



What Does It Mean to Implement a Research Uptake Strategy? Experiences from the REFANI Consortium

Summary on the Panel Discussion

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Humanitarian Aid
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Introduction

When designing and implementing a research uptake strategy, it is important to remember that communicating to wide audiences will be most effective when the whole research team participates. The [Research on Food Assistance for Nutritional Impact \(REFANI\)](#) project, a Consortium comprised of two operational partners ([Action Against Hunger](#) and [Concern Worldwide](#)) and two research partners ([ENN](#) and [University College London](#)), is a unique example of how a whole team has come together, in practice, to realise research uptake.

REFANI is a large research project, with staff based in more than five countries around the world, all of who have been working together to implement the REFANI research uptake strategy since August 2015. Although final project results will not be available until 2017, members of the Consortium convened in London in October 2016 to share the experiences and lessons learned in uptake with the wider community of policy and practice. This discussion served as a follow-up to the panel hosted by the [Department for International Development \(DFID\)](#) in February 2016, which brought together colleagues from REFANI, [Oxfam](#), the [Overseas Development Institute](#) and DFID. This earlier discussion provided attendees with various methods and ideas to overcome challenges and capitalise on opportunities that arise when implementing a research uptake strategy in humanitarian contexts.

Building upon the earlier discussion, this REFANI panel discussion provided those who attended with an inside look at REFANI's research uptake strategy, specifically the ways of working between Consortium partners on a global and local level, stakeholder engagement as the basis for the theory of change and tracking uptake during and after the project. The presentations then moved to highlight specific areas of REFANI's research uptake strategy: First, demonstrating how early and mid-term stakeholder engagement in Pakistan has raised interest in the project among primary stakeholders, tapped into the research community in the country and prepared the project in planning for final dissemination events. Second, a detailed description was given of how the Somalia team has engaged within existing networks to mitigate difficulties of working in the country, identify the correct stakeholders and networks for sharing experiences and project results and plan for future collaborations. Lastly, preliminary results from the Niger study were shared, showing that even if results are not as originally expected, there are still valuable ways to learn from findings, disseminate evidence and plan for events, keeping in mind the importance of being able to adapt to any outcome of the project. After each panelist presented, significant time was given to questions and discussion. Common themes among the discussion related to: identifying the correct stakeholders and networks with which to share results; appropriate indicators for research uptake; packaging project evidence; and tracking uptake after the project ends.

This summary report below gives an overview of the presentations of each panellist, and the questions and discussions emerging from the audience. The full presentations are available in Annex 1. For biographies of each speaker, please refer to Annex 2. Finally, a list of those who participated in the event is available in Annex 3.

For the recording of the event, as well as any questions or comments, please contact REFANI@actionagainsthunger.org.

Welcome Remarks

Silke Pietzsch - Technical Director, Action Against Hunger USA

Silke began by welcoming everyone to the panel discussion, and introduced the speakers for the day.

Opening Remarks

Abigail Perry, Senior Nutrition Adviser, Department for International Development (DFID)

Abigail thanked everyone for coming and for showing interest in the topic of research uptake, an area in which DFID has been a strong proponent, especially over the last few years. She explained that the REFANI project sits within the wider [DFID Humanitarian Innovation Evidence Programme \(HIEP\)](#), which aims to generate evidence and research uptake in humanitarian fields. REFANI was one of the first projects of the HIEP programme, and everything that has been funded since has a requirement for research uptake. Abigail continued to explain that in fact, two out of three REFANI project objectives are around research uptake, and that the REFANI example is particularly interesting because all of the partners have taken on-board this concept of research uptake right from the beginning of the project. She clarified that there was a lot of work that had to be done to understand what the scope of research uptake activities involved at the beginning of the project, and what DFID expectations were of REFANI in that regard. Of all the projects under the HIEP, she said that REFANI has perhaps put the most thought into research uptake, so the HIEP Secretariat places a lot of value on the learning generated from the REFANI research uptake strategy's (RUS) design and implementation. Lastly, Abigail mentioned how REFANI preliminary results have started to become available. She emphasised that it is important to ensure that the key players in the humanitarian space engage with this evidence. Finally, she thanked the REFANI team for taking the time to organise the discussion, saying that she hoped it would provide an opportunity to exchange experiences on research uptake, especially as DFID would like to promote more of this type of cross-learning within the humanitarian community and beyond.

Key points:

- Since the development of the HIEP, all projects which are funded under the programme have been required to contain a RUS;
- Of all the HIEP projects, currently, REFANI has the most comprehensive RUS; and
- DFID strongly promotes exchanging findings and experiences from its projects among humanitarian actors, and specifically to REFANI, learning from the implementation of the RUS.

Moderator: Silke Pietzsch

Silke thanked Abigail for her opening remarks, and then described the format of the discussion. Each of the four panellists briefly spoke about his/her own experiences participating in the REFANI uptake activities, and then all were invited to participate in a discussion.

Panellists

Zvia Shwartz – [Communications and Research Uptake Officer \(CRUO\), REFANI](#)

Zvia began her presentation by briefly describing the aim and intended outcomes of the REFANI project, and how working together with the project's partners and donors, she has been able to make REFANI evidence available to technical and non-technical audiences in policy and practice.

