Academic Knowledge Mobilisation

Cecilia Cannon, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
Challenges and opportunities for the SDGs & Agenda 2030

- Taking stock of what sort of knowledge academic institutions can offer the SDGs and Agenda 2030
- Broader challenges relating to knowledge mobilisation and how to address them
What does the academic institution have to offer in terms of knowledge for reaching the SDGs & Agenda 2030?

Who is the target audience for the knowledge we produce?

What does this audience need?

What is the best way to transmit academic knowledge to the audience (communicate with them / reach them / resonate with them)?
Academic Knowledge Products

- Research
  - Research projects – academic / scientific
  - Research projects – commissioned
  - Master’s / PhD theses / Applied research projects (partner with orgs.)

- Teaching / trainings
  - Academic teaching
  - Executive education / tailored training programmes

- Dissemination / mobilisation
  - Publications (academic / policy / public / websites / apps…)
  - Events
  - Consultancy work – ‘Experts’ (review committees, governments, high-level panels, etc.)
  - Involvement in external initiatives / partnerships
Knowledge mobilisation for whom?

- UN agencies, other International Organisations
- Regional organisations
- Governments (national & local)
- Business community
- NGOs
- Civilians
- Researchers
- Other (health workers, farmers, industry specific groups)
What does this audience need? How can we begin to organise the knowledge for mobilisation?

- Overall Agenda 2030 and the SDGs
- Implementation & capacity building
  - Multilateral governance (e.g. role of the UN)
  - Regional / national / local policies
  - Business practices
  - Social awareness / behaviour change
  - Partnerships
  - Financing
  - Technology / science (Uni Southhampton / Toyota: Green electrics)
- Monitoring & review
  - Indicators, targets, data gathering, analysis
- Specific goals (thematic: health, gender, water, education...
Knowledge beyond SDGs and Agenda 2030

- Not about the SDGs or Agenda 2030, but useful lessons to apply to the SDGs and Agenda 2030
  - Social behaviour change (Knowledge generated around health – mobilised for Global Handwashing Campaign)
  - Partnerships (what works and what doesn’t)
  - Monitoring and review processes (optimal modes of inclusive processes)
  - Economic forecasting

- Ideas welcome...
Challenges & Opportunities for Knowledge Mobilisation
Challenges (As discussed at UN Research Uptake Conference, April 2016)

- Dis-incentives for knowledge mobilisation
  - For academics
  - For policy practitioners

- Resource constraints
  - For academics
  - For policy-practitioners
  - Need for new funding models beyond government funding
  - Foundations

- ‘Lost in translation’ problems (length, jargon, channel of communication)

- Access barriers to data, knowledge and people (bureaucracies, geographic proximity to the policy world)

- Timeline mismatches
Knowledge mobilisation for implementation (As discussed at UN Research Uptake Conference, April 2016)

- Close engagement with policymakers – seek out partnerships for collaboration
- Involve policy-makers throughout research cycle: research embedded in policy and policy integral to research programmes
- Improving access / partnerships for research institutions in developing countries (on the ground – lessons from civil society networks with small HQ office in Geneva/New York, and extensive network of local NGOs)
- Publication of flagship reports and high-level panels that involve experts
- Sabbaticals – researchers to policy world, policy world to research institutions
- More effective dissemination of research output (language, length, timing, channel of communication, social media, events)
- Overcoming timeline mismatches (share / discuss preliminary findings)
Knowledge mobilisation for implementation

- Solicitation of research institutes to establish projects that help states implement policies;
- Solicitation of individual experts and scholars to help states implement laws / policies;
- Executive education and training programs for policy practitioners.
Knowledge mobilised for monitoring & review

- Monitor policies and programme, either formally solicited by international bureaucracies or as independent watchdogs;

- Independent watchdogs can reference monitored data produced by academic institutions in their shadow reports submitted in formal review processes;

- ‘Experts’ sit on review committees, and serve in official monitoring teams.
How can knowledge be better leveraged to serve implementation?

Communication & ongoing dialogue.
1. Govs, IOs, UN agencies, businesses, NGOs to communicate what is needed – what don’t they ‘know’?

- Sustainable Development Knowledge platform – listing gaps in knowledge as they become apparent in review processes.
- UN resident coordinators – to regularly raise ‘knowledge gaps.’
- Governments to raise gaps in their knowledge relating to implementation in their country review reports
- Shadow reports (civil society) to raise gaps in knowledge
- International Organisations, UN agencies, issue calls for expertise or knowledge on specific areas of need – publish on websites
- Instead of viewing these gaps in review processes as shortcomings / failings, they become a call for knowledge mobilisation
2. Academic institutions or knowledge producers to communicate what they ‘know’

- The IISD knowledge platform – a good start
- Geneva Data, SDG radar, other networks, hubs, forums
- Graduate Institute – web portal in the making to link through to all people, events, publications, teaching relating to SDGs and Agenda 2030
- Academic institutions around the world... varying types of expertise / specialisation to fill the needed gaps
Matchmaking or generate new knowledge?

- Knowledge sometimes already exists, just a question of putting the relevant people in contact, of bringing a publication to someone’s awareness, of presenting research findings in language & format that will reach and resonate with the policy practitioner in need.

- Other times, this knowledge needs to be generated – do it together, with the policy practitioners involved in the research design and throughout the research process.
Thank-you!