because:
 - Data sharing has immense value
 - It makes sense to re-use collective wisdom rather than reinventing the wheel e.g. in the use of particular tools, sourcing for diversity agendas, dealing with broken links
 - Many web tools (including new 'web 2.0' ones) provide opportunities for both individual services as well as wider communities of users and collaborators.

Practical ways forward

To realise collaboration in practice, it is necessary to identify practical routes to channel energy through, such as:

- Identifying and employing tools that help compare principles/practices and approaches. A solution could be sharing success stories through a wiki. The group discussed ideas about possible content for a wiki but agreed it would require a commitment to resources beyond what was feasible.
- Agreeing to work towards standards (i.e. showing a commitment to openness by engaging in a process to eventually adhere to externally agreed standards of best practice) is more realistic than trying to make strong commitments from the outset and then try to stick to them. The group agreed it was committed to such a process of taking a measured approach to work towards key standards of openness where possible.
- Making strategic improvements by using two processes – helping others within the group to understand difficulties and use collective capacities to overcome constraints
- Placing the intermediary in a position of greater power and influence, and creating legitimacy

⁹ This relates to discussions in the conceptual stream that recommended thinking about 'uses' rather than 'users' to help think about the actions people take. 'Uses' relates to the goals in the trinity, but has to be thought through in relation to both goals and environments.

The group proposed conducting a pilot to explore collaborative work. This would involve identifying and deciding on a new tool which has potential for sharing, is based on standards and which helps us to achieve a common goal. The tool needs to promote openness, have the facility to move data around, enhance existing work while being resource un-intensive. It could help facilitate the first round of collaboration and open up doors to further and more challenging initiatives between participants' organisations.

The group agreed that the challenge would be to find a practical and modest way forward to ensure steps forward can be made within relatively short time periods. Participants decided they would like to try to see a demo about RSS feeds, to see if this might be worth pursuing as a pilot.

The group also committed to sharing resources and information on usability, potentially using the usability group on the Eldis Community¹⁰ site. For example, BRIDGE will share experiences from a website usability session they are holding with student volunteers.

The power of everyday decisions
Notes from Editorial & Implementation Stream

Why explore the editorial side of our work?

The reputation and effectiveness of our work as information and knowledge intermediaries rests largely on the information we choose to mediate through our work. Thus the editorial decisions we make and the policies and processes that surround those decisions are fundamental. We as 'the editorial group' were interested in how others make editorial decisions and approach editorial issues such as selection, quality and balance of content. Through sharing experiences and solutions we felt we could come up with common criteria/standards amongst the group. We wanted to discuss the following: practical plans for improving our work, editorial criteria and how we source, how others approach similar editorial problems and practical collaboration.

Editorial criteria and implementation issues

Decision-making

As intermediaries, daily issues are around how we choose what information we include in our services; and how we choose what is the best/most relevant information while trying to ensure objectivity at the same time. Decision-making is often governed by individual choice, but it is important to have some criteria to ensure balance of views is portrayed.

Approaches to editorial decision making

GNet regional windows	GSDRC	Eldis
GNet regional window staff are initially trained in technological aspects and then on how to abstract. They source	GSDRC use a list of criteria for sourcing and choosing content, they try to include material with a governance angle within the	Eldis editors have to find enough information to send out email newsletters twice a month. They engage with different networks

¹⁰ <http://community.eldis.org/>

<p>information and send this to the headquarters in Cairo to authorise and upload onto the GDNNet website. Each person is expected to contribute 24 abstracts a month – often they send across everything they find because it is difficult to prioritise what is most important. HQ staff make final editorial decisions.</p>	<p>last 3-5 years. An Information Officer does a wide search and DFID (their main target users) are left to make a choice from a list on what they want more information on.</p>	<p>to find the ‘new and best’ stuff out there, but deciding what constitutes the ‘best’ information is a day to day challenge that editors face. Editors are recruited for their knowledge in a particular area but decisions tend to be subjective. The group felt that engaging more with their audience could help balance this out and reach a ‘common subjectivity’.</p>
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Information focus: ensuring quantity, quality and diversity of content

We agreed that the coverage of multiple and diverse perspectives within our services is central to the mandate of information and knowledge intermediaries. We discussed what type of information their services focus on and explored the idea that intermediaries should be focusing on other information such as less ‘traditional’ research or information that is inaccessible. There are other types of information that could be covered rather than published, peer-reviewed material, such as datasets, and there are other types of knowledge other than research that services could be promoting. We asked if and how we could move towards making ‘unheard voices’ more visible.