Having partners based in multiple countries, Zvia explained REFANI's ways of working with all offices, in headquarter level and field level. On a global level, Zvia is able to lead on uptake activities, receiving support from partners in: providing input on materials; sharing stakeholder contacts; and participating in briefings, events and conferences. Whereas on a local level, REFANI operational partners take the lead on uptake activities, receiving support from Zvia to drive forward stakeholder engagement with existing networks and organisations, as well as coordinate and organise meetings and events.

Zvia proceeded to demonstrate how all of the activities that comprise the project's research uptake strategy are based on REFANI's definition of research uptake: *the process whereby research findings are communicated and utilised by a target audience*. She explained that research uptake for REFANI considers both the evidence that is produced throughout the course of the project, as well as uptake of results itself. Zvia described that the foundation of the theory of change is continuous stakeholder engagement throughout the course of the project, simultaneously prioritising and re-prioritising stakeholders as the research findings take shape. By staying in communication with stakeholders, always sharing new evidence and materials, it is hypothesised that they would be more likely to use the project's evidence once it becomes available.

Lastly, Zvia concluded by sharing a timeline of uptake activities for the REFANI project, including conferences, journal publications, study reports, additional stakeholder engagement and follow-up and dissemination events. Setting the stage for the following three speakers, Zvia then listed a few common questions which arise when implementing a research uptake strategy, like: what is communicated with stakeholders before results are available? How can one facilitate local stakeholder engagement? How does the strategy need to change if results are not as hypothesised?

Key points:

- Working with partners to implement a RUS is essential to facilitating uptake, both in carrying out the activities, and tracking the actual success of the uptake;
- REFANI's research uptake theory of change is based on the idea that evidence is produced throughout the course of the project, all of which needs to be communicated to stakeholders on a regular basis in order to enable research uptake; and
- There are many practical considerations to keep in mind when drafting a RUS, and then even more during its implementation, for example, timelines of the project (and staff) and planning activities remotely.

Murtaza Sangrassi – Pakistan Study Manager in Dadu, REFANI

Murtaza began by sharing his position within the [REFANI Pakistan study](#), and the key study implementation activities he manages from Dadu, Sindh District. Murtaza emphasised the importance of local stakeholder engagement, not only for raising the visibility of the REFANI project in general, but also for sharing experiences with similar on-going projects. This is valuable for gaining a better understanding of the local context, collaborating and exchanging advice and ultimately, for setting the stage to share final results. Local stakeholder engagement can begin to influence local governments and NGOs when designing new projects or research, even before results are finalised.

There have already been a few examples of local stakeholder engagement for the REFANI-Pakistan study, at various points of the project, Murtaza explained. Right when implementation began for the study, he worked with REFANI's operational partner in the field, Action Against Hunger, to identify relevant stakeholders with which to engage and share updates. Murtaza was able to tap into these existing contacts that provided him with feedback from key stakeholders on their interest in REFANI findings, and how to share additional information in the future. He noticed that stakeholders were indeed very interested in the study, and in some cases followed-up with him for additional information. This interest led Murtaza to plan an additional meeting in the field, as well as begin to think about other meetings and events he can attend in order to meet with stakeholders and share updates on REFANI.

Murtaza concluded his presentation by sharing some lessons learned from the local stakeholder engagement he organised, namely the utility of this early engagement to: raise interest in stakeholders, facilitate uptake, establish the project and its partners in the field and build a lasting interest among local partners to track uptake of evidence, even after the project ends.

Key points:

- Engaging with the local stakeholder community early on is beneficial for the project, as one can learn of similar ongoing research in the country, how to best package information and the most appropriate stakeholders with which to engage;
- Early engagement raises the visibility of the project and can lead to additional requests for information and sharing from stakeholders; and
- Project partners can gain insight into needs and interests of local stakeholders by engaging with them regularly, providing insight for future projects.

Mohamed Jelle – REFANI Somalia Study Coordinator, University College London (UCL)

Mohamed started by giving a brief overview of his role in the [REFANI Somalia study](#) – which ranged from designing the study protocol, to developing the tools used for the study, to helping analyse the data collected. He then described the context in Somalia, and some of the challenges that researchers face when working in the field, like: insecurity, being based remotely and remaining unbiased when working with government and camp leaders. Mohamed then explained how working closely with REFANI Somalia's operational partner, Concern Worldwide, helped to mitigate these challenges. Most importantly, Concern has very good connections in-country with government officials, donors, NGO networks, cluster groups and more. All of these

connections then made it possible for Mohamed and the rest of the REFANI Somalia team to effectively run the study, as well as share study updates and begin to facilitate uptake.

Mohamed described the networks that exist for research in Somalia, and how he has tapped into them in order to share experiences and updates from the REFANI project. Two major networks of stakeholders are the Strengthen Nutrition in Somalia (SNS) and the Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRICS), both of which are based in Nairobi. Mohamed explained how he used these meetings to share updates with others who work on similar projects, as well as to make connections with officials in the government, donors and other NGOs.

For the REFANI Somalia study, Mohamed was already able to present updates and evidence to a few networks, sometimes with specific coordinators and officials. He explained how these early meetings with stakeholders has helped the study team to better understand the context in Somalia, raised the visibility of the project among key stakeholders and also informed the team on how to best package the results once they are available. In a country like Somalia especially, engaging with stakeholders from within existing networks is very valuable.

