Perspectives on strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice

WORKING PAPER

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Working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’
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ABSTRACT

Introduction:
The attention to and demand for stronger linkages between research, policy and practice is increasing, especially in fields concerned with sensitive and challenging issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and HIV and AIDS. Share-Net International, the knowledge platform on SRHR, has been established to combine the expertise and strengths of Dutch organizations, Southern partners and key international actors working in the area of SRHR. To enhance Share-Net's strategy for strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice, the present study aimed to obtain a better understanding of perceptions of knowledge within the Dutch fields of research, policy and practice involved with SRHR and HIV and AIDS in international development, how knowledge between these fields is linked and how these linkages can be strengthened.

Methodology:
A narrative literature review was performed, and 28 key informants were interviewed between May and August 2015. Most of them were working in senior positions, including as SRHR advisor, programme officer, policy advisor, manager, professor or advocate, at Dutch-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs), co-funding organizations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, intermediary organizations, the public health service, and universities or other knowledge institutes.

Results:
Knowledge activity strategies, such as those utilized by Share-Net International, aim to improve the use of knowledge in the fields of research, policy and practice through activities that optimize knowledge flows within and across the fields of research, policy and practice. Various models are used to comprehend such knowledge flows, such as the ‘knowledge spiral’ developed by von Krogh et al. (2000) and the four spectra of knowledge-sharing activities developed by the K* initiative (Shaxson et al., 2012). Which types of knowledge-sharing activities are most appropriate to optimize the use of knowledge may depend on the specific context and the supply of and demand for knowledge of the various groups involved.

The interviews showed that NGO practitioners have a variety of purposes for conducting research, such as to improve their programmes, to build the research capacity of partner NGOs or to influence policies. Based on the purpose, they select the appropriate research design and type of researcher. For instance, NGOs may decide to conduct baseline studies or needs assessments themselves, whereas they would ask leading research institutes to perform bigger studies, especially when they intend to influence national policies with the research findings. This is because they believe that policymakers will take research findings from leading research institutes more seriously.
Policymakers indicated that research findings from academia do not always meet their demand in terms of the type of questions investigated and how the findings are documented. At the same time, the policymakers acknowledged that research evidence is only one of many factors informing policymaking, even when researchers address policy-relevant questions.

Researchers in academia said that organizational incentive structures encourage them to only publish in peer-reviewed journals. However, some did disseminate their findings in other formats intended for various audiences, such as newspaper articles. Some researchers indicated that it can be challenging to collaborate with practitioners and policymakers — for instance, when disputes arise about the research design.

Key informants described various barriers and enabling factors that either strengthen or prohibit linkages between research, policy and practice. They mentioned the following barriers: discrepancies in duration and cycles; policy processes; incentive structures; fragmented supply of knowledge; prejudices; and power relations. Furthermore, they mentioned the following enabling factors: participation in the Share-Net International and Share-Net Netherlands knowledge platform; existing linkages between research, policy and practice; working in alliances and other collaborations; and education. Various key informants indicated that they think Share-Net is a unique platform because it brings various groups and their different types of knowledge together. Some mentioned the knowledge platform as a network opportunity to communicate with other professionals at meetings. It helps them to stay up to date with other people's activities and to approach them later.

The interviewees offered various suggestions for optimizing knowledge flows between research, policy and practice. A majority of these suggestions related to: (1) creating more transparent demand for and supply of knowledge in each field; (2) developing and pushing a joint knowledge agenda for Dutch institutions working on SRHR and HIV and AIDS; (3) increasing opportunities for strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice — for example, by setting criteria for integral funding; (4) developing a system for learning and knowledge sharing; and (5) focusing learning on implementation processes.

Discussion:
The key informant interviews showed that neither the supply of nor the demand for knowledge in research, policy and practice is always perceived as clear or concrete. The involvement of many actors in SRHR and HIV and AIDS at various levels shows that linkages between the fields are many and diffuse. This shows the richness of knowledge generation and sharing within the SRHR and HIV and AIDS field, but at the same time it seems to create a perceived fragmented supply of and demand for knowledge. Literature reviews could help to make this perceived fragmented supply of knowledge more focused, whereas the development of a knowledge agenda could help to make this perceived fragmented demand for knowledge more focused.
The variation in demand for and supply of various types of knowledge creates opportunities for a variety of knowledge-sharing activities. These activities could focus on interdisciplinary dialogues and on making tacit knowledge more explicit, to encourage joint creation of knowledge. These types of activities are envisioned to lead to innovative knowledge and increased knowledge use in decision-making.

A group of students have further explored the feasibility of Share-Net developing a joint knowledge agenda and the potential role of power relations between stakeholders (see van Beek et al., 2015). They found that almost all participants in their study support the idea of developing a joint knowledge agenda, although their participants also expressed some doubts and concerns, such as the challenge of agreeing on the content of a joint agenda because there are many different stakeholders involved who have their own goals and visions. They concluded that if Share-Net Netherlands is to initiate the development of such an agenda, a first step would be to challenge prejudices and power relations between the fields of research, policy and practice, and to make the varieties in the demand for and supply of knowledge more visible.

Conclusion and Recommendations:  
The findings suggest that some types of knowledge, such as ‘evidence’ resulting from academic research, may be considered more legitimate than other types of knowledge, and that it is not always easy to be aware of the knowledge held by practitioners and policymakers. To be able to jointly create new knowledge, the various groups involved need to acknowledge that all actors possess knowledge and that these types of knowledge are important and legitimate. For instance, findings suggest that key informants consider tacit knowledge undervalued at present and an opportunity for creating more impact and innovation. Whereas barriers to the flow of knowledge, such as power relations and prejudices, may maintain present understandings of knowledge and whose knowledge counts, interactions between research, policy and practice in knowledge-sharing activities may challenge such perceptions and create an environment which acknowledges that all types of knowledge are meaningful. In accordance with the ‘knowledge spiral’ developed by von Krogh et al. (2000), Share-Net is recommended to set up a concrete structure for learning and knowledge sharing which enables knowledge to evolve in an upward spiral, which could mean that for every knowledge activity a variety of stakeholders is involved, to optimize joint knowledge creation, and a follow-up plan of action is formulated and acted on.
This study has been commissioned by Share-Net International and the Share-Net working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’.

The author wishes to thank the Share-Net secretariat, the Share-Net working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’ and all other people who have been involved in initiating this research. In particular, the author wishes to thank Anke van der Kwaak for her valuable feedback on the report and the key informants who were willing to share their expertise and perspectives and to provide feedback on the report at several stages of the research process.
FOREWORD

After a number of decades of being an academic and a research manager at an NGO in SRHR, I am all too aware of the many challenges involved in linking research, policy and practice, not least when working from the North in Southern and resource-poor countries. Academia, international programming and policy in development cooperation have traditionally all had their different ambitions, traditions and routines. As a consequence, it has not always been self-evident that research was an integral part of the Dutch practice of international development work. Research funds have long been piecemeal and not systematically incorporated into regular programme financing. Academics often followed their own separate academic tracks.

Fortunately, not least since the WRR report on Dutch development aid was published in 2010,1 the situation has improved substantially. Many actors in the field now increasingly feel the importance of shared knowledge production and adequate knowledge translation and implementation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has launched five knowledge platforms for the purpose of linking research to practice and policy. Share-Net International is the knowledge platform for SRHR and HIV/AIDS. Knowledge management is our core business. Share-Net actively promotes and strengthens the linkages between research, policy and practice by organizing groups and activities where knowledge is produced and shared, both in and between our country nodes in the Netherlands, Bangladesh, Burundi and Jordan.

The present study was commissioned with the aim of improving our insight into how our members (in the Dutch network) feel about knowledge management and about the linkages between research, practice and policy. Not least, we wanted to tap into our membership’s expertise and suggestions on how those linkages may be strengthened. The resulting report, a job well done by Billie de Haas, not only provides an impulse to Share-Net International by developing a framework for planning, implementing and evaluating our own knowledge processes, but it also contributes to general understandings about the added value of knowledge management for strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice in international development.

Prof. Dr. Ine Vanwesenbeeck
Steering Committee Chair, Share-Net International

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIDS - Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
AISSR - Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research
DFID - United Kingdom Department of Foreign and International Development
EP-NUFFIC - European Platform-Netherlands Universities’ Foundation for International Cooperation
HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IS Academie - International Cooperation Academy
ISS - International Centre of Social Science
K* initiative - Kstar initiative
KIT - Royal Tropical Institute
NGO - Non-governmental organization
NICHE - Netherlands Initiative for Capacity Development in Higher Education
NWO-Wotro - Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research-Science for Global Development
PhD - Doctorate of Philosophy
SRHR - Sexual and reproductive health and rights
UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund
VU - Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
WHO - World Health Organization
1. INTRODUCTION

The attention to and demand for stronger linkages between research, policy and practice is increasing, especially in fields concerned with sensitive and challenging issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and HIV and AIDS (Crichton & Theobald, 2011). Academic institutes are being encouraged to conduct more societally relevant research, non-government organizations (NGOs) are required to show programme efficacy, and policies need to be transparent and evidence-informed (e.g. Delisle, Roberts, Munro, Jones, & Gyorkos, 2005; Goicolea, Sebastián, & Wulff, 2008; Ramezankhani, Akbari, Pazargadi, & Shapouri-Moghaddam, 2014; Sutherland, Fleishman, Mascia, Pretty, & Rudd, 2011; Zaidi, Bigdeli, Aleem, & Rashidian, 2013).

To strengthen linkages between research, policy and practice, Share-Net International, the knowledge platform on SRHR, has been established to combine the expertise and strengths of Dutch organizations, Southern partners and key international actors working in the area of SRHR (Share-Net International, 2015). Its objective is as follows:

“Share-Net International aims to share existing knowledge, generate new knowledge to address prioritized research gaps, and translate knowledge into formats appropriate for intended audiences so as to contribute to the development of better policy and practice” (Share-Net International, 2015).

To reach this objective, Share-Net International focuses on the following four types of knowledge management activities:

- knowledge generation — i.e. “the process of addressing priority knowledge gaps through research and further analysis and synthesis of existing data”;
- knowledge sharing — i.e. “dissemination through a wide range of channels and tools of both new and existing knowledge”;
- knowledge translation — i.e. “ensuring evidence is presented in formats appropriate for the intended audience”;
- knowledge use — i.e. using knowledge as “a means to improve policies, programmes and practices” (van der Kwaak, 2015, pp.3–4).

Share-Net Netherlands has two working groups that focus on strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice. The working group ‘Operational research’ specifically aims to share research findings and experiences of conducting operational research in the context of SRHR funded programmes. The working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’ has a broader focus on strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice in the Netherlands to encourage societally relevant research and evidence-informed policy and practice. So far, their activities have mainly focused on knowledge sharing between researchers and NGO practitioners — for instance, by organizing the annual ‘Linking students and NGOs’ event — but there are aspirations towards strengthening linkages with policymakers as well. Although the objectives of the working group have not been specified, the working group feels that continuous learning about linking research, policy,
and practice is one of its central aims, to identify existing gaps between research, policy and practice and to develop activities that can help to bridge those gaps. This report aims to provide an impulse to the working group by developing a framework from which to operate — and to which to link its activities.

1.1 Study objectives and study questions

It is envisaged that a framework that identifies existing and potential linkages between research, policy and practice can help to identify the added value of the working group, its specific aims, how these contribute to the objectives of Share-Net International and the needs of key stakeholders, and the activities necessary to achieve the working group's aims. Subsequently, the working group will be able to review its current activities and adjust current or create new activities in line with achieving its aims, and continue active learning on how to best link research, policy and practice. Hence, the following study objectives and questions have been formulated:

1.1.1 Study objectives

1. Obtain a better understanding of perceptions of knowledge within the Dutch fields of research, policy and practice involved with SRHR and HIV and AIDS in international development, how knowledge between these fields is linked and how these linkages can be strengthened.
2. Provide an impulse to the working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’ by developing a framework for planning, implementing and evaluating Share-Net’s knowledge management focused on linking research, policy and practice, from which to operate — and to which to link the working group’s activities.

1.1.2 Study questions

1. What are understanding(s) of knowledge, whose knowledge counts, and which approach should be adopted when striving to support the strengthening of linkages between research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS?
2. What is the current state of knowledge on knowledge brokering and on how to best strengthen linkages between research, policy, and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS?
3. What are the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the current state of linking research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS, and specifically regarding the working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’?
4. What are the needs of key stakeholders regarding linking research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS, and specifically regarding the working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’?
5. What should be the long-term goal and specific objectives of the working group ‘Linking research, policy, and practice’?
6. On which areas and activities should the working group ‘Linking research, policy, and practice’ be working?
The following chapter will explain the methodology used for this study. Chapter 3 will provide theoretical perspectives on knowledge flows; after which, Chapter 4 will describe the findings from key informant interviews. Subsequently, Chapter 5 will discuss how the theoretical perspectives on knowledge flows relate to the findings of the key informant interviews. In the concluding Chapter 6, the study questions will be answered, and recommendations will be provided for research, policy and practice in general and more specifically to Share-Net International, Share-Net Netherlands and the working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’.
2. METHODOLOGY

The present study utilized both a literature review and key informant interviews. An initial literature review was used to design the interview guide based on the research questions (see Annex 2: Interview guide). An additional, second, literature review was used to develop the conceptual model and to guide the interview coding and analysis. Table 1 shows how the research questions were operationalized and which methodology was used to answer each research question.

<table>
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<th>Research question</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. What are understanding(s) of knowledge, whose knowledge counts, and which approach should be adopted when striving to support the strengthening of linkages between research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS?</td>
<td>Perceptions of meaning of knowledge, such as evidence, and knowledge use. Theories and perceptions about the role of knowledge in strengthening linkages between research and policy, research and practice, and policy and practice.</td>
<td>Literature review, promising practices, key informant interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What is the current state of knowledge on knowledge brokering and on how to best strengthen linkages between research, policy, and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS?</td>
<td>Theories and perceptions on knowledge brokering to link research, policy and practice, including theories on knowledge sharing, joint creation and innovation; promising practices of linking research, policy and practice.</td>
<td>Literature review, key informant interviews</td>
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<td>3. What are the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the current state of linking research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS (and the working group ‘Linking research, policy, and practice’)?</td>
<td>Perceptions of types of knowledge; supply of and demand for knowledge; enabling environment — i.e. barriers and enablers — including present knowledge-sharing activities and the role of Share-Net as a knowledge platform</td>
<td>Key informant interviews</td>
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<td>4. What are the needs of key stakeholders regarding linking research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS (and the working group ‘Linking research, policy, and practice’)?</td>
<td>Needs and suggestions for improving supply of and demand for knowledge; enabling environment — i.e. barriers and enablers — and the role of Share-Net as a knowledge platform</td>
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<td>5. What should be the long-term goal and specific objectives of the working group ‘Linking research, policy, and practice’?</td>
<td>Resulting from research questions 1–4</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
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<td>6. On which areas and activities should the working group ‘Linking research, policy, and practice’ be working?</td>
<td>Resulting from research questions 1–4</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
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Table 1. Operationalization and methodology by research question
2.1 Literature review

Literature was searched for in the Web of Science database using the following search terms: SRHR policy practice; sex* policy practice; SRHR linking research policy practice; sex* linking research policy practice; SRHR knowledge; sex* ‘knowledge exchange’; sex* ‘knowledge brokering’; and sex* ‘knowledge transfer’.

Whenever relevant articles were found in journals that were suspected to have published more often on this topic, journals were further explored for: research policy practice; and link* research policy practice. These journals included: *Health Research Policy and Systems*, *BMC Public Health*, *Plos One*, *Social Science & Medicine*; and *Global Public Health: an International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*. A majority of articles found through the searches in Web of Science and peer-reviewed journals, such as *Health Research Policy and Systems*, focused on linking research and policy, especially the uptake of research by policymakers.

In addition, certain websites were further explored regarding linking research, policy and practice, such as the work of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in this area (Young, 2008; ODI, 2015). Furthermore, Share-Net International and a number of key informants provided literature suggestions, including information about the promising practices described in this report and the K* initiative (Shaxson et al., 2012).

2.2 Promising practices

In the interviews, key informants brought three promising practices forward of linking research, policy and practice: the IS Academie, the Oxfam Novib Academy, and the Academic Collaborative Centre for Public Health. These three practices are all Dutch initiatives but differ in their focus: the IS Academie aims to strengthen linkages between research and policy; the Oxfam Novib Academy linkages between research and practice; and the Academic Collaborative Centre for Public Health linkages between research, policy and practice. These three promising practices were selected because they exemplify different approaches of how institutions from different fields have sought collaboration with the intention of bridging the gaps between the fields concerned, by organizing multi-stakeholder knowledge-sharing activities. The report discusses these promising practices in more detail, as they may inspire future Share-Net activities.