We identified particular challenges emerging from our work covering multiple and diverse sources of content:

- **Sourcing southern content**
 One problem in particular the IDS Knowledge Services are facing is sourcing greater proportions of southern content. Eldis for example find it time consuming to identify research from developing countries as it is often harder to find online. Thus there can be a trade of between quantity and diversity of coverage. In some cases there are also tensions between diversity of sources and quality of material.
- **External influences determine what can be included**
 Funder requirements can determine the focus of your information. For example, id21 are funded by DFID for the purpose of communicating research from the UK. This means they are required to focus on UK research.
- **Overcoming barriers to content-sharing between intermediaries**
 We could do more together over content-sharing, joining forces to ensure wide coverage. HSRC in South Africa are currently working with the Wellcome Trust on a project on sharing data but could provide others with research outputs, data and metadata. When working on content sharing there needs to be compatibility on the content you are dealing with as HSRC found that there were barriers around format when working with the Wellcome Trust. The group felt encouraged to partner over innovation rather than try to address these kinds of issues by themselves.
- **Tensions between diversity mandate and host organisations’ values**
 Intermediaries need to uphold values about promoting diverse and multiple perspectives, values that can sometimes be at odds with the host organisation who may disagree with

material posted or want their own material to take precedence; this has been a recurring issue for the IDS Knowledge Services.

- **Maintaining the quality of the collection in the long term**

The nature of the Internet means that online information does not have to be weeded as in physical collections. However, links constantly change and Eldis, id21 and GdNet have to physically check and repair all links on their websites to maintain accessibility. HSRC uses free software such as Xenu which identifies broken web links automatically.

Copyright and permission

Securing permission to use content is another daily challenge in our work. There are question marks over whether you need to get permission from authors and/or publishers depending on how you intend to use the content. This issue was discussed at the first meeting of the I-K-Mediary Group and remains an ongoing challenge.

Examples of how different services approach issues around copyright and permission include:

id21	GSDRC	Eldis
<p>id21 create extensive summaries of pieces of research then ask the author/s of research rather than publishers for permission to publish on their site and in print publications. However, they have found that consulting authors can be time consuming and are considering discontinuing this approach under the basis that what they create is quite a different product to the original research. Commercial publishers can be difficult to obtain permission from, but id21 have found that they can be particularly responsive if they view their products as an advert and promotional tool.</p>	<p>GSDRC ask for authors' permission to include their material and give a deadline of two weeks to respond; if they do not hear back, the information is included as they have made an effort to check for permission</p>	<p>Eldis generally feature published documents already in the public domain, which is part of how they measure quality of the information they put up. They do not generally seek permission from authors to include links to the documents in their database. They will however contact publishers to ask if they can include full text of documents on CD-Rom using a creative commons license.</p>

What next for the editorial group?

The group would like to:

- Actively use the group to share on editorial processes (e.g. editorial guidelines) and ask for advice around editorial problems and challenges e.g. explore what the push for southern content and views means and how we can implement this
- See whether there are editorial standards we can agree on
- Investigate whether there are practical steps on how we can collaborate e.g. content-sharing
- Explore how editors can use web 2.0 in their work

Collaborating to understand our impact

Notes from the Monitoring & Evaluation Stream

Why explore Monitoring and Evaluation?

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is a key means of understanding the kinds of impacts and influence we are having through our knowledge and information intermediary work. Many of us are under pressure from our donors to demonstrate 'impact'; we are also motivated to understand more to help us improve our contribution. Whilst it is easy enough to measure web hits and production targets, understanding our impact is harder – we wanted to explore this together. We agreed to focus on sharing how we approach M&E in our organisations and the challenges we face, we then looked at possibilities of collaborating to undertake comparative M&E using benchmarking.

Particular challenges in evaluating information related projects

There was a discussion about the challenging nature of evaluating information related projects. What would success look like? And what constitutes evidence? Another issue was that often funding for intermediary services comes as part of other projects so it is only seen as a side activity rather than as an intervention contributing to the outcomes of the project. It was suggested that we should therefore ask more about the role of information in project evaluations. Some types of intermediary work are seen as more straightforward to evaluate- for example doing more targeted and engaged work or tracking the influence of a specific publication. However the majority of intermediaries are communicating information and knowledge in a variety of ways and the results are not always easy to see.