Key points:

- When working in difficult contexts, tapping into existing networks and relationships of partners, located in the region, can mitigate challenges of conducting research;
- Sharing evidence and project experiences through networks, such as clusters and consortia, provides insight on best practices, key stakeholders and opportunities for disseminating findings; and
- All partners should participate in research uptake activities, as they can provide linkages with other organisations and networks for raising the visibility of the project.

Kate Golden – Senior Nutrition Adviser, Concern Worldwide

Kate began her presentation by briefly explaining her role in Concern Worldwide, and also her technical adviser role within the REFANI project. She went back and described how important it is to fill the evidence gaps on cash and nutrition, which appealed to Concern, and that is why they were interested to become part of the REFANI Consortium, leading on two of the three country studies.

Specifically speaking to the [REFANI Niger study](#), Kate summarised the hypothesis of the study: the same amount of cash given two months earlier than the standard transfer would have a more positive effect on child undernutrition. She then went on to show that there was no significant difference between arms of the study, therefore the results were not as hypothesised. Kate emphasised that this is a risk of doing research – outcomes can be different than expected – but that is not to say that the results are not valuable. Even if findings are different, there is additional evidence produced which may explain why the result was unexpected, potentially filling other evidence gaps. Kate then gave a few examples of how a research projects can learn from unexpected results: continue analysing the data to investigate other factors which may have had an impact on the study; plan to use the data to inform future

programmes and research; and learning from the difficulties of implementing studies and which methods and designs may work better.

Then, Kate went over a few ways in which Concern has been sharing its results to date and how they plan to be a part of future dissemination, at various meetings and conferences, in addition to publishing journal articles. Concluding her presentation, Kate shared some final thoughts on conducting research and facilitating research uptake in general. She acknowledged that doing research is challenging, but it is necessary, especially considering that it may influence future programmes. Research uptake activities, such as planning for materials and articles, should be done from the beginning of the project, however Kate stressed how important it is to also be flexible, as requests for presentation may come last minute, and of course, results may be different than what you initially plan for.

Key points:

- When conducting research, there is a risk of results not being as hypothesised or expected, however relevant findings will still be available;
- Collaborations between research and operational organisations can be challenging but are critical to producing high-quality, relevant research; and
- When working with research, especially in difficult contexts, one must always remain flexible and balance priorities of partners and donors.

Discussion, Questions and Answers

After the panellists wrapped up their presentations, Silke opened the floor to questions from the attendees. The following questions were asked and then discussed by the speakers¹.

1) Teasing out policy implications from research findings is not always self-evident: how do you know which stakeholders to speak to, and how to package the information?

By engaging with stakeholders from the beginning of the project, and as the project progresses, we are able to ask what their interests are and how they can imagine using the findings. Even if we are not able to extrapolate recommendations, we at least know what type of information our stakeholders want, so it will be easier to package the information for them. On a local level, we also found that government officials wanted to be a part of the study from the planning stages, which is a good way to continue engaging with them as the project moves forward, but it also means we have to juggle what we need to do, with what the government expects. In Somalia especially, it is important to engage with all levels of government and other agencies, which are quite spread out: local level, national level and based in Nairobi.

2) Research uptake may happen after the project ends, how does REFANI deal with that reality? What are your suggestions and plans to look at uptake during the project, rather than just disseminating the results?

¹ The individuals who asked and answered these questions are not identified. Answers have been combined in this document to give an overview of the entire discussion.

The Consortium is well aware that most reports will be done close to the end of the project, with some journal articles being published after the project ends. By beginning to engage with REFANI stakeholders early on, we are able understand what information they need, and that will allow us to share relevant materials very quickly at the end of the project, leaving us with some time for additional engagement. At this last point of engagement, we will already be able to ask if they can see any immediate ways for the findings to be utilised. Also, we are continuing to track mentions and citations to REFANI information, which will indicate if people are using the findings. We hope by the end of the project, to get a few instances of uptake. However, we have also tried to build ownership over uptake activities throughout our partners so that they will continue tracking the uptake past the project's lifetime.

3) Which indicators are you using for uptake? How have you defined uptake in your logframe?

The logframe existed from the start of the project, before the research uptake strategy was put into implementation. Ideally, the research uptake officer would have a hand in creating the logframe, but as it stands now, they are basic indicators, like number of journal articles submitted, mentions of REFANI on social media, links to REFANI on other websites, etc.

4) If you could go back to the beginning of the project, and reshape the logframe and the theory of change, to have a specific focus on tracking research uptake, which takes a lot of time, what would you have done differently?

Firstly, before the research questions were formed, we would have talked to local governments and organisations to ask what evidence they need most. Ideally, these local agencies would have a part in designing the study and research questions. We also would have made sure to leave more time at the end of the project to track uptake and analyse the success of the research uptake strategy. Since the studies all finish at different times, we would also have liked to have requirements for our partners to continue working on the project longer, to engage more with the uptake activities.

5) There are clear challenges between NGOs and academic partners during implementation, are there now challenges between both for the uptake activities?

Working in any consortium is challenging; it takes a while for the researchers and the implementers to be clear on their priorities and objectives. Constant communication to reassess how the research activities fit within the normal programming is key. There are many logistical issues to take into consideration to produce high quality research, which NGOs may not know about, for example. For research uptake specifically, it is difficult to anticipate what types of products might come out in addition to peer-review articles. In other words, how can we use the essential findings earlier than their publication? For this, we had to work with our research partners to see what can be written up and shared in advance, without compromising the publications. At the end of the day however, we are all working toward the same objective of influencing policy and programming, and setting out best practices.

