EEG's Research Uptake Approach

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Acknowledgements

Executive summary

The Applied Research Programme on Energy and Economic Growth (EEG) aims to unlock the barriers to achieving sustainable, efficient, reliable and equitable large-scale energy systems in low-income countries (LICs), to impact economic growth and ultimately lift people out of poverty.

EEG has developed a **Policy Research into Action Cycle** (PRActiCle) that keeps the end-user of the research – in this case those making decisions on energy policy – the focal point throughout. The circular approach puts activities such as policy engagement, capacity development, and communications on an equal footing with traditional the research process itself to deliver research that is **relevant** (responds to user demand), **accessible** (can be easily engaged with) and **actionable** (provides practical insights for public and private sector stakeholders). The ultimate objective is to build a body of evidence around how sector reforms, innovative technologies and practicable actions can be used to help maximise the economic impacts of energy infrastructure investments in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.
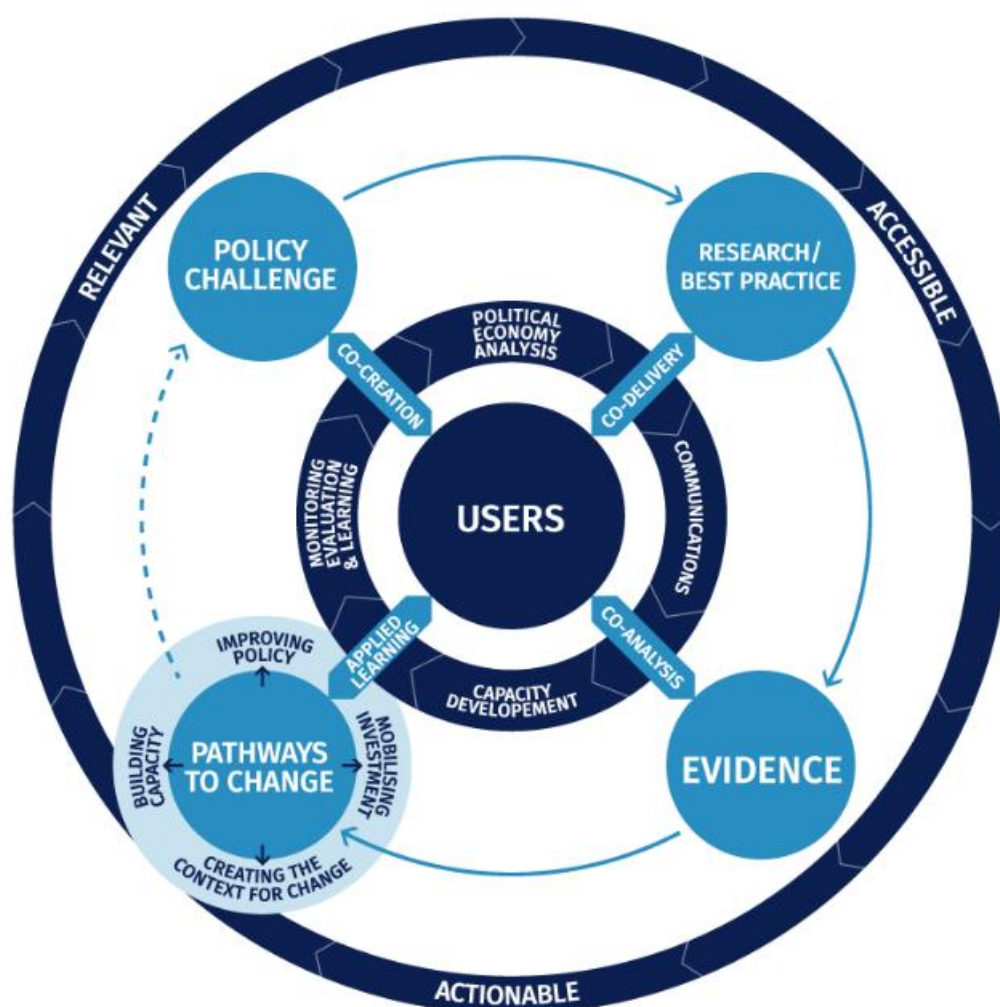

Figure 1 PRActiCle diagram

Implementation of PRActiCle is based on the following key principles:

- An inclusive approach to stakeholder engagement and co-delivery
- A strong understanding of the political economy
- Building capacity among researchers and research users

- The use of appropriate communication methods and media
- Creating linkages with existing best practices and other research processes
- The use of robust monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) approaches to assess influence and outcomes.

EEG identifies four **transformational pathways** through which the effectiveness of PRActiCle can be assessed. These form the basis for the programme to measure user-centred research projects and are: i) improving policy; ii) mobilising investment; iii) creating the context for change: and iv) building capacity.

By supporting these transformational pathways, EEG research can help influence and improve downstream energy sector outcomes (environmental, social, economic, and technical). Although it is unlikely that significant changes will be measurable within the lifetime of research processes, or fully attributable to EEG projects, nonetheless, EEG projects will frame their objectives in terms of their potential contribution to these challenges.

This framework sets out the principles of PRActiCle and how this informs a range of EEG programme strategies and processes. These include project design and approval, communications, capacity development, MEL, political economy analysis (PEA), and value for money (VfM) assessment.

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List of abbreviations

BCURE	Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence
DFID	Department for International Development
EEG	Energy and Economic Growth
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
GHG	Greenhouse gas
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
LICs	Low-income countries
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
STEPS	Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability
ToR	Terms of reference
VfM	Value for money

Introduction

EEG aims to unlock the barriers to achieving sustainable, efficient, reliable and equitable large-scale energy systems in low-income countries (LICs), to impact economic growth and ultimately lift people out of poverty.

To maximise the impact of the programme, EEG has developed a **Policy Research into Action Cycle** (PRActiCle). This approach puts the user at the centre of the programme, with research co-designed and co-implemented by researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. Essential to this approach are activities around policy engagement,[1] capacity development, and communications.

