External Review of PAGE II Programme

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1. Introduction

PEP launched the second Policy Analysis on Growth and Employment programme (PAGE II) programme in 2016 with support from DFID and IDRC to continue building on the success of the PAGE-I programme (2012-2016). The initiative supports rigorous, locally-led analyses aimed at the creation of reliable evidence to assist policy-making for inclusive growth, employment and female empowerment in the areas of labour markets, social protection and entrepreneurship in developing countries. The programme aims at filling evidence gaps in the scientific literature on growth and employment using cutting-edge methodologies. Priority is given to low-income economies, fragile and/or conflict-affected situations.

The initiative supports 46 project grants, including 30 MPIA/PMMA grants for non-experimental research projects, 8 CBMS projects, 6 PIERI grants for randomized controlled trials and field experiments (4 and 2 projects respectively), and 2 grants combined to support an institutionalisation project for CGE modelling (MPIA method).

The objective of this third component of the external review is to determine the extent to which PEP has delivered on its PAGE-II commitments as outlined in section 4.5 of the programme’s proposal. As indicated in the TOR, this section of the review covers three main issues: (1) policy research, (2) capacity building and promotion of southern expertise and (3) policy engagement and research communication. The report is in three sections as below, each covering the main issues to be reviewed.

A. Policy research
   - Scientific quality of research
   - Policy relevance
   - Research innovation

B. Capacity building and promotion of Southern expertise
   - Training delivery
   - Quality of training and mentorship
   - Research and policy integration
   - Professional development
   - Institutional capacity enhancement
   - Focus on gender equity
C. Policy engagement and research communication

- Evidence-informing policy
- Policy research design
- Policy outreach
- Targeted research communication
- Continuous policy engagement

The review is based on a desk study of various relevant documents that were provided to us by the PEP Secretariat. Especially important were PAGE II progress reports to the donors, as well as information retrieved from PEP’s M&E system. To understand the reality behind the evaluations provided in the progress reports and M&E indicators, we also looked at 12 projects in detail by tracking the full paper trail of those projects, from Expression of Interest to final reports and policy briefs, including all the available feedback/assessments given to the team, as well as the self-assessment of the team. Given that PAGE II covers four Thematic Research Groups (TRGs) and three challenge levels¹, we looked at the paper trail of one project within each TRG-challenge level pair.² In the case of multiple projects available within a TRG-challenge level pair, we looked at the paper trail from the project with the lowest project number. We liaised with the Secretariat to collect additional data for this PAGE II review.

In 2019, IDRC granted additional support to extend the PAGE II initiative with another round of funding (14 projects). We will not review this extension as its first progress report was not available yet when we did the research for this review.

2. Policy Research

We consider here the performance of PAGE II with respect to its commitments in terms of policy research. The commitments have three elements, namely scientific quality of research, policy relevance, and research innovation, each with the following indicators:

1. Scientific quality of research:
   - Number of peer-reviewed publications in PEP working paper series
   - Publications in highly regarded peer-reviewed journals
   - Presentations of research findings in international conferences

2. Policy relevance:
   - Number of completed research projects with clear evidence-based policy recommendations to inform policy debates and initiatives on poverty, inclusive growth, gender and employment issues in targeted countries.

3. Research innovation:

¹ The ‘challenge level’ of a project, either low, medium or high, is determined using a set of criteria related to the specific contexts/environments in which the project is led (and the team is working) to assess whether this context is challenging enough to achieve PEP’s objectives in terms of capacity building (quality research) and policy outreach.

² Because no MPIA project was available with a high challenge level, the final sample includes only 2 MPIA projects and one additional PMMA project.
Development, by local researchers together with PEP resource persons and Research Fellows, of new methodologies, tools, literature reviews, training material, PEP school components on PAGE issues.

We now discuss the results of our review for each component.

2.1 Scientific Quality of Research

PEP’s ambition is to empower local experts to achieve the highest international standards of scientific quality in policy-relevant research, implying that PEP research outputs are not only publicly available, but also appearing in high-level peer-reviewed journals. PAGE II therefore aims at further improving publications, as well as to increase the chances and number of publications in high-level peer-reviewed journals, through a renewed strategy:

- A new scientific writing workshop provided during PEP Annual Conferences
- The revision of PEP grant contracts, to include the mandatory publication of working papers, as well as incentives to encourage preparation of articles for submission in scientific journals.
- A mentorship agreement, co-signed by all project members and their mentor, strongly encouraging them to seek to co-author a working paper and journal article based on the project.
- A recommended list of strategic/high-visibility international conferences for PEP researchers to present their results in order to review peer comments to improve their quality. This list is updated, and submission deadlines are indicated when calls are launched monthly.
- Proposals of “PEP special issues” to high-level journals

How successful is PAGE II in its pursuit of scientific quality in research? Table 1 below presents the targets and actual performance for the three indicators of scientific quality of research that were identified respectively monitored for the PAGE II programme:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of peer-reviewed publications in PEP working paper series (see logframe indicator 2.3)</td>
<td>43 projects published as PEP WP</td>
<td>45 projects (with a total of 56 WPs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publications in highly regarded peer-reviewed journals (see logframe indicator 2.4)</td>
<td>11 REF 2* (or higher) publications</td>
<td>28 (14 REF 2* and 14 REF 3*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations of research findings in international conferences</td>
<td>no specific indicator / target included in the logframe</td>
<td>16 (35%) project teams presented their research/findings at 11 different high-level international academic conferences</td>
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</table>
Table 1 shows that the performance of PAGE II has exceeded the targets in terms of the number of peer-reviewed PEP Working Papers (WPs) and especially publications in higher impact journals. Also, currently 8 PAGE II papers are under review in high-level journals. Furthermore, one third of the project teams have been able to present their work at high-level international academic conferences, such as the Canadian Economics Association (CEA) meetings (May 31-June 1, 2019), IZA/World Bank/NJD Conference on Jobs and Development (June 6-7, 2019), Western Economic Association International (WEAI) Conference (June 28-July 2, 2019), and Annual Conference on Economic Growth and Development (December 18-20, 2019).

A PEP special issue was published by Environment and Development Economics in 2018 (including 5 articles based on PAGE projects), and another was submitted to the Review of Development Economics in 2019 (again with papers from 5 PAGE projects, 3 of which have already been accepted and published online so far).