2.3 Key informant interviews

Twenty-eight key informants participated in this study (see Annex 1: List of key informants). Most of them were working in senior positions, including as SRHR advisor, programme officer, policy advisor, manager, professor or advocate, at Dutch-based NGOs, co-funding organizations, the Ministry of
Foreign Affairs, intermediary organizations assigned to encourage internationalization in Dutch education and innovative research on global issues with a focus on sustainable development and poverty reduction, the public health service, and universities or other knowledge institutes. Some jobs specifically required them to link research, policy and practice — for example, working on knowledge management or as a knowledge broker; others would work on linking these fields from a research, policy or practice perspective as part of their ongoing work. Some key informants are active members of the Share-Net Netherlands knowledge platform or had previously been active members; some are passive members; and some had heard little or nothing about Share-Net Netherlands before.

Considering the exploratory nature of this study, the key informants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide, which was continuously tailored and fine-tuned during the data collection process (Hennink et al., 2011). The interview guide addressed the following topics: the meaning of knowledge and evidence; knowledge use; perceptions on linking research, policy and practice contextualized in the SRHR and HIV and AIDS domain of the Dutch international development sector; needs and barriers regarding linking research, policy and practice; recommendations for strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice; and the envisaged role of Share-Net as a knowledge platform. From the first interviews it appeared that questions related to the current state of the Share-Net working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’ and its needs were difficult to answer by participants who were not active members of the working group. Therefore, answers to the research questions concerning the working group are not discussed in the findings but have been formulated as recommendations.

In total, 24 interviews were conducted between May and August 2015, of which 20 interviews were with one key informant and, by request, four interviews were with two key informants working in the same organization. Based on the language preference of the key informants, four interviews were conducted in English, and the other 20 interviews in Dutch. The quotes from Dutch interviews in this report have been translated by the researcher. On average, interviews lasted 70 minutes, ranging from 27 minutes to 113 minutes.

All interviews were recorded with a voice recorder and then transcribed verbatim. Thereafter, the transcripts were coded in Max (Weber) Qualitative Data Analysis (MAXQDA), a qualitative data analysis program, using the following codes: (1) barriers for flow of knowledge; (2) present knowledge-sharing activities; (3) steps/recommended knowledge-sharing activities; and (4) demand for and supply of knowledge, categorized into: (a) communication; (b) content/process; (c) depth/breadth; (d) duration/cycles; (e) explicit/tacit; (f) methods; and (g) purpose. These categories of demand for and supply of knowledge were sorted for the following fields or groups of people: donors; lobby and advocacy; policymaking/international NGOs; programmes/implementation; and research/education. At the beginning of the interview, key informants received the Terms of Reference explaining the study and were asked to sign a consent form, which explained the objectives of the study, the study procedures and that their participation in the study was voluntary, confidential and anonymous.
Participants received a transcript of their interview and a draft version of the report, on which they were requested to provide comments.

2.4 Validation of findings

To validate the findings of the present study, and to encourage participation of Share-Net members in the development of this report, the following steps were taken:

- Key informants provided written feedback on the draft report.
- A Share-Net symposium ‘Enter into dialogue: perspectives on linking research, policy and practice’ was organized for Share-Net members, key informants and other interested people. At the symposium, the preliminary findings were presented, after which three discussants provided their feedback and provocative statements for plenary discussion from different perspectives: (1) research; (2) practice; and (3) linking research, policy and practice. After the plenary discussion, participants split up in groups, according to ‘Open Space Technology’, where topics chosen by participants were further discussed in depth (see Annex 4: Report of the Share-Net symposium ‘Enter into Dialogue: Linking research, policy and practice’).
- Based on one of the recommendations in the draft report, a group of 10 Bachelor’s students from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) further explored the feasibility of Share-Net developing a joint knowledge agenda and the potential role of power relations between stakeholders (see van Beek et al., 2015). Their research included nine in-depth interviews with Share-Net Netherlands members.

This feedback has been included in the final report, particularly in the development of the recommendations.

2.5 Reflection on researcher’s subjectivity and positionality

The study may have been affected by the following considerations of subjectivity and positionality (Hennink et al., 2011):

- **Work experience**: The researcher has mostly worked at Dutch universities and, to a lesser extent, at Dutch NGOs. This work experience has created more affinity and familiarity with the fields of research and practice than with the field of policy.

- **Selection bias**: Through active participation in Share-Net Netherlands, the researcher was aware of, and able to approach, a diverse range of potential key informants. However, the final selection of key informants has been influenced by the researcher’s existing relations with potential key informants. These existing relations may not have been a reflection of the complete Dutch fields of research, policy and practice working on SRHR and HIV and AIDS in international development.

- **Emic perspective**: At the time of data collection, the researcher was a member of the Share-Net Netherlands Core Group and Chair of the Share-Net working group ‘Linking research,
policy and practice’. This emic or ‘insider’s perspective’ may have helped her go more deeply into the topic but may have also created some ‘blind spots’.

- **Positionality:** The researcher’s active participation in Share-Net may have caused the key informants to view the researcher as a representative of Share-Net Netherlands, as has been expressed by several key informants during the interviews. This may have prohibited key informants from sharing certain information because they may have assumed this was already known by the researcher or because they may have felt uncomfortable disclosing such information. The signing of a consent form, which explained that participation would be confidential and anonymous, attempted to avoid the latter.

### 2.6 Limitations of the study

In addition to the researcher’s subjectivity and positionality, which may have affected this study, the following limitations can be considered:

- **Focus of study:** The study focused on Share-Net Netherlands; interactions with the other country nodes and the role of Share-Net International have been left out. Share-Net International focuses on knowledge generation, sharing, translation and use. Although it would have been interesting to take all these four pillars of knowledge management into account, this study has mainly focused on knowledge sharing between research, policy and practice.

- **Stakeholders:** Although many stakeholders could have been identified and included in the study, it was decided to focus mainly on senior researchers, NGO practitioners and policymakers at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as representatives of, respectively, the Dutch fields of research, practice and policy. The perceptions of stakeholders such as students, the private sector, the media, international institutes and politicians are not represented in this study.

- **Selection bias:** The researcher had easier access to key informants she already knew, as discussed under subjectivity and positionality. Some potential key informants indicated that they did not have time for the interview because of summer holidays or because it was too time-consuming. Furthermore, most of the key informants interviewed were already aware of, or working on, the nexus of research, policy and practice. This may have created a more positive picture of researchers, policymakers and practitioners being motivated to link research, policy and practice. Although the study assumes that there is a need to link research, policy and practice, there may be many professionals who do not see a need for linking these fields. A quantitative survey could have helped to gain insights into this.

- **Comparison of fields:** A focus on the fields of research, policy and practice assumes a practice of separate fields that can be compared. However, from the key informant interviews it appeared that these fields are often interrelated and diffuse, which made it difficult to compare them.
3. Theoretical perspectives on knowledge flows

A multitude of initiatives have been set up to strengthen linkages between research, policy and practice. In the Netherlands, for instance, such initiatives include the five Dutch knowledge platforms for global development, the Academic Collaborative Centres for Public Health and the three promising practices described in this report (The Broker, 2014; ZonMW, 2016; Komen & Hardon, 2011; Oxfam Novib, 2015; Academische Werkplaats Publieke Gezondheid Limburg, 2015). Strengthening linkages through knowledge activities is known as, among other terms, knowledge management, knowledge translation, Communities of Practice and knowledge brokering (Gagnon, 2011; Shaxson et al., 2012). Share-Net International envisions itself as a Community of Practice — i.e. “groups of individuals with shared interests that come together in person or virtually to tell stories, to share and discuss problems and opportunities, discuss best practices, and talk over lessons learned. Communities of Practice emphasize the social nature of learning within or across organizations” (van der Kwaak, 2015, p.47). Although all these concepts of knowledge activity have slightly different meanings, Shaxson et al. (2012) argue that they are all systematically interlinked activities involved with knowledge sharing to increase knowledge use.

Knowledge can be defined as “the full utilisation of information and data, coupled with the potential of people skills, competencies, ideas, intuition, commitment and motivation” (Grey, 1996 in: Pathirage, Amaratunga, & Haigh, 2007, p.116). This definition of knowledge emphasizes that knowledge includes both explicit knowledge and “tacit understandings of what that information means and how it can be used” (Shaxson et al., 2012, p.2). This shows that actors in research, policy and practice can hold different knowledge about the same topic. Knowledge can be divided in many other ways, such as content or process knowledge and knowledge held individually or communally (ibid.).

Whereas explicit knowledge can be expressed in words and numbers, tacit knowledge or understandings is more difficult to articulate (Nonaka, Konno, & Toyama, 2000). Tacit knowledge is embedded in human beings based on experiences. It can include perceptions, intuition and know-how (Goffin & Koners, 2011; Nonaka et al., 2000; Pathirage et al., 2007; von Krogh, Ichijo, & Nonaka, 2000). Explicit and tacit knowledge are complementary and both necessary in interactions between individuals to create new knowledge (Nonaka et al., 2000; van der Kwaak, 2015). According to Pathirage et al. (2007), explicit and tacit knowledge should not be regarded as binary concepts but as opposite ends of a spectrum.

Strategies such as knowledge management and knowledge brokering aim to advance flows of knowledge within and across the fields of research, policy and practice to improve knowledge use. Various models are used to comprehend such knowledge flows. For instance, a model developed by von Krogh et al. (2000, p.180) assumes a ‘knowledge spiral’ where knowledge evolves through alternately individual and collective interaction in an upward spiral of originating, conversing, documenting and internalizing knowledge (see Table 2).
To facilitate knowledge creation, von Krogh et al. (2000) describe five enablers for knowledge creation: (1) instil a knowledge vision; (2) manage conversations; (3) mobilize knowledge activists, such as knowledge brokers; (4) create the right context — for example, organizational structures that stimulate collaborations; and (5) globalize local knowledge — for example, aggregate knowledge and adapt it to other contexts.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Individual Interaction</th>
<th>Collective Interaction</th>
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<td><strong>Face-to-face interaction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conversing:</strong></td>
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<td>Sharing tacit knowledge between individuals</td>
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<td><strong>Virtual interaction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Documenting:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalizing:</td>
<td>Converting knowledge into explicit forms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making explicit knowledge tacit once more</td>
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Table 2. Knowledge spiral (von Krogh et al., 2000, p.180)

Shaxson et al. (2012, p.3) distinguish the following knowledge-sharing activities to improve knowledge flows: (1) access knowledge; (2) translate knowledge, to interpret and apply information; (3) broker knowledge, which means that “producers and users of knowledge” build relationships, bring “different types of knowledge” together and help “to co-produce knowledge”; and (4) develop a “system-level function” that facilitates innovation by developing an enabling context which ensures that funding is available, that incentives for knowledge sharing exist, and that actors from various fields are able to innovate their ways of sharing knowledge and to adapt knowledge to their local contexts.

Figure 1 represents these different functions as a spectrum, which can be performed by both individuals and organizations and at the inter-organizational level.

Which types of knowledge-sharing activities are most appropriate to optimize knowledge use may depend on the specific context and the needs of the various groups involved (Shaxson et al., 2012; Traynor, DeCorby, & Dobbins, 2014). One way of determining such needs is by distinguishing between or among a supply of, and a demand for, knowledge. Both the knowledge supply and demand can be either fragmented or focused (Table 3). For instance, if the supply of knowledge is fragmented but the demand for knowledge is focused (scenario 3), activities focused on gathering and enabling access to information, such as literature reviews, may be most appropriate, whereas in the case where knowledge supply and demand are both fragmented (scenario 4), a variety of knowledge-sharing activities may be best for users and producers of knowledge to meet their supply and demand (Shaxson et al., 2012).
It has been argued that knowledge flows used to be considered rather static, such as the flow of research to policy and practice — i.e. research uptake — where researchers would disseminate their findings, and policymakers and practitioners were expected to let this knowledge inform their policies and practices (ESRC-DFID, 2013; Shaxson et al., 2012). However, according to Oliver, Lorenc, & Innvaer...
(2014), it is wrong to assume that increased research uptake will automatically benefit policymakers, and researchers have overlooked how research and policy actually interact. They argue that instead of studying how policymakers should increase their research uptake, they should look into these processes of policy decision-making. For instance, Young (2008, p.4) explains that policy processes are “complex, multifactorial and non-linear”: stages in the policy process from “agenda setting through decision-making to implementation and evaluation” rarely take place in a logical order, and at the same time many actors try to influence these processes, which makes it difficult for research findings to inform policymaking.

Rather than considering knowledge to be moving in static flows, the K* (Kstar) initiative — an overarching concept for all activities involved with knowledge sharing to increase knowledge use — assumes that, to come to innovation, dissemination of knowledge alone is not sufficient and that joint creation of knowledge is a prerequisite (Shaxson et al., 2012; von Krogh et al., 2000). To be able to jointly produce or create new knowledge, the various groups involved need to acknowledge that all actors possess knowledge and that these types of knowledge are important and legitimate (Shaxson et al., 2012). According to von Krogh et al. (2000), tacit knowledge is the most important source of innovation and can only have impact if it is made explicit and shared with others (see Table 2). Since tacit knowledge is difficult to articulate, it is usually made explicit through knowledge-sharing activities such as direct interaction and storytelling (Goffin & Koners, 2011; van der Kwaak, 2015).

Creating the right context, or an enabling environment, is important for knowledge to flow, have impact and lead to innovation (Boyko, Lavis, Abelson, Dobbins, & Carter, 2012; Shaxson et al., 2012; von Krogh et al., 2000). An enabling environment is characterized by direct interaction, openness and space for creativity and spontaneity which optimizes the ways in which people interact and distribute their tacit knowledge. Such an environment can be reached through interdisciplinary interactions and personal assertiveness and by utilizing the knowledge of every individual involved (von Krogh et al., 2000).

Creating an enabling environment means enabling facilitators and addressing barriers that may impede knowledge flows. Many potential barriers can be distinguished at the individual, organizational and network/system level. Individual barriers may include attitudes and lack of time and intrinsic motivation, which is crucial to transfer tacit knowledge (Fenn, 2009; Osterloh & Frey, 2000; von Krogh et al., 2000). Organizational barriers may include incentive structures, which may not reward knowledge-sharing activities; company paradigms; and procedures — for instance, relating to planning, budgets and budget lines which may not allow for interdisciplinary knowledge-sharing activities (Bielak, 2012; von Krogh et al., 2000). Network- and system-level barriers may include jargon, challenges to measuring the impact of knowledge-sharing activities, power imbalances between stakeholders, and certain types of knowledge being valued over other types (Bielak, 2012; Shaxson et al., 2012; von Krogh et al., 2000).
Some barriers have been specifically mentioned in relation to linking research, policy and practice. For instance, de Goede, Putters, van der Grinten, & van Oers (2010) distinguish barriers related to expectations, transfer issues, acceptance and interpretation in the interaction between research and policy. Researchers may experience pressure to rush translation of their research findings, which could comprise “critical evaluation of ethical, policy, and social implications” (Ostergren, Hammer, Dingel, Koenig, & McCormick, 2014, p.1). Another barrier can be a mismatch between the type of knowledge supplied by researchers and the type of knowledge demanded by policymakers, such as limited research on intervention effectiveness and data on costs and cost-effectiveness (Milat et al., 2014). Furthermore, incentive structures in academia motivate researchers to publish in peer-reviewed journals because promotion processes recognize such publications in contrast to publications for policy and practice (Otten et al., 2015; Harvey et al., 2015). Jansen, van Oers, Kok, & de Vries (2010, p.1) observe striking differences between the fields of research, policy and practice, and their cycles, which strengthen their “niche character” and “hampers integration and collaboration”, including duration of cycles, transparency, accountability, power roles and priority setting.

3.1 Conceptual model

Figure 2 shows the conceptual model for this study. It assumes that the flows of various types of knowledge within and across the fields of research, policy and practice should be optimized for knowledge to have impact and to lead to innovation (research question 1). The types of knowledge activities that are most appropriate to optimize the knowledge flows depend on the needs of professionals involved in research, policy and practice (research question 4). Those needs can be determined by distinguishing a demand for and a supply of various types of knowledge (research questions 2+3+5+6). For instance, a practitioner could have a demand for evaluation research and have a supply of tacit knowledge of how to adapt a programme based on evaluation findings. In such a case, optimizing knowledge flows between research and practice could mean that a researcher conducts the evaluation research (knowledge demand practice supplied by research), after which the practitioner and researcher together translate the findings into recommendations for practice (knowledge demand research supplied by practice). In addition to meeting the needs of the professionals involved, it is important to understand the barriers and enabling factors underlying the specific context of the Dutch field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS in international development in order to create an enabling environment that will optimize the flow of knowledge (research questions 1+2).
Figure 2. Conceptual model
4. Findings

Based on the literature review and the resulting conceptual model, the findings from the key informant interviews have been structured as follows:

1. Key informants’ needs for knowledge, which have been structured by their demand for and supply of various types of knowledge
2. Key informants’ perceptions of barriers and enabling factors that create an enabling environment for knowledge flows between research, policy and practice
3. Key informants’ suggestions for knowledge-sharing activities that could optimize knowledge flows between research, policy and practice.