6) It is usually very difficult to work on changing policies in difficult contexts. Usually having assistance from an intermediary person or organisation, who can feed the evidence to the correct people in-country has been useful. Was that considered for the REFANI project?

Of course there are key intermediaries who can pass the findings on to policy makers, rather than the researchers themselves. However, it is a tricky thing to do, especially in Somalia, where you have to ask yourself, how is it best to reach those intermediaries? Do you go to New York, to Nairobi, to London to find them? And then, how would you find the correct person to play this role? For the REFANI Somalia study, it is probably best to be in Nairobi to share the findings, but it will be a big question for us to choose the correct people to take the findings forward.

7) When results aren't as expected, as 'wow' as originally thought, there is still value in the findings, which can be used to influence policymakers. How have you worked to manage expectations of 'wow' results for the REFANI Niger study, not only with stakeholders, but within Concern Worldwide?

The study's main research did not show an impact, but we did find other useful evidence that provides us with a new strong hypothesis. For instance, all the data that we collected about malaria in Tahoua, Niger will help us to explain why we saw the outcomes we did, and it is a fairly simple message that resonates with Concern's experiences already. It is very difficult to simply say, "it's complicated," which is not the sound bite we hoped to get at the beginning. It is very clear that REFANI findings will only scratch the surface of the evidence gaps, so we haven't had to manage expectations, but we have been communicating as we needed to, like: "here are some important factors to consider, and here is how you can investigate them further." We are able to give suggestions for new projects or research. Furthermore, with all the information we have in our data sets, we could look at many more questions, which at the end, can turn out to be more interesting than the original research questions.

8) Do you have any examples of stakeholders with whom you are trying to engage, those which perhaps you had to convince of the REFANI project?

Initially we started engaging with some key stakeholders who we thought definitely have an interest in REFANI and its findings. Although some had replied that they do not necessarily work in any of the areas that REFANI touches on, they still agreed to speak. Even in these cases, at the end of the conversation, the stakeholders said that they found value in the evidence and would like to continue to be updated. However, now that we've reached a stage where we have a better understanding of where the results are headed, we will have to go back to our stakeholder lists and see who else we need to be engaging with, and who we may need to convince. This will also depend on the interests of REFANI partners – with whom do they now want to engage? For example, in Somalia, the team has concentrated on the nutrition and cash clusters, which have been the most obvious stakeholders. But as the study progressed, and the research team witnessed such high death rates, they have started to think about engaging with the health cluster and the World Health Organization as well. This engagement will not be just for sharing results, but also for providing advice and support to conducting verbal autopsies, something that the Somalia team initially hadn't set out to do, but a direction in which the results have taken them.

9) How have you worked with communications teams to make results available?

As part of REFANI's objectives, we must make all evidence available to both technical and non-technical audiences. Considering that Zvia, the communications and research uptake officer for REFANI has no technical background in nutrition or cash, it has always been the first step, to

have her begin drafting materials aimed at a wider audience. However, it has always been important to work both with the REFANI researchers and the communication teams of each REFANI partner. First, work with the researchers to make sure all the nuance is captured and that evidence is being demonstrated responsibly, and then with the communications team to ensure that the packaging is appropriate for various audiences.

Final comment – It is very apt to have this conversation today, on the 300th anniversary of the birth of James Lind, the man who conducted the first ever clinical trial. He did a trial on sailors for scurvy, because at the time, Britain was losing more soldiers to scurvy than to war. He discovered that you could keep sailors from dying from scurvy by giving them citrus fruits. How long did it take the Treasury to give out citrus fruits to sailors? 40 years! This just shows that research uptake has been a challenge for a very long time, not just today!

Closing Remarks

Silke Pietzsch

Sometimes, projects can be very focused on the country level; focused on finding that intermediary who can pass along evidence to policymakers, but perhaps looking out of the country would be helpful as well. In the case of the REFANI Pakistan study, for example, they found that there were some very influential people, working outside of the country, who have been supporting the government and getting officials on board to use evidence. It is always worthwhile to consider who these ‘powerful’ intermediaries are, and get them on board to assist in research uptake as well.

Silke thanked everyone who attended and called-in. She said that it was exciting to have a large audience interested in, and discussing research uptake, as well as those who are specifically interested in the REFANI study.

Conclusion

In recent years, many organisations have been committed to implementing research uptake strategies for their projects, working to ensure that research evidence reaches those who would use it: key decision-makers in policy and practice. This discussion gave attendees an inside look into the practical implementation of REFANI’s research uptake strategy, and how the Consortium’s partners all work to ensure its success.

While REFANI has been able to share its experiences on certain issues and challenges that have risen since the project began, there are still many questions to consider. For example, who is best placed to engage with primary stakeholders? How can unexpected results influence planned research uptake activities? How can one properly track research uptake within the timeframe of a project?

As demonstrated by the discussion which followed the panel presentations, these are common topics faced by all those who work on research uptake. Considering the growing interest and dedication of organisations to implement research uptake strategies, it will be increasingly more important to continue sharing experiences and best practices among research uptake practitioners, in all fields, across all positions.