The objective is that the research is:

- *Relevant* (i.e. responds to user demand to address an evidence gap constraining effective policy making or investment)
- *Accessible* (i.e. can be easily internalised in decision making and is suitable both in terms of the medium and message)
- *Actionable* (i.e. can be used in practical terms by decision makers and influencers, whether in the public or private sector domain)

The concept of PRActiCle should be at the core of all stages of programme delivery and be fully mainstreamed into EEG processes (project design and delivery, MEL, communications, PEA, and VfM).
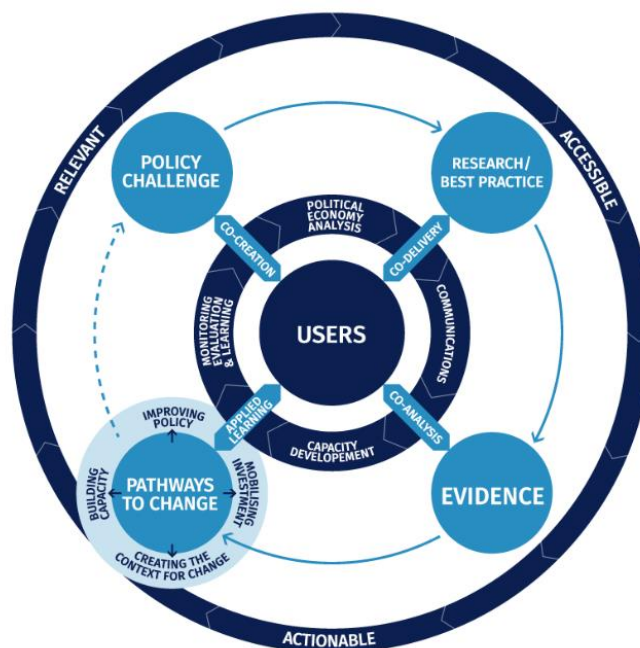
Figure 2 PRActiCle diagram

This paper outlines this approach in detail, summarising best practices that inform the PRActiCle research approach, synthesising these insights into a framework, and looking at the practical implications of applying the approach to EEG's programming.

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[1] We define policy engagement as the process of ensuring that research topics and outputs reflect the interests and agendas of decision makers (policy, investors), and research uptake as the process whereby research is then structured and delivered to maximise its usefulness for these decision makers (through PEA, co-delivery, capacity building, communications, and outreach).

1   Review of best practices in achieving impact through research

1.1   Review of current evidence

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) defines research impact as 'the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy' (ESRC, 2017). This can involve *academic impact* (advancing understanding and method) as well as wider *social and economic impact* (the benefits of acting on research findings, e.g. changes in policy and investment decisions). ESRC classifies the potential impact of research in three ways:

- **Instrumental:** influencing the development of policy, practice, or service provision, shaping legislation, and altering behaviour;
- **Conceptual:** contributing to the understanding of policy issues and reframing debates; and
- **Capacity building:** through technical and personal skill development.

To achieve impact, ESRC stresses the importance of a flexible two-way exchange between researchers and users. User engagement requires more than the sharing of research outputs through seminars, workshops, and knowledge products. It also demands a collaborative approach (co-design, co-delivery, shared learning), allowing users to bring policy and practice into the research process. This acknowledges the role users play in delivering impact, as well as potentially improving the quality of the research itself. Types of activities can include adopting research users as co-investigators, supporting resource needs for active participation of research users and other stakeholders, and allowing space for activities that support innovation, reflection, and ownership (e.g. learning events). Impact can also be amplified through the inclusion of intermediaries and knowledge brokers (e.g. universities, third-party research programmes, specialised media) in the research process. These knowledge brokers can help facilitate further dissemination among their own networks and build visibility and reach not available at the individual programme scale (ESRC, 2017; University of Cambridge, 2016).

The Department for International Development (DFID) manages a range of programmes promoting research uptake. These include Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (BCURE), which since 2013 has been exploring methods and opportunities for building end user capacity to understand and action research findings. DFID also provides its own guidelines for best practice in research uptake (DFID, 2016).[2] It recognises that research uptake must be built into research processes from the start and continue throughout the research process. DFID likewise stresses that effective uptake is done through stakeholder engagement, capacity building, communication, and its inclusion in M&E processes. However, the guidance recognises that there is no single correct way to achieve uptake. It also notes that research should not *ex ante* pursue a specific advocacy agenda, but may seek to influence outcomes where there is clear research evidence to support them.

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) responded to the release of the DFID research guidance (IDS, 2016), identifying several potential areas to strengthen it. These include the importance of co-production of research (drawing upon a wider set of stakeholders than just policy makers), as well as ensuring that research uptake is regarded as a holistic process rather than just as a communications process (including strengthening networks, stimulating demand, and building capacity of knowledge intermediaries).

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[2] See https://bcureglobal.wordpress.com/

A report by the ESRC's Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability (STEPS) Centre (ESRC, 2014) sets out the importance of stakeholder network mapping, provides approaches to identify attitudes and relationships, and outlines how a research process might seek to influence them over time. This can be a complement to output-oriented frameworks (e.g. logframes) in understanding power relations and change processes, and can provide a useful link between PEA and influencing.

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) sets out best practices to maximise the influence of research processes (ODI, 2017). Alongside common themes (stakeholder targeting, timing, messaging), they stress the political nature of policy development (often ignoring or misinterpreting evidence), the need to work in a smart and flexible way to achieve change, and the importance of building long-term relationships and networks. The need to be propositional is also important, given the limited availability and attention of policy makers.

1.2   Key principles

Drawing upon the evidence and best practices in the literature, this section identifies key principles and key success factors in the effective uptake of research that should be reflected in the EEG approach.

- **Ensuring relevance:** Influential research is framed by the specific challenges and decisions faced by policy makers, investors, or industry practitioners. Challenges for decision makers will usually relate to how to design new policies or regulations (weighing costs, benefits, and distributional effects), whether or where to invest funds (e.g. new infrastructure, R&D, etc.), or how best to support the development of new energy service or technology markets. To maximise relevance, therefore the research process needs to be aligned with decision processes and research methods need to be suitable for answering the questions identified.