Key learning about undertaking M&E of intermediary work

1. Try to be clear from the outset about the kinds of change you want to see from your intervention. Match this back to the mandate of the organisation. Having a 'theory of change' can help you to check back and reflect on whether what you are doing matches what you originally wanted to do. This does not mean you need to stick to the path defined early on but you should reflect on what changes have been made, or where differences occurred and learn from why this happened.
2. Keeping the focus of evaluation on learning and improvement helps to overcome many concerns about 'impact'. One useful approach is to start at the beginning by thinking about an evaluation in terms of research questions that you want to answer.
3. No single evaluation method works on its own for evaluating intermediary projects and therefore collecting data through multiple methods and triangulating it is very important to build in rigour into evaluation. Over time a body of both qualitative and quantitative evidence can be collected from different settings, which adds up to a reasonably robust methodology. We felt donors would be happy with an approach such as this where we outline what is achievable to measure in terms of outcomes- as long as they have some good stories, based on a robust process.

Number crunching: approaches to identifying how many...

Together we identified some of the different quantitative measures we use to collect data about our services, listed below. However as said above none of these are perfect nor sufficient on

their own and the challenge lies in the interpretation of the figures. Types of data collected include:

- 'Hits' on a website (but we don't necessarily know what someone wants or if they find what they are looking for)
- Links to other websites
- Citations (of website or publication)
- Activity in an online discussion (types of topics)
- How many people register / subscribe to a service/event
- How many people walk into a resource centre
- Recording the kinds of information requested
- Number of registered researchers
- Requests to sign up to email updates
- How many people open an email
- Number of contracts with suppliers

While it can be good to record the number of people who have received marketing materials or been told about a service it is a mistake to assume that, just because you have told someone about a service, they remember to use it.

Getting to know you, getting to know more about you: approaches to understanding our users

The group discussed the importance and different ways of getting to know more about who is accessing our information and using our services. One challenge is that some users don't necessarily want us to know who they are and in other cases it is hard to identify who the end user of information is- a more junior member of staff might be sent to get information from a library for someone more senior. However some of us were profiling researchers, analysing the feedback received from users and conducting surveys. There are often concerns that surveys will have low response rates, particularly from some hard to reach groups. However one example was given where a survey was sent out to government ministers which resulted in a 25% response rate (this could have been higher if a better time had been chosen for the survey) - so it is possible to get a response from your target users!

How unexpected!: approaches to identifying outcomes

The most challenging part of evaluation for intermediaries is in identifying the outcomes which result from our services. Whilst the group agreed it was difficult, we found that it can be done. We often collect feedback, anecdotes and stories about examples where our work has made a difference but there are concerns that the examples might not be representative or detailed. However it was felt that through a combination of making the effort to follow-up users and get more details and context about the feedback received, and through mapping out the various anecdotes, comments and stories against our initial outcomes framework or theory of change; then we could add rigour to anecdotal evidence.

Other methods were to focus on a small sample of target users and follow up with them at regular intervals to really find out how they are using our services. This might include a network mapping of users and their immediate influences or a network analysis of policy processes which maps where the intermediary is located and its sphere of influence.

Links to other aspects of service delivery: linking to marketing and promotion

We discussed how evaluation and marketing could support each other. You can get feedback about your services whilst marketing them, and can market the services through evaluation activities. Collecting case studies for evaluation purposes can also be reused for marketing purposes. One example given was in AMREF where for a while they had a 'user of the month' feature in their library. This gave the chance to collect and share feedback about the library but it also helped to market the library; people became

quite competitive as they all wanted to be user of the month! Linking marketing and evaluation highlights the importance of sharing feedback received and evaluation findings with your users.

***Comparative approaches to M&E:
benchmarking between I-K-Mediary Group
members***

A central part of our discussion was exploring the possibility of collaborating around M&E through benchmarking our work against each other. We

discussed what we mean by benchmarking and why we would want to do it. We agreed that the purpose of benchmarking is to assess our individual achievements in a collective way and to learn.

What is benchmarking? Our definition

- A point of reference
- Comparing yourself to someone else
- A set of thresholds/minimum standards

Rather than immediately start trying to compare ourselves, we thought we should start by identifying what different aspects of our work we had in common, and what could be benchmarked. Different themes included:

- Content selection
- Synthesis, repackaging and communicating
- Audience reach
- User satisfaction and influence
- Transparency and values

Within each theme we identified a range of different areas where we could begin to explore comparative analysis. We agreed that we would continue the discussion after the workshop.