4.1 Knowledge needs: demand for and supply of various types of knowledge

This section will describe how the supply of and demand for knowledge are perceived in the fields of research, policy and practice, and to what extent the key informants feel the supply of knowledge meets the demand. Although the findings from the literature review suggest that knowledge is held by all stakeholders, in the interviews the key informants do not always discuss knowledge in this way; most often they tend to use the words ‘research’ or ‘evidence’ and discuss what they feel needs to happen to make policy and practice more research-informed or to make research more relevant for policy and practice.

The purpose of doing research

Key informants working at NGOs indicate that they demand knowledge, or research, for various purposes. For instance, they may want to conduct research to empower civil society, to influence policies or to build capacity. Depending on the purpose of the research, they will select a research method, approach and seniority of researcher. For instance, one key informant involved in operational research said:

“I asked my partner: what is the reason you need these data? What is your aim? He told me he wanted to push his partners to work more on governance and meaningful youth participation. So what would be the best way to approach this? Should we do quantitative research? Or an experiment? [...] I notice that this makes me think differently about research. You try to figure out: what do partners need this research for? [...] I start to explain research more in those ways than in scientific ways.” (P11)

In some cases, NGOs will perform research themselves or involve students or local researchers — for instance, when it concerns baseline studies or other small research questions. Another option is to ask implementing organizations to conduct research themselves — for instance, to assess the needs in their community. Some NGOs purposively initiate this as a strategy for capacity-building: the NGO practitioners will develop research skills and will learn about the needs in their community. However, some key informants feel that it is better to involve senior academic researchers from leading
academic institutes to obtain in-depth analysis for policy and programme improvements or to increase the credibility of research findings. For instance, one practitioner feels that research needs to be conducted by leading academic institutes for policymakers to take it seriously:

“You can do a quick and dirty evaluation, but if you need research findings for policy influencing, or for a difficult conversation, than you have to make sure that the research is conducted in a professional way. [...] Some NGOs perform their own research, in which they let local NGOs collect their own data. I'm not convinced this will yield the best results.”(P6)

**Accountability**

Several key informants working in research and practice feel that Dutch NGOs are being held more accountable nowadays for how they spend their funding. Although most of them think this is a positive development, some question the way this has been translated into the conditions set by funding agencies. For instance, donors may ask NGOs to perform big impact evaluations and to collect extensive quantitative data on a broad spectrum of indicators for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Various key informants consider these methods not always the most appropriate methods for evaluating programmes. They argue that other research approaches, such as process evaluations using qualitative research methods, could be more useful and appropriate for finding best practices and lessons learned. For instance, the following practitioner would prefer to see less, but more in-depth, data collection, including time to learn from and reflect on such lessons learned and to adapt programmes accordingly:

“There is this bureaucratic system of having many results and aggregating results to a level where it loses its meaning. [...] This focus on numbers [...] doesn't tell you anything about the quality of what has been reached. [...] Many small studies are performed in a too short period of time by researchers who have little background in research. [...] Instead, one big research project with a well-developed research question would have helped us a lot more.”(P24)

Besides the supply of explicit knowledge in practice consisting of, for instance, data from monitoring and evaluation and operational research, the following practitioner indicates that there is also a supply of tacit knowledge which is not always made explicit but on which many practitioners base their work:

“I think there is a lot of practical knowledge based on gut feelings. For instance, you see many things happening, thinking: ‘Is that a smart thing to do?’ Of course, it is always good to see how it can be done differently.”(P3)

**Publish or perish**

Practitioners and policymakers may ask academic researchers to conduct research that could inform their policy and practice. However, several researchers with experience of working in academia point out that the organizational incentive structure in academia encourages researchers to publish in peer-reviewed scientific journals only. Some key informants with experience of working in policy indicate that this supply of research output is not always relevant for policy and practice — for instance, when
recommendations provided in peer-reviewed articles are too abstract to implement or when articles focus on explaining differences. In contrast, descriptive knowledge, such as programme evaluations or statistics describing the magnitude of SRHR issues, is perceived to be more relevant for influencing policies. At the same time, policymakers acknowledge that policymaking is not informed by evidence only, but by other factors as well. A researcher felt that policymakers and donors have difficulty internalizing evidence when it is counter-intuitive:

“Sometimes innovative research ideas based on theories are counter-intuitive. It can be difficult to obtain funding for such ideas when the people granting such proposals do not believe they will work.” (P4)

Another disadvantage of the incentive structure for publishing in peer-reviewed journals mentioned by a researcher is that tacit knowledge is less often made explicit:

“Doctors hardly write any handbooks anymore about how to diagnose because universities only value the number of peer-reviewed publications. Yet it is so important that such knowledge is made explicit.” (P1)

At the same time, several researchers indicated that they do disseminate their findings in various formats intended for various audiences, including fact sheets or policy briefs to reach policymakers:

“I don't like it at all that all the beautiful things we do are hardly taken up in practice. Look, we all do our best, and we write Dutch articles and Dutch textbooks even [...]. For your scientific career it's a waste of time, I can assure you, because it's not appreciated at all. But we do it, because we find it important that people can access this knowledge.” (P4)

However, one researcher felt that there is a potential pitfall for focusing knowledge dissemination too much on reaching policymakers through policy briefs only:

“If we start writing small policy briefs only [...] I don't like it. Policy briefs, is that all we're striving for? And I think, I hope, there are certain policymakers who are willing to read an academic article [...]. The products resulting from research and knowledge generation should be diverse, and it should not just be one standard product with one format. I don't believe in it.” (P25)

**Research approaches**

In addition to the supply of knowledge through publications, some academic researchers mention that they have the skills and tacit understandings to conduct quality research using a variety of methods and approaches suiting the variety of knowledge questions in policy and practice. However, some of these researchers experienced that donors would demand their own preferred methods and approaches, and that donors can lack faith in innovative research methods suggested by researchers:
“I find often there is a lot of sort of lip service to things like children’s voices, but then there is no actual support for doing that, you know, for doing that in your research, or making that matter in your policies. It tends to be very tokenistic in the end.”(P21)

In such cases, key informants felt that their tacit knowledge could have met the knowledge demands of practitioners but that certain barriers, such as disputes about research approaches, prevented them from collaborating.

4.2 An enabling environment

The key informants in this study mentioned various barriers and enabling factors creating the current environment for knowledge flows between research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS.

4.2.1 Barriers to the flow of knowledge

The key informants listed the following barriers: discrepancies in duration and cycles; policy processes; incentive structures; fragmented supply of knowledge; prejudices; and power relations.

Discrepancies in duration and cycles

Some key informants were of the opinion that academic research, which often takes a few years to generate, might not be appropriate for answering knowledge questions from policy and practice, which they say often need to be answered in the short term. However, other key informants questioned whether this is true and argued that a distinction should be made between policy questions, which could be long term, and political questions, which could be short term. One policymaker said that it is actually important for SRHR policy to be consistent in the long term to achieve positive change:

“Because the Dutch SRHR policy has been consistent in the last 10 years, the international world also knows that these are the Dutch priorities [...] And I think it's good; our SRHR agenda is one that needs a long term. [...] It often takes a generation before social and cultural norms start changing, like accepting that access to contraception or sexuality education for young people is normal [...]. Our SRHR agenda is full of such social norms, plus all opposition involved.”(P18)

Also researchers and practitioners emphasized that it takes time to reach cultural and social change on SRHR issues. Some indicated that fixed project cycles of four years are often too short to implement programmes effectively, especially when this includes setting up a process for various stakeholders to work together. For instance, a key informant working at an intermediary institution said:

“Somehow it is the mentality that this is the project period: four years. Why? [...] And now we are even talking about organizational changes [...] in four [organizations] working together, it takes more than
a year to do it properly, so... yes, what is left of the time for implementation then? Validation, going back, check, readapt, yes, very difficult.”(P26)

Both researchers and practitioners felt that if project cycles lasted longer, more sustainable change could be achieved, and it would become easier to measure these changes.

Incentive structures
A researcher mentioned a lack of incentives for academics to disseminate research findings in other ways than peer-reviewed articles as a barrier for researchers to conduct and publish research that is relevant for policy and practice:

“The university considers research in terms of whether it is publishable, and donors are interested in influencing policies, so they want to increase the legitimacy for funding SRHR by showing its effectiveness. [...] But for science this is not interesting at all. Absolutely not! [laughs] They only care about being able to publish the findings.”(P1)

At the same time, a lack of incentives was also mentioned as a barrier for learning and sharing knowledge with other professionals within and across the fields of research, policy and practice. For instance, this practitioner explained that incentive structures in NGOs encourage them to prioritize proposal writing:

“People have other things on their minds right now [...] if they need to choose between writing a project proposal or learning... [...] Yes, they will tell you that learning is a priority, but I would like to see what that means in terms of time being invested.”(P6)

Fragmented supply of knowledge
One key informant who used to work in policy felt that a barrier to evidence-informed policymaking is a fragmented research field for SRHR in the Netherlands or a lack of visibility of this field, which makes it difficult to know where to obtain specific information:

“There is no Dutch faculty for reproductive health, at least not that I'm aware of. I'm sure there is gynaecology, obstetrics, safe motherhood, but there is not one focused research group. Maybe it exists, but I'm not aware of it.”(P14)

Also a practitioner mentioned that she would like to collaborate more with Dutch universities but that she does not know exactly which university is doing what and where there could be opportunities for collaboration. She hopes that the knowledge platform could help to bring institutions together that are working on the same topic.

Prejudices
Another perceived barrier is prejudices and expectations about other professionals and a polarization of their different approaches. For instance, some key informants felt that researchers only care about
publishing or that research is only perceived to be valid if it takes a positivistic approach. Yet, from the key informant interviews, it appears that many of the key informants work at the nexus of these fields, which suggests that their approaches may not always differ that much in reality. According to one key informant:

“There are so many different ways for collecting and generating knowledge, and I notice a sort of binary thinking — for instance, putting action research opposite fundamental scientific research. You know, all this black and white. [...] There are so many people doing the same things, only placing different accents. Sometimes the barriers or distances seem big, but in reality they are not.” (P25)

**Power relations**

Several key informants mentioned the role of power relations. For instance, one key informant with experience in research, policy and practice felt that it would be good to acknowledge the role of power in flows of knowledge:

“I think part of the problem is not realizing how political it is. It’s so... these areas are so political and so much about power and so much about who gets what in terms of wealth and attention and rights. If you don’t have that rooted in your thinking, it’s not going to change, I don’t think.” (P8)

Some Share-Net members indicated that power relations play a role within the knowledge platform. For instance, their membership and participation may be motivated by their political or strategic agenda in relation to the Dutch government and other SRHR organizations. Furthermore, some members perceive competition and competing interests between members:

“We are all enormously competitive because we are trying to get funding from the same donors. [...] I find it difficult because the knowledge platform is for sharing and learning. You have common goals, but I notice the competition is constraining. [...] You notice it, for instance, in the agenda setting because each member wants to attract attention to their own niches.” (P6)

Another power-related barrier felt by key informants is a donor-driven agenda for research and practice, which they felt does not always prioritize needs based on evidence and works against the long-term implementation necessary for programmes to have impact. Rather than focusing on programmes that have proven their effectiveness, they may feel urged to focus on innovative projects:

“I think our old way of working is still very good: working on many components, involving everyone: an evidence-based approach. [...] But you see us moving away from it, because there is less funding for this way of working. So you’re donor-driven, you start developing new approaches. [...] This shows you that the donor decides. And for the Dutch practitioners and researchers working on SRHR, this means the Ministry plays a very big role.” (P3)
4.2.2  Enabling factors for the flow of knowledge

Key informants described the following enabling factors for the flow of knowledge between research, policy and practice: the Share-Net International and Share-Net Netherlands knowledge platform; existing linkages between research, policy and practice; working in alliances and other collaborations; and education.

Share-Net International and Share-Net Netherlands knowledge platform

Various key informants indicated that they think Share-Net is a unique platform because it brings various groups and their different types of knowledge together. Some mentioned the knowledge platform as a network opportunity to communicate with other professionals at meetings. It helps them to stay up to date with other people’s activities and to approach them later.

The content knowledge shared by the knowledge platform is appreciated, such as the thematic meetings, and reports shared through the newsletter. To increase the use of knowledge obtained at thematic meetings, one key informant suggested that these meetings could have more impact if meeting reports included highlights and were distributed shortly after meetings for participants to distribute them in their organizations and networks.

One practitioner emphasized the importance of maintaining high-quality thematic meetings by investing in quality speakers and facilitators and by scheduling enough time for in-depth discussions:

“In that discussion after the presentation, someone had a very interesting question which was not well answered. So this shows that you need quality facilitators who can intervene to check whether the question has been sufficiently answered. Because that was an interesting moment where new insights could have been developed.” (P7)

Another issue addressed is the full agenda of the knowledge platform, which leaves limited space for organizing meetings in response to current discussions and events:

“Sometimes I think it would be nice to have a thematic meeting on a certain topic, but the themes for the meetings have already been determined. The spontaneity is totally gone. And I think sometimes spontaneity is necessary for obtaining new insights; it cannot all be directed.” (P25)

Another opportunity provided by the knowledge platform which is appreciated by several members is the small grants fund and NWO-Wotro calls for proposals. It is appreciated that these grants encourage collaborations with professionals in other fields and in the other country nodes of Share-Net International. Key informants are divided in their opinions about to what extent short-term studies, such as the Share-Net small grants fund, or long-term studies, such as the NWO-Wotro calls for proposals, will lead to knowledge innovations. For instance, some welcomed the small grants fund because they feel it is very open, with few conditions, which promotes creativity and innovation;
whereas another key informant felt that such small initiatives lead to more fragmentation of knowledge:

“I think that’s something that really worries me about this small grants proposal, [...] because I think when you start projectizing things, [...] it’s very difficult to create... real sort of fruitful enquiring links. [...] What you want to do is create... kind of... thinking, you know, communities where reflection and thinking and open discussion... actually bring innovations forward — and not just innovations that everybody's got on their list of innovations — but really innovate.”(P8)

Existing linkages between research, policy and practice
From the interviews, it becomes clear that the key informants cannot be easily categorized as either researchers, policymakers or practitioners. Researchers, policymakers, advocates and practitioners can all found to be working within the same organization; and many key informants have linkages with other countries, such as Dutch researchers conducting research to influence policies and practices in other countries. Policymakers are shown to be found at the international level, such as the United Nations; in the Netherlands, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and NGOs; and in other countries, such as Dutch embassies and implementing organizations. This interconnectedness at various levels shows that linkages between research, policy and practice in the Dutch field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS in international development are many and diffuse. For instance, a policymaker indicates that, often, Dutch research on SRHR does not influence Dutch policymaking on SRHR directly but via international technical agencies that set international guidelines on SRHR:

“We need to realize that the Netherlands is a small country. It would be unrealistic to think that Dutch research influences Dutch policies. That’s not how it works. We have a worldwide policy development informed by evidence which is translated into international guidelines and theories. As the Netherlands, we need to take these into account and try to see where we can add value — how we can contribute.”(P18)

At the same time, this same policymaker indicated that there are demands for direct linkages as well, such as Dutch applied research making important contributions to knowledge questions arising from the implementation of Dutch policies on SRHR.

Working in alliances and other collaborations
Key informants indicated that in recent years a lot has changed in the Dutch international development field of SRHR with regard to linking research, policy and practice. They indicated that because NGOs work in alliances, and because NGOs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and universities are members of the knowledge platform, the fields have become more connected, and stakeholders have become more visible. Due to donor requirements, NGOs work more on monitoring and evaluation and perform operational research to learn and improve their programmes. Some feel that the use of a Theory of Change helps them to adopt a more theory-based approach to their work and to focus their learning:
“Learning has become more integrated in our projects and programmes. I think it's quite new in our sector that you use Theories of Change and that you make your assumptions clear and think about how you are going to test those assumptions. Is it really true that change works how we think it works? So we try to be more systematic in formulating our learning questions [...] and I think this helps us to learn in a better way.”(P22)

However, one practitioner felt that change does not automatically follow learning: adapting programmes based on lessons learned may require an organizational change:

“Sometimes partners address very good points for improvement, and then I notice they did not include this in their next project proposal. [...] So I think learning, doing research and obtaining new insights do not necessarily lead to change. You need to do more if you want to achieve that.”(P7)

A researcher working on operational research appreciated the conditions set by donors to collaborate with professionals from other fields — for instance, by NWO-Wotro:

“That is where you find the added value in universities collaborating with NGOs, because I notice that we as NGOs are insufficiently joining theoretical debates, asking theoretical questions and translating our practical and research knowledge into theory. So collaborate with an academic institute helps us to stay sharp. [...] And sometimes when I listen to scientific debates, I think: wow, we have progressed so much further in our thinking, we even already have findings on that, but we don’t publish them.”(P11)

Key informants appreciate these new developments of working in alliances and collaborating with professionals in other fields, but at the same time they also encounter new challenges — for instance, that working in consortia can delay processes or make outcomes less optimal:

“People from various organizations all have their own needs, which is nice and positive, but it has a lot of disadvantages as well, I think, because everyone wants to have their say and add something, which makes it too big; it has become too big. And under time pressure, it becomes difficult to sit down and think, to reflect and interact with all relevant parties involved about the necessary indicators and how to measure these well.”(P9)

Another challenge is that collaborating with many partners in an alliance can increase the distance between those who are learning through operational research and those who are implementing:

“When it’s smaller, it goes more automatically, because you’re more on top of it, and there is more communication with those implementing the programme. Now that it’s bigger, working as an alliance, it no longer flows so naturally, so you have to think about how to translate and disseminate your findings.”(P11)
In this case, this researcher at an NGO would document their operational research findings into concrete messages for specific target groups — for example, managers — in their partner organizations.

