Policy BUDDIES: lessons learnt by researchers engaging in "buddying" with provincial policymakers in South Africa to advance evidence-informed decision-making

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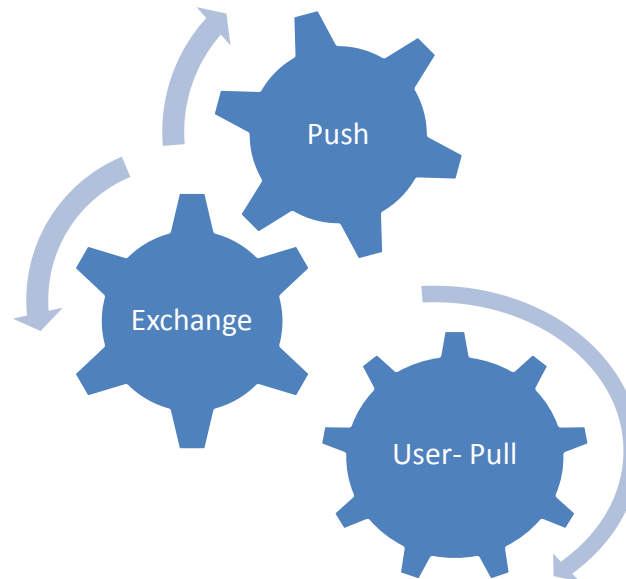[5] Effective Health Care Research Consortium, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom

Use of systematic reviews in policy decisions

Lavis 2004; Oxman 2009

Langlois et al. Health Research Policy and Systems (2016) 14:20

Policy BUDDIES – **BU**ilding **D**emand for evidence in **D**ecision making through **I**nteraction and **E**nhancing **S**kills

Situational analysis (baseline assessment)

Capacity development
- Enhancing capacity to identify various research questions and drawing on systematic reviews to inform refinement of their questions

Buddies
- Support policymakers in making decisions related to research through a buddy model, and providing opportunities for dialogue.

Resources
- Package and make dedicated resources available to guide policymakers and provide links to relevant researchers.

Monitoring and evaluation

Situational analysis

To understand policy-makers' needs and factors influencing the use of research evidence in policymaking and implementation

- Policy development
- Priority policy areas
- Barriers and facilitators to EIDM
- Strategies to enhance use research evidence in policy development

IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE

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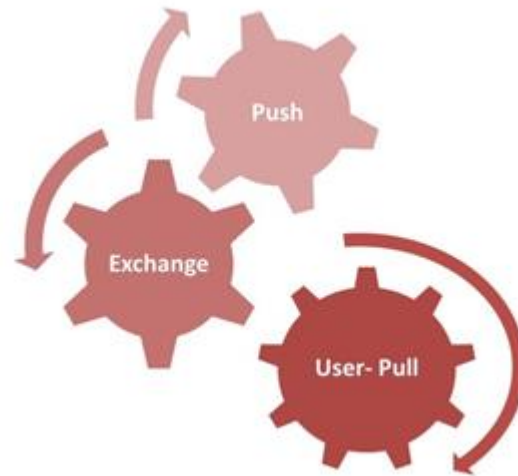
Research evidence and policy: qualitative study in selected provinces in South Africa and Cameroon

Celeste E. Naude[1†], Babalwa Zani[2†], Pierre Ongolo-Zogo[3], Charles S. Wiysonge[1,2], Lillian Dudley[4], Tamara Kredo[2], Paul Garner[5] and Taryn Young[1,2*]
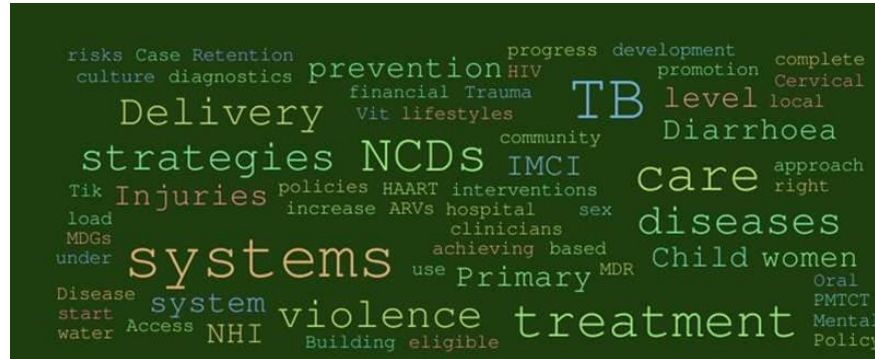
Strategies to enhance research use