The performance in terms of the indicators shows that PAGE II is performing well in generating high quality research. However, as reviewers we were also interested in taking an in-depth look at the PAGE II projects themselves. Specifically, we took a sample of 12 PAGE II projects, following their paper trail from the Expression of Interest up to the completion of the project.3 In terms of scientific quality we especially looked at the final products of each project, namely the WP and policy brief (PB), as well as the design paper and SDG paper for the PAGE II CBMS projects. We also looked at the coherence of the different outputs within a project. We make the following observations:

**CBMS Projects**

Within the PAGE II programme, the CBMS projects now also include a ‘thematic paper’ that goes beyond the CBMS methodology to set up a community-based monitoring system. This thematic paper increases the publication potential of CBMS outputs and allows for better alignment of CBMS activities with the activities in the other TRGs.

While we think that the addition of a thematic paper is a good idea for CBMS, we noted one issue specifically, namely that the objectives of the thematic papers were often not very well aligned with the CBMS methodology itself limiting their scientific contribution to the literature. For instance, the objectives of CBMS 2003S are to “(i) to develop and implement a community-based monitoring system (CBMS) to monitor the different dimensions of poverty; and (ii) to investigate the extent of effectiveness of C:AVA Project in Ghana in respect of addressing gender inequalities and empowering women.” Not surprisingly, the proposal mentions “two parallel research activities” without discussing their links, except for choice of location and data collection (variables).

The CBMS methodology appears to function primarily as a data collection tool for the thematic paper: “We adopted CBMS methodology to generate information on youth and financial

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3 The performance of the different partners (and therefore TRGs) in terms of generating quality research outputs has already been discussed extensively in the Review of Partnerships. For that review, we looked primarily at WPs and journal publications, from PAGE II as well as other PEP projects.
inclusion.” (CBMS 20141). However, the CBMS methodology is developed for the monitoring of individual households on the basis of a census. This sampling strategy is not always the most appropriate, however, as we discussed in the Review of Partnerships. It also leads to some ad hoc adjustments in sampling that lack clarity and proper sampling justification.⁴

In order to make a stronger scientific contribution, the CBMS thematic paper should be more deeply embedded in the CBMS methodology, both being supported by and strengthening it, and making it a coherent part of the entire project. For instance, thematic papers could explore the importance of the CBMS approach versus traditional approaches in specific contexts, where census data make a difference. Or it could explore methodological innovations in the CBMS methodology. Or it could even analyse how the introduction of a CBMS programme has affected local policymaking, etc.

One of the CBMS projects we looked at was a follow-up project from 2016 (CBMS 19956). This is potentially a very interesting extension of the CBMS methodology from cross-sectional to panel analysis allowing one to “analyse the changes in poverty profile (community and household level) of the CBMS previous rural sites over the period 2015 – 2017, using the CBMS poverty maps, descriptive statistics and other statistical tools.” (Togo_CBMSProposal_Version5). It was disappointing to find, however, that the project itself did ignore the panel dimension of the data focusing on the most recent round only.

Given that the CBMS project generates not only a thematic working paper and policy brief, like the non-CBMS project, but also a Design and SDG paper related to the community-based monitoring system, we looked at all four outputs. Overall, our assessment is that the papers are generally of reasonable quality and of interest, but that there is also scope for improvement. Our concerns are very similar as discussed in the Review of Partnerships and therefore not repeated here.

**PMMA Projects**

The scientific quality of the PMMA projects was generally high. The projects made use of methodologies that could be found in the analysis of microeconomic issues in the economics literature. Thus, the projects adequately addressed problems of selectivity bias and endogeneity in key covariates. Various post-estimation, as well as robustness checks, were performed to validate the findings. In some cases, attempts were made to address issues of causality. For those projects that had access to panel data, issues of unobserved heterogeneity were addressed within the scope of the data.

In terms of the literature to guide the discussions, most of the PMMA projects cited the relevant papers, including more recent papers. Indeed, most of this literature was used to

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⁴ Consider, for instance, the following mentor’s feedback within the CBMS 20035 project: Note that CBMS requires a census… In case the number of beneficiaries of C:AVA project from your census data is not enough to do the analysis for your PAGE theme paper, you can add respondents from other sites. The new sites where you get your additional respondents need not to be covered in your CBMS census. (uploads: Project_20035_1498826928 - Revision based on Comments by Reviewers). It is not clear, however, how other respondents are ‘added … from other sites’ and whether this only involved C:AVA beneficiaries or also non-beneficiaries.
develop the conceptual frameworks to underpin the projects. In most of the projects, the relevant contribution to literature was clearly stated and appropriate policy conclusions discussed. The structure of the final papers was quite standard and comparable to those in high ranking journals.

There were a few areas that need some improvements. First, the literature reviews of some of the projects appeared rather generic and lacked clear direction. Some of the projects over-emphasised the absence of literature in their respective study-areas (or developing countries) or simply cited papers that were similar to their studies, rather than synthesising the discussions to either build a hypothesis to be tested or properly identify their contribution to the literature (e.g. PMMA 20015, PMMA 20026, PMMA 20083).

**PIERI Projects**

The overall impression of the PIERI projects is that they are of high or even very high scientific quality and many of these papers have high publication potential. The quality is not uniform though, as some important weaknesses can be observed in some projects, for instance in the analysis of project PIERI 12937. The WP concludes that “Policymakers should also include soft skills during the formulation and reformulation of SME policy in order to bridge the business skills and knowledge gap”, but the paper does not show that adding soft skills gives a statistically significant different result, hence it is actually not clear from the analysis why one would add soft skills (and have 2 days instead of 1 day of training).

**MPIA Projects**

The MPIA projects relied exclusively on Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) modelling, which has been extensively used in policy analysis in the economics literature. Most of them relied on PEP’s standard CGE model with significant extensions. These models use a mix of micro and macro data, and the novelty in the methodology is that it allows for various calibrations to examine broader economic issues extensively. These methodologies can be very rigorous when properly executed.

The scientific quality of the MPIA projects is generally good. The projects made various contributions to the literature for developing countries on growth and employment. The framing of the methodology and the context within which they were analysed has been satisfactory. Limitations of the data were also adequately explained, except in a few cases where some improvements will be needed.

This notwithstanding, a few of the projects had problems in the framing of the analysis, in discussing the implications of their studies or clearly outlining their limitations (e.g. project

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5 The PIERI RD has noted that project PIERI 12397 received extremely poor reviews from referees and that the mentor will no longer work for PEP.