Annex 1 – Panellist Presentations

Research Uptake in a Consortium

Zvia Shwartz
REFANI Communications and Research Uptake Officer

REFANI Research Uptake Panel
October 4, 2016



REFANI Background

The **REFANI project** aims to strengthen the evidence base on the nutritional impact and cost-effectiveness of cash- and voucher-based food assistance programmes, as well as identify the mechanisms through which this effectiveness is achieved.

Project objectives:

- ❖ High quality, relevant research has been carried out and fills gaps in the evidence base
- ❖ REFANI results and new evidence has been made accessible to both technical and non-technical audiences
- ❖ REFANI research uptake by key stakeholders in policy and practice has been successful

Research Uptake for REFANI

- Full-time, fully-funded project position to design and implement research uptake activities
- Builds into DFID learning on research uptake
- With support and input from partners, REFANI research uptake strategy is being implemented since August 2015

Working with Partners

- Global level (HQs)
 - provide contacts with stakeholders
 - provide input on materials
 - attend conferences
 - submit abstracts to journals
 - participate in briefings with donors and organisations
- Local level (Pakistan, Somalia, Niger)
 - arrange briefings with local stakeholders
 - engage with existing contacts in local/national governments
 - attend meetings and events hosted by other organisations
 - coordinate events and provide logistical support

REFANI Uptake Theory of Change

The process whereby research findings are communicated and utilised by a target audience

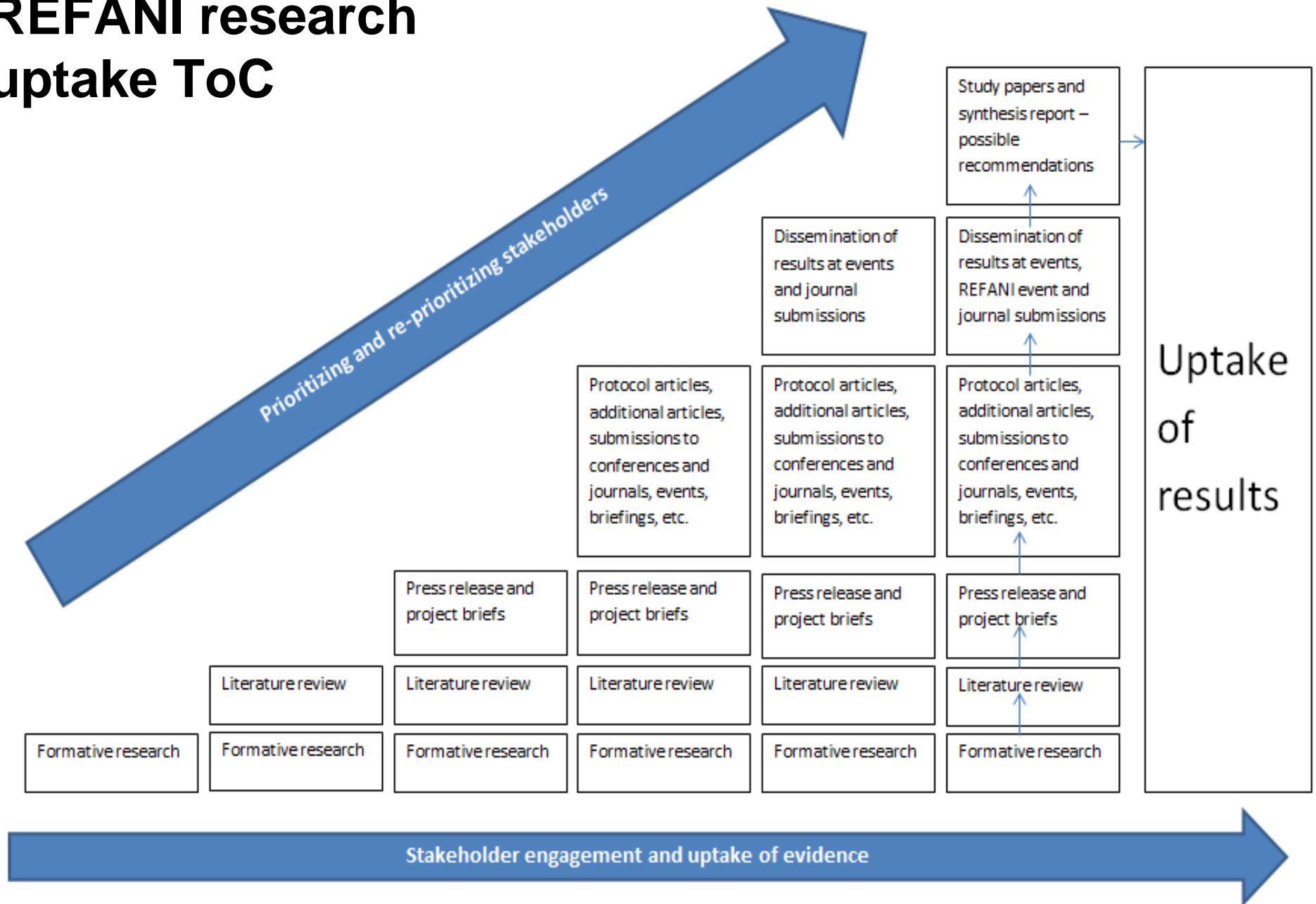
Act

- Identify key stakeholders, and continuously engage with them to share updates and relevant information
- Producing and sharing materials throughout the course of the project to wider audiences
- Planning for events, articles, conferences, meetings, etc.