**Education**

One issue several key informants pointed out as an enabling factor for strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice is education. For instance, education can teach students the necessary skills to be applied in their future work in policy and practice. On the other hand, professionals working in policy and practice can obtain research skills by obtaining an additional degree. For instance, a researcher explained how funds allow professionals working in policy and practice to do a Master’s degree in the Netherlands:

“*Here, being an international institute, they come from all over, so they can compare experiences between each other in different country contexts, which also helps. So, yes, maybe one way to kind of form that link is to maybe have more, to build more respect between researchers, practitioners and policymakers and have them be much more one and the same.*” (P21)

Reducing the barriers and strengthening the enabling factors discussed by the key informants are envisaged to contribute to an enabling environment for linking research, policy and practice.

### 4.3 Suggestions for improving the flow of knowledge

Key informants provided various suggestions for improving the flow of knowledge between research, policy and practice, to make more progress and improve the sustainability and impact of their activities. An extensive list of these suggestions is enclosed in the Annex. These suggestions are related to: (1) a more transparent demand for and supply of knowledge; (2) developing and pushing a joint knowledge agenda; (3) increasing opportunities for strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice; (4) developing a system for learning and knowledge sharing; and (5) focusing learning on implementation processes.

#### 4.3.1 A visible and concrete demand for and supply of knowledge

Key informants indicated that they are curious about the knowledge demands and supplies of other professionals working on SRHR. To share their demand with research and practice, a policymaker stated that, first of all, this means that policymakers should make their own demand for knowledge more concrete, such as within the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

“*There are still many lessons from researchers and practitioners that can help us to improve our policy implementation, because we’re never done it [giggles]. But this is a process that needs to start in our organization first.*” (P18)
Not only did key informants feel that policymakers, researchers and practitioners should make their demand for and supply of knowledge more visible and concrete, but they would also like to know how policymakers, researchers and practitioners use knowledge; which cycles they go through; and how other professionals can link up to the various stages of such cycles to strengthen linkages between the fields, as explained by a practitioner:

“Ask policymakers: [...] What kind of knowledge do you want out of the knowledge platforms? To what extent do you have a need to use knowledge for policymaking? [...] to make this more explicit.” (P3)

4.3.2 Develop and push a joint knowledge agenda

Key informants felt that the development of a joint knowledge agenda, which maps the demand for and supply of knowledge in the various fields, will enable stakeholders to see where they can be complementary to or collaborate with others and how value can be added to the knowledge that is already there. A researcher working in practice said:

“Which research agenda is relevant? After having established this, you can let people off to do their own thing, compete with one another, but do have this conversation: where do we as Dutch institutes add value? What do we want to push? Which research agenda do we want to follow or push with donors?”(P11)

Internationally, a joint knowledge agenda can help to discuss how Dutch knowledge can add value to the international knowledge base. Furthermore, it can help to proactively link Dutch knowledge to the international knowledge base — for instance, by strengthening linkages with international agencies. A researcher explained:

“What are the international priorities, and how can the Netherlands play a role in identifying those priorities and influencing those priorities? [...] I think the knowledge platform can play an important role in linking Dutch organizations to the international field [...] especially for initiating research that can help to answer the questions of tomorrow.”(P17)

As discussed as a barrier for the flow of knowledge, several key informants indicated dissatisfaction with the feeling of their work being donor-driven. A policymaker suggested that knowledge platforms have the potential to be more proactive rather than reactive to Dutch policies:

“Sometimes it can seem a bit reactive, I think [...] like this is what the Ministry expects the knowledge platforms to do, and then the knowledge platforms write a beautiful report meeting exactly the wishes of the Ministry. But instead of that you would actually like to receive a kind of visionary... image and also have a mirror held up like: ‘You see it like this... but we are here in practice, and that is no longer how things work’, for instance.”(P20)
4.3.3  **Increase opportunities for strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice**

Key informants provided some recommendations for overcoming discrepancies between research, policy and practice with regard to differences in project cycles and project durations. First of all, it is argued that a variety of short- and long-term research studies can be complementary and can help to answer the variety of knowledge questions — for instance, by asking Master’s students to answer short-term knowledge questions. Second, it is suggested that there should be more opportunities and time allocated in project proposals for learning, reflection and adaptation during programme implementation itself, including research projects, where findings can be shared and discussed during the project, rather than only at the end. Third, there could be greater efforts to link research to policy and practice after research findings have been published. For instance, a key informant working at an intermediary organization explained:

“Usually it is only after research financing stops that research uptake starts. It can be years later that scientific research starts to manifest itself somewhere and is taken up by accident. And that is a shame. [...] I would plead to run these projects for a longer period of time, so researchers can stay active and continue developing based on what they have collected.” (P28)

Another recommendation provided was to link knowledge more consciously to the stages of policy and project cycles when knowledge input is required, and to make research, policy and practice cycles more compatible — for example, publishing policy briefs ahead of international conferences, as suggested by an advocate working in practice:

“You need to know what is happening, how processes take place, and jump in on time.” (P12)

Key informants felt the need to create more mutual understanding between professionals working in research, policy and practice and to establish incentives for working together, as suggested by a consultant with experience in research, policy and practice:

“We need to find ways to make collaborations more attractive. That is important, that it works out for all parties involved. [...] And that's a process. You cannot make it happen in one day or the other; it is something you need to learn.” (P1)

The key informants made several suggestions for how to make this happen, such as integral funding and donors setting criteria for collaborations. A key informant working at an intermediary organization thought that research processes involving various stakeholders can have more impact than the findings emerging from the project:

“I think a research process involving various stakeholders [...] putting energy in, making these parties collaborate well and the expertise being developed during such a process can be useful for the broader environment. I think such a process can have more impact than the findings coming out of the project.
It’s the way of working, the way of thinking and the interaction between stakeholders that can be enriching for research, policymakers and practitioners.” (P28)

Other suggestions involved interdisciplinary working. For instance, a researcher felt that policy and practice can become more evidence-informed if researchers start working in these fields after having finished their PhD. A policymaker and a researcher suggested that one-day or more long-term internships, where professionals are introduced to the daily work of professionals in other fields, may help to overcome prejudices and develop an understanding of each other’s knowledge demands. For instance, the researcher said:

“Bring your researcher to work day [...] Yes, I mean that could be really helpful because I said I think it’s legitimate to say that some people in these positions don’t know what the others go through, you know.” (P21)

Also in education, policy and practice could become more integrated in the curriculum. A practitioner working at an NGO who regularly collaborates with students and student supervisors said:

“For instance, now you see that universities ask us if we can have a look at their curriculum from our NGO perspective and if we can give a lecture or formulate a practical assignment for their students. Of course, this is super interesting for us: it makes it more clear for students what we as an organization do, and we hope it may provide us with interesting ideas and insights.” (P22)

“I think it continues to become clearer that if you want to learn and use knowledge, then you have to create time for this. It can’t be something extra.” (P22)

4.3.4 Develop a system for learning and knowledge sharing to increase knowledge use

Several key informants indicated that their organizations are looking for promising practices of linking research and practice. For instance, this researcher working on operational research would like to share experiences about conducting operational research and how this can support capacity-building:

“How do you organize operational research? Who is learning, where, and how? [...] I would like to discuss this with other people involved in operational research on SRHR.” (P11)

A practitioner, whose organization has asked this key informant to develop a protocol for student-NGO collaborations, would like to exchange best practices of involving students in organizations — for instance, through internships:
“How can you construct a system where you really are able to take advantage of the students’ abilities but you’re also not abusing them and you’re really giving them a lot in return as well, so you know it needs to be a good win-win.” (P13)

Key informants suggested the development of a system for learning and knowledge sharing based on a variety of knowledge-sharing activities that will lead to joint creation and innovation, as this researcher summarized:

“So there should be a system for giving direction to each activity, to make it useful and carry it along. [...] There should be more temporality in these things: one after the other, it needs more time, not doing everything at once [...] to understand how these various strategies influence each other and should connect.” (P9)

A key informant with experience in working in research, policy and practice thought that this requires setting up a process, which includes participation, interaction and space for reflection and discussion:

“You have to set up processes to make it happen. [...] The process of linking and not even new knowledge, I mean new knowledge expecting is a bit much in that short time, but actually getting... getting those processes working better, I think that’s what it really should be about. [...] That doesn’t just happen by being, putting people in a room, you’ve got to really pursue that, I think. I don’t mean it in terms of money; I mean it in terms of feeling that they are part of a more effective community.” (P8)

Key informants suggested that ways to create such a system could be, for instance, to encourage researchers and practitioners to formulate recommendations and a plan of action together in a participatory process, to regard research uptake as part of the research process, and to have discussions about documents being published, as this researcher suggested:

“That you share a policy brief in a workshop, so not only sharing the knowledge but taking it a step further.” (P25)

Several key informants felt the need for a knowledge broker to ensure that such linkages are made — for instance, this key informant working as a knowledge broker:

“You need someone in the lead, someone who is assigned to make sure connections are made, because they don’t happen by themselves. [...] Someone who speaks the languages of the various stakeholders, who understands their stakes. [...] Someone needs to bring them together and initiate the discussion.” (P2)
4.3.5  **Increase attention to implementation processes**
Some key informants suggested a greater focus on process learning. For instance, a policymaker feels it would be important to discuss how implementation processes can be improved:

“How can you use lessons learned, that information that is available to improve your policies, to adjust them, add new elements. [...] This means formulating a learning agenda, exchange, sharing experiences.”(P15)

Also a researcher felt that research could focus on such processes:

“Which guidelines are in place, how should these be executed, that could be a focus, and the evidence base on implementation research, there continues to be a need for research connecting systematic reviews to analyses of what works and why, to develop guidelines and to continue to improve these.” (P17)

Knowledge-sharing activities focusing on these suggestions may contribute to stronger linkages between research, policy and practice.
5. Promising practices

Key informants mentioned the following three promising practices in the interviews. They are discussed in more detail, as they may inspire future Share-Net activities.

5.1 IS Academie

The IS Academie started in 2005 to improve and strengthen linkages between academia and policymakers in international development (Rijksoverheid, 2010).

The objectives of the IS Academie are to improve the quality of Dutch policy on international development and to increase public support for international development. To achieve these objectives, it aimed to ensure that research should become more relevant and applicable to policy; younger researchers should become involved in international development; policy officers should develop a broad and extrinsically focused perspective; academic policies for research and education should create more space for international development; and political support for international development should increase. Five IS Academies were established, creating collaborations between policy departments of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and knowledge institutes in the Netherlands (ibid.).

5.1.1 IS Academie: HIV/AIDS

One of the five IS Academies focused on HIV and AIDS, a collaboration between the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) at the University of Amsterdam. Its activities focusing on policy development included:

- **expert meetings**;
- practitioners implementing AIDS programmes working as international AIDS research fellows to translate their knowledge to policy;
- knowledge translation into policy papers; and
- researchers and policymakers attending international AIDS conferences together: to present research findings and to organize sessions around the translation of the conference findings into Dutch policy and new research questions.

The IS Academie HIV/AIDS has helped researchers and policymakers to jointly create knowledge. Policymakers have become more aware of research findings, and the university's curricula have become more focused on policy and practice. For instance, students can do internships at the Ministry, and policymakers give guest lectures at the university, which enables them to interact with students and receive their feedback (Komen & Hardon, 2011).

5.1.2 IS Academie: Education and International Development

Another IS Academie programme that was established is the research group Education and International Development, a collaboration between the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the AISSR. Since 2012, the two main focus areas of the Education and International Development research group are the role of education in reconstructing (post-conflict) States, peacebuilding and reform; and education in relation to SRHR.

The IS Academie Education and International Development encourages policy-oriented research projects to be carried out in its two priority areas. Within the framework of the IS Academie programme, it is organizing various research activities to explore the nexus between SRHR and education. For this purpose, the IS Academie cooperates with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oxfam Novib and Edukans.

More information about the IS Academie Education and International Development can be found at https://educationanddevelopment.wordpress.com/.

5.2 Oxfam Novib Academy

The Oxfam Novib Academy started in January 2015 and aims to “interact more systematically with the academic world” (Oxfam Novib, 2015, p.4). Oxfam Novib wants to provide Master's students with an inspiring internship and at the same time “make effective use of available knowledge and expertise to improve the quality” of its programmes (ibid.).

The Academy is part of Oxfam Novib's knowledge management strategy and contributes to “the facilitation of a learning culture within the organization” (ibid., p.12). Each semester, about 10 students are selected for an internship of three to six months on various focus areas, such as Youth Engagement and Education; Women, Peace and Security; and Women's Bodily Integrity. Each student is assigned a mentor from Oxfam Novib. During the course of the internship, the programme aims to achieve close collaboration between the mentor and the student's supervisor from the university. Before the internship starts, the student and mentor sign a ‘mentoring contract’ stating their professional and personal learning goals and expectations (ibid., p.11). This may include the products the student will deliver — for example, both a Master's thesis and a brief report with programme recommendations for Oxfam Novib.

Activities of the Oxfam Novib Academy include:

- a **three-day introduction event** to familiarize the students with Oxfam Novib's history, staff and work and security training;
- **biweekly learning meetings** for professional learning, which provide a space to exchange ideas, both among the students themselves but also in interaction with Oxfam Novib staff, to “create valuable knowledge products” (ibid., p.6);
• peer-to-peer learning sessions for personal learning for both students and mentors;
• sessions on methodology — for example, about frameworks for programming and methods for data collection;
• connecting with university departments — for instance, via students’ supervisors, to discuss knowledge questions and to stay ‘cutting edge’; and
• a blog serving not only as a “reflection of the student’s experiences but also as an instrument to profile the Academy to potential partners and interested students and young audiences” (ibid., p.10).

More information about the Oxfam Novib Academy and the blog can be found at http://oxfamnovibacademy.tumblr.com/.

5.3 Academic Collaborative Centre for Public Health

The Academic Collaborative Centre for Public Health initiative (in Dutch: Academische Werkplaats) in the Dutch province of Limburg has “the objective of achieving that the three domains of policy, practice and research become working partners on an equal footing” (Jansen, De Leeuw, Hoeijmakers, & De Vries, 2012, p.1).

It has developed a knowledge agenda which includes learning questions to be answered in the short term (maximum six months); the medium term (maximum two years); the long term (four years or longer); and continuously. These knowledge questions are formulated by policy and practice — for example, the public health service, municipalities and general practitioners — and studied by researchers from the University of Maastricht. The Collaborative Centre plays a brokering role in translating knowledge questions from policy and practice into concrete research questions, involving public health professionals in writing research proposals, and adapting research designs to practical and policy needs. For instance, to promote joint creation of knowledge, working groups consisting of researchers, policymakers and public health professionals write research proposals together and meet periodically during the research process to discuss implications of the findings for policy and practice.

The knowledge-sharing activities of the Collaborative Centre include:
• knowledge-sharing meetings (in Dutch: Referieberijeenkomsten) organized to increase interaction between research, policy and practice by discussing a topic from a scientific, professional and policy point of view;
• masterclasses for public health professionals and researchers working in the niche of research, policy and practice — for example, a two-day masterclass on the use of qualitative research methods in public health practice;
• ‘small is beautiful’ (in Dutch: Klein maar Fijn) research, which is a research conducted in three to six months. Municipalities formulate a knowledge question, which the Collaborative Centre
translates into a concrete research question. The Collaborative Centre selects Master’s students who will answer this research question. During the research process, the students are in close contact with the municipality and will present their findings to the municipality. Based on the findings, the student and the municipality together develop recommendations for policy; and

- **factsheets:** the research findings of the ‘small is beautiful’ studies and other studies are summarized in two-page factsheets which are distributed among the municipalities or other target groups and published on the Collaborative Centre’s website.

More information can be found (in Dutch) at [http://www.academischewerkplaatslimburg.nl/](http://www.academischewerkplaatslimburg.nl/).
6. Discussion

Knowledge activities can help to optimize knowledge flows within and across the fields of research, policy and practice. Various models are used to comprehend such knowledge flows, such as the ‘knowledge spiral’ developed by von Krogh et al. (2000) and the four spectra of knowledge-sharing activities developed by the K* initiative (Shaxson et al., 2012). Which types of knowledge-sharing activities are most appropriate to optimize knowledge use may depend on the need for knowledge of the various groups involved and barriers and enabling factors in the specific context. This need may be determined by distinguishing between the supply of, and a demand for, knowledge. Both the knowledge supply and demand can be regarded as either fragmented or focused.