6 Group 1 treatment versus Group 2 treatment (2-arms treatment): 1-day on business management training versus 2-days with business management + interpersonal skills. Also, the PB states that “Revenue increased most for those who received interpersonal skills training as well as business management skills training, by 83,305 LRD/month for firm owners in Group 2 and by 78,637 LRD/month for firm owners in Group 1 (average increases compared to the control group)” But, looking at the standard errors these differences are unlikely to be significant.
MPIA 19906, MPIA 20242, MPIA 20108 and MPIA 20030). Analysing a mixture of micro and highly aggregated macro data can be sensitive to different policy scenarios, and these challenges need to be adequately indicated and addressed. More generally, even though the MPIA projects were generally of a high standard, they can still benefit from some uniformity in organising the structure of the final papers.

2.2 Policy Relevance

In terms of policy relevance, the PAGE II project has identified and monitored as indicator the number of completed research projects with clear evidence-based policy recommendations to inform policy debates and initiatives on poverty, inclusive growth, gender and employment issues in targeted countries. The target was 46 projects, and 46 (i.e. all PAGE II-supported grants) have resulted in clear evidence-based policy recommendations per PEP (see logframe outcome indicator 2).

These numbers suggest that PAGE II has been fully on target in terms of the policy relevance aspect of scientific quality. PEP’s scientific mentor’s evaluation form includes assessments of “the improvement of each project in the application/use of PEP-taught skills/knowledge in PEP research”, including an assessment of “Development of evidence-based policy recommendations”. The scientific mentors use a rating on a scale from 1 to 10:

1 – no improvement at all
2 – very little improvement
3 – little improvement
4 – improved but below expectation
5 – improved slightly below expectation
6 – improved as expected
7 – improved slightly more than expected
8 – improved more than expected
9 – improved much more than expected
10 – improved beyond all expectations

The ratings provided by the scientific mentors are reported in Figure 1.7 Most projects are rated with a 7 or 8, i.e. a project improved (slightly) more than expected in terms of its development of evidence-based policy recommendations. However, it is somewhat hard to interpret these ratings as they are based on improvement vis-à-vis an “expectation” which is not further specified. Therefore, in practice, PEP judges whether a project has clear evidence-based policy recommendations from the approval of the project papers by both the TRG/scientific committees and the external reviewers.8

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7 This is the most recent rating given.
8 We have now learnt that from round 3 of PAGE II, the POC mentors are expected to be better able to assess the clarity of policy recommendations—thanks to the introduction of a “policy paper” in each project. These policy papers are also meant to address some of the issues described below (e.g. related to policy contextualization, cost vs benefit considerations).
We have also, therefore, tried to judge how the PAGE II projects perform in terms of producing clear evidence-based policy recommendations. Our first impression is positive — all projects provide policy recommendations and in most cases, they are clearly linked to the analysis. Also, the PEP capacity building efforts put heavy emphasis on the importance of developing sound evidence-based policy recommendations. That this is not an easy task, is reflected in the fact that we also observe some issues for our sample of projects.

We noted that in some cases policy implications were derived based simply on benefits without attention being paid to the costs.9 There were also situations where the policy messages were not clearly formulated10 and the policy context was insufficiently reflected in the conclusions.11 In some instances, there was no clear link between the analysis and the recommendation. For instance, CBMS 20035 states that, “The study recommends the adoption of CBMS methodology by the Ministry of Local Government Services through District Assemblies in Ghana to help provide data to aid planning and assess outcomes of development interventions for improved livelihoods.” (p.26). The study, however, does not show the benefits of the CBMS methodology, and only uses the resulting data. Similarly, CBMS 20141 recommends continued support for CBMS data collection, but the paper shows that Uganda is already rolling out a “Community Information System”.

9 See for instance PIERI 13014 which recommends that “input packages and intensive advisory service should be provided at farm level at the right time for farmers to maintain the increase of maize productivity” but a CBA is lacking.
10 For instance, “Total production at farm level does not significantly improve, though beneficiaries’ farmers see their maize production increased by 400 kg to 1000 kg.” (PIERI 13014).
11 For instance, the PIERI 12937 proposal justifies its focus on a customer-centred business training intervention noting that this is “a promising avenue to foster business recovery in the post-Ebola and conflict period”, especially given that “the Ebola outbreak was characterized by a dramatic reduction and aversion towards social interactions at all level of society”. However, the WP of the project lacks this policy context and it is no longer clear why the proposed business training is especially relevant within the context studied.
We observed also that policy conclusions were sometimes based on descriptive analysis which can only be suggestive in the absence of causal analysis. Some of the projects failed to properly situate the policy implication within a much broader framework that acknowledges the possible consequences of the different assumptions underpinning the analysis (e.g. MPIA 19906), and especially in the construction of some variables (e.g. MPIA 20261). They therefore lead to policy suggestions that appear to be simple summaries of their main findings. It should be possible to situate policy suggestions within a wider relevant context, especially where it offers policy makers more options by extending the findings of the current study. PMMA 19978 could have done that to make it even more useful in that regard.

In sum, we agree with PEP that the policy relevance of all projects is not in doubt. The projects have tested several policies relevant to the growth and employment agenda in many developing countries, including the LFCs. The policies tested included those on foreign direct investment, fiscal consolidation, agricultural subsidy, wage subsidy and energy subsidy, among many others. These are the areas that provide considerable challenges to governments, and so it would be extremely helpful that PEP projects show how some of the challenges might be addressed. The illustrations of what else can be done in deriving policy implications or suggestions is to encourage the need to reflect a little more broadly.

2.3 Research Innovation

Over the past few years, most of PEP’s energy in terms of innovation has been devoted to developing the three bilingual online courses (fourth one on gender analysis, plus gender modules for two existing courses, in preparation), which have increasingly replaced in-class (PEP school) training activities. Also, a major revamping of PEP’s training material and recommended readings is near completion. The PEP trademark DASP software is also updated and extended periodically.

Research innovation in MPIA projects comes in several forms, and these include the various extensions to the PEP Standard CGE model, the different simulations of multiple policy scenarios under severe data limitations, and more specifically in the case of Mongolia, the opportunity to develop a CGE model. These developments can be important foundations for other studies.

While PIERI is clearly using cutting-edge impact evaluation methodologies, it innovated in terms of its implementation by introducing field visits in PAGE II (besides the study visit) to be able to better mentor the implementation of the projects.

Although the PMMA projects largely relied on well-known methodologies in the analysis of microeconomic studies, the contributions to the literature for developing countries present

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12 Cf. CBMS 20141.
13 In the paper, some recommendations were made about the importance of (1) training only, (2) credit only, and (3) both credit and training to firm performance. The literature on the subject distinguishes between general and specific training, as well as training offered to skilled or unskilled labour. The paper could have benefited from some of these extensions, but no explanations were provided about their absence. The outcome indicator for the study (sales) could have been varied for a much tighter policy implication: for instance, relying on sales per worker because of the correlation between sales and the size of the firm.
some significant research innovation. These contributions can be relied on as the foundation of other studies.