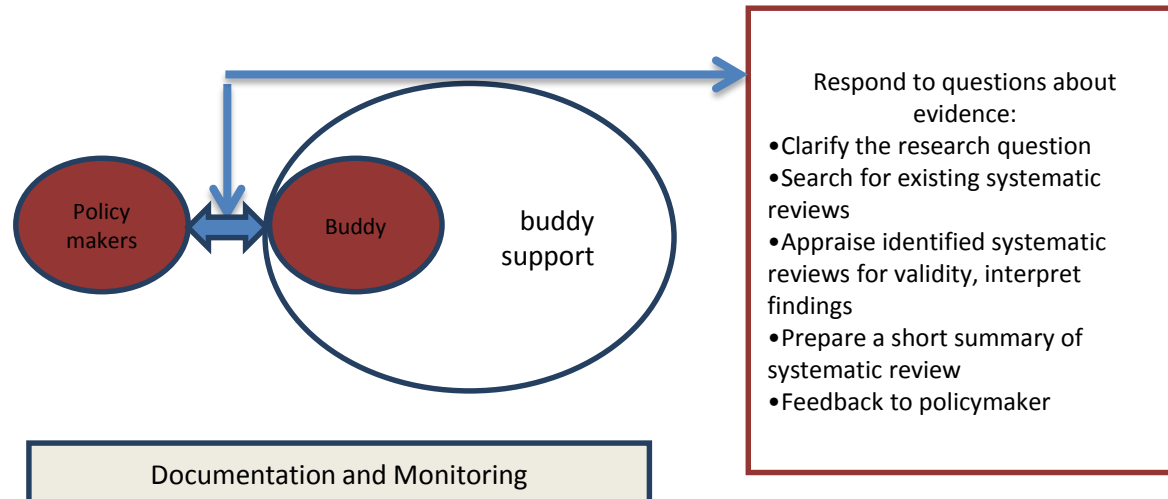| Policymakers to understand the importance of research and its role in policies	Importance of joint efforts between researchers and policymakers	Researchers to understand the policy environment

Situational analysis: Programme managers emphasised the importance of **joint efforts** between researchers and policymakers - **working together** with mutual trust and understanding each other's environments

Buddies

A 'buddying' model to create links between policy-makers and researchers around specific priority policy questions.

Wordcloud showing keywords of priority policy areas

Respond to questions about evidence:
- Clarify the research question
- Search for existing systematic reviews
- Appraise identified systematic reviews for validity, interpret findings
- Prepare a short summary of systematic review
- Feedback to policymaker

Policy makers

Buddy

buddy support

Documentation and Monitoring

Evaluation

- Mixed-methods

- Evaluation data and methods:
  - document review of policy and project documents,
  - in-depth interviews with policy-makers and project staff, and
  - a focus group discussion with researcher buddies.

- *To describe how the intervention was implemented, barriers and successes during its implementation and uptake, and learning strategies developed during this process.*

- *To describe the impact of the intervention on policy-makers' use of research evidence to inform their decision-making.*

Lessons learnt: evaluation

- **Flexibility**

Buddying taught me that when engaging with policymakers about evidence, one needs to be flexible and depending on the nature and format of the engagement, one needs to try and find the most feasible mode of communicating the evidence.

- Researcher buddies benefited in **learning about the policy-making world**

We don't have their capacity/skills and they don't have ours. The linkage is the key to make the process smoother.

- Engagement helped researchers understand that systematic review evidence is **only a piece of the complex policymaking puzzle**.

As a buddy, I learnt that we have much to learn about decision-making in our government environment

Lessons learnt: evaluation

- Having policymakers who **champion** the use of evidence appears to facilitate 'buddying'.

- Buddying can be **time-consuming** and wanes when champions leave posts.

It takes a lot of time just to talk and build relationships. One week for example I felt I didn't get any work done, because all I did was talk. But actually I did because I was building relationships.

- **Spin offs**

Additional linkages we have made are a big success. We are now getting additional requests from other policy-makers who were not involved in the project. So our network has expanded through our collaboration with policymakers in the project.

In conclusion

- Relationships open the door to mutual respect and learning.
- Researcher buddies benefited in learning about the policy-making world.

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