Outcome

- Uptake of evidence and results produced throughout the course of the project

REFANI research uptake ToC



Timeline for REFANI Research Uptake

- By Spring 2017, all results will be final
- Dissemination launch events in planning stages (multiple cities)
- Journal articles will be submitted
- Attending conferences to present all study components
- All study reports will be disseminated
- Another round of stakeholder engagement
- Time for tracking uptake
 - Through discussions with stakeholders
 - Tracking citations and references to REFANI

Practical Considerations for Research Uptake

- What do you talk about in the meantime?
- Without results, how do you know who your primary stakeholders are?
- How can you reach national and regional stakeholders?
- How can you plan stakeholder meetings and events remotely? And who presents at them?
- What if peer-reviewed articles come out after the project ends?
- What if you don't have enough time to track uptake after results are finalised and released?

Summary

- Working with partners is key to facilitating activities which lead to research uptake
- Building ownership over the activities among all partners ensures their interest in engaging with stakeholders and tracking uptake
- Setting the stage for final uptake of results
 - Engaging locally through partner field offices
 - Participating in related networks and events
 - Getting feedback from stakeholders at multiple stages

Local Stakeholder Engagement

Murtaza Sangrassi
REFANI-Pakistan Study Manager in Dadu, Sindh

REFANI Research Uptake Panel
October 4, 2016



Position in REFANI Consortium

Study Manager in Dadu, Sindh District, Pakistan

- Lead on operational implementation of Pakistan study
- Lead the planning and implementation of study intervention (the cash and voucher distribution)
- Support dissemination of study information to internal and external stakeholders

Importance of Local Stakeholder Engagement

- Raises visibility and knowledge of REFANI project
 - Initiate engagement and host meetings
- To ensure stakeholders who work in the same locations on similar projects know about the research
 - To support with implementation of the study through feedback of the local stakeholders about the context
 - To share information and collaborate, set ground work for final result dissemination
- Research findings can influence local government
 - For designing district strategies
- Research findings can influence local and international NGOs
 - For designing future projects or research

REFANI Early Stakeholder Engagement

- Tapped into Action Against Hunger (ACF) sources to find stakeholders
 - FSL and Nutrition departments in Dadu, through Dadu Deputy Commissioner
- List of participants from past workshops held in Dadu
- Invited specific government officials working on nutrition and food security

REFANI meeting held in Dadu on October 20, 2015

- District government officials and local, national and international NGOs and CSOs
- Shared study objectives, timeline, themes, research questions and baseline findings
- Discussion focused on how REFANI findings may influence their scope of work
 - For example: results related to anemic mothers

Impact of Early Engagement

On future actions

- Eager reception of initial workshop led to planning of mid-term workshop in Dadu

On other projects

- Sharing study design and information led to discussion with stakeholders on designing future projects on nutrition and food security in Dadu

On relationship with stakeholders

- Established open communication between stakeholders throughout the project – knowledge sharing is easier

On understanding interests

- Questions and feedback will help team package final results in a useful format for stakeholders



Mid-Term Stakeholder Engagement

Lessons learned workshop in Dadu

- Organized by ACF's Program Quality and Accountability Department
- Study information was shared, along with updates and timeline for future data
- Participants were very interested to know about final results – influenced plans to hold final workshop

Follow-up

- Government health department officials requested more information during their ACF-Dadu office visit
 - Interest among key stakeholder was heightened from initial meeting

Plans for Future Engagement

- Follow-up meeting in Dadu October 2016 with same stakeholders from previous meeting
- Dadu team will be in contact with stakeholders at different forums to share results of REFANI
 - ACF meetings
 - Workshops with local government and NGOs
- Final launch of results in Islamabad in February 2017
 - Will be able to share insight from Dadu level

Lessons Learned

- Important to hold meetings in the office
 - Generally, meetings are held in hotels
 - Allows stakeholders to return to the office in the future and talk to colleagues, more formal
 - In case staff leaves, there will be a replacement to handle new follow-up
- Stakeholders are indeed interested to hear updates
 - Good to keep stakeholders updated, and interested, as project progresses
- Engaging with stakeholders for REFANI will help ACF on future research projects in the area

Summary

Useful to engage local stakeholders throughout the course of the project

- For the study team itself
- For the local NGO/government

Early and ongoing engagement facilitates research uptake

- Responsibility of all project and study staff

Hosting meetings establishes the project as a knowledge actor

Working Within Existing Networks

Mohamed Jelle
REFANI-Somalia Study Coordinator, University College
London

REFANI Research Uptake Panel
October 4, 2016



Position in REFANI Consortium

REFANI-Somalia Study Coordinator

- Developed and finalised the study protocol
- Developed and finalised the study budget
- Mapped the study area in Weydow IDP camps, Mogadishu, Somalia
- Developed and piloted research tools
- Sought the relevant ethical approvals
- Lead the organisation of the field site activities
- Helped in data analysis
- Support publication writing

Research Environment in Somalia

- Insecurity in Somalia is high – heightened sensitivity
- Many NGOs and all UN agencies work remotely
- Inaccessibility for international experts
- Lack of relevant government institutions vs. Obligation to work with government
- Involving camp leaders vs. Minimizing the effect of gate keeper activity