The key informant interviews showed that neither the supply of nor the demand for knowledge in research, policy and practice is always clear or concrete. The involvement of many actors in SRHR and HIV and AIDS at various levels seems to create a perceived fragmented supply of and demand for knowledge, which can also be viewed as a variety and richness of knowledge generation. Key informants experience a mismatch between supply and demand between fields due to divergent project cycles, research methods and outputs. Prejudices about the supply of and demand for knowledge of other professionals may strengthen these perceptions. At the same time, many key informants appeared to be working at the nexus of research, policy and practice, which indicates that the supply of and demand for knowledge between the fields of research, policy and practice do find each other and may actually overlap.

The variation in demand for and supply of various types of knowledge, and key informant suggestions for increasing joint production of knowledge, rather than a linear dissemination of knowledge from producer to user, creates opportunities for activities focused on knowledge brokering and innovation brokering, as discussed by Shaxson et al. (2012). For instance, depending on the purpose, depth/breadth and short-/long-term demand for research, collaborations could be initiated with students or more senior researchers, or capacity-building could be intensified by having local researchers conduct research. As indicated, strengthening linkages between the fields of research, policy and practice in educational institutes can help to make connections between research, policy and practice more natural for future professionals (Giles-Corti et al., 2015; Komen & Hardon, 2011).

Whereas systematic literature studies and an open-access knowledge base can contribute to a more focused and visible supply of explicit knowledge, interdisciplinary interactions can contribute to a more focused supply of tacit knowledge. The literature review showed that joint creation of knowledge is a prerequisite to achieve innovation and that tacit knowledge is the most important source for innovation, which can only have impact if it is made explicit and shared with others in interdisciplinary interactions (Shaxson et al., 2012; von Krogh et al., 2000). As a Community of Practice, Share-Net International recognizes and acts on the importance of tacit knowledge by organizing interdisciplinary interactions for knowledge sharing (van der Kwaak, 2015). Suggestions by key informants to increase opportunities for strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice; to develop a system
for learning and knowledge sharing; and to focus learning on implementation processes indicates that there is interest in scaling up activities focused on interdisciplinary interactions and making tacit knowledge more explicit.

Von Krogh et al. (2000) describe five enablers for knowledge creation: (1) instilling a knowledge vision; (2) managing conversations; (3) mobilizing knowledge activists; (4) creating the right context; and (5) globalizing local knowledge. The findings of the present study are discussed on the basis of these five enablers.

### 6.1 Instil a knowledge vision

The first enabler, instilling a knowledge vision, is in line with key informant suggestions for developing a joint knowledge agenda. Van Beek et al. (2015, p.38) have further explored opportunities for developing such an agenda within Share-Net Netherlands and the role of power between stakeholders. They found that almost all participants in their study support the idea of developing a joint knowledge agenda: it could improve collaboration between stakeholders, identify knowledge gaps and “might draw more attention to intervention or implementation research”.

However, their participants also expressed the following concerns and doubts: it may be difficult to agree on the content of a joint agenda because there are many different stakeholders involved, with their own goals and visions; it may require a lot of time and money, while there is a possibility that the agenda will not be followed up on; it is important that stakeholders keep their own role, rather than having them all on the same page; and power imbalances between stakeholders actually exist.

If Share-Net Netherlands is to initiate the development of such an agenda, a first step would be to start a dialogue between Share-Net members, facilitated by the Share-Net secretariat, to discuss prejudices and power relations between the fields of research, policy and practice, and to make the differences in the demand for and supply of knowledge more visible (van Beek et al., 2015).

Also, at the Share-Net symposium ‘Enter into dialogue: linking research, policy and practice’, where preliminary findings of the present study were discussed, power relations were considered an important barrier (see Annex 4: Report of the Share-Net symposium ‘Enter into Dialogue: Linking research, policy and practice’). Symposium participants concluded that decision-makers are found in any organization at any level in research, policy and practice, and that it is important to identify those decision-makers because they are the ones who have the power to make changes. One of the conclusions from the symposium was that to create an enabling environment for knowledge sharing and joint creation between the fields of research, policy and practice, it is necessary to create a safe environment in which stakeholders feel free to share their perspectives. Following a process of evidence-based priority setting, taking ethical considerations into account — such as providing special
attention to underrepresented groups — may contribute to creating such a safe environment (Sen & Govender, 2015; Sutherland et al., 2012; Viergever, 2014)

6.2 Manage conversations and mobilize knowledge activists

Share-Net, as a knowledge platform, can manage conversations and serve as a knowledge activist by initiating knowledge-sharing activities. Intensifying activities in accordance with the ‘knowledge spiral’ (von Krogh et al., 2000) can help to evolve knowledge by sharing tacit knowledge and making this more explicit. Opportunities can be found in intensifying activities focused on:

- **originating** — for example, sharing tacit knowledge between individuals — for instance, through short-term interdisciplinary internships, such as the proposed ‘Bring your researcher to work’ day;
- **conversing** — for example, bringing small interdisciplinary working groups together to exchange tacit knowledge through dialogues;
- **documenting** — for example, not only bringing a fragmented supply of explicit information together through systematic reviews focused on countries or themes but also documenting tacit knowledge about lessons learned and best practices and how to adapt these to local contexts. A learning agenda may help to prioritize tacit knowledge discussions; and
- **internalizing** — for example, making explicit knowledge tacit again by not only disseminating documents through websites and newsletters but also by discussing such findings in workshops (ibid.).

This ‘knowledge spiral’ is in accordance with key informant suggestions to set up a system for learning and knowledge sharing that does not stop at documenting knowledge but continues to evolve this knowledge in an upward spiral (ibid.). As one key informant said, this means not only working together in participatory ways but also acknowledging temporality and initiating consecutive activities, such as including the development of a plan of action in each research project (Tulloch et al., 2011). Following suggestions from key informants and symposium participants, setting up a system for learning and knowledge sharing could mean that for every knowledge activity: objectives are formulated; expectations of participants are integrated into the development of the programme; appropriate methodologies are chosen; a variety of stakeholders are involved, to optimize joint creation of knowledge; the activity is assessed to determine whether objectives have been met; and a follow-up plan of action is formulated and acted on, including follow-up activities.

6.3 Create the right context

Creating the right context, or enabling environment, could be encouraged by taking into account the barriers and enabling factors underlying the specific context of the Dutch field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS in international development. The key informants discussed the following barriers that may constrain an enabling environment for knowledge to flow within and across the fields of research,
policy and practice: discrepancies in duration and cycles; incentive structures; a fragmented supply of knowledge; prejudices; and power relations, including competition and a donor-driven agenda. Although participants discussed how changing incentive structures could encourage researchers to conduct more policy- and practice-relevant research and could encourage researchers and practitioners to engage in knowledge-sharing activities, it remained unclear which incentives policymakers need to become more actively involved in knowledge-sharing activities, and how knowledge should be translated and shared for policymakers to use it.

The participants’ suggestions for optimizing the knowledge flows could help to reduce the barriers perceived by the key informants. For instance, making the demand for and supply of knowledge more visible and concrete and developing and pushing a joint knowledge agenda may help to reduce barriers related to power imbalances and the perception of work being donor-driven. Taking up opportunities that stimulate the joint creation of knowledge, such as criteria for integral funding, will encourage researchers, practitioners and policymakers to work together, which may contribute to fewer prejudices and less competition. Furthermore, developing a system for learning and knowledge sharing may increase incentives for researchers, policymakers and practitioners to engage in learning and knowledge-sharing activities.

Enabling factors for creating an enabling environment mentioned by the key informants were participation in the Share-Net knowledge platform; existing linkages between research, policy and practice; working in alliances and other consortia; and education. From the key informant interviews it appeared that linkages between research, policy and practice exist at various levels. For instance, it was mentioned that Dutch research may not influence Dutch policy only directly but also rather indirectly via international policymaking. It may be a successful strategy to strengthen such existing linkages, rather than pursuing new — more direct — linkages between Dutch policy and research.

The key informants feel that the Share-Net knowledge platform and working in alliances contribute to connecting professionals within and across the various fields and to making the knowledge demand and supply more visible and focused. However, a few pitfalls have been observed when working in consortia — for instance, when too many stakeholders become involved, which can again impede the flow of knowledge between research and implementation by increasing distances between these subgroups within the bigger consortium. Too many stakeholders involved in one project can make processes slow and difficult because too many stakes need to be taken into account, which may lead to compromising rather than optimizing or a full agenda leaving little space for reflection, creativity and spontaneity.
6.4 Globalize local knowledge

Sharing promising practices and lessons learned between organizations and documenting these will help to ‘globalize local knowledge’. As local Share-Net knowledge platforms are being set up in four countries, future activities can focus on how linkages between these platforms could be strengthened.

6.5 Knowledge creation in relation to Share-Net’s knowledge management activities

Share-Net International focuses on the following four types of knowledge management activities: knowledge generation, knowledge sharing, knowledge translation, and knowledge use (van der Kwaak, 2015, pp.3–4). The five enablers for knowledge creation and the ‘knowledge spiral’ discussed by Von Krogh et al. (2000) focus mainly on knowledge creation through knowledge sharing. These understandings of knowledge flows between research, policy and practice have emphasized strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice through knowledge sharing, and less through knowledge generation, translation and use. Future research is recommended to focus on these other types of knowledge management activities.
7. Conclusions and recommendations

The present study aimed to obtain a better understanding of perceptions of knowledge within the Dutch fields of research, policy and practice involved with SRHR and HIV and AIDS in international development, how knowledge between these fields is linked and how these linkages can be strengthened. Based on the conceptual model (see Figure 2), this study explored: (1) the supply of and demand for various types of knowledge in the fields of research, policy and practice; (2) perceived barriers and enabling factors creating the current environment for knowledge flows between research, policy and practice; and (3) suggestions for improving the flow of knowledge.

7.1 Conclusion

7.1.1 Understandings of knowledge
The literature review showed that knowledge is held by all actors: each actor in each discipline has a demand for and a supply of knowledge. When knowledge is jointly created in interdisciplinary interactions, knowledge can lead to impact and innovations (Shaxson et al., 2012; von Krogh et al., 2000). To be able to produce or create new knowledge jointly, the various groups involved need to acknowledge that all actors possess knowledge and that these types of knowledge are important and legitimate (Shaxson et al., 2012). From the interviews it appeared that key informants are mostly aware of explicit knowledge generated by research. They discussed how research findings can be considered more credible for influencing policies when the research has been performed by leading academic institutes. This suggests that some types of knowledge, such as ‘evidence’ resulting from academic research, may be considered more legitimate than other types of knowledge, and that it is not always easy to be aware of the knowledge held by practitioners and policymakers. At the Share-Net symposium ‘Enter into dialogue: linking research, policy and practice’ participants discussed that knowledge is jointly created by multiple actors and that it is important to recognize that also academic research is both value-laden and bounded by limitations — for example, what can and what cannot be researched. In addition to explicit knowledge, key informants suggested developing a system for learning and knowledge sharing and focusing learning on implementation processes. This suggests that tacit knowledge may be considered undervalued at present and an opportunity for creating impact and innovation. Whereas barriers to the flow of knowledge, such as power relations and prejudices, may maintain present understandings of knowledge and whose knowledge counts, enabling factors, such as interactions between research, policy and practice in knowledge-sharing activities, may challenge such perceptions and create an environment which acknowledges that all types of knowledge are important and legitimate.

7.1.2 How to strengthen linkages between research, policy and practice
The literature review showed that linkages between research, policy and practice can best be strengthened by improving the knowledge flows between these fields. As a knowledge platform, Share-Net International can serve as an information intermediary, knowledge translator, knowledge broker and/or innovation broker depending on the specific context and needs of the actors involved.
(Shaxson et al., 2012). The key informant interviews showed that the demand for and supply of knowledge on SRHR and HIV and AIDS are diverse in terms of explicit and tacit knowledge and of other types of knowledge, including purpose and methods. There are many organizations and individuals working in the fields of research, policy and practice, nationally and internationally, who demand and supply knowledge, which creates a perceived fragmentation in both knowledge demand and supply. This implies that a variety of knowledge activities can help to match the demand for and supply of knowledge:

- **Information intermediary**: Through its website and biweekly newsletter, Share-Net International provides access to information from multiple sources. This information could consciously focus on the supply of knowledge from research, policy and practice, including systematic literature reviews and international policy guidelines.

- **Knowledge translator and broker**: Share-Net International can organize interdisciplinary meetings to share and jointly create knowledge, and document knowledge in various formats intended for various audiences, including factsheets or policy briefs, to improve knowledge use in decision-making. More emphasis could be placed on sharing tacit knowledge and developing a system for evolving knowledge, in accordance with the knowledge spiral, by developing a plan of action for each activity (von Krogh et al., 2000).

- **Innovation broker**: Share-Net International can contribute to an enabling environment for knowledge flows between research, policy and practice by addressing barriers, such as power relations, and supporting enabling factors by creating opportunities for interdisciplinary funding and incentives for knowledge sharing.

### 7.1.3 The current state of linking research, policy and practice

The key informants perceived various barriers and enabling factors underlying the specific context of the Dutch field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS in international development that create the current environment for knowledge flows between research, policy and practice. The barriers described are discrepancies in duration and cycles; policy processes; incentive structures; fragmented supply of knowledge; prejudices; and power relations. The key informants described the following enabling factors for the flow of knowledge between research, policy and practice: the Share-Net International and Share-Net Netherlands knowledge platform; existing linkages between research, policy and practices; working in alliances and other collaborations; and education. They felt that participation in the Share-Net knowledge platform and working in alliances contributes to connecting actors within and across the various fields and to making the knowledge demand and supply more visible and focused. However, a few pitfalls have been observed when working in consortia — for instance, when too many actors become involved, it can actually impede the flow of knowledge between research and implementation by increasing distances between these subgroups within the bigger consortium. This can make processes slow and difficult, because too many stakes need to be taken into account, which may lead to compromising rather than optimizing or a full agenda leaving little space for reflection, creativity and spontaneity.
Funding agencies have the opportunity to set criteria for integral funding, for monitoring and evaluation, and for creating time and resources in project processes for learning, reflection and programme adaptation. This means that funding agencies can play an important enabling role in optimizing knowledge flows between research, policy and practice.

7.1.4 **Suggestions for improving knowledge flows between research, policy and practice**

Key informants have provided various suggestions for improving the flow of knowledge between research, policy and practice in the Dutch fields of SRHR and HIV and AIDS in international development, to make more progress and improve the sustainability and impact of their activities. These suggestions are related to: (1) a more transparent demand and supply of knowledge; (2) developing and pushing a joint knowledge agenda; (3) increasing opportunities for strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice; (4) developing a system for learning and knowledge sharing; and (5) focusing learning on implementation processes.

7.2 **Recommendations**

Based on the findings in this report, input from the Share-Net symposium 'Enter into dialogue: linking research, policy and practice' and findings from the VU study (van Beek et al., 2015), the following recommendations have been formulated for researchers, policymakers, practitioners, donors and intermediaries, Share-Net International and Share-Net Netherlands, and the Share-Net working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’.

7.2.1 **Researchers**

- Incentive structures should be created for researchers to not only focus on the quality of their work and publications in peer-reviewed journals but also on the relevance of their work for policy and practice — for example, conducting research on Theories of Changes and Logical Frameworks of programmes and projects, and writing more descriptive papers about what works.
- Action research, in which the implementing actors themselves are the key stakeholders, can encourage mobilization of tacit knowledge (experiences, perceptions, intuition, know-how), which is crucial for increasing the effectiveness of development work.
- Researchers should enter into research dialogues with other actors to discuss research methodologies and paradigms.
- Literature review studies can contribute to focus the supply of knowledge, which will encourage research uptake.

7.2.2 **Policymakers**

- To increase knowledge use in decision-making, policymakers should make their knowledge demand and supply more concrete, be more active within research dialogues and partner with researchers when possible.
7.2.3 Practitioners

- There should be an incentive structure for practitioners, including time, resources and power, to engage in knowledge-sharing activities, to reflect on lessons learned and adjust programmes accordingly.
- Implementing organizations should be encouraged to include their knowledge about what works and lessons learned in future project proposals.
- To increase the effectiveness of development work, more attention is needed on the crucial role of the real implementers (schools, clinics, community groups etc.): what makes them effective, motivated, innovative?

7.2.4 Donors and intermediaries
Share-Net, researchers, policymakers and practitioners can all find themselves in the role of donor or intermediary. Subsequently, in this role they are recommended to:

- encourage joint creation of knowledge and uptake of research findings by setting criteria for collaborations and integral funding;
- create time, space and resources in project proposals for learning processes: through self-assessments, regular exchanges for learning and sharing explicit and tacit knowledge, space for experimenting with new interventions and reflecting on these. This will create more sustainable changes and best practices that can feed policies; and
- ensure that monitoring and evaluation systems focus on mobilizing tacit knowledge (experiences, perceptions, intuition, know-how), to increase the effectiveness of development work, rather than focusing on targets.