3. Capacity Building and Promotion of Southern Expertise

How did PAGE II perform with respect to its commitments around capacity building and promotion of southern expertise? In exploring this question, we focus on training delivery, quality of training and mentorship, research and policy integration, professional development, institutional capacity enhancement and gender equity. The commitments involving the six components and their indicators are as follows:

1. Training delivery:
   ✓ Number of researchers who participated in PEP School on-line courses
   ✓ Number of researchers who participated in PEP Schools, other training workshops
   ✓ Number of researchers who participated in study visits

2. Quality of training and mentorship:
   ✓ PEP Research Fellow and mentors to have provided supervision and mentorship to researchers in publishing high quality research outputs and policy briefs.

3. Research and policy integration:
   ✓ Number of researchers who have learned how to apply cutting-edge tools/methodologies for analysis of policies in consultation with policymakers and other stakeholders.

4. Professional development:
   ✓ Researchers who benefit from significant career advancement (posting, promotion, or award) partly due to their involvement in PAGE II, leading to increased policy influence.

5. Institutional capacity enhancement:
   ✓ Contribution of individual researchers and institutional grants for building research capacity at the institutional level in target countries to promote research excellence, south-south collaboration and collaborative work with PEP and other institutions in development policy research in beneficiary countries.

6. Focus on gender equity:
   ✓ PEP projects aim for a high level of participation of female researchers and predominantly mentoring and supervision of young researchers, therefore all indicators are gender- and age group disaggregated where applicable.

We discuss here the results of our review for each component, starting with training delivery.
3.1 Training Delivery

The training of researchers represents one of the first steps in PEP’s unique approach after the shortlisting of researchers for their programmes. Under the PAGE-II programme, three main modes of training were available to researchers: namely, online courses, PEP Schools and other training workshops and study visits. Admission into the training programme followed a phased-in approach, as researchers could only access the last two, after completing the online courses. This notwithstanding, all the three training modes were over-subscribed. The online courses were over-subscribed by as much as 195 percent, the PEP Schools by 51 percent and the study visits by 65 percent. Table 2 below shows these oversubscriptions as the number of participants far exceeded the targets for each of the indicators monitored. Especially striking is the fact that the number of researchers taking online PEP courses was almost three times the number targeted, and this is attributed to the fact that these courses were open to the public for a fee. The high demand shows the value of going online, allowing PAGE II to scale up reaching many more beneficiaries at a relatively low cost, both among PEP and non-PEP researchers. PEP’s track record of research and/or the themes of PAGE-II are certainly attractive.

Table 2. Training delivery: Targets versus performance by indicator

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<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of researchers who participated in PEP School on-line courses (see logframe indicator 1.1)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of researchers who participated in PEP Schools, other training workshops (see logframe indicator 1.2)</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of researchers who participated in study visits (see logframe indicator 1.1)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that PEP could exceed the targets for the number of researchers participating in PEP school, other training workshops and study visits, arose out of the fact that initially the target was one researcher per team (i.e. 46). By the time the budget was approved, it provided for 2 members per non-CBMS teams (i.e. 38 x 2 = 76), but the logframe was not adjusted to reflect the new budget. Hence, the realized number of researchers participating in PEP school, other training workshops and study visits, was exactly on target.

Out of the 201 persons trained, 38 percent of those came from microeconomic analysis (PMMA), 25 percent from micro-macro policy modelling (MPIA), 29 percent from community-based monitoring systems (CBMS) and 12 percent from experimental research – randomized controlled trials (PIERI). More than half of the participants were women and more than half were LIE/FC researchers. See Table 3 below.
Table 3: Distribution of Trained Researchers across TRGS

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Researchers</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMMA</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Team Leaders</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIE/FCs</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPIA</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Team Leaders</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIE/FCs</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIERI</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Team Leaders</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIE/FCs</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBMS</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Team Leaders</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIE/FCs</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Women</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Female Leaders</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LIE/FCs</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is every indication from the distribution, that every effort was made to achieve the target of at least 50% women in all the TRGs. The same applies to the LIE/FCs and it is certainly commendable. What is interesting is the fact that the number of PIERI researchers and trainees was far less than for other TRGs.

3.2 Quality of Training and Mentorship

The quality of the training offered under PAGE-II can be assessed by the quality of output of the projects, the testimonials of participants and, to a large extent, the quality of the resource persons (mentors). Relying on the quality of the PEP working papers and the published papers, they were generally of good quality, given that most of the researchers were from LFCs. In terms of the testimonials from the participants, they were appreciative of the training and found them to be useful for their work with PEP and other research collaborations. The resource persons for the programme were amongst a large pool of experts that PEP has been relying on for the past several years and this includes experts from world-class universities, as well as other experts from other developing countries.
Generally, the content of training under the PAGE-II programme is comparable to what could be found in other top institutions doing policy research. More specifically, the inclusion of experimental research is commendable, given the significant cost implications and time-consuming nature.

The purpose of an external expert review, such as the current one, is to ensure that the research techniques and methodologies required are consistently updated and remain comparable to those of other international research institutions that are dealing with identical research themes like those of PEP. This is certainly a good complement to the practice of self-assessment by researchers. While it is acknowledged that PEP’s approach to capacity-building is unique and enhancing quality, lessons from other research networks could be useful\(^{14}\).

Given that the number of PEP researchers that have benefitted from PEP training programmes has (far) exceeded the targets set for PAGE II, the next question to address is the quality of these programmes. The performance of the different partners (and therefore TRGs) in terms of capacity building, including training has already been discussed extensively in the partnership review.

Here we take an additional in-depth look at the PAGE II projects. Specifically, by following the paper trail from the Expression of Interest to the completion of the project, we can observe and evaluate the mentoring process ‘in action’. We make the following observations:

**CBMS Projects**

- Some teams would have benefitted from expert advice on quasi-experimental methods.\(^{15}\) This suggests that PEP projects can benefit from more cross-TRG interaction, as this expertise is available within PEP (e.g. from PMMA).
- The paper trail shows for several projects that there are comments and replies available for the proposal on PEP’s intranet. Other feedback (except for editorial feedback on the WP) was provided through email communication. It would be better if all mentor feedback and research team replies are available in one place, preferably PEP’s intranet, allowing the mentors and teams to quickly review outstanding issues and PEP to monitor the process.

**PMMA projects**

- Unlike other projects that may require continuous engagement with mentors even after the standard PEP training, because of their all-encompassing nature, depending on the calibre of researchers\(^{16}\), the PMMA projects may not require very frequent meetings since the methodologies can be hands-on and quite practical.