- **Stakeholder engagement:** In order to be effective, many research processes must have robust approaches to identifying and engaging relevant stakeholders during the creation of research, dissemination, or application. This not only includes decision makers (public and private) but also other influencers and those impacted by downstream decisions (academics, non-government organisations, donors, energy programmes, multilaterals, investors, industry, energy users, etc.). These groups can provide valuable support to change processes, but can equally be disruptive where their opinions are not considered or their interests are directly challenged. When they are co-opted, they can also play a useful role in co-delivery, dissemination (e.g. as evidence intermediaries), or capacity building. Stakeholder engagement should start early, ideally before the research design, and continue through to dissemination of results.

- **Political economy:** Maximising the potential impact of research outcomes requires a strong understanding of the political economy in which potential decisions are being made and evidence is used. Research processes should consider political economy barriers to actioning research findings and consider how these might be overcome as part of the research process itself (i.e. through stakeholder mapping, consultation, or targeted capacity building). Projects should be agile and incorporate space for reflection and adjustment where political economy or other challenges might diminish the likelihood of uptake.

- **Capacity building:** Research uptake depends heavily on the ability of end users to understand, interpret, and apply evidence to their own operational context. Likewise, delivering quality research outputs may require robust local research capability. In many LICs, this may mean providing capacity building support on both the supply and demand sides (e.g. around methods, sector knowledge, and incentives). Soft skills are also likely to be of high importance in ensuring uptake (e.g. relationship building, partnership working, negotiation, and conflict

resolution). Building engagement and ownership through increased capacity is best achieved as an integrated part of the research agenda, rather than as a standalone exercise. Capacity may be required at the individual level (e.g. researcher/policy maker) or at the institutional level (systems, culture, etc.).

- **Communications:** Research outputs should be structured according to the needs of the intended audience – whether in terms of content, format, or dissemination channel. Alongside peer-reviewed journals, outputs should be produced for both technical and non-technical audiences and consideration should be given to how different types of output are best suited to different types of objective (e.g. decision support vs. informing/educating). Projects should not rely solely on publications or electronic media but should actively engage in evidence-based discussion (whether through meetings or virtually). Key attributes in policy-oriented communications are that they should be concise, clear, visual, and applicable to operational needs. Presentation of findings should also be user-oriented. Adequate resourcing needs to be allocated for outreach and user engagement.

- **Leveraging the wider research context:** For the utility of research outputs to be maximised, they should be embedded within a wider landscape of available data, existing insights, and best practice. Projects should have access to (or seek to commission) a synthesis of existing evidence. This can not only help to identify research gaps but also help decision makers while awaiting research outputs. The outputs of an individual research project should always be presented in the context of this wider knowledge landscape, helping to build consensus around the weight of evidence. Attempts should be made to bring related research institutions on board to support the influencing process. However, research programmes should not advocate for specific policy changes unless these are clearly based on their research results.

- **Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL):** Assessment of uptake of research findings should be built into MEL frameworks. At a minimum, this should focus on ensuring that the research is of sufficient quality (e.g. through peer review of outputs), that it is accessible to decision makers (based on key stakeholder feedback), and that both researchers and users have the capacity to engage with the process (ensuring the presence of a user needs assessment). Research impact should also be explored as a core part of the M&E process (e.g. changes in policy and investment, changes in opinions, changes in capacity, etc.). It must be noted, however, that downstream outcomes (technical, economic, social, and environmental) may be challenging to evidence due to issues around attribution and timescales associated with change. Outcomes are likely to be best explored through case studies examining uptake and application. The programme may also form the basis for its own learning stream, as a useful platform to explore the efficacy of PRAcitCle.

2 Understanding the pathways to transformational change

At an impact level, EEG research processes seek to improve economic/social outcomes for electricity users in ways that lead to economic growth. This is achieved by improving the quality and availability of evidence to support decision making (either directly or indirectly through changing attitudes and supporting long-term research capacity). Policy makers are seeking to balance a range of competing agendas when addressing energy sector development. These include the following:

- *Environmental* (e.g. reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, improving air quality, sustainable land use, etc.)
- *Social* (e.g. improving energy access, affordability, inclusivity, safety, health, employment, etc.)
- *Economic* (e.g. increasing productivity, energy security, growth, innovation, sustainability, etc.)
- *Technical* (e.g. increasing generation capacity, network reliability, grid efficiency, etc.)

However, it is challenging to attribute quantifiable downstream outcomes and impacts directly to upstream research processes. This is due to the potentially long results chains, issues of attribution, and the long timescales involved in turning research into actionable policy and investment. EEG will seek to frame research objectives and outputs within the context of these policy challenges and quantify the potential scale of opportunities. By framing research in the context of national or regional policy challenges, the outcomes are more likely to appear relevant to decision makers and other end users. This is explored further in the MEL section.

Despite these challenges EEG can support the achievement of these policy objectives through a number of transformational pathways, which are set out in Table 1. These transformational pathways represent change processes for PRActiCle. In a broader context, EEG provides a useful opportunity to explore and understand the dynamics of research-led change processes. This in turn can help DFID and other donors build the evidence base that can help with the design of more effective research programmes.

Table 1 identifies the following pathways where EEG research can play a role in facilitating the above outcomes, together with how such engagement might be evidenced.