7.2.5 Share-Net International and Share-Net Netherlands
Share-Net should facilitate optimal knowledge flows between research, policy and practice for knowledge to have impact and lead to innovation. As a knowledge broker, Share-Net contributes to knowledge being generated, shared, translated and used — for instance, by bringing stakeholders together in meetings. However, there is a potential for knowledge to have more impact. Therefore, the following recommendations are made.

Knowledge spiral
Share-Net is recommended to make more resources available, including human resources at the secretariat, to implement the knowledge spiral developed by von Krogh et al. (2000), which means that:

- for each activity, objectives are formulated, participants’ expectations are integrated into the development of the programme, appropriate methodologies are chosen, stakeholders from various disciplines are involved to optimize joint creation of knowledge, the activity is assessed to determine whether objectives have been met, and a follow-up plan of action is formulated and acted on, including follow-up activities;
• more attention is paid to tacit knowledge and making this more explicit — for example, by documenting recommendations, lessons learned and promising practices as discussed in interdisciplinary dialogues;
• reports of meetings should start with highlights and a small summary and be shared with members shortly after meetings, to maintain the momentum and to increase knowledge sharing and use by individuals and within organizations; and
• knowledge should be translated and documented in various outputs for various stakeholders. The secretariat should play a leading role in creating these documents with expert input from members or should be able to outsource this role to consultants.

An enabling environment
Share-Net is recommended to contribute to an enabling environment for knowledge flows between research, policy and practice. This means addressing the barriers and strengthening the enabling factors discussed in this report. With regard to discussions around power, Share-Net could create a safe and equal environment, in which all members are involved and feel open to initiate and contribute to dialogues about:

• understandings of knowledge, which knowledge counts, whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge does not count, and which values are involved in the knowledge we supply and demand, including values involved when conducting research; and
• priority setting of themes within SRHR and HIV and AIDS, and how to take an ethical approach in deciding which knowledge questions are taken up and which ones are not.

This may require open dialogues about existing power relations and conscious choices of locations for meetings, including geographical alternation.

Knowledge generation and sharing activities
Share-Net should focus knowledge-generating and -sharing activities mainly on making the perceived fragmented supply of and demand for knowledge more focused — for example, by documenting tacit knowledge and conducting literature reviews — and bringing supply and demand together. Generating new knowledge should match the demand for knowledge from the various fields, including long-term and short-term research, and small multidisciplinary working groups and dialogues.

Knowledge translation and use
Share-Net is recommended to obtain more insights into knowledge translation and use, especially knowledge use in decision-making. Share-Net International should develop strategies and increase its efforts to strengthen linkages with policymakers at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and at international organizations such as UNFPA, UNESCO and WHO, to further develop and showcase the value of Dutch contributions to the international field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS.

Joint knowledge agenda
Share-Net is recommended to contribute to a more visible and concrete demand for and supply of knowledge in the fields of research, policy and practice by mapping these demands and supplies in a joint knowledge agenda. Such an agenda should be considered flexible, and not too narrow, to enable stakeholders to see where they can complement or collaborate with others, and how value can be
added to existing knowledge. Internationally, a joint knowledge agenda can help to discuss how Dutch knowledge can add value to the international knowledge base and to proactively link this knowledge to the international knowledge base — for instance, by strengthening linkages with international agencies. Furthermore, a joint knowledge agenda can ensure long-term knowledge/research uptake transcending project lifetimes.

Joint learning agenda
Share-Net should facilitate the joint development of a learning agenda by researchers, policymakers and practitioners to guide Share-Net's activities — for example, formulating learning questions about advocacy for sexual rights, programme effectiveness or the role of young people in SRHR. This will encourage process and tacit knowledge sharing, joint creation of knowledge and knowledge use.

7.2.6 Share-Net working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’
Current linkages between research, policy and practice within the Dutch field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS in international development seem more naturally developed when they are based on underlying funding structures. For instance, the Share-Net working group ‘Operational research’ was set up after Dutch NGOs started performing operational research as part of their programmes funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Linkages with stakeholders in Dutch academic institutes not involved in such funding streams seem less evident, and this is where, in addition to learning about linking research, policy and practice in general, the Share-Net working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’ can add value within Share-Net Netherlands.

Dutch universities and knowledge institutes such as ISS and KIT train many students to become academic scholars. There is huge potential for strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice through their education. Not only are these students future professionals, or current policymakers and practitioners, of whom many will start or continue working in policy and practice, but also these students are able to conduct research that is relevant to policy and practice. Therefore, the following long-term goal, objectives and activities for the working group are proposed:

7.2.6.1 Long-term goal, objectives and activities
The Share-Net Netherlands working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’ contributes to optimizing knowledge flows in the Dutch field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS in international development by strengthening the involvement of academic researchers and institutes at the nexus of research, policy and practice by:

- mainstreaming learning about linking research, policy and practice and the role of knowledge in the working group’s activities, such as:
  - formulating and reflecting on meeting objectives, formulating follow-up activities, and documenting and sharing promising practices and lessons learned;
  - jointly creating knowledge by involving stakeholders from various fields in the working group’s meeting and activities; and
  - formulating knowledge questions on linking research, policy and practice to be answered by students;
• stimulating students at Bachelor’s, Master’s and PhD level to develop a policy and practice perspective through activities such as guest lectures by policymakers and practitioners, and student internships;

• stimulating research relevant for policy and practice through activities such as facilitating interactions and research dialogues between (PhD) students, policymakers and practitioners, and obtaining a transparent demand for knowledge questions from policy and practice to be answered by students — for example, through research factsheets, speed dating; and

• stimulating research-informed policy and practice through activities such as:
  o content knowledge sharing between (PhD) students, policymakers and practitioners — for example, presenting research findings at annual ‘Linking students and NGOs’ events;
  o process knowledge sharing — for example, developing protocols for student–NGO collaborations;
  o tacit knowledge sharing — for example, masterclasses on innovative research methods; and
  o explicit knowledge sharing — for example, stimulating translation and sharing of research findings for policy and practice.
References


ESRC-DFID (2013). ESRC-DFID joint fund for poverty alleviation research guiding principles on uptake, impact and communication of research. London: ESRC.


### Annex 1: List of key informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key informant</th>
<th>Job description</th>
<th>Work environment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>SRHR expert</td>
<td>Academia, policy and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Academia, policy and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Senior programme officer</td>
<td>Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Academia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>UD/Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Academia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Manager programmes</td>
<td>Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Policy advisor</td>
<td>Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>Policy and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Senior advisor/Professor</td>
<td>Academia and practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>Senior researcher</td>
<td>Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>P12</td>
<td>Advocate</td>
<td>Practice</td>
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<td>P13</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>P14</td>
<td>Policymaker</td>
<td>Policy</td>
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<td>P15</td>
<td>Policy advisor</td>
<td>Policy</td>
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<td>P16</td>
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<td>Senior researcher</td>
<td>Research</td>
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<td>P18</td>
<td>Senior advisor</td>
<td>Policy</td>
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<td>P19</td>
<td>Ambassador</td>
<td>Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>P20</td>
<td>Trainee</td>
<td>Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>P21</td>
<td>Senior lecturer/Researcher</td>
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<td>P22</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>P23</td>
<td>Post-doc researcher</td>
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<tr>
<td>P24</td>
<td>Programme coordinator</td>
<td>Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P25</td>
<td>Senior advisor</td>
<td>Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>P26</td>
<td>Senior programme officer</td>
<td>Intermediary institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P27</td>
<td>Senior policy officer</td>
<td>Intermediary institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>P28</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Intermediary institution</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Annex 2: Interview guide

Introductory talk
- Sign consent form
- Do you have any questions so far? Shall we begin?

Interview questions

General questions
1. Can you tell me something about your work and how you are involved in research/policy/practice in the field of SRHR and HIV/AIDS?

Topic questions

Knowledge
1. How do you understand knowledge?
   - Meaning of knowledge (knowledge versus research/evidence)
   - Whose knowledge counts?
   - Which approach should be adopted when striving to support strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS?
2. How, in the context of linking research, policy and practice, do you, as a Share-Net member, use knowledge?
   - Yourself and within your organization?

Linking research, policy and practice
3. How do you perceive the current state of linking research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV/AIDS?
   - Role of action research, operations research, research done at NGOs etc.?
4. How is linking research, policy and practice different considering it’s SRHR and HIV/AIDS and it’s in the Netherlands?
   - International situation? Compared to Dutch situation? (progressive/facilitating policy)
   - Role of moral politics? In relation to evidence/knowledge/research?
   - Influence moral politics: which knowledge can counteract this? Cost-effectiveness? Human rights? Women’s participation?
   - How to deal with this? E.g. work on skills, values, personal beliefs of policymakers and other stakeholders?
5. What are barriers for bridging the gap between research, policy, practice? What could be enabling factors?
   - For research, policy and/or practice
   - Barriers within organizations/field of work? Or between organizations/fields of work?
6. What are your **needs regarding linking research, policy and practice** in the field of SRHR and HIV/AIDS?
7. How do you perceive the **current role of the working group** ‘Linking research, policy, and practice’?
8. What are your **needs regarding the role of the working group** ‘Linking research, policy, and practice’?
9. **How do we best strengthen** linkages between research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS?
   a. What could be the role of **knowledge brokering**?
   b. What could be the role of **Share-Net**?
10. **Which steps need to be taken to bridge the gap(s) between research, policy and practice?**
    a. Which role can Share-Net play in this regard?
    b. Knowledge brokering? Stimulate top-down or bottom-up?

11. What should be the long-term goal and specific objectives of the working group ‘Linking research, policy, and practice’?
12. What are the areas and activities the working group ‘Linking research, policy, and practice’ should be working on?

- Recap: Do I understand correctly that you mean...
- Is there anything about this topic we haven’t discussed that you would like to add?

**Closing questions**
- To summarize... question
- We have discussed different aspects of linking research, policy and practice. What would you recommend should happen to successfully bridge the gap between these three aspects?

Thank you for this interview!

**Post-discussion stage**
What did you think of this interview? Were there any difficulties? Do you think I should change something for the next interview?
Annex 3: List of needs, steps and recommended activities suggested by key informants

1. A system for learning and knowledge sharing
   1. It is important to set up a process for knowledge-sharing activities, and there is a need for someone to take the lead in coordinating such processes. Expecting new knowledge in a short time is a bit much: focus on the process of linking knowledge, and get those processes working better.
   2. We need to develop a system which makes each activity useful, gives it direction, and ensures it is followed up, like a ‘spiral loop’. This requires temporality: one knowledge-sharing activity after the other; take time to generate, mobilize, jointly create and implement knowledge and to understand how all these different knowledge strategies influence each other and activate knowledge at the right stages of the research, policy and practice cycles.
   3. There should be thinking: we have an agenda, how can we add value to the knowledge that is there to push that agenda along? How can we raise the level of discussion, or how can we focus discussion on key issues? How can we make sure that people in policy positions get the right information at the right time? It needs a lot of follow-up and investment to make it work.

2. Enabling environment; tackling barriers
3. Knowledge agenda
4. Knowledge questions
5. Knowledge-sharing activities
6. Knowledge use
7. Dialogues
8. Knowledge dissemination
9. Research methods and approaches
10. Collaborations between researchers, policymakers and practitioners

4. Learn more about how to strengthen linkages between research, policy and practice in one’s own organization — for instance, by discussing Theories of Change, change management etc.
5. The operational research working group should focus more on processes, on learning: how do you organize research, where and who are learning in these processes? And how? This requires time for discussion.
6. Share-Net can help to share knowledge on best practices and theoretical models for better linking research, policy and practice within organizations (through case studies)
7. There is a need for mutual learning on processes of knowledge production, dissemination, sharing etc.
8. There is a need to learn how to use lessons learned from practice to improve and adapt policies in an ongoing way.
9. To encourage learning by country and theme, Share-Net should find a way to bring the lessons learned from all the small grant fund studies together and discuss their implications for policy and practice in all country nodes.

11. Interdisciplinary working
12. Knowledge brokers
13. Share-Net International and Share-Net Netherlands
14. Working group ‘Linking research, policy and practice’
15. Knowledge institutes
16. Students and education
17. Donors
18. Policy
19. EP-NUFFIC/NWO-Wotro
10. When working with PhD students, we need to find a way to obtain lessons learned during the four-year period, and not just afterwards.

11. It is important to create space in project proposals for learning and reflection — for example, the use of a Theory of Change already creates an opportunity to reflect on the project and to adapt the project in response to a changing context or lessons learned. It is important to start this dialogue with your donors in order to create such spaces.

12. After knowledge has been documented, it should be shared — for instance, in interactive meetings — for it not to be just shared but to be taken a step forward.

13. There is a need to learn how to make research findings more visible, how to use the right vocabulary, what the good instruments and mechanisms are to link them to policy and practice, and how to create change on legal frameworks.

14. There is a need to learn in participatory ways about effective ways of research uptake and the role of knowledge platforms.

15. Research projects should not stop after publication of the findings. More efforts (and financing) should go into linking those findings to policy and practice in the years thereafter. Share-Net could play a role in this.

2. Enabling environment; tackling barriers

16. To increase linkages between research, policy and practice, organizations should invest in ‘change management’ because such collaborations require cultural change.

17. Realizing how political it is, the role of power about who gets what in terms of wealth, attention and rights, should be rooted in our thinking.

18. A survey among former interns of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may help to indicate barriers between research and policy and how to overcome these.

19. It would be good to be more transparent and aware about the politics under the surface and stakes involved that limit strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice.

20. We need to discuss what keeps researchers, policymakers and practitioners from working together. What are the obstacles? What are their expectations, and how can we make them happen?

21. If you want to learn, use knowledge, then you need to create time for this; it can’t be something extra.

22. To encourage joint creation, there should be an equal power balance between stakeholders and sources of knowledge.

3. Knowledge agenda

23. A long-term SRHR policy agenda is favourable in order to create change.

24. There is a need to set up a knowledge agenda in a transparent, participatory way, which includes priority setting based on financial limitations based on criteria, such as efficacy and ethics, which is owned by all parties involved. For more information, see PhD research by Rik Viergever.

25. Share-Net needs to be proactive and formulate a joint knowledge agenda. We need to identify important knowledge questions. Where do we add value as Dutch organizations? Try to see who can do what, work on issues together, push for this agenda together. Identify international funding opportunities.

26. Knowledge institutes should make their SRHR expertise more visible, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should clearly articulate its policy needs in a long-term knowledge agenda.
27. Fragmentation and projectizing need to be reduced.
28. There should be space on the agenda to organize thematic meetings spontaneously, depending on current debates and needs; this will help to develop new insights.
29. Small grant funds should be awarded to innovative studies: make sure you stay ahead and do not conduct studies all others are already conducting. It should focus on thorny questions in order to have an answer to questions that are going to be asked.

30. Research priorities should be on better implementation of international guidelines, implementation of programmes, and systematic reviews on what works and why, in order to develop and adapt guidelines.
31. Dutch research should find its added value to the international SRHR agenda and connect its evidence base to the evidence base of international organizations.
32. Partner organizations and communities should be more involved in setting the agenda and formulating knowledge questions.

4. Knowledge questions
33. Study the advantages and disadvantages of short-term and long-term research studies with regard to their relevance for policy and practice.
34. Study the advantages and disadvantages of having a country focus with regard to the relevance of research for policy and practice.
35. It would be good to discuss the ‘Dutch approach’ and how, and to what extent, it can really be useful in the context in which young people are living out their lives and making sexual decisions in places other than the Netherlands.
36. We should invite Lilianne Ploumen to tell us more about her vision of the role of trade and the private sector in international development, and SRHR specifically.
37. Share-Net should create space in the agenda to organize spontaneous meetings on urgent topics, such as the migrants in Eastern Europe and their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

5. Knowledge-sharing activities
38. Small thematic working groups of researchers, policymakers and practitioners are helpful to increase linkages between research, policy and practice.
39. It's valuable that Share-Net consults members for input to international conferences and provides feedback of such conferences to the members.
40. The findings of the small grants fund and NWO-Wotro studies should be discussed with members and inform members' policies.
41. People should feel rewarded for coming to meetings in terms of interesting new discussions, new ideas, good contacts, and ideas about how to go forward. They need to feel part of a more effective community. You've got to pursue that to make that happen.
42. Thematic lunch meetings at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can be helpful to strengthen the linkage between research, practice and policy.
43. Research groups should be more actively involved in the organization of thematic meetings, among other things to increase interaction between research and practice before the meeting itself.
44. Share-Net could coordinate in-country projects to discuss how projects are complementary and work on issues like advocacy together.
45. A country focus (in meetings) helps to set priorities and to bring stakeholders together.

6. Knowledge use

46. We should focus more on knowledge use: which activities increase knowledge use?
47. There is a need to explore media like the Scientific Council to see how they can be helpful in research uptake.
48. Universities should create advocacy departments, like they have media departments, to encourage research uptake in policies and practice, rather than having each researcher doing this for themselves.