\(^{14}\) Other networks with similar ambitions of capacity-building for research include the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) and Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR).

\(^{15}\) The suggestion of using regression discontinuity in CBMS 20035 is puzzling. Also, this project looks at the impact of an intervention with correlations, probit, differences in means, i.e. not systematically controlling for selectivity.

\(^{16}\) LFC researchers may need a little bit more attention.
• The outputs of most PMMA projects meet very high quality standards, suggesting rigorous training. In some cases, data limitations constrained the types of methodologies that were adopted, but the general impression is that the methods are still very robust.

PIERI Projects

• The PIERI projects received strong feedback
• The comments are mostly technical. More context and policy-oriented comments may be useful to enhance the policy relevance.
• The roles of mentors and (different) team members are not always clear. One of the scientific mentors in one of the PIERI projects who is evaluating the team is also co-author of the FR (PIERI 12942). However, per the mentor’s agreement, the mentor should only be directly involved after the FR is approved.17
• In PIERI 12937, the FR has three researchers as authors, while the WP has 1 researcher as author (next to the mentor). It is not clear why authors are dropped and PEP may want to develop a policy on this to make sure that (especially junior) researchers receive the credit for their work even if they have contributed less (but learnt more).

MPIA projects

• The methodologies adopted for the MPIA projects require extensive training and mentorship. Even though PEP’s approach for the training of participants is judged here to be adequate, the nature of the MPIA projects often requires continuous engagement between the mentors and the researchers.
• It is encouraging to find some mentors co-authoring the final papers of the researchers. This reflects the extent to which the mentors have continued to engage with the researchers even after the standard PEP training. This is very critical in enhancing the quality of both the training and mentorship obtained under the PAGE-II programmes.

3.3 Research and Policy Integration

A key feature of PEP’s mission is to inform development policies worldwide through fostering engagement with policy stakeholders. To which extent does PAGE II succeed in integrating research and policy?

PAGE II identified and monitored as indicator the number of researchers who have learned how to apply cutting-edge tools/methodologies for analysis of policies in consultation with policymakers and other stakeholders. Also, here PAGE II exceeded expectations - the target was 138 researchers and 201 was achieved (see logframe outcome indicator 1).

17 “Once the final report is approved, PEP’s objective is to continue to improve the quality of the publication in order to target the highest possible level of journal (referring to the REF framework). In this context, a more substantial and direct contribution by the mentor, as co-author, is permitted and, indeed, encouraged. The research team and mentor hereby agree that they will work together to produce and co-author all working papers and journal publications drawn from the PEP research in question.”
Within PAGE II, researchers were trained in skills for research and policy integration through various instruments. First, researchers received mentorship from the Policy Outreach Committee on how to substantiate the policy relevance of their project throughout the project. Policy mentors were requested to analyze the policy relevance and context of the proposed projects, and to guide the teams in the implementation of an effective policy outreach and dissemination strategy. They were also mandated to monitor, analyze and advise the teams’ reports on the consultations held with the key policy targets, as well as to provide assistance and guidance in dissemination activities. The mentors’ evaluations and comments should also be uploaded onto PEP’s intranet system.\(^\text{18,19}\)

Looking at our sample of PAGE II projects, we found the comments on the policy context analysis and dissemination strategies by the policy outreach mentors for the PMMA, MPIA, PIERI projects highly constructive and policy context-sensitive, and it must have been exciting for local researchers to learn how their ‘academic’ research can be of value to practitioners.

For the CBMS projects, it is harder to see whether and how the researchers were trained in skills for research and policy integration. Unlike in the other TRGs, researchers were not asked to do a separate and detailed policy context analysis and dissemination strategy, and therefore no related comments could be found.\(^\text{20}\) The CBMS teams were evaluated in terms of policy outreach performance (Policy context analysis, Research legitimacy or importance, Engagement), but these are scores only.

All teams that benefited from periodic advice from a POC mentor were asked to complete a survey to evaluate PEP’s new strategy/approach to support policy outreach.\(^\text{21}\) The results (118 respondents) to date reveal that:

- Nearly all (99% respondents) believe that this new programme has contributed to enhancing their capacity to 1) understand policy implications, 2) engage with policy actors, and 3) communicate research for policy use.
- Among the activities comprised in this new programme, 52% of respondents have ranked the policy context analysis\(^\text{22}\) as the one to have had the most impact in terms of building their individual capacity for policy-engaged research.
- Regarding the policy outreach (POC) mentorship,
  - 96.5% considered that the guidance received (from their mentors) was well-informed and relevant to the context of their country and project
  - 94% considered that their assigned mentor should continue advising PEP teams

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\(^\text{18}\) Annex D of PAGE II proposal.
\(^\text{19}\) The mentor’s evaluations and comments are uploaded from round 3 in PAGE II.
\(^\text{20}\) According to the CBMS RD, “CBMS projects since the beginning of PEP are required to include a policy context analysis and dissemination strategy in their CBMS project proposals given the expected outputs and use of CBMS methodology. Among the strategies include involvement of key policymakers - who are target users of the outputs of the CBMS and/or may help the country teams institutionalize CBMS in their countries - in the CBMS activities (local organized fora/ workshops/meetings, and in CBMS session of the PEP meetings).” However, these policy context analyses and dissemination strategies lack detail as found in the other TRGs.
\(^\text{21}\) 8 CBMS and 1 MPIA-ISP teams were advised/supervised in policy outreach by their TRG mentors, and 3 teams from Round 1 (2 PMMA and 1 PIERI), involving former PAGE I grantees were considered not to be in need of such mentoring.
\(^\text{22}\) Initially developed with guidance from PEP staff, and then further discussed/revised with the policy outreach mentor once the project is selected.
- 98% believed that future PEP project teams would benefit from “more” interactions with policy outreach mentors.
- 94.5% indicated that it has helped them improve their understanding of the policy implications of research.
- 95% mentioned that it has helped improve the "policy messaging" of the research findings.
- 93% thought that it was instrumental in the success of their policy engagement strategies.
- 90% believed that it has contributed to building long-term capacity for policy-engaged research.

A second instrument within PAGE II to train the researchers in enhancing the policy relevance of their research was the inclusion of a “Policy Day” in the 2019 Annual General Meeting. The “overall objective of this day was to help developing country researchers implement strategies to promote and facilitate the use of evaluation and research-based evidence in policy design in their home countries”. As noted in the Review of Partnerships, the researchers found policy dissemination workshops useful and thought that they should be offered regularly if not more concentrated (possibly as a short course).