Table 1: Transformation pathways to research uptake and policy engagement

Transformation pathway	ESRC change modality	How research underpins transformation	How this might be evidenced
1. Supporting development and implementation of better energy policy	Instrumental	EEG delivers outputs (evidence, decision making tools) that are useful for better policy making, budget allocation, and more robust regulatory frameworks	• EEG provides tools and evidence that are used directly as the basis for policy development • EEG cooperates directly with policy makers or other decision makers to deliver research (co-delivery) • Policy makers cite research as influential or as justification for policy change • Policy makers engage directly with EEG research processes (workshops)

2. Mobilising and scaling investment in energy systems (generation, transmission and distribution, access, decarbonisation)	Instrumental	EEG provides greater insight and certainty for financing agencies and investors (public and private) to increase the flow of investment into technology deployment, enabling infrastructure, market development, and/or R&D	• Investors engage directly with EEG research processes (agenda setting, co-delivery) • Investors cite EEG research in their investment or market development decisions • Investors get access to EEG outputs and communications (e.g. participate in stakeholder workshops) • Investors' behaviour reflects recommendations and/or evidence from EEG research (e.g. volume of investment, in specific projects/ technologies)
3. Creating the context for change by influencing opinion and building consensus	Conceptual	EEG research supports a better understanding of energy sector challenges and opportunities. This in turn allows for a reframing of the debate, helps address political economy barriers, and creates a more amenable context for change among key stakeholder groups	• Non-core stakeholders cite EEG research as important in the context of energy futures debates • EEG research is referenced in media or academic discussions • Key political economy actors are identified and engaged in EEG research processes • Public debate aligns with the outcomes of EEG research
4. Improving the quality and understanding of energy research	Capacity building	EEG develops the capacity of key decision makers to commission, interpret, and analyse research, and enhances the credibility and capability of (national) research partners to address issues relevant to energy sector reform	• Policy makers can internalise research outputs and apply them to a policy context • Decision makers engage with research processes in a committed and collaborative way • Research teams build relevant technical and soft skills that support policy uptake (consultation, influencing, negotiation, and communication) • Research partners are commissioned to undertake additional research on similar themes

These pathways will form the basis for how the impact and outcomes of EEG might be assessed during its mid-term and end-of-programme evaluations. EEG should maintain a clear overview of what is being done along these pathways, how it is being achieved, and how likely transformation is to occur.

3   Application of PRActiCle to EEG activities

The power sectors of many EEG focal countries are in a state of technical, economic, and financial crisis. Challenges include a significant investment gap, inadequate and unreliable supply, and grid access challenges for a range of consumers. Utilities often supply power at below the cost of generation, relying on regular bailouts from public authorities. Other issues include badly designed subsidies, poor institutional capacity, weak governance, corruption, and an underdeveloped policy and regulatory environment.

As outlined in the introduction, EEG has developed a **Policy Research into Action Cycle** (PRActiCle) that keeps the end-user of the research – in this case those making decisions on energy policy – the focal point throughout. The below diagram demonstrates how the ongoing dialogue is central to the programme's approach; seeking to generate evidence and harness best practice which speaks directly to the key challenges and questions policy-makers face. Furthermore, EEG identifies four **transformational pathways** through which the effectiveness of the policy research into action cycle can be assessed. These form the basis for the programme to measure user-centred research projects and are: i) improving policy; ii) mobilising investment; iii) creating the context for change: and iv) building capacity.

Through this innovative demand-led research and delivery approach, EEG aims to promote the use of evidence in policy decisions, and ultimately, help bring the benefits of modern energy services to poorer people. This section will go into more detail of how the programme will apply PRActiCle to EEG activities.

3.1   Applying political economy analysis to PRActiCle

The energy sector in LICs is often highly politicised and characterised by a range of incumbents and vested interests (e.g. indigenous fossil fuel interests, national utilities, monopoly network operators, politicians, etc.). The consideration of political economy in research programming is therefore important because it can help maximise the impact of the evidence generated and ensure that pathways to change are realistic. It can be disaggregated into macroeconomic circumstances, socio-political conditions, institutional environment, and power sector context.

For example, to make a research programme useful, the costs of exploring new energy pathways or systems should be explored alongside their technical implementation or their socioeconomic benefits.

While maintaining an independent and evidence-based approach, an awareness of PEA challenges can help make research processes and outcomes more useful in several ways:

- **Identify barriers to change:** Research processes that incorporate PEA as part of their design processes (e.g. through stakeholder network mapping) can identify and address a wider set of barriers that might impede uptake (including wider capacity or institutional challenges).
- **Create consensus and engagement:** Stakeholder engagement processes provide an opportunity to engage a range of political economy actors in an inclusive and dynamic process, potentially increasing buy-in and identifying possible change agents.
- **Build capacity and awareness:** Capacity building and communications activities can be used to reach a wide range of stakeholders, targeting not only those with technical responsibility but others who have political power or can influence successful uptake.
- **Propose PEA-aware solutions:** PEA-aware research can avoid the use of standard model solutions to reform, and can make recommendations more relevant to the local context, given differences in market structure, economy, and capacity between countries.

At a programme level, EEG has reviewed political economy approaches and will develop a more detailed strategy with a view to ensure more relevant and actionable research outcomes.

3.2   Capacity development

The capacity of policymakers to find, appraise and apply evidence in the policymaking process is critical to the impact of research. Similarly, researchers must understand the policy context and communicate their findings in a manner that aligns with how policymakers may actually use evidence, rather than an overly formal model of policymaking.

Policymakers often understand the need for rigorous research, however do not have the capacity to translate the research into implementation. EEG aims to fill this gap. Capacity building will be tailored to the needs and constraints of policymakers, EEG will produce a paper outlining the strategy for capacity development on EEG. This section provides a brief overview of the principles and activities of capacity development.

The key principles of capacity development are:

- **Demand-driven approach** to ensure that demand is appropriately identified and the objectives are clearly outlined from the beginning.
- **Collaborative approach** to ensure it is not a standalone activity but involves a range of stakeholders integrated throughout the research process.
- **Appropriate models, methodologies and technologies** to build capacity.
- **Training tools suited to different stakeholders**, building on our experience of action-oriented research and capacity building in other programmes.
- **Practical guidance,** which captures learning and provides clear actionable direction, through an emphasis on practical implementation of research findings and lessons learned.
- **Interactive, participatory and problem based training,** utilising group work and plenary discussions and case study simulations to encourage active participation, data analysis and sharing of participants' experiences.
- **Adequate resourcing** in order to ensure sustainability and continuity of work.