What next for the M&E group?

Suggestions for future collaborative work around Monitoring and Evaluation were as follows:

1. Create a good practice guide to the evaluation of information and knowledge intermediary services to share our approaches, tools and surveys. This would not aim to replicate the myriad of evaluation theoretical guides and toolkits already available but to bring together our experiences of what is possible.
2. Do some more work understanding where information and knowledge intermediaries fit into policy processes through a network(ed) analysis that compared stories of influence in a common framework. This idea was also proposed by the conceptual group.
3. Take forward benchmarking by:
 - Breaking down each of the themes above by different types of interventions e.g. website, print policy briefs, CDs, seminars etc,
 - Identifying which aspects of our work (outlined above) we particularly want to benchmark on
 - Identifying appropriate indicators for comparison
 - Sharing our progress and reflect together on differences and similarities

Towards an I-K-Mediary Programme: Looking to the future

“ To me the most interesting lesson to draw from the workshop/conference was that despite the differences in nature and aims of our organisations, in the end we share a common challenge: to effectively communicate a message that contributes to the development of our countries of regions. In how we successfully support each other in fulfilling that difficult task, lies the key of our network. ”

Adriana Foreo, LAC Regional Coordinator, GDNNet, Argentina

All discussions during the workshop identified further areas for knowledge sharing, knowledge generation and collaboration. During the workshop a group of participants began to explore further how such exchange and collaboration could be enabled in future.

This group decided that, in order to realise the emerging ambitions, the I-K-Mediary Group needed to develop beyond the informal network that emerged from the 2007 Brighton workshop to create a more formal network. This sub-set shared their ideas with other workshop participants, after some discussion their ideas were endorsed enthusiastically.

So we agreed that we will seek funding to establish a network and programme of activities that will:

- Be global in nature with possibilities for regional groupings and events in future
- Have Information and knowledge intermediaries at the core, with possibilities to engage a broader spectrum of stakeholders around specific events
- Place an emphasis on sharing learning and collaboration

Participants from 10 different organisations volunteered to form a Core Group which will take responsibility for guiding the I-K-Mediary Group from its current situation to towards a programme that will enable us to achieve our ambitions. This group agreed to clarify the Terms of Reference and ways of working for the I-K-Mediary Group; ensure coherence of the ongoing I-K-Mediary informal network and develop programme proposal for a I-K-Mediary Programme

Core Group members are:

- Centre for Policy Analysis (CEPA), Sri Lanka (volunteered after the workshop);
- DevZone, New Zealand;
- D-Net, Bangladesh;
- Indira Gandhi Institute for Development Research (IGIDR), India;
- Institute for Development Studies (IDS), UK;
- International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), France (volunteered after the workshop);
- Healthlink, UK;
- Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa;
- Philippines Institute for Development Research (PIDS), Philippines;
- Southern African Documentation and Research Centre (SARDC), Zimbabwe

Participant reflections and workshop evaluation illustrated how important this ‘sense of promised continuity’ was to us. There is no better way to end this report than with some quotes from participants:

- “ *[The most useful thing was] ...the sense of promised continuity – this wasn’t a wasted two days.* ”
- “ *[I have benefited from]...the sense that I can approach people/organisations within the network for advice, consultation and general exchange.* ”
- “ *We now have the commitment to establishing networks/tools for communication and collaboration.* ”
- “ *From an informal network group decided to move towards specific programmes. That is... excellent.”* ”

The I-K-Mediary Group has come a long way since its inception in 2007. The plans formed at this workshop stand its members in a good position to work together to realise our collective and individual ambitions. We hope to find the funding that will enable us to undertake more learning and collaboration together. The I-K-Mediary Group welcomes new like-minded members. Further details about the I-K-Mediary Group vision and mission, its members and our work, and how to join can be found at our temporary webpage.

<http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/ikmediary-group>



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Appendices

Appendix 1

Full list of intermediary services represented at the Between Ourselves workshop

NATIONAL

Bangladesh Online Research Network (BORN) Bangladesh

www.bdresearch.org

Hosted by DNet

BORN brings together research papers on Bangladesh and those related to Bangladesh into one portal, for researchers, academia, policy makers and NGO leaders. As well as being a clearing house of research information, it promotes debates and converts research information into advocacy agendas where relevant.