3.4 Professional Development

Another key element of PEP’s ambition is to help local experts in their professional development to be able to play a future role in policy debates through high quality research. It will generally be challenging to track career advancement, given the limited length of the PAGE-II programme while advancements take some time to occur. The review, however, established that some researchers benefitted from some career advancements in the period reviewed. Given that a total of 201 researchers have been trained under PAGE II, as many as 55% reported benefiting from the programme in terms of a significant career advancement. This suggests that PEP has been highly successful in terms of building skills, e.g. for professional advancement. This number is based on the teams’ self-reported achievements and supports what we learnt from speaking to the researchers themselves at the Annual General Meeting in Cape Town in May 2019. They clearly view the opportunity to participate in the PAGE II programme as an important professional activity giving them additional skills to succeed in the future.

While the reported benefits in advancement may not entirely be due to the activities of PEP programmes, those related to research collaborations seem to be significant exceptions. The reported achievements showed some researchers indicating that they were commissioned to work in other institutions undertaking similar research as PEP.

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23 PAGE II has therefore identified and monitored as indicator the number of researchers who benefit from significant career advancement (posting, promotion, or award) partly due to their involvement in PAGE II, leading to increased policy influence. Here the target was 97 researchers and a total of 110 was achieved (see logframe impact indicator 2).

24 Since 2013, PEP’s M&E system tracks all events related to career advancement via the projects’ technical report updates, completed periodically by individual researchers throughout the course of the projects – as condition to releasing grant payments. The respondents must state whether the event is, at least in part, due to the experience of the PEP project/training. If not, then the event is not compiled in our stats. If it is, then the questionnaire requires a detailed explanation of how it has contributed.
Some of these developments must be properly validated. One possible way of doing this is to prevail on the researchers to acknowledge the particular PEP programme that they were participants of in their research output; for instance, in the research papers that are disseminated. Another option is to strengthen the PEP alumni network further. This also allows for easier tracking of the careers of PEP researchers over time. Indeed, as indicated in the Review of Partnerships, it is important for PEP to continue tracking its alumni, to observe career advancement not only during or right after PAGE II but also thereafter.\textsuperscript{25} Also the possibility of a systematic (impact evaluation) study should be explored even if attribution is nontrivial. But, given that PEP has funded 300+ projects and 1000+ local researchers by now, there is a lot of data to work with and it should be possible to develop an evaluation approach with some promise, even if not perfect.

From the review, it was not very clear whether the researchers that participated in the PAGE-II programmes came from academic institutions or non-academic institutions. The academic researchers tend to have a higher incentive to publish, and the policy aspect may not be very robust. A good blend of academic and non-academic (policy analysts) is often useful in such circumstances. We know this is already the case for some TRGs.\textsuperscript{26}

### 3.5 Institutional Capacity Enhancement

PAGE II also aims at enhancing institutional capacity in target countries to promote research excellence, south-south collaboration and collaborative work with PEP and other institutions in development policy research in beneficiary countries. Two contributions are envisaged here, namely from individual researchers and from institutional grants.

We must note that understanding the extent to which individual researchers and institutional grants are helping to build research capacity at the institutional level in target countries is quite tricky. First, the effects may not be realized immediately, as consideration must be given to the long-term effects. Second, it again depends on whether the researchers in the required institutions are in a position to promote research excellence and research collaborations.

Through self-assessments, PEP researchers have indicated whether they have shared or transferred research-related knowledge, skills or competences gained through this PEP project to peers in the country. For all PAGE II (Round 1 and 2) projects, Table 4 reports the percentages of the researchers indicating that there was a transfer of skills by type of transfer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th align="left">Table 4. Transfer of PEP skills to non-PEP researchers/institutions (% of researchers/ projects*)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td align="left">Provide mentoring and/or training to peers (i.e. other researchers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td align="left">– for scientific knowledge/skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td align="left">– for policy outreach/communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td align="left">Present and discuss methods with research users*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{25} While PEP’s M&E system allows one to track any events that occur over the course of the project, the tracking ends with the latest activity/grant payment (usually a national policy conference or an international conference presentations). We understand that PEP is currently discussing how to create a system to ensure a more systematic tracking of alumni’s career advancements beyond the end of the project cycle.

\textsuperscript{26} This is so for MPIA, PMMA (Round 3) and PIERI (Hewlett).
Create new research collaborations and partnerships*  
Adoption of new methods (analytical tools/techniques) by local institutions*

| 24% of project teams | 24% of projects |

*These 3 criteria are reported via the consultation and impact forms of the projects’ technical reports – which is filled only once per team (one member responding for the team).

Because no targets were defined for these transfers we do not have a yardstick against which we measure the outcomes in Table 4. It is clear, however, that most of the individual researchers indicated that they have shared their newly acquired PEP skills and research methods with peers and research users, and about half of them have done the same for policy outreach and communication skills. About one quarter reported the creation of new research collaborations and partnerships as a result of PEP capacity building, but this percentage is likely to increase in the near future. The adoption of new methods by local institutions was primarily reported by the CBMS projects which are more institutional in nature by design involving local government units.

Further information from CBMS has made clear that none of the local partner institutions (i.e. local administrations) involved in PAGE II has adopted CBMS methodology so far. CBMS points to the final design papers where prospects for scaling up are discussed. These sections mention discussions with different stakeholders to continue CBMS work but no breakthroughs are reported. This experience suggests that the current modality of supporting two rounds of small CBMS projects may not be the most effective way to change monitoring systems in a country.

In terms of institutional capacity enhancement, PAGE II identified and monitored as indicator the number of grants provided to qualified institutions for building and “institutionalizing” new expertise in Macroeconomic Policy Modelling (see logframe indicator 1.7). The target was one project and this was met through an institutional grant of 100K USD for a Mongolia institutional project. Initially a second grant was envisioned, but the Board expressed serious concerns about the Mongolia institutional project and preferred to not go ahead with plans for a second such grant. In particular, the project was found to be too focused on a single methodology (CGE) and there was also concern that it did not emphasize academic output sufficiently.27

Even though PEP managed only one institutional grant under the PAGE-II programme, we believe that an increase in these types of projects must be encouraged, especially for LFC research institutions.28 PEP can take advantage of collaborations to offer training to some more of such institutions to enhance their chances of taking up some of PEP’s future proposals.