Based on these principles the key capacity building activities identified for EEG:

- **Capacity development workshops** for researchers and policymakers in low-income countries to design, contribute and/or disseminate findings of policy-relevant research. These workshops will likely be smaller than the policy engagement workshops in part 1 and carefully targeted in terms of matching participants with a topic they perceive as relevant. Where possible, workshops will piggy-back on other development programmes focused on technical assistance, to achieve maximum impact and value-for-money. The EEG Programme has and will continue to benefit from the knowledge at OPM through the Capacity Development Programme it runs. In particular, Climate Proofing Growth and Development (CPGD) has organised a series of workshops (both live and webinars). OPM is planning to host at least one EEG workshop per country programme either in person, for example in Myanmar, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone, or via webinar.
- **Capacity building partnerships.** EEG OPM will further leverage the capacity building partnerships that the EEG team and OPM has created. EEG can rely on these networks to disseminate new research and build the capacity of government and NGOs to incorporate evidence into their decision-making.
- **Targeted lectures and seminars.** EEG will seek to optimise their visits to its focus countries by providing seminars, workshops, lectures, etc. on a range of interesting topics at universities, professional associations, energy organisations and utilities, sector training schools or

government training schools. As well as building local capacity this will help inform the team on the needs and demands with regard to local training.

- **Provide support to universities and technical institutes in low-income countries.** A particular focus for EEG is building the capacity of LIC academics to conduct research. A detailed strategy for building the capacity of LIC academics will be outlined in the Research Framework and Workplan for Part 2, following discussions with our networks and partners, and also in light of the findings from the policy workshops and Research and Matchmaking Conference. The strategy will seek to draw on the expertise and reputation of our northern academic partners, and will open an opportunity for a two-way flow of ideas and dialogue given the substantial contribution that LIC academics can bring to shaping and implementing the EEG research agenda.

- **Training for different levels of audience**. On the job training or e-training could be offered in some cases, for example for utilities or renewable energy investors. Where possible, training initiatives will piggy-back on other development programmes focused on technical assistance, to build relationships, maximise impact and achieve value-for-money. This could include regional learning visits, for example, for government officials from other countries to learn from South Africa's success in renewable energy auctions, as described in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**.

- **Facilitate cross-fertilisation**. OPM will encourage exchange of information amongst policymakers worldwide, to enhance synergies and learning experiences. This will be done in different ways: through EEG workshops, webinars, newsletters, blogs, the website, etc.

3.3   Project design and delivery

The key principles set out in Section 1 will be reflected in EEG research programmes (both regional and country level). A criterion for judging research proposals and awarding grants will be that the proposal demonstrates (a) a strategy for research uptake and capacity development, (b) achievability and outcome focus, and (c) realistic impact focus. The relationship between researchers and partners will ideally be two-way: policy or private stakeholders helping researchers to tailor the research questions and approach to ensure practical relevance, and to acquire relevant data; and researchers helping policy or private stakeholders to understand the nature, value and results of rigorous research and apply it in practice.

To encourage uptake of research, EEG activities should be able to demonstrate that they:

- Respond to evidenced demand/discussion with key decision makers and other stakeholders;
- Address evidence gaps that currently impede effective policy making or investment;
- Engage with key constituencies through implementation, using co-delivery as appropriate;
- Build sufficient local capacity to ensure robust evidence (supply) and ability to use (demand);
- Allocate sufficient resources to ensure stakeholder engagement and inclusion throughout;
- Produce outputs that are suitable for the intended audiences in form and content;
- Bring in key evidence and best practice from elsewhere to present a fully informed picture; and
- Set out the political economy challenges associated with achieving any recommendations.

These elements should clearly be built into terms of reference (ToR) and associated appraisal processes, as well as informing EEG's processes when framing research agendas (e.g. in country programmes).

3.4 Communications and influencing

A strong communications strategy forms a core part of ensuring the effectiveness of uptake of research and impact on policy. EEG has developed a communications strategy for the programme in year one.

Communications strategies for the EEG projects will balance instrumental, conceptual, and capacity building objectives. Some activities will aim to influence specific policies or policy makers, whereas others will be designed towards building awareness, securing commitment, or encouraging participation by partners or researchers.

In all cases, communications strategies should be expected to do the following in terms of maximising the chances of impact:

- Identify key stakeholders who may benefit from the research and map their knowledge needs (decision making responsibilities, influencing power, what they think, how research might assist them/inform their views).
- Develop evidence-based messages for each identified stakeholder group using appropriate language and content, making clear the benefits for the associated application.
- Identify suitable formats and distribution channels for messaging, combining publications, media and events (including the use of trusted intermediaries where appropriate).

To maximise the chances of success, communication programmes should also:

- Consider the political economy constraints that might prevent stakeholders from acting upon evidence and consider how other power groups can be influenced to support uptake.
- Be concise and use infographics to explain key findings to time- and attention-constrained policy audiences.
- Ensure that distribution channels are suited to audience needs (e.g. taking into account level of IT literacy).
- Identify how communication can be integrated with other EEG activities (e.g. research delivery and capacity building) to add value.
- Ensure sufficient resourcing (keeping in mind VfM through focusing on high-impact/low-cost activities and buying in expertise where appropriate).
- Build in evaluation measures to assess communication effectiveness (e.g. support to decision making, change in terms of debate, wider market developments, etc.) as set out below.

Table 4 sets out how different types of communication might serve different policy uptake and influencing objectives.

Table 4:   Mapping communication outputs to types of change

Communication activity	Primary ESRC change modality	Secondary change modality	Likely audience
Policy briefs	Instrumental		Decision makers
In-person briefings	Instrumental		Decision makers
Applied results workshops	Instrumental		Decision makers, donors
Development workshops	Instrumental	Conceptual	Decision makers, donors, researchers
Case studies	Instrumental	Conceptual	Decision makers, researchers
Blogs	Conceptual		Researchers
Newsletters	Conceptual		Donors, researchers
Flyers	Conceptual		Donors, researchers
Lessons learned reports	Conceptual	Capacity building	Donors, researchers
Training seminars	Capacity building	Instrumental	Decision makers, researchers
How-to guides	Capacity building	Instrumental	Decision makers, researchers
Research methods reports	Capacity building	Conceptual	Researchers

3.5   Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

The Policy Research into Action Cycle is a central element of the results monitoring and learning framework. It is captured in the following indicators, which provide a consolidated overview of the collective impact of individual projects:

- **Impact level:**
  ο Number of cases of research outputs informing policy decisions, government strategies, and/or investments in LICs on high-cost energy infrastructure.
- **Outcome level:**
  ο Number of references made to EEG research findings in press articles or policy documents / speeches.
  ο Number of times EEG researchers or consortium members provide technical support to governments, companies or international development partners on energy policy or investment decisions.
  ο Number of research projects that are designed and/or implemented in collaboration with a government, utility, private company or international development partner.