Dev Zone

New Zealand

www.dev-zone.org

Hosted by the Development Resource Centre

The Dev-Zone website includes a Knowledge Centre which is a database of international development related links updated daily. They also publish a theme-based magazine called *Just Change* written by development practitioners and academics, fact sheets and policy submissions. Their large specialist library, the Development Resource Centre (DRC), is a national resource centre on development, aid and global issues.

Open Index Initiative

India

<http://oii.igidr.ac.in>

Hosted by the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR)

IGIDR is developing a new abstracting and indexing database consisting of articles published in Indian Social Science journals for researchers and policy makers.

SocioEconomic Research Portal for the Philippines (SERP-P) Philippines

<http://serp-p.pids.gov.ph/publications/>

Hosted by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS)

SERP-P is an online repository of completed, ongoing and pipeline research studies done by various institutions, including the PIDS. It is aimed at legislators and features research in major socio-economic and policymaking fields and statistics/information related to Bills passing through the Philippine Congress. It has over 4,000 studies on its database

Tanzania Online Gateway

Tanzania

www.tzonline.or.tz/

Hosted by the Economic Social Research Foundation (ESRF)

TzOnline hosts development information on Tanzania related to issues such as poverty, growth and mining. It contains over 6,000 documents in its database and also provides email bulletins.

Vietnam Economic Portal (VNEP)

Vietnam

www.vnep.org.vn

Hosted by the Central Institute for Economic Management (CIEM)

This portal serves as an information resource on VietNam's economic renovation and development. VNEP is a pool of official economic reports announced by the Vietnam Communist Party, state agencies, statistics, and research products on the Vietnam economy.

REGIONAL

ART Knowledge Hub

Kenya

www.amref.org/info-centre/art-knowledge-hub/

Hosted by African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF)

This is a one-stop-shop for up-to-date information on HIV/AIDS Prevention, Care and Treatment. AMREF also plan to set up a web based health portal to enhance information dissemination for health workers across Africa.

Affiliated Network for Social Accountability (Africa)

South Africa

www.ansa-africa.net

Hosted by the Human Resources Science Council (HSRC)

This is a knowledge intermediary that provides information and creates awareness of issues related to social accountability initiatives.

Europe's Forum on International Cooperation (Euforic)

Netherlands

www.euforic.org/

Euforic provides information, knowledge and communication on international cooperation and development e.g. trade, governance, and aid in a number of European languages. It has indexed 7-8,000 documents and offers news services, RSS index feeds, video content and blogs.

Knowledge Commons

South Africa

Currently under development

Hosted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)

HSRC plan to set up an African "Knowledge Commons" with research done by African institutions accessible in a central portal.

Southern African Aids Portal

South Africa

Currently under development

www.aidsportal.org/

Hosted by Health Economics & HIV/AIDS Research Division (HEARD)

The AIDSPortal is an internet platform which provides tools to support global collaboration and knowledge sharing among new and existing networks of people responding to the AIDS epidemic. The Southern African AIDS portal is currently under development.

SARDC Virtual Library

Zimbabwe

<http://databases.sardc.net>

Hosted by the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC)

SARDC has a Virtual Library with regional information on social, political, economic and cultural issues of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

GLOBAL

BRIDGE

UK

www.bridge.ids.ac.uk

Hosted by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

BRIDGE is a gender and development information service. It also hosts Siyanda (www.siyanda.org) – an online database of gender summaries linked to full texts, personal profiles of gender experts, other news and information items, and a space where gender practitioners can share ideas, experiences and resources.

Eldis

UK

www.eldis.org

Hosted by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

Eldis is a development portal website which covers development information on a range of themes e.g. conflict, aid and climate change. It

contains over 35,000 records and offers e-mail newsletters, newsfeeds, CD-ROMs, resource guides, country pages; community pages and highlights news, events and jobs.