27 “The objective should not be to institutionalize a single technique (such as the CGE modeling effort), but enhance the capability of the institution to respond to the policy needs of the country and policy-makers” to “ensure that the appropriate technical instruments and models are used to address the relevant policy issues at hand...not build a model whatever the research question was” (as quoted by ED in personal communication).
28 We have been made aware that PEP has grappled with this subject before. While we recognise that it would require very careful and thoughtful argumentation to reorient PEP towards some institutional focus, and that it would require significant amounts of funding, we note that funding agencies are also likely to be interested in institutional development. Indeed, building the capacity of individuals is not necessarily in competition with building the capacity of institutions. They could easily go together.
Another possible option is to collaborate with local institutions already undertaking training in economic policy management. There are quite a few of these institutions in developing countries, and some of them already have some donor funding.

### 3.6 Focus on Gender Equity

Per the PAGE II proposal, “PEP projects aim for high level of participation of female researchers and predominantly mentoring and supervision of young researchers, therefore all PAGE II indicators are gender- and age group disaggregated where applicable”. Also, all teams must have a minimum of 50% female researchers and PEP carefully monitors their participation in all research activities. We saw earlier in Table 3 the extent of female participation in research and training. Based on the most recent reports to donors we have the following detailed reported gender breakdowns by PEP:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Participation of female researchers, target and achievement</th>
<th>Percentage female Target</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team leaders</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers involved</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of researchers who participated in PEP online training courses (output indicator 1.1)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers who participated in a PEP (in class) training workshop (output indicator 1.2)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers who participated in a study visit (output indicator 1.3)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers who participated in conducting policy analysis using cutting edge methodologies under the supervision/mentoring of PEP resource persons (output indicator 1.4)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers who have participated in the design and implementation of policy engagement and research communication strategies under the supervision/mentoring of Policy Outreach Committee members (output indicator 1.5)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers who have learned how to use/apply new tools/methodologies for policy analysis, and to conduct research in consultation with policy stakeholders (outcome indicator 1)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers who experience important career advancement, exposure and/or increased involvement in policy processes at the national level, as a result of their PEP-PAGE project (impact indicator 2)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 above shows that women participants constituted half or more of the total, except for the team leaders (39%) and researchers who participate in a study visit (38%). Furthermore, 46% of the projects focus primarily on gender-related issues.

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29 PEP-PAGE II programme. Progress report. March 2, 2020
PAGE II also provides small grants (of US$20-66K) to PEP Research Fellows to enhance research capacity and support publication of high quality research outputs. The total number of research fellows is 20 currently, of which 9 are female. A total of 9 Research Fellows benefitted from a PEP grant (output indicator 1.6), of which 7 were female.

The number of research papers accepted for publication in highly regarded peer-reviewed journals and other relevant publications (recognized in Research Excellence Framework system) stood at 23. This figure refers to publications based on research supported as part of previous PEP programmes, such as PAGE I or STAARS. The participation of female researchers as co-authors in these publications stands at 40%.

Apart from aiming for a high level of participation of female researchers, PAGE II is also aiming at “predominantly mentoring and supervision of young researchers”. Given that the logframe indicators are not broken down by age, we asked the GS to provide additional information on the age distributions, which is reported in the next table. This shows that PAGE II researchers are on average in their mid-thirties. Considering that most researchers in developing countries finish their PhDs in their early 30s, this suggests that PAGE II is aiming, on average, at researchers at the start of their post-PhD careers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team leaders</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All researchers</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female researchers</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Age at time of project selection

While teams often include researchers in their twenties, this is not always the case. Reviewing our sample of PAGE II projects, we noted for instance that one of the teams was relatively mature with the youngest researcher being 36 years old (with a PhD from 2010) (PIERI 12942). The outputs of this team were also very top rated in terms of scientific quality and policy relevance. Nevertheless, it may have been good to require all teams to add some younger researchers to enhance capacity building and peer learning.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{30} One may argue that experience rather than age matters. Age, however, is especially relevant when considering the long-term returns to capacity building.
4. Policy Engagement and Research Communication

This last part of the PAGE II review evaluates the extent to which the programme has been able to deliver on its commitments in terms of policy engagement and research communication? One of the pre-eminent objectives of PEP activities has always been the provision of contextualized policy solutions and to positively impact the formulation of policies in developing countries, and research teams have been required to substantiate the policy relevance of their research in the proposal and to develop and implement a policy engagement strategy.

The PAGE II programme aims at further intensifying activities in support of this objective. Various new instruments were developed and put in place, including the introduction of a Policy Outreach Committee, two mandatory workshops (a policy outreach workshop and a communication workshop), the requirement that research teams put together a “policy influence plan” with a detailed description of the policy consultation and dissemination strategy and careful monitoring and evaluation of their corresponding milestones, and the introduction of a new blog.

The commitments under policy engagement involve three components, namely policy research design and evidence-informing policy, policy outreach, targeted research communication, and continuous policy engagement, each with the following indicators:31

1. Policy research design and evidence-informing policy:
   ✓ Number of research projects designed/conducted in direct consultation with local/national policy makers or stakeholders for inputs.
   ✓ Use of research finding and reliable research evidence to assist in policy dialogues and debates to facilitate policy formulation, reform or implementation in favour of inclusive growth, employment and/or women's economic empowerment.

2. Policy outreach and targeted research communication:
   ✓ Composition and engagement (number of policy briefs, meetings, interactions, technical media articles on PAGE-supported research, national and regional policy conferences, blogs) with local policymakers and other intended research users during the project cycle.

3. Continuous policy engagement:
   ✓ Researchers who participate in follow-up policy analysis in related areas partly due to their involvement in this initiative.

We now discuss the results of our review for each component in turn.

4.1 Policy Research Design and Evidence-Informing Policy

PAGE II has identified and monitored two indicators for “policy research design and evidence-informing policy”. First, the number of research projects designed/conducted in direct consultation with local/national policy makers or stakeholders for inputs. The target was all 46

31 According to the PAGE II proposal and the TOR there are 5 components but, we grouped them into three.
PAGE II projects and this was achieved (see logframe indicator 3.1). Second, the use of research finding and reliable research evidence to assist in policy dialogues and debates to facilitate policy formulation, reform or implementation in favour of inclusive growth, employment and/or women’s economic empowerment. The target was 23 occurrences, and PEP reports 26 (see logframe impact indicator 1).

While this suggests that PAGE II has achieved (and exceeded) the targets, we use our sample of PAGE II projects for further analysis. Within PAGE II, research teams design a Policy Context Analysis (PCA) at the beginning of their projects with advice from the policy outreach mentor. This analysis includes three steps, namely (i) background or context analysis, (ii) stakeholder analysis, and (iii) public perception of issue and/or current policy. These analyses seem to be thoroughly done and highly informative of the policy context surrounding each proposal. Also as part of the PCA, policy stakeholders are being consulted. Moreover, we note that many of the projects involve key policy stakeholders as part of the research team.