However, while providing a simplified and realistic basis for monitoring, these indicators nonetheless say little about what the transformation pathways are, nor about the effectiveness of these pathways (i.e. the downstream outcomes and impacts associated with the four thematic areas).

Downstream outcomes (and associated indicators) might include:

- **Environmental outcomes**

- ο Tonnes of CO_2 avoided
- ο Improvements in grid carbon intensity
- ο Reduced GHG intensity of GDP
- ο Reduction in particulates or other air quality measures

- **Social outcomes**
  - ο Increased number of people with new/improved access to electricity (ICF)
  - ο Cost of electricity to different user groups (including marginalised groups)
  - ο Disability-adjusted life years avoided

- **Economic outcomes**
  - ο Job creation
  - ο Economic multipliers
  - ο Utility creditworthiness
  - ο Energy intensity of GDP
  - ο Reduction in generation cost

- **Technical outcomes**
  - ο Reduction in load shedding or outage rates
  - ο Additional megawatts of low-carbon capacity
  - ο Reduced technical losses (%)
  - ο Grid margin requirements

From a *monitoring* perspective it is unrealistic that projects be asked to report against specific downstream outcomes as part of a core logframe. The results chains are long (in terms of timing and influence) and attribution is a challenge. Nonetheless, projects should be expected to frame the value of their research in terms of the scale of potential downstream outcomes that might flow from changes in policy, investment, or wider market development.

From a *learning* perspective, there is a clear opportunity within the EEG learning context to explore the process of PRActiCle using impact studies that assess programmes against the transformational pathways set out earlier. It is therefore important that EEG has a clear overview of the transformational impact of the overall programme and its sub-projects. This should include an assessment of the quality of design, progress to date (i.e. against process indicators), and the potential for future impact. This will help it proactively frame the questions that might be explored during the mid-term (2019) and end-of-programme evaluations (2021).

At a high level, the impact of the research can be captured along the four key pathways of change. To assess progress and the likelihood of impact, we look for evidence at three stages:

1) Robustness of design

2) Effectiveness of implementation

3) Evidence of influence

We propose using the following scoring matrix for each project and to inform an assessment of the programme as a whole:

Table 5: **Tracking matrix for research uptake – transformational impact**

Table 5: **Tracking matrix for research uptake – transformational impact**

Transformation pathway	Core audience	Robustness of design (1) Weak, (5) Strong	Effectiveness of delivery (1) Weak, (5) Strong	Likelihood of influence (1) Weak, (5) Strong
Policy improvement	Policy makers	• Consultation with key policy stakeholders in project design • Use of stakeholder analysis and PEA in project formulation • Evidence of demand from policy makers and other key partners • Clear research proposition to inform policy development or decision making	• Evidence of co-delivery of research with core policy stakeholders • Process engagement (regular face-to-face briefings, attendance at workshops) • High-quality targeted communication products (policy briefs)	• Direct use of evidence by core stakeholders • Referencing and citation in policy documents • Associated changes in policy and regulation • Evidence of downstream outcomes (e.g. technical, economic, social, and environmental)
Investment mobilisation	Investors, donors, utilities	• Consultation with key finance stakeholders in project design • Use of stakeholder and PEA in project formulation • Evidence of demand from investors/funders and other key partners • Clear proposition to inform/improve investment decision making	• Evidence of co-delivery of research with core financial stakeholders • Inclusion of beneficiaries in research process (regular reporting, workshops) • Targeted communication products (investment/market briefings)	• Direct use of evidence by core stakeholders • Referencing and citation in investment/allocation strategies • Findings reflected in investment mobilisation, planning and scale-up • Evidence of downstream outcomes (e.g. technical, economic, social, and environmental)

Creating the context for change	Opinion formers Vested interests Media Wider public	• Stakeholder analysis and PEA identifies key groups, their current belief systems, and potential barriers to change • Clear strategy exists for engaging with identified stakeholders to promote understanding • Strategy to use knowledge partners to expand influencing capacity	• Evidence of close engagement with key non-core constituencies during research process • Communication products and modalities target wider opinion formers and public (e.g. blogs, articles, opinion pieces) • Effective collaboration with intermediaries and knowledge partners for dissemination	• Non-core constituencies reference research findings in public or through social media • Media reports or reflects key research findings or identified opportunities • Key stakeholders shift position and/or move toward evidenced position
Building capacity	Research community Research beneficiaries	• Includes assessment of researcher/and or stakeholder capacity and development needs • Integrates activities to build technical capacity of research teams/and or beneficiaries	• Successful delivery of capacity building activities for researchers and/or beneficiaries on technical thematic/soft skills • Development of high-quality capacity building materials (how-to guides, research briefing notes, academic papers)	• Research teams deliver high-quality research products based on peer review and beneficiary feedback • Beneficiaries can communicate research findings and articulate their usefulness • Researchers can develop new research proposals and mobilise funds for further policy/ investment

There is also the opportunity to use EEG's own approach to transformation as the basis for a case study to help inform DFID's wider attempts to maximise uptake from programme design across its portfolio. This can both form part of an internal learning dialogue and be used for external communications.

4   Core projects vs. country programmes

EEG is implementing two types of programming structure – regional projects and country programmes. While both share the overall goals of EEG, each structure will have distinct characteristics, objectives, and, as a result, approaches to research uptake.

Core projects

EEG is funding highly applied core projects that aim to yield 'quick' results by promoting best practice and/or addressing pressing research questions that have broad applicability across countries. Initial projects being implemented include the design of renewable energy auctions in Africa (UCT) and exploring the role of grid monitoring technologies (GridWatch). These projects are developed and defined by external research providers within the boundaries of the wider EEG research framework (thematic areas, research questions, and methodologies).

Core projects need not be anchored in a specific country (although they may use a single country to deliver research that is of use to a wider region, such as GridWatch in Ghana). Their target stakeholder group will be determined by the thematic focus and evidence generated by the project. A core objective should be the applicability of research across a wide regional context (i.e. transferability of results to different countries). Regional actors and platforms are therefore more likely to feature in the design and delivery stage and may be the target for dissemination and communication activities. The ability to translate research findings to other country contexts and build associated capacity is key. Engagement with global platforms, institutions, and programmes is also likely to be an essential part of programming (e.g. Energy Sector Management Assistance Program, World Energy Council, Asian Development Bank, Rockefeller Foundation, etc.).

Country programmes

EEG is also developing demand-driven country programmes, concentrating EEG resources to maximise impact, leverage existing DFID energy market interventions and maximise VfM. Initial country programmes will be Sierra Leone, Myanmar and Ethiopia. Once the initial programmes have been established, the programme will then expand to new countries. Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal have been identified as possible countries.

Country programmes will be formed of clusters of individual projects within a single country context. They may address a range of relevant themes or focus around a single issue. They may be of varying sizes and methodologies. While falling broadly within the EEG framework, the thematic scope will be more closely co-developed by EEG in partnership with local stakeholders (policy makers, utilities, investors, and DFID and other donors). Similarly, the ToR for research providers will be more prescriptive. Projects will be primarily oriented towards improving decision making and investment capacity in-country, as well as creating greater understanding of opportunities and challenges among wider stakeholder groups. Research may be undertaken in partnership with existing government and donor programmes to provide an anchor for evidence and evaluation. The primary audience for dissemination and capacity building will be in-country stakeholders. However, key findings will be disseminated more widely into regional fora and through international knowledge partners.

The differences between core projects and country programmes are further explored in the table below:

Table 2:   Differences in focus between regional projects and country programmes

	Country programmes	Core projects
Stakeholder engagement	At programme level, EEG will actively manage core relationships (DFID, donors, policy makers, investors, utilities) during design, capacity building, and research uptake activities to ensure alignment and coordination between projects Stakeholders will be direct (i.e. potential research users and decision makers – policy makers, investors, donors, utilities) as well as indirect (those who create the context for change through shifting understanding and beliefs, e.g. civil society, academia, media) At a project level, research teams need to provide visibility of their stakeholder engagement with EEG to ensure coordination at a country level	Core projects will manage their own stakeholder relationships, coordinating with EEG to ensure alignment particularly where project activities overlap with EEG country programmes, or where outreach and influencing activities include EEG international programme partners
Thematic focus	Demand-led (facilitated by EEG) based on country-level decision maker priorities identified through EEG scoping visits, workshops and PEA (e.g. with policy makers, utilities, investors, donors). Also allows some scope for research-led proposals (encouraging creativity)	Research-led based on identified knowledge gaps and development of evidence relevant to a broad range of country contexts within DFID's wider L(M)IC remit. Potential for focus on cross-cutting themes (fragile and conflict-affected states and gender)
Practical application	Delivers research that supports defined decision making contexts at country level (e.g. development of specific policies and regulations, investment appraisal, programming choices)	Focused on advancing knowledge of how to address generic challenges relevant to multiple countries (e.g. technology deployment, market mechanisms, policies)
PEA	When relevant, more in-depth PEA required at programme level, based on higher expectations of transformational impact, and greater need for 'permission to operate' in-country. When relevant, PEA to be conducted at a country level by EEG, and reflected in proposals	Some PEA required to assess other barriers to uptake of evidence and change within the regional context, but should be generic (i.e. thematic rather than country-specific)
Structure	Country programmes have potential for multiple areas of research focus through different projects reflecting the range of local stakeholder priorities, but these may be potentially aligned based on country demand	Each project has a single thematic area of focus, targeting an identified knowledge gap and how to address this at a regional level
Capacity building	Capacity building at two levels. First, the EEG programme will have an explicit focus on building the capacity of key stakeholders in relevant EEG themes, bringing in best practice alongside influencing skills and research uptake theory. This will be	Projects should incorporate capacity building activities relevant to the uptake of their specific research topic, and include a review of available evidence as part of their research uptake strategy

	done both through best practice papers and workshops Second, individual projects will undertake capacity building relevant to their individual decision context	
Communication/ dissemination	Primary focus on communication to in-country partners, building longer-term relationships with national knowledge partners (universities, institutes, media) Regional learning where appropriate (peer-to-peer, presentation in regional fora)	Regional-level dissemination, focusing on engaging with regional organisations (IFIs, regional research institutes, leading universities) for widest possible reach. Supported by direct in-country transfer where lessons are identified as relevant (e.g. peer-to-peer learning). Stronger focus on academic publishing
Research uptake management	Core role for EEG in managing relationship with key in-country stakeholders (DFID, policy, utilities, investors) to ensure engagement processes are aligned and research uptake activities coordinated	Regional relationships managed primarily by research partners, with visibility provided to EEG to allow coordination with global knowledge partners and programmes where appropriate
Results, reporting, and evaluation	Expectation of demonstrable influence and transformation at country level related to use of research and capacity building in specific decision making contexts	Expectation of engagement by regional partners around research outcomes, including use of outputs by national partners where appropriate

Considering the above, there are different expectations and modalities for achieving research impact depending on the type of project being supported. This table sets out the processes and resourcing requirements to deliver effective uptake, breaking down the process into four stages:

- Programme/project development
- Capacity building during implementation
- Communication of results
- Reporting/evaluation