Working with Operational Partner

- Concern Worldwide (CWW) is one of the few agencies based in Mogadishu
- Lessons learned from REFANI – Niger study and applied in Somalia – relationships and responsibilities
- Important to agree on ways of working – which started before the start of the study
 - REFANI team in field office
 - Manage budget correctly
 - Remote management of study protocols and strategies to maintain data quality
- Decisions are always agreed by both UCL and CWW - technical decisions are lead by UCL and admin./financial decisions are lead by CWW
- Concern has good connections with the Somali government and donors
- Concern commonly gets invitations from networks, like Clusters, to make presentations



Working with operational partner helps in running study smoothly

Working within Existing Networks

- Nutrition and food cluster coordination meetings both in Mogadishu and in Nairobi
 - Members are all local and international NGOs implementing nutrition/food security programmes, relevant UN agencies like UNICEF, WFP, FAO and government bodies
- Consortium meetings like Strengthening Nutrition in Somalia (SNS) and Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRiCS) which are also based in Nairobi
- Ad hoc meetings with any stakeholder including government and donors, are common
- Challenges due to difficulties of working in Somalia and competing interests networks



Working within existing networks guarantees sharing evidence, sharing best ways of implementation, best ways of doing research, easy platform to present results to stakeholders

Stakeholder Engagement

- Use of previous experience in the region to identify stakeholders, and through CWW
- Presentations made to Nutrition and FSL Clusters
 - Brief update of REFANI including background, protocol and timeline
- Ad hoc meeting with the Nutrition Cluster coordinator
 - UCL study coordinator requested and gave update of REFANI
- Meeting with SNS consortium
 - Brief update of REFANI including background, protocol and timeline
- Meeting with ministry of health officials
 - Update on REFANI background

Impact of Engagement

- Received feedback and questions related to study design and intervention
 - Understood areas of most interest to those working in Somalia
 - Understood best ways to package information in the future
- Raised visibility of the project among other organisations and set the stage for sharing additional updates, and final results
 - Get others interested in the study, wanting to follow its progress, and have them anticipate the results
- Shaped our understanding of the situation in Somalia and taught us which networks to use for result dissemination later on

Lessons Learned

- All researchers and host agency focal point should be involved in research uptake and dissemination as part of their core work
 - CWW program coordinator, study PI and UCL study coordinator led the RU in Somalia
 - Their experience and networks in the area helped create visibility for the study
- Very important to identify and involve relevant stakeholders as early as possible by those within the right networks
- No relevant research committees in the MoH in Mogadishu, but important to communicate with them whilst maintaining neutrality and independence in the ongoing conflict
- Present study protocols as early as possible in the relevant forums to get back constructive feedback and comments
- Use regular cluster meetings to update stakeholders on study progress
- Seek meetings with cluster coordinators if needed to get chance to present the study protocols at the Cluster review meetings

Summary

- Working with operational partners, and within existing networks can help mitigate the difficulties faced working in a complex environment
- Engaging through these methods will increase learning from others, and may help with the REFANI-Somalia study, in learning how to package results, with whom to engage, etc.
- Such engagements will also help the study identify networks that may be present in the study area
- Finally, such engagements may help the study partners identify potential partners for future collaborations

Utilising Actual Research Results

Kate Golden
Senior Nutrition Adviser, Concern Worldwide, Dublin

REFANI Research Uptake Panel
October 4, 2016



Concern's role in REFANI Consortium

- Concern Worldwide works in 25 countries, mostly Africa
 - Nutrition seriously in 12
 - Cash-based assistance in 21
- My role in Concern
 - Senior Nutrition Adviser at Concern since 2010
 - Leading thematic Resilience support team since 2015
 - Work closely with advocacy team (Ally Carnwarth) and other tech advisers (e.g. Jenny Swatton for Social Protection/cash)
 - Coordinate direct technical support to Concern's Somalia and Niger programmes on nutrition, livelihoods, WASH
- My role in REFANI
 - Provide technical inputs on REFANI study design, implementation, interpretation
 - General facilitation between HQ, field teams, partners

Why Concern Joined REFANI Consortium

- REFANI was a good fit for Concern
 - Nutrition focus and expanding use of cash
 - High quality, like-minded partners: UCL, ENN, ACF
 - Commitment to filling critical evidence gaps
 - A chance to answer an enduring question – *is cash enough?* If not, what else is needed?
- Scaled up our engagement - initially, we committed to possibly hosting 4 studies. In the end we hosted 2 of the total 3 studies

The Research Findings

- In Niger, we expected that *the same amount of total cash given two months earlier (before the onset of the lean season) than the standard emergency cash transfer (given just as the lean season starts as we've done for the last 5 years) would have a more positive effect on child malnutrition.*
...but there was no difference
- Results may not play out as hypothesized – this is the ‘risk’ of research
- Even without ‘wow’ results, additional, relevant findings have emerged e.g. the potential importance of malaria treatment on nutrition outcomes in this context

Implications and Additional Learning

- Important to know early cash isn't the magic bullet in (*2015, in this context*) – continue to investigate other factors
- A rich set of quantitative and qualitative data available for additional analysis – more to come and inform programmes
- Concern /UCL now know what it takes to undertake quality research in challenging contexts - flexibility, clear communication, meticulous planning
- Clearer idea of what research questions and methods are most relevant to our programmes – for future research collaborations