GNet

Egypt (HQ)

www.gdnet.org

Hosted by the Global Development Network (GDN)

GNet hosts a range of online services for researchers and policymakers featuring recent, policy-relevant and development-oriented research on social sciences and economics from the South. Their Knowledge-Base includes researchers and organization profiles as well as a database on research works on development topics relevant to the region. They have seven regional windows including one for Africa, South Asia; and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC)

UK

www.gsdrc.org

Hosted by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

GSDRC is a consortium which includes the University of Birmingham, IDS and two consultancy firms. Their services include: an online document library with research summaries; a rapid response research service/helpdesk for DFID staff; a consultancy service; topic guides providing overviews of current knowledge in thematic areas relating to governance, social development and conflict; a monthly email bulletin; and a research column.

id21

UK

www.id21.org

Hosted by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

id21 communicates the latest evidence-based research that is funded and undertaken by UK institutions by producing highlights of research

in accessible formats. It has over 3,700 summaries on its database and covers development information across all disciplines. Their print publication, *id21 insights*, offers a thematic overview of the latest research on different development issues and is produced nine times a year and is free to subscribers. It also offers e-mail alerts and some French & Spanish translations.

National Education Quality Improvement Initiative (NEQI)

South Africa

Currently under development

Hosted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)

NEQI is a new education research reporting service which will feature research on education and quality in South Africa and internationally.

Science & Development Network (SciDev.net)

UK

An independent organisation

www.scidev.net

SciDev.net covers news and information about science, technology and the developing world. It is a platform for policymakers, researchers, the media and civil society to explore how science and technology can reduce poverty, improve health and raise standards of living around the world.

Source

UK

www.asksource.info

Hosted by Healthlink Worldwide

Source is a database containing global information on health, disability and child rights, and information & knowledge management. It contains over 27,000 documents and offers e-mail updates, news feeds and material on CD-ROMs, toolkits, recommended source lists, newsletters and journals.

Appendix 2

Policy processes and intermediary roles within them¹¹ : possible research theme

The idea

In every policy process there is an ocean of actors involved in different ways in the formulation, decision making and implementation of decisions. For all decisions it becomes clear that many different actors wade into that ocean to try to shape either the policy or the process¹². Some actors will be right at the epicentre of processes, others will be further out in supporting roles.

Actors involved have different purposes and roles within that process. They may seek to:

- influence outcomes (the decision made)
- represent the interests of others
- make the decisions
- inform the people involved*
- advise others
- make connections between different actors*
- influence process (the way the decision is made)*
- implement the decision
- observe and document the process

Within this complex picture:

- Is it possible to identify a typology of roles/purposes/functions within policy processes?
- Is it possible to identify distinctive “intermediary” roles within these processes? (The starred roles seem to be indicative of intermediary roles).

Research proposal

To examine a particular policy process, identify the different actors within it and analyse those actors in terms of their purpose/function/role and location. Mapping actors within policy processes is not new¹³; however we feel it would be useful to look particularly at those actors playing an intermediary role or function – identifying where they are located and where they are active.

Purpose

Undertaking and comparing couple of case studies of policy processes would help to

- Identify the kinds of roles required to make the policy system of function.
- Identify how different roles/functions relate to each other
- Identify where actors are claiming more space than they actually function in (eg Poverty Observatory?) creating a “black hole” which can squeeze out actors who actually could play these roles

Related work to be undertaken by the I-K-Mediary Group

Compiling a collection of case studies of how intermediary work has helped influence decisions.

¹¹ Notes by Catherine Fisher (IDS) based on discussion during Between Ourselves workshop involving: Alison Bullen (HSRC), Ananya Raihan (DNet), Andrew Chetley(Healthlink), Richard Humphries (HSRC)

¹² Or are unwilling actors in a process, e.g. people who will be affected by a decision

¹³ E.g. Eva Schiffer and Douglas Waale “Tracing Power and Influence in Networks” June 2008
<http://www.ifpri.org/pubs/dp/ifpridp00772.asp>

Appendix 3

Participant reflections

Some jet-lagged, somewhat disconnected but appreciative impressions **Maria McMillan, Development Resource Centre, Aotearoa* New Zealand**

I work at the Development Resource Centre in Aotearoa New Zealand. We're a resource centre that works to create a just world through informing and educating New Zealanders on aid, development and global issues. While part of our work is focused on working with teachers, youth workers, young people and the general public, my programme also works on getting good quality, research based and accessible information to development practitioners and policy-makers.

There's no other organisation in Aotearoa that is particularly dedicated to intermediary work (as I've now learnt to call it) so I was delighted to travel to Centurion, South Africa and meet with other organisations from all over the globe that have a similar mandate. The events were an uncannily perfect fit with what we do. While I enjoyed and appreciated the diversity of the attendants I was also pleasantly surprised by the similarity of the work many of us do, and the lessons that could be learnt from sharing and discussion.

I have come back with a satisfying bushel of ideas and activities to inspire me in my work. Today, my first day back at work, at a whole organisation Monitoring and Evaluation planning session, my team decided to pilot an M and E project around website usability. I could use ideas and propose tools discussed in both Anna's (IDS) M and E session and Adrian's (IDS) website usability workshop.

I found the conference plenary sessions intellectually stimulating and practical. The notion first proposed by Megan (DFID) that intermediaries can have a role beyond supplying and communicating research to building demand for research and capacity building among research users was revisited throughout the four days. I'm about to recruit our first dedicated researcher and these conversations are going to shape my work plan for that person.

The workshop was flexible enough to accommodate ideas that arose along the way. Anna and I got somewhat obsessed by benchmarking and we were able to spend a satisfying few hours with others unpacking what that might look like for information intermediaries, Geoff's pond provided a nourishing source of analogy and inspiration, the hotel's own small pond with large fish seemed relevant somehow, Homo Infomediary stood upright, wandered out of her cave, gazed around appreciatively in new light, and grunted with a newly found language.

I had conversations throughout the week where someone would describe something their organisation was doing and someone else would say "Oh, that's interesting, we were thinking of doing that, can we see what you've done?". Theories emerged, collaborations were hatched, ideas were blatantly stolen and copyright and ownership happily ignored. It was a rich time. Many thanks to the wonderful organisers from the Human Sciences Research Council and Institute of Development Studies.

*Aotearoa is the currently preferred indigenous (Māori) name for New Zealand.

Reflections from Adriana Forero, GDNNet

I personally found the workshop/conference very helpful in providing an input for both the day-to-day work and for the long term planning of our institutions. The possibility to get to know other IK-Mediaries and share with them work experiences was really constructive, among others, to start thinking on different ways to measure the effectiveness and impact of our work.

The discussion definitely raised a lot of issues to reflect on and enriched the process of formalizing the concept of “IK-Mediaries”. Since nowadays almost everything builds on networks the workshop/conference was a very good occasion build an effective network of ours. With regards to the internet tools we have to get familiar with, I feel that the cyberworld is changing too fast and for some of us that still have to learn more on them the network might be a very good instrument to provide support for our activities.

Finally, to me the most interesting lesson to draw from the workshop/conference was that despite the differences in nature and aims of our organizations, in the end we share a common challenge: to effectively communicate a message that contributes to the development of our countries of regions. In how we successfully support each other in fulfilling that difficult task, lies the key of our network.

Reflections from Ingy Magdi, GDNNet

I really enjoyed attending the workshop/conference and found it to be very helpful. For the first time I can sit with a group and discuss issues related to my job without having to explain first what is nature of my work. And this is because all of us understand what is the role of a knowledge intermediary.

Also bringing together all those knowledge intermediaries in one place, sharing and discussing mutual concerns and trying to find solutions and effective ways to reach our target was very constructive. Despite the differences in nature and aims of our organizations, in the end we all share a common challenge which is how to effectively communicate with our target audience and how to provide them with the services they are looking for.

The workshop discussions raised a lot of issues to enhance the concept of IK Mediaries. The conference also gave us a golden opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the new internet tools which we should eventually use in our organizations in order to enhance and upgrade our organizations website to match with this constantly growing cyberworld.

Reflections from Shamprasad M. Pujar, IGIDR

The workshop served as a unique platform for sharing, learning and collaboration amongst the intermediaries, from different parts of the world. It broadened the span of group and fostered understanding as regards to each other’s compass of professional activities. The group with its diversity of varied ambient work spheres of the members offered rich opportunities to participants for learning and collaboration.

The workshop promoted various professional attributes such as taking up leadership, campaigning or championing roles in opening/enhancing access to knowledge. It includes exchange of content and promoting each other’s services. It showcased how the group-activity can make a difference in dissemination of information and thus guide the policy/decision makers for the effective implementation of policies.

The success stories and best practices encouraged members to initiate/kick start innovative services for the benefit of policy makers and other members of the group. For example, the Development Research Month of PIDS in Manila and Subject Specific Portals of IDS Knowledge Services. The resolutions made in the first workshop were discussed and some of them were re-drawn to suit to the wider audiences. I am sure; in the future it will become one of the strongest groups, which will make its mark in nook and corners of policy-making establishments.