7. Dialogues

52. In international development, there is a need for more intensive communication, a dialogue, between researchers and practitioners. It requires a process of gradually more mutual influence of questions relevant to practice and providing the types of answers that are relevant to practice. It is very useful that students are more involved in this process.
53. In meetings and presentations, there should be enough time for questions and discussions, because these are the moments that offer space for going into depth and gaining new insights.
54. The quality of meetings is more important than the quantity of meetings.
55. Discussions after presentations should focus on implications for policy and practice.
56. Quality facilitators are needed to guarantee in-depth and valuable discussions and to move these discussions to a higher level.
57. Create communities where reflection and thinking and open discussion actually bring innovations forward, and not just innovations that everybody’s got on their list of innovations, but really innovate. This will raise the level of discussion and improve quality.
58. Personal relations between researchers, policymakers and practitioners help to strengthen linkages between research, policy and practice.
59. Linking students and NGOs should not be mere presentations of Master’s theses but should include discussion on how to make substantive links between researchers, policymakers and practitioners: how to work collaboratively?

8. Knowledge dissemination

60. It is a good development that scientific peer-reviewed journals provide more space for sections such as forum discussions and letters to the editor, other than only publishing findings of scientific research. Such publications are important, and universities should have more appreciation of such activities.
61. Research findings can be published in various ways: in peer-reviewed journals for the research world, Dutch public-friendly abstracts or reports for the Dutch public, and Dutch factsheets of 3–4 pages focusing
on recommendations for policy and practice. These are distributed among target groups and published on the website.

62. Sometimes we combine several short-term studies into one factsheet to be able to make more generalized conclusions.

63. Reports of meetings should discuss the most important recommendations — for example, start the report with some ‘highlights’. They should be shared quickly after the meeting, so participants can share them with colleagues.

64. Research findings should be translated and communicated in various forms to fit various audiences — for instance, recording presentations and posting these as movies on the website instead of, or in addition to, PowerPoint presentations. Or record a short interview with a speaker — about the most important findings and implications for policy and practice, for instance — and post this on the website.

65. There is a need to learn about good ways to share and disseminate findings: what are the best ways to influence policy — for example, through policy papers, mobile technology, infographics? Who should you target with your information?

66. Researchers and practitioners should make their work more visible to policymakers and articulate the benefits of their work.

9. Research methods and approaches

73. There should be a variety of researchers, where some focus more on fundamental research and others more on applied research. The latter should not only be appreciated in academia for their publications in peer-reviewed journals.

74. There is a need for a variety in knowledge generation activities for policy purposes, both short-term and long-term, depth and breadth.

75. Research can help to improve the implementation of policy into practice by identifying crucial conditions and how to overcome barriers. This requires a mix of methods beyond randomized controlled trials.

76. Short-term knowledge questions can be conducted by Master's students in three to six months.

77. Knowledge questions should be leading in the kind of research design to be chosen. A combination of studies performed by academic institutes and by NGOs themselves would be good.
78. Sometimes academic evaluations are too big and expensive considering the programme being evaluated.
79. At the start of a project, it needs to be clear what will be evaluated.
80. Research should focus on the Theories of Change that have been developed for SRHR.

10. Collaborations between researchers, policymakers and practitioners
81. We should look for ways to make collaborations between research, policy and practice attractive to all parties. It should add value. Realizing such a thing takes time; it’s a process.
82. The coordinator will need to invite relevant stakeholders to join a working group. The size may depend on the complexity of the assignment.
83. Donors can set the conditions for integral financing where research, policymakers and practitioners are encouraged to work together and set up integral programmes. Parties will be encouraged to enter into dialogues, however difficult these dialogues may be: they may speak different languages, but they have shared agendas.
84. NGOs have data available for researchers to work on but may lack the funding to involve researchers. Parties should put financing together and be willing to invest in research.
85. There is a need for more interactive, participatory, continuous short-term and long-term knowledge projects in which researchers, policymakers, advocates and practitioners participate together and generate and implement knowledge continuously, rather than having knowledge output only at the end of the research process.
86. Collaborating with academic institutes will help NGOs to contribute their knowledge to theoretical debates. NWO-Wotro projects are helpful in encouraging this, where operational research and monitoring and evaluation are linked to theoretical thinking.
87. To improve linkages between research and policy, it could be worthwhile to involve policymakers in working groups for calls for research.
88. There is a shared responsibility of researchers and practitioners to formulate recommendations together. This should be a participatory process and should always include a Plan of Action.
89. The small grants fund should be used for collaborations between researchers, policymakers and practitioners. Of course, the content should be interesting as well, but it should set conditions for a Plan of Action, for instance.
90. Knowledge questions should be formulated together with various stakeholders, including practitioners and community members. This diversity will slow down things — it takes time — but it is important in order to make it work. Going slowly and into depth is what is needed to strengthen linkages between research, policy and practice.
91. Research, policy and practice may be better linked due to the process of working together than the research findings itself coming out of such a process.
92. Academic research and the process of setting up consortia of researchers and practitioners for such research take time.

11. Interdisciplinary working
93. Researchers working in policy and practice are helpful to increase linkages between research, policy and practice.
94. Internships (of students) are helpful to increase linkages between research, policy and practice.
There is a need for researchers, policymakers and practitioners to have a better understanding of each other’s work — for example, through interdisciplinary one-day internships.

Researchers working for a while at policymaking departments and policymakers at knowledge institutes may help to strengthen linkages between research and policy.

12. Knowledge brokers

A knowledge broker should do more than transfer knowledge only; this person should aim to jointly create knowledge and help to adap knowledge to fit various contexts. Knowledge is dynamic; it should flow.

You need someone to take the lead, be it a knowledge broker or coordinator: someone who is assigned to make connections, because it won’t happen spontaneously. This person needs to speak the different languages of the fields and understand the stakes of the parties involved.

There is a need for the various fields to make their activities more visible. A knowledge broker could help to actively link parties to existing initiatives.

There is need for a knowledge broker who understands the stakes and expectations of the various parties, who understands the various perspectives, and who can bring those together in concrete ways.

The role of a knowledge broker in the research process: The knowledge question should come from practice or policy, and then we enter into dialogue with the university and start a process together as a working group in which we set up a research design and formulate research questions. We write the research proposal together: we make sure the design is achievable in practice, payable and acceptable. This means that we take into account ethical considerations such as inclusion of all groups in society. Especially policymakers find this important. We divide tasks into who will write which part. Then we combine it into one research proposal. As the knowledge coordinator, I will revise the whole text. Then, if the research proposal is granted, we stay together as a working group to discuss the findings and any other business during the research process. In practice, this means the working group meets most often at the start and end phase of the research project, and in between we may meet once a year.

13. Share-Net International and Share-Net Netherlands

Share-Net adds value because of the multi-stakeholder nature of the group and because of the commitment of people working together in it.

Share-Net can coordinate meetings between Share-Net members and policymakers at international conferences to discuss the implications of the conference for national policies.

Share-Net provides access to SRHR organizations.

The Share-Net network helps NGOs to make contact with academic institutes.

There is a need to make clearer what members can expect from Share-Net — for example, in which ways can members be involved in agenda setting, organization of activities, dissemination of knowledge etc., and what is in it for members? For instance, in relation to the various country nodes, are field offices of Dutch member organizations automatically members?
14. Working group 'Linking research, policy and practice'

The working group on 'Linking research, policy and practice' can find its focus by taking research as a starting point, rather than focusing on the link between practice and policy as well.

15. Knowledge institutes

Dutch SRHR expertise is fragmented. There is a need to map the SRHR expertise in the Dutch knowledge institutes.

16. Students and education

Researchers need to learn how to develop recommendations for policy and practice and to include these in their research.

Collaborations between universities and vocational institutes are helpful to increase linkages between research, policy and practice.

Share-Net can help to coordinate supply and demand of NGOs to provide lectures at universities or perhaps develop an international SRHR curriculum together.

There is a need for NGOs to learn best practices, develop a model or a way of working, of how to collaborate better with university students — for instance, through student internships.

17. Donors

We need to map the international funding field in SRHR, including DFID and the Scandinavian countries: what are their policies and focus areas? Why do they differ? Are they based on evidence or politics? And how do their policies relate to the objectives/funding needs of NGOs?

Rather than investing big amounts of money in big international organizations, donors should invest more in integral financing of research and practice — i.e. extending the research component to improve the implementation of programmes.

The important role of Dutch funding in international research on SRHR should be made more visible.
18. Policy

121. Policymakers should be more involved in linking research, policy and practice.

122. Can the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs make its knowledge needs more explicit and concrete?

123. Dutch embassies should focus on knowledge mobilization in the countries, bringing civil society together.

124. Policymakers are interested in research focused on what works and why.

Such lessons learned from research and practice can help to improve policy implementation.

125. There is a need to know more about the knowledge use of policymakers, to make this more transparent.

126. There is a need to obtain a better, transparent understanding of financing streams, priority setting, and the processes of policymaking and implementation and how these are evidence-informed.

19. EP-NUFFIC/NWO-Wotro

127. Links should be made between Share-Net, NWO-Wotro and EP-NUFFIC partners thematically or in-country.

128. Dutch NGOs should increase their collaboration with EP-NUFFIC in order to encourage capacity-building in the countries they work with by educating students and professionals on gender and SRHR.

129. NWO-Wotro is interested in being part of the debate on how to increase linkages between research, policy and practice; it can share its experience on this topic.

130. NWO-Wotro and NICHE funding are helpful in strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice.
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1. Introduction
This symposium aimed to discuss how Dutch players in the international field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS can strengthen linkages between research, policy and practice, and to formulate actionable recommendations for Share-Net and organizations working in the field of SRHR and HIV and AIDS. To prepare for the symposium, participants were asked to read the draft report ‘Perspectives on strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice’ commissioned by Share-Net.

1.1 Objectives of the meeting
- Share preliminary findings of the study ‘Perspectives on strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice’ commissioned by Share-Net
- Reflect on the preliminary findings and obtain feedback for finalization of the report
- Discuss emerging issues and formulate actionable recommendations:
  - for Share-Net and organizations working in the field of SRHR and HIV; and
  - targeted by audience: researchers, policymakers, practitioners, donors; any others?

1.2 Programme
14.00 – 14.10 Introduction – Hermen Ormel (KIT), Chair
14.10 – 14.40 Presentation Share-Net study ‘Perspectives on strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice’ – Billie de Haas (independent consultant)
14.40 – 15.30 Plenary discussion on findings
  Discussants: Evert Ketting (independent consultant), Esther Miedema (IS Academie, UvA) and Thilly de Boer (Rutgers)
15.30 – 15.45 Break
15.45 – 16.45 Discuss implications for research, policy and practice – Open Space – Facilitator: Anny Peters (Rutgers)
16.45 – 17.00 Plenary feedback and closure by Chair
17.00 – 18.00 Drinks
2. Report of the afternoon

2.1 Introduction

Hermen Ormel (KIT), Chair

Hermen introduces the Share-Net knowledge platform, and the aim and programme of this meeting. He emphasizes that the findings of the study to be presented are key to what Share-Net as a knowledge platform can achieve.

As suggested by the title of the symposium, one important finding from the study is the importance of encouraging dialogues across disciplines. To put this advice in practice, Hermen asks participants to discuss with their neighbour in three minutes how they link research, policy and practice and how they ‘share knowledge’ in their daily work?

Hermen explains that it is important to encourage dialogues between research, policy and practice but that, at the same time, it should be acknowledged that policy processes are ‘complex, multifactorial and non-linear’. Policy process stages from ‘agenda setting through decision-making to implementation and evaluation’ rarely take place in a logical order, and at the same time many actors try to influence these processes, which makes it difficult for research findings to inform policymaking.2

2.2 Presentation of the Share-Net study ‘Perspectives on strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice’

Billie de Haas (independent consultant)

Billie presents preliminary findings from the study ‘Perspectives on strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice’. The draft report is not meant for sharing; a final report will be shared with the participants. Please find the PowerPoint presentation enclosed (Annex 3. PowerPoint presentation by Billie de Haas).

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2.3 Plenary discussion on findings
Discussants: Evert Ketting (independent consultant), Esther Miedema (IS Academie, UvA) and Thilly de Boer (Rutgers)

Evert Ketting, Esther Miedema and Thilly de Boer discuss the preliminary study findings: Esther from a research perspective, Thilly from a practice perspective, and Evert from the perspective of working at the nexus of research, policy and practice.

Discussant: Esther Miedema, UvA
Esther Miedema comments on the study from a researcher’s perspective. She feels that knowledge only has meaning when it is shared. According to Esther:

- We need to acknowledge that knowledge is *jointly constructed*. In continuation of that, we should discuss the nature of research: What is research? What is knowledge? Knowledge is a shared creation: a plea for knowledge as jointly constructed. Research is not a neutral process, not value-free: evidence or facts are value-laden: which values do we bring when we do research? There should be a dialogue around that (both qualitative and quantitative research). And what can we learn from that? Who should be included in the process of jointly constructing knowledge?
- *Surprise*: research is not merely functional. What is functional? We should not narrow research too much; that leaves no space for surprise. You can find something unexpected when doing research: this is very valuable. So leave the research agenda slightly open.

Esther concludes her discussion with two recommendations and a statement for discussion:

**Recommendations:**
- Include a reflection on the experience of, and lessons learned within, the IS Academies as precursor to the current knowledge platform.
  - In which ways were the IS Academies able to strengthen linkages between research, policy and practice, what were the strengths of this set up, where were IS Academies seen to fall short, and how can we learn from this?
- The value of ‘jointly constructing’ knowledge (report recommendation): this requires expansion of the participants in knowledge generation to include ‘non-experts’: who are the experts, and who determines who is left out of our definitions of experts?

**Statement:** Compelling question: should researchers primarily be concerned about the quality of research or the relevance of research?

Discussant: Thilly de Boer, Rutgers
Thilly de Boer comments on the study from a practitioner’s perspective. She cites three quotes from the draft report about working in practice. These quotes concern the difficulty of measuring the impact of interventions, the need for adapting interventions based on recommendations, and the importance of giving voice to the people for whom interventions are intended. Formulation of indicators, a Theory of Change, and a monitoring and evaluation system at donor/alliance level may prohibit implementing
organizations from mobilizing tacit knowledge, which Thilly feels is crucial for increasing the effectiveness of development work.

Thilly discusses what practitioners want to gain from research: what works, how it works, what element is key, and how it can be repeated. She feels that practitioners are more interested in tacit knowledge than researchers — for instance, the process of developing an intervention: what is contributing to the success?

Thilly concludes her discussion with three recommendations and a statement for discussion:

**Recommendations:**
- To increase the effectiveness of development work, more attention is needed for the crucial role of the real implementers (schools, clinics, community groups etc.): what makes them effective, motivated, innovative?
- This asks for more attention and budget in the project proposals for learning processes: through self-assessments, regular exchanges for learning and sharing explicit and tacit knowledge, space for experimenting new interventions and reflecting on these.
- This results in more sustainable changes and best practices that can feed policies. The role of our partner organizations is to guide these processes.

**Statement:** Mobilizing tacit knowledge (experiences, perceptions, intuition, know-how) is crucial for increasing the effectiveness of development work — but it is easily overlooked in scientific research and in our monitoring and evaluation systems focusing on targets. This calls for alternative forms of research such as action research, in which the implementing actors themselves are the key stakeholders.

A question asked by the Chair: What is evidence? Can we translate tacit knowledge into evidence?

**Discussant: Evert Ketting, independent consultant**

Evert Ketting comments on the study from a perspective of working at the nexus of research, policy and practice. He narrates how he changed 25 years ago from working in academia to practice, and then returned to the academic world. He experienced this return to academia to be a culture shock: academics only focused on scientifically published articles and were not aware of any publications published by international agencies such as UNFPA, WHO or UNESCO.

According to Evert, the real problem is that researchers, practitioners and policymakers live in three different universes:
- **Policymakers** work between politicians and policy implementers; they try to make a link between the two and need information to do so.
- **Practitioners**, project managers, and NGOs working in the field are mediators between policymakers and the needs of the ‘field’: they need information to serve these two parties.
- **Researchers** are mediators between the academic community and implementation managers, and sometimes policymakers: they have to satisfy academic needs, by contributing to the
theoretic body of knowledge published in international journals, and they are also asked to be relevant for society and politics, which is not their first language.

Evert typifies the type of information that these parties need:

- **Policymakers** want information showing the severity of a problem, which they can sell to politicians; they are not interested in theoretical studies or in how to implement programmes.
- **Practitioners** are interested in strategies and approaches that can help to implement their programmes effectively, and they want to show that their programmes are successful. They are not interested in theories and are already aware of the seriousness of problems.
- **Researchers** are rewarded for producing theoretical, explanatory research: they try to investigate the causes of phenomena.

Evert concludes his discussion with two recommendations and a statement for discussion.

**Recommendations:**

- Encourage researchers to study logical frameworks of programmes and projects — so as to make them understand what types of information implementing and policymaking agencies really need.
- Create possibilities for researchers to write and publish descriptive papers (what is the situation, and how does it work?) — because that is what policymaking and implementing agencies need and use; there is too much pressure on providing explanations.

**Statement:** The reward system of academic researchers prevents them from being relevant for policy and practice (as the system is only based on the number of publications in highly rated peer-reviewed journals).

**Plenary discussion**

The plenary discussion focuses mostly on the role of power relations in knowledge generation, sharing and uptake and on incentives for actors to be engaged in knowledge-sharing activities.

1. **What is really missing in knowledge brokering?**

   The study shows that Dutch practitioners and researchers are involved in knowledge-sharing activities facilitated by Share-Net but that the participation of policymakers and the private sector could be encouraged. What changes are needed in the system to increase their participation? Several participants in the study indicated that they are curious about the knowledge demands of policymakers and that policymaking processes are unclear to them. There does not necessarily seem to be a need to generate more knowledge but, rather, for bringing existing knowledge from the various fields together: to make the fragmented supply of knowledge more focused.

2. **Who are the policymakers?**

   When talking about policymakers, it is important to understand which policymakers you are targeting — for example, policymakers at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague or policymakers in the implementing countries? Policymakers can be regarded as decision-makers who are in the position
to decide what is going to happen. They can be found in any organization, including researchers who decide what to evaluate and how.

3. **What is the role of power?**
Where is the power? Are all stakeholders equal? Do they respect each other? It can be a balancing act to be critical and equal partners at the same time.

Participants in the study indicated that they felt that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has more power because it finances programmes. Due to the role of power, practitioners may feel encouraged to report successes only and not be open about interventions that did not work well, although sharing such information could be very interesting to learn from. Power imbalances can also be found between departments within organizations — for instance, in discussions about whose knowledge counts. It is important, but can be challenging, to create an equal environment, also within knowledge platforms such as Share-Net.

4. **When is knowledge relevant?**
Studies may have relevant findings that are not easily transformed into actionable recommendations. This raises the question: for whom should research findings be relevant? Who determines when knowledge is relevant?

5. **Incentives**
What is the reward system for practitioners to be engaged in knowledge-sharing activities? It is important to look not only at the incentives for researchers to be relevant to society and policy but also at the incentives to engage in such activities for practitioners and policymakers. Do they have the time, resources and power to be engaged?

2.4 **Open Space — Discuss implications for research, policy and practice**

Facilitator: Anny Peters (Rutgers)

Via Open Space, symposium participants are asked to provide input into the preliminary study findings and to discuss emerging issues and opportunities/implications for research, policy and practice. First, each participant is asked to suggest a topic (see Annex 1. Topic suggestions for Open Space). The four topics suggested most often are discussed in groups. After the group discussions, each group presents its findings.

**Group 1. How to link to research, policy and practice.**
This group discusses how linkages between research, policy and practice can be strengthened. They experience difficulties formulating recommendations, as not all fields are represented in this discussion. They wonder who the decision-makers are and how they base their decisions? What are
the different universes of researchers, policymakers and practitioners, and where do these universes overlap? All three groups may have different demands for and supplies of knowledge, but perhaps there is enough overlap between these universes to meet each other’s knowledge demands?

To enhance knowledge sharing, it is considered important to create a safe environment in which all participants feel free and respected to express themselves openly.

The group also discusses possibilities of a joint knowledge agenda for Share-Net and how power may influence such agenda setting. This issue has been further explored by VU students.³

Group 2. Scattered and focussed demand for and supply of knowledge

This group discusses whether, and how, the demand for and supply of knowledge should be more focused. They feel that knowledge has never been as visible as it is nowadays. To obtain information fast, it is important to make the supply of knowledge more focused. For instance, researchers could be encouraged to conduct more review studies.

For knowledge sharing to result in improved practice, there should always be a follow-up to each knowledge-sharing activity: what is the next step? This often fails due to lack of time or money, or because a project ended. In such cases, there could be a role for others to take this up.

Each knowledge-sharing activity should have clear objectives. Based on these objectives, the methodology for the meeting should be chosen. A good facilitator should be able to enable learning and enable participants to apply what has been learned.

Group 3. Addressing tacit/different kinds of knowledge

This group discusses the difference between tacit and explicit knowledge, and other types of knowledge. They argue that tacit and explicit knowledge should not be considered in binary terms but as a spectrum, or perhaps even as a cross, as the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge may

possibly be overly artificial. The group wonders when tacit knowledge is persuasive enough to be considered evidence. Before starting a research project, researchers should ask policymakers and practitioners about their knowledge needs, rather than first doing the research and then asking whether they find it useful. Research projects need space and financing for exchange and learning. Practitioners and policymakers should be involved from the start: a diversity of participants will help to formulate the ‘right’ research questions. For this same reason, a diversity of participants should be involved in the development of research grants.

**Group 4. Involving policymakers**

This group discusses the involvement of policymakers in knowledge-sharing activities between research, policy and practice. They argue that knowledge is only relevant when it is used. But who are the users? According to this group, the users are decision-makers, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Southern partners. Rather than waiting for policymakers to formulate their knowledge demands, researchers and practitioners should inspire policymakers with ideas coming from the field. But how do you grasp the attention of policymakers, and how do you make knowledge relevant for them? These questions remain unanswered.

**2.5 Closure by the Chair**

The Chair, Hermen Ormel, concludes the meeting with some final remarks:

- It is important to understand which knowledge questions are taken up and which are not, and why.
- A safe environment will encourage diverse — less narrow — discussions and will help knowledge to be shared and taken up by various groups.
- In knowledge-sharing activities between research, policy and practice it is important to be aware of potential power imbalances and to create equal partnerships.
Annex 1. Topic suggestions for Open Space

Participants suggested the following topics for further exploration:

- Is more knowledge the same as learning, and is that the same as improving practice?
- How do you get researchers, policymakers and practitioners to work together and devise a joint knowledge agenda?
- Do they have the same needs?
- How do you connect the different roles?
- How can you make tacit knowledge more explicit, who will use it and how?
- How do you bring out different kinds of knowledge throughout project cycles?
- Evidence is political, normative, not neutral; there is a desire for change, transformative protection of research.
- How do you increase the visibility of research/tacit knowledge among policymakers so that they can understand what is relevant to them? How do you create an enabling environment?
- How do you involve policymakers in knowledge-sharing activities?
- Who is the policymaker? How do we define them? Only in The Hague or in NGOs? Who are the decision-makers, what is the decision space, and when/how are decisions made?
- ‘Knowledge only has meaning when it’s shared.’ How do you share it, and how do you prevent a knowledge overload? If I have a question, where do I find the answer? What is the meaning of knowledge when it’s not shared?
- How can academic researchers be rewarded for working in a way that is policy-relevant? What kind of incentives can you think of?

Policymakers

- How do you involve policy makers in the knowledge platform/knowledge-sharing activities?
- Who is the policymaker? Decision-maker? What is the decision space?
- How do you increase the visibility of relevant tacit knowledge to policymakers?
- How do you engage policymakers in the discussions?

Joint knowledge agenda

- The collaboration of/with multiple stakeholders for the development of the knowledge agenda
- The challenges of a knowledge agenda with different stakeholders
- Collaboration between researchers, policymakers and practitioners regarding a knowledge agenda. How?
- How can the solutions suggested by Billie be used in practice (joint knowledge agenda)?

Types of knowledge

- How do you convince policymakers/donors to invest in tacit knowledge development?
- How do you bring out different kinds of knowledge throughout a project and programme cycle (and not just at the end) and share it on an ongoing basis with policymakers?
- Make tacit knowledge explicit! How? And who?
Linking research, policy and practice

- How do you connect universes, roles, interests? Common ground?
- How do you get researchers closer to practice? Make findings usable, in understandable language.
- GAP and how to improve
- Needs of different stakeholders
- With regard to knowledge sharing (demand/supply): how do you ‘break down walls’ between the three universes (researchers, policymakers, practitioners)?
- How do you get all these different interests on the same page? Where is there overlap (between stakeholders)?
- How can academic researchers be rewarded for working in policy- and practice-relevant ways?

Other

- More relevant knowledge; learning; improve practice?
- Long-term investment; knowledge generation as a political act; normative nature; transformative potential
- Knowledge only has meaning when shared: how to share; knowledge overload; power
## Annex 2. List of participants

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Annex 3. PowerPoint presentation by Billie de Haas

**Study objective**

- Commissioned by Share-Net International and the Share-Net working group “Linking research, policy and practice”
- Objective: Obtain a better understanding of the Dutch fields of research, policy and practice involved with SRHR and HIV and AIDS in international development, how they are linked and how these linkages can be strengthened.
- Provide input to the working group “Linking research, policy and practice” for developing a framework from which to operate and in which to structure activities.
- Today: Discuss preliminary findings and obtain feedback for finalization of report.
- Draft report not yet complete; not to be shared.

**Research questions**

1. What are the current states of knowledge and knowledge practices in the field of SRHR and HIV/AIDS?
   - Literature review
2. What are the current states of knowledge and knowledge practices in the field of SRHR and HIV/AIDS and how do they interlink?
   - Literature review
3. What are the perspectives of key stakeholders regarding the current states of knowledge and knowledge practices in the field of SRHR and HIV/AIDS and the need for change?
   - Key informant interviews
4. What are the perspectives of key stakeholders regarding linking research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV/AIDS and the need for change?
   - Key informant interviews
5. What are areas and activities Share-Net should be working on?
   - Recommendations

**Literature review**

- Increasing demand to strengthen linkages between research, policy and practice
- Knowledge sharing activities in order to increase knowledge use:
  - E.g., knowledge management, knowledge brokering
  - Improve knowledge flows within and between fields
- To reach impact and innovation:
  - Not static flows, e.g., research uptake, but:
  - Co-creation of knowledge
  - Assumes: all types of knowledge are important and legitimate

**Choice for knowledge sharing activities depends on the specific context and the needs of the various groups involved**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario 1</th>
<th>Scenario 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supply and demand are focused</td>
<td>Supply is focused; demand is fragmented</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supply is fragmented</td>
<td>Supply and demand are fragmented</td>
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- Focus or fragmented

**Diagram:**

- Knowledge creation and dissemination
- Knowledge translation
- Knowledge broker
- Innovative broker
- Enabling access to information from multiple sources
- Making sense of and apply information
- Improving knowledge use in decision-making
- Influencing the wider context to reduce transaction costs and facilitate innovation.
Perspectives on strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice

**Literature review**

- **Knowledge**
  - Various types of knowledge, e.g. spectrum of explicit and tacit knowledge
  - Complementary, interaction between both is needed to create new knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual interaction</th>
<th>Collective interaction</th>
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<tr>
<td>Face-to-face interaction:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orientation:</td>
<td>Making group conversations to form concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction:</td>
<td>Converting knowledge into explicit forms</td>
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<td>Virtual interaction:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction:</td>
<td>Making explicit knowledge tacit once more</td>
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- **Enabling environment for knowledge creation**
  - Dismantle barriers that impede knowledge flows, e.g. at:
    - Individual level, e.g. attitudes, time, intrinsic motivation
    - Organisational level, e.g. incentive structures, procedures
    - Network/system level, e.g. power tolerances, certain types of knowledge valued over other types of knowledge
  - Barriers for linking research, policy and practice, e.g. mismatch in demand and supply of types of knowledge, duration of cycles, priority setting
  - Enablers: funding, incentives for knowledge sharing, direct interaction, openness and space for creativity and spontaneity, etc.

**Methodology**

- **28 key informants**
  - Including SRHR advisors, program officers, policy advisors, managers, professors or advocates
  - Working at Dutch based NGOs, co-funding organisations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hivos World, EP-HUPFIC, GGD, and universities or other knowledge institutes
  - Specifically appointed to link research, policy and practice; or working on linking these fields from a research, policy or practice perspective as part of their ongoing work

- **Data collection**
  - Semi-structured interviews, 70 minutes on average
  - May-August 2015
  - Transcribed verbatim, coded in MaxQDA

- **Main themes for analysis**
  - Perceptions regarding current state of linking research, policy and practice
  - Demand and supply of knowledge
  - Barriers to flow of knowledge
  - Current knowledge sharing activities
  - Needs regarding linking research, policy and practice
  - Recommended steps/suggestions for knowledge sharing activities

**Findings: Demand for and supply of knowledge**

- **Key informant working on operational research**
  - "I asked my partner: what is the reason you need these data? What is your aim? He told me he wanted to push his partners to work more on governance and meaningful youth participation. So what would be the best way to approach this? Should we do quantitative research? Or an experiment? [...] I notice that this makes me think differently about research. You try to figure out: what do partners need this research for? [...] I start to explore research more in these ways than in scientific ways."

- **Demand for and supply of various types of knowledge is diverse**
  - Purpose; Context; and process knowledge; Methods; Depth and breadth of knowledge; Duration and cycles; Explicit and tacit knowledge; Communication
  - Networks and conflicts
  - Many organisations and individuals demand and supply various types of knowledge on SRHR and HIV and AIDS
  - Linkages are many and diffuse
  - This leads to fragmentation
Findings: Demand for and supply of knowledge

Linkages are not always direct:
“We need to realise that the Netherlands are small. It would be out of reality to think that Dutch research influences Dutch policies. That’s not how it works. We have a worldwide policy development informed by evidence which is translated into international guidelines and theories. As the Netherlands, we need to take these into account and try to see where we can have added value. How can we contribute.”

Findings: Barriers to the flow of knowledge

Key informant working at NGO:
“I think our old way of working is still very good: working on many components, involving everyone: an evidence-based approach. […] But you see us moving away from it, because there is less funding for this way of working. So you’re donor-driven, you start developing new approaches. […] This shows you that the donor decides. And for the Dutch practitioners and researchers working on SRHR, this means the Ministry plays a very big role.”

Findings: Current knowledge sharing activities

Key informant appreciates the conditions set by donors to collaborate with professionals from other fields, for instance by IMD-Netro:
“That is where you find the added value in universities collaborating with NGOs, because I notice that we as NGOs are insufficiently joining theoretical debates, asking theoretical questions, and translating our practical and research knowledge to theory. So collaborating with an academic institute helps us to stay sharp. […] And sometimes when I listen to scientific debates, I think: wow, we have progressed so much further in our thinking, we already have findings on that, but we don’t publish them.”

Findings: Barriers to the flow of knowledge

Barriers impeding the flow of knowledge:
- Lack of incentives for learning and knowledge sharing activities
- Invisibility and prejudices
- Power imbalances
- Competition
- Donor-driven agenda for research and practice

Findings: Current knowledge sharing activities

Knowledge platform and working in alliances:
- Connects players within and between the various fields
- Makes knowledge demand and supply more visible and focused
- Pitfalls:
  - Increasing distances between subgroups within the bigger consortium
  - Processes become slow and difficult because too many stakeholders need to be taken into account
  - A full agenda may leave little space for reflection, creativity and spontaneity and for adapting programmes accordingly
  - Fragmented supply of knowledge from operational research and monitoring and evaluation

Findings: Demand for and supply of knowledge

Key informant working at NGO:
“We are all enormously competitive because we are trying to get funding from the same donors. […] I find it difficult because the knowledge platform is for sharing and learning, you have common goals, but I notice the competition is constraining. […] You notice it for instance in the agenda setting because each member wants to attract attention to their own niche.”
Perspectives on strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice

**Findings: Suggestions to improve the flow of knowledge**

- A more transparent demand and supply of knowledge
- Develop and proactively push the knowledge agenda
- Increase opportunities for co-creation of knowledge
- Develop a system for learning and knowledge sharing to increase knowledge use
- Focus learning on implementation processes

**Conclusion**

- What are the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding their current state of linking research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV/AIDS?
- Barriers: Invisibility, lack of incentives for learning, competition, donor-driven agendas
- Collaboration and knowledge platform are useful
- What are the needs of key stakeholders regarding linking research, policy and practice in the field of SRHR and HIV/AIDS?
- A more transparent demand and supply of knowledge
- Develop and proactively push the knowledge agenda
- Increase opportunities for co-creation of knowledge
- Develop a system for learning and knowledge sharing to increase knowledge use
- Focus learning on implementation processes

**Take-home messages**

- Everyone produces and uses knowledge
- All types of knowledge are important and legitimate
- Strengthening linkages between research, policy and practice means:
  - Increasing multidisciplinary dialogues
  - Inclusion of a follow-up plan in each knowledge sharing activity
- In order to:
  - Increase knowledge use (including research uptake)
  - Co-create knowledge
  - ...to reach impact and innovation

**Conclusion**

- What are areas and activities ShareNet should be working on?
  - Act as a knowledge broker, be in the lead
  - Strengthen linkages with international technical agencies/policy mobilizing
  - Develop a learning agenda, organize activities on process knowledge
  - Knowledge sharing:
    - Small multidisciplinary working groups/dialogues
    - Invest and create time for learning, reflection and adaptation
    - Make explicit how knowledge is used
    - Include follow-up in each knowledge generation/sharing activity, invest in knowledge uptake
    - Multidisciplinary formulation of actionable recommendations

- Conclusion
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