Table 3:   Processes for uptake of research – expectations by project type

Process stage	Country programmes	Core projects
Programme development	Country scoping (desk research) Stakeholder engagement PEA (when relevant) and identify champions Framework paper setting out agreed scope and transformation pathways Integrate research uptake into ToR, proposal format, and appraisal guidance	EEG framework acts as main guidance to proposal developers Integrate research uptake into ToR, proposal format and appraisal guidance Review proposals to strengthen research uptake
Capacity building	*Set-up* Kick-off meeting (with decision makers and researchers to review decision making context) – explore uptake opportunities and sensitise researchers	Kick-off meeting with EEG and key stakeholders to explore research context, decision making needs, and opportunities for uptake

	to decision maker needs and challenges	Include review of existing knowledge/best practice relevant to specific topic within research agenda
	Potential EEG-led workshop in-country on policy influencing, how-to guidance, and development of soft skills, potentially incorporating technical capacity building for research teams	*Ad hoc* capacity building activities where appropriate
	Implementation	
	Where there is no direct project contact, organise bi-annual research uptake meetings between principle investigators and potential users of research (e.g. policy makers, investors) to review progress and undertake course correction/capitalise on emerging opportunities	
	Country (or regional) level meeting every year to bring together groups of relevant projects, EEG staff, and other stakeholders to share lessons learned. Regional events could be held in an EEG country or alternatively resourced from regional hubs (e.g. Delhi, Nairobi)	
	EEG will support targeted workshops on best practice (e.g. one per country per year), including project staff and key beneficiaries as well as wider stakeholder groups. These will piggyback where possible on existing events to ensure VfM	
	To support this, EEG will draft best practice materials in relevant sectors, drawing upon project outputs where appropriate (up to three topics). These will be chosen/coordinated across countries to identify thematic areas that are replicable across country programmes	
	EEG will support curriculum/research development workshops for key research/teaching universities and institutes on core topics covering technical insight, policy influencing, and funding strategies	
	End of project	
	EEG will coordinate with research teams to deliver end-of-project capacity building workshops for research users and other stakeholders focused on understanding and use of results (either by project or bundled)	
Communications	EEG to develop communications and dissemination strategy at country level, building upon networks of individual projects, as well as identified channels	Projects encouraged to use their own dissemination networks but coordinate with EEG to avoid duplication and overlap, particularly in regard to major

	(media, research institutes, universities) Projects also encouraged to use their own dissemination networks but coordinate with EEG to avoid duplication and overlap, particularly when engaging with key central stakeholders Projects will feed through into international communications strategy to be managed directly by EEG when engaging with major platforms and partners (e.g. SE4ALL, World Energy Council)	energy platforms, initiatives, and institutional partners
Reporting and evaluation	Each project provides an annual summary of research uptake and transformational change (self-reported) based on EEG template EEG undertakes stakeholder outreach on an annual basis (focusing on larger programmes) to assess engagement with stakeholders and assess emerging impact Data feeds into an overall annual synthesis report of transformational change for EEG that is then available for mid-term and final evaluation More detailed review undertaken on completion of individual projects	Each project provides an annual summary of research uptake and transformational change EEG undertakes outreach on an annual basis to assess engagement with stakeholders and assess impact Feeds into an overall synthesis report of transformational change for EEG

5 Resourcing, roles and responsibilities

Responsibility for implementing PRActiCle and influencing policy will be shared between EEG and the sub-projects themselves. EEG is expected to play a greater role in managing the uptake of research at the country level to ensure that overall impact and VfM is high, and that relationships with key stakeholders are properly developed and sustained. However, in the core projects EEG will aim to coordinate approaches where possible not only to share learnings but also to ensure that EEG is presented as a coherent body of work to stakeholders. Furthermore, it is possible that international teams of researchers delivering regional projects may lack the capacity and networks to develop long-term influencing relationships with local stakeholders and may therefore also require some support from the core EEG team or additional subcontracted support focused specifically on research uptake.

The level of resourcing and sharing of responsibilities to deliver PRActiCle will depend on the context of the individual programme and project. For example, at the country level, there is likely to be some level of variation in the number and shape of projects funded. One country programme may be dominated by a smaller number of larger projects implemented by institutions with strong policy links and capacity building capabilities. In this case, coordination may effectively be devolved to the institutions, with only high-level coordination from EEG. Other country programmes may be more diversified, e.g. a single larger project complemented by several smaller grants where the capacity to ensure uptake will be lower. In such situations, there may be a case for dedicated country resources to ensure coordination and capacity building across the project portfolio. The allocation of responsibilities and resources between EEG and projects at country level will therefore need to be flexible and reflect the complexity of project coordination and management. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Nonetheless, it is possible to envisage the broad shape of responsibilities as set out below[3]:

Table 1:   Research project and EEG responsibilities

	Research project responsibility	EEG responsibility
Programme development	• Stakeholder engagement to identify political support and demand • Preparation and submission of proposal incorporating relevant research uptake activities • Review and refinement of proposal to improve research uptake	• Scoping and stakeholder engagement at country programme level (CP) • Country PEA (when relevant) (CP) • Preparation of country framework paper (CP) • Preparation of ToR and appraisal structure for programmes
Capacity building	• At least bi-annual research update/capacity building meetings with core stakeholders • End-of-project capacity building activities (training, briefing, application of evidence to decision context)	• Convening research uptake, influencing skills, and capacity building workshops in each country for research partners and wider stakeholders • Delivery of one thematic capacity building workshop per country per annum, adapting materials and structure to context (CP)

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[3] Note: CP – indicates *country programme* level only.

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Communications	• Development of project communications strategy (in coordination with EEG) • Preparation of project-level messages and materials (e.g. policy briefs, how-to guides) • Preparation of academic papers • Attendance and dissemination at events (in coordination with EEG)	• Development and management of country communications strategy (identifying and building network partners) (CP) • Development of international communications strategy (identifying and building network partners) • Support partners in research uptake activities where necessary through sharing and outsourcing.
Reporting and evaluation	• Annual self-reporting on research uptake, capacity building, and transformational change • Final self-reporting on research uptake, capacity building, and transformational change • Cooperation and facilitation of mid-term and final reviews	• Development of project reporting templates • Synthesis of annual reporting on research uptake at country and regional programme level • Additional annual stakeholder consultation for large projects where required, e.g. <£50,000 (annual) • Support to mid-term evaluation (additional synthesis work, stakeholder consultation) • Support to final evaluation (additional synthesis work, stakeholder consultation) • Best practice in research uptake paper

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