What's been shared so far

- Study was presented to ECHO regional event in October 2015
- Study protocol published
- Report with preliminary results made available in English and French, being shared via various channels
- Preliminary results shared with ECHO and the Food Security Alliance in Niger in July 2016
 - Likely to influence ECHO Humanitarian Implementation Plan for 2017 (due out in November)
- What Works Global Summit September 2016

Plans for Future Sharing

- Slightly less urgency given the results - there is time to wait for initial findings from additional analysis before having e.g. a big dissemination event.
- Possibly tagged onto an another event on cash or nutrition in Spring 2017, to be determined
- Micronutrient Initiative Forum October 2016
- Research for Nutrition ACF Conference November 2016
- Global REFANI launch events (in multiple cities)

Conclusion - Final Thoughts

Research on 'what works' is essential:

- Academic/NGO partnerships can be challenging but critical
- Flexibility and strong communication necessary to adapt to a changing context
- Must balance research with actual programme priorities

Research uptake is important for operational organisations

- Peer reviewed journal articles are only one component
- Important to think through the research 'products' as much as possible from the outset – who might use them, and most importantly, when results would be available, and in what form
- However, there is only so much you can plan – a lot depends on the actual results
- Need to be flexible and responsive as results emerge, e.g. translating preliminary results quickly for an ECHO meeting
- Useful to have a single person dedicated to Research Uptake (Zvia), but engagement tends to come in waves

Annex 2 – Panellist Biographies

Silke Pietzsch, Moderator - Action Against Hunger USA - Technical Director

Silke Pietzsch has worked in the humanitarian and development sectors since 1998, specializing in food security & livelihoods and emergency nutrition programs. Silke has worked in Action Against Hunger USA headquarters since 2008, initially as the agency's Senior Food Security & Livelihoods Advisor, and later as the organization's Technical Director. She currently oversees all technical and research aspects of the organization's work in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia, providing policy expertise, positioning, and representation in international forums, and leadership in emerging sectors like cash transfer programs in emergency and recovery contexts. Silke is also currently the chair of the the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), sits on the steering committee for the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) and the Technical Development Group of the REFANI Consortium.

Zvia Shwartz - Research on Food Assistance for Nutritional Impact (REFANI) – Communications and Research Uptake Officer

Zvia is the Communications and Research Uptake Officer for the REFANI project. REFANI is a consortium funded by DFID and co-financed by the European Commission, comprised of Action Against Hunger, Concern Worldwide, the Emergency Nutrition Network and the University College London. REFANI aims to strengthen the evidence base on the nutritional impact and cost-effectiveness of cash and voucher-based food assistance programs, as well as identify the mechanisms through which this effectiveness is achieved. She manages the day to day engagement with stakeholders, as well as produces materials for all consortium partners. Prior to joining the REFANI team, Zvia worked as a communications officer for the Crisis Management Centre – Animal Health (CMC-AH) at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, leading all communication work, externally and internally, for rapid response missions to countries facing animal health emergencies in Asia and Africa.

Ghulam Murtaza Sangrasi - REFANI - Study Manager of REFANI Pakistan study

Murtaza has been leading the REFANI study in Pakistan, specifically engaged in refining the study protocol, developing data collection tools, selecting clusters and enrolling households in the research. He has also been a part of the recruitment and training of the research team, and making logistical arrangements for the implementation of study. Murtaza has been working in the development sector with different organisations since 2010, in many areas of Pakistan; Sindh, Khairpur, Jamshoro, Tando Allahyaar, Mirpurkhas and Dadu.

Mohamed Jelle - University College London, Institute for Global Health - Study Coordinator of REFANI Somalia study

Mohamed is a public health nutritionist with over 7 years' experience working in emergency nutrition with various local and international NGOs and the UN, before joining the REFANI project in early 2015. He worked in Kenya, Sudan and Somalia, mainly with refugees and IDPs in conflict, natural disasters and in other humanitarian crisis. Mohamed has a keen interest in nutrition in emergencies, maternal and child health, monitoring and evaluation, operational research and other cross-cutting issues such as women and youth empowerment and reducing violent extremism by creating job opportunities for the youth.

Kate Golden - Concern Worldwide - Senior Nutrition Advisor

As Senior Nutrition Advisor for Concern Worldwide, Kate is currently leading a team of advisers

from the nutrition, WASH and livelihoods sectors to support community resilience programming in Concern's more disaster prone contexts. Kate has been working in the field of nutrition in the developing world for thirteen years – including posts with Concern in Ethiopia (2003-2004), South Sudan (2004-2005) and the Republic of Sudan (2006). Kate has been working as a nutrition adviser based in Concern's Dublin office since 2006. She holds a master's degree in Nutrition Science and Policy from Tufts University and has practical experience in the Community Management of Acute Malnutrition, promotion of infant and young child feeding, nutrition assessments, data analysis and organic vegetable farming.

Annex 3 – Participant List

28 people attended the panel and called-in, coming from the following organisations:

Action Against Hunger
Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP)
Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR)
Child Hope
Christian Aid
Comms Consult Ltd.
Communicable Diseases (COMDIS)
Evidence Aid
Evidence for HIV Prevention in Southern Africa (EHPSA)
Giving Evidence
Institute of Development Studies (IDS)
International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh
International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP)
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Maximizing the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition project (MQSUN)
Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)
Mercy Corps
Organic Health Response
Overseas Development Institute
Oxford Policy Management Group
SHARE Consortium - London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine