



# MAINSTREAMING ENGAGED RESEARCH THROUGH THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF INNOVATION

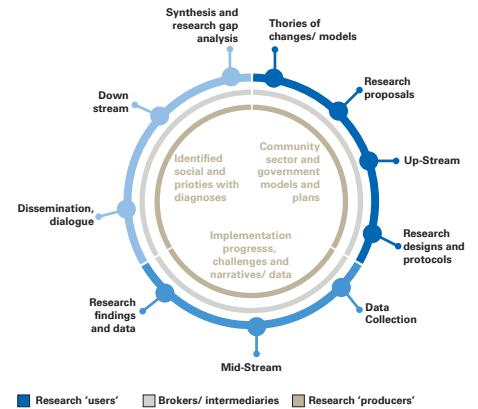
## Background

Engaged research is increasingly acknowledged as a useful emerging framework, a set of principles and iterative processes for democratizing knowledge between users and producers, and closing the gaps between knowledge and action across the research. The DSI, through the NRF, is making several efforts to deepen engaged research in the NSI, by investing in the exploration of innovative ways this emerging framework can be strengthened in the NSI. A key impetus in this movement towards engaged research has been the question of impact – the extent to which investments in research knowledge contribute to, benefit and influence society. Despite its proven importance and the many visible engaged research practices in the NSI, it has become apparent that this work has been somewhat isolated and ad-hoc.

The HSRC, with support from the DSI, is undertaking a project aimed at developing a coordinated approach towards engaged research in the NSI. This will be achieved through an exploration of ways in which an engaged research agenda can be established and engaged research principles and methods can be strengthened, sustained, and leveraged for impact across the NSI.

A key impetus in this movement towards engaged research has been the question of impact – the extent to which investments in research knowledge contribute to, benefit and influence society. Researchers are required to make explicit the connections between their research and its capacity to generate or improve products, processes and services and to demonstrate impact on issues of public concern. Engaged research is seen as a viable pathway to research impact since it encourages effective engagements and co-creation of knowledge among knowledge producers and potential users, thereby facilitating greater use and uptake of research products and ideas.

In a departure from traditional dissemination approaches where evidence is handed over to stakeholders, engaged research advocates an ongoing relationship throughout the process. Co-production can occur at each stage of the pathway and accelerates the impact of research (see Figure below adapted from the NRF ER Framework). For example, co-production at the research stage facilitates partners' readiness to take up findings because of their input in the nature of the research questions, methods, and interpretations.



At the dissemination stage, the research findings are tailored to meet the partners' needs from knowledge mobilization products. Partners could also enhance dissemination and advocate for research ideas through their organizational channels with a breadth and depth that researchers cannot achieve. The early engagement of stakeholders, including researchers, public service and product users, and policy makers enables a better understanding of the relevance of the research and, in return, the potential for knowledge translation, positive outcomes and longer-term impacts (Key et al 2019).

## Towards Engaged Research Agenda for Impact in the NSI

Although the HSRC and many other institutions have had a long-standing focus and history on engaged research, with proven partnerships and interlinkages with others in the NSI, it has become apparent that this work has been somewhat isolated and ad-hoc. The aim of this project is to develop a coordinated approach towards engaged research in the NSI. This will be achieved through an exploration of ways in which an engaged research agenda can be established and engaged research principles and methods can be strengthened, sustained and leveraged for impact across the NSI. The HSRC proposes a multi-phased implementation strategy which will be employed to establish an engaged research agenda in the NSI.

The specific objectives are to:

- 1. Understand the experience and priorities of local engaged research champions and synthesise available research.
- 2. Increase awareness, broaden participation and build a shared knowledge base around engaged research.
- 3. Facilitate engaged peer interactions for rapid learning and relationship forming.
- 4. Facilitate the transfer of engaged research practices between organisations and individuals through funded secondment or peer-support programme.
- 5. Integrate knowledge of engaged research with practical experience to scope new projects and scale existing collaborations.

This project will expand over five years with targeted priorities, objectives and outputs as outlined in below. The project will draw on two connected streams of work:

**The first stream** focuses on expanding our knowledge and understanding of what has been done before, locally and internationally, through a review of policy and research around ER and through an annual conference.

**The second stream** will run in parallel and will focus on building working relationships and practical experience around ER activity. Ultimately, these two streams will support each other by developing new knowledge and momentum around ER. In Phase 3, the two streams will merge to support the design and/or scaling of a number of ER projects.

### Phase 1: Y1

#### Understand knowledge space

Objective: Understand the experience and priorities of local ER champions and synthesise research, available

Outputs: In-depth literature review; Consultation workshop with NRF partners

#### Peer exchange

Objective: Facilitate ER peer interactions for rapid learning and relationship forming

Outputs: Two rounds of 'speed dating' sessions for ER-interested scholars (and policy/ community-based partners) to share on projects, experiences or needs

### Phase 2: Y2 - Y3

#### Build knowledge network

Objective: Increase awareness, broaden participation and build a shared knowledge base around ER

Outputs: Conference call for papers; hybrid conference; conference summary report; science communication on conference; Special Issue Journal

#### Transfer experience

Objective: Facilitate the transfer of ER practices between organisations and individuals through funded secondment or peer-support programme.

Outputs: Funding call for proposals 1; Evaluation tool to assess proposals; Secondment or peer-support

### Phase 3: Y4 - Y5

#### Scale impact

Objective: Integrate knowledge of ER with practical experience to scope new projects and scale existing collaborations.

Outputs: Funding call for proposals 2; Evaluation tool to assess proposals; Evaluation tool to assess projects; Projects evaluation report; Learning exchange seminar

At the end of this 5-year project, we hope to see more coordinated and impactful ER projects responsive to a joint framing of engaged research in the NSI, a strengthening of the knowledge base for ER and increased opportunities for learning and skills transfer across the system. These efforts will hopefully combine to inform science, technology and innovation that is responsive to the social, economic and developmental issues of the country.