We would like to make two observations, however. First, the PCA suggests that there will be an “Interim stage review”, including a review of the initial “stakeholder matrix”, a readjustment of the “target list for dissemination”, and the introduction of a “basic cost-benefit analysis ... of your policy recommendations”. This has not been implemented, however, due to budget limitations for POC mentorship/review. Also, as explained by PEP to us, the CBA turned out to be a more complex issue than anticipated – even for the POC mentors – and so was left aside for R1-R2. We understand that all of this has now been resolved with the R3 approach through increased POC mentorship and the development of a policy paper (analysis including CBA) following detailed instructions - both in writing and during the 3-day policy engagement workshop in Senegal.

Our second observation is that there are no policy context analyses for the CBMS projects. According to the CBMS RD, these can be found in the design papers which “include a background on local governance structure where decision making /planning is done” and “papers usually also include a review of existing monitoring systems”. However, these sections in our random sample of projects do not provide an analysis of the local policy context. For instance, CBMS 19956 discusses various nationwide agricultural policies as examples of monitoring systems. A list of stakeholders is indeed provided (“Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Water, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, NGO: Women, Democracy and Development”, etc.), but their roles and interactions in the local context remain unclear.

The lack of a serious policy context analysis at CBMS is unfortunate. Such analysis could force researchers to identify the actual local need for data and why this would affect policies (theory of change). For instance, one of the CBMS projects intends to “produce data as inputs to the preparation of local development plans” (proposal CBMS 19956), but it remains unclear over which local policies local authorities, farmer associations, village development committees, etc. have discretionary power within the context studied, and who are the key influencers in this respect.

To evaluate whether the evidence produced by PAGE II research is informing policy, we also analysed our sample of projects in more detail. Out of the sample of 12 projects, 7 are reported to have assisted in policy dialogues and debates to facilitate policy formulation, reform or
implementation in favour of inclusive growth, employment and/or women's economic empowerment. In some cases, the researchers got involved in making policy. Table 7 below reports how the indicator has been met in these cases.

These examples show that in most of the cases (6 out of 8) the evidence of the project generated a debate on policy-relevant issues and/or policies. In two cases, government officials/experts indicated an interest to utilise the skills learnt in the future, but it is not clear whether this has happened subsequently.

**Table 7. Examples of evidence-informing policy**

- Local experts at the municipal level were trained on the CBMS approach and plan to adopt it.
- Higher and lower local government officials in Katakwi district showed willingness and received training on how to collect data and utilise the results under the CBMS approach.
- The study findings aroused a debate on the role of SMEs and the relevance of skills training in enhancing the performance of SMEs.
- The study findings aroused a debate on the state of the local agricultural sector and the inclusion of the youth
- Presentation of the study findings aroused an intense debate on the impacts of the various government policies/programmes including the Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) programme, that have been introduced into the agricultural sector for growth and gainful employment
- A policy dialogue on productive use of remittances and the welfare of migrant households ensued
- The study findings aroused a debate on issues from measurements to the impact of urbanization. Another debate point was about whether the government should invest on secondary towns or mega cities
- Some team members being appointed to sub-committees working on policy and legislative issues related to their research works; as well as course on applied econometrics for policy makers

Source: TR_key IS stats_results_Aug2019.xlsx

A sample of PAGE II ‘impact stories’ for 13 projects selected by PEP shows that in most cases the project findings inform decisions. In a few cases, the project led to even more direct policy influence, especially the participation in an ongoing policy discussion group set up by the Ministry for SMEs and Employment Promotion in Benin and inclusion of findings by the Commissioner’s for the Protection of Citizens in her annual equality report to Parliament in Serbia. Some other impact stories state that local policy initiatives are taken in line with the PEP findings (‘current agricultural subsidy programme is likely to be reoriented … as per PEP team’s recommendations’, ‘findings … have been readily accepted’, ‘team’s findings … would be assimilated’, ‘staff would use the team’s findings’, etc.), but it remains hard to assess the extent to which PEP’s findings have changed the actual policy debate/direction.

These lead us to two other observations. First, the PAGE II projects appear to be most effective when informing policy dialogue and debates, but it is unclear whether they have had any impact on policies themselves in all but a few cases. It is interesting that this also seems to hold for CBMS projects, which are presented as “action research” (see the Review of Partnerships). One issue here is that the impact of research on actual policy is both complex and takes time, and therefore attribution will be difficult in most cases. The fact that project teams do often include key policy stakeholders can be expected to enhance the policy impact of the projects, however.

Second, PEP monitors and evaluates the policy impact of the PAGE II research on the basis of the technical reports submitted by the research teams themselves. As noted, research teams design a Policy Context Analysis at the beginning of their projects, and policy-makers are consulted during (or at least at the onset of) the project. But, there seems not to be a feedback loop from policy-makers to PEP after the project has been completed. How do policy-makers view the relevance of the PAGE II research? Do they think it has significantly increased the evidence? Do they think this had any impact on the actual policies so far? How could the project have been done differently to enhance policy impact according to them? Answering these questions will require targeted engagement with policymakers in a review like this one relying on a survey.

4.2 Policy Outreach and Targeted Research Communication

In terms of policy outreach and targeted research communication an impressive array of activities has been reported for the PAGE II program in the most recent progress report. The table below suggests that PAGE II is doing well in terms of policy outreach and research communication, also considering that the project is still running. For instance, while 41 teams have discussed their findings with policy-makers, the remaining five were planning to host their PEP-sponsored national conferences in March. They had to be postponed until when the COVID-19 situation in the specific countries improves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of policy briefs approved for publication (outcome indicator 2)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings discussed with policy stakeholders (outcome indicator 3)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In public events</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In private advisory meetings</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects in national news media (press, television, radio) (outcome indicator 3)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While 39 teams organized public events for dissemination, 29 of these included (PEP-sponsored) national policy conferences, and 8 CBMS projects presented in the context of validation or knowledge-sharing events with stakeholders.

33 The CBMS Kenya project did identify an eligible beneficiary to a particular government program who had been excluded. This was corrected by the local administration during the CBMS validation activity.

34 A standard short survey questionnaire to be completed by participants at all NPCs might already give some insights but, probably more in-depth interviews are also needed, say, one year after a project is completed.
A total of 49 policy briefs were prepared, edited, and approved. The total number of downloads of the 40 policy briefs that were published online so far was 6,000, i.e. each policy brief was downloaded 150 times on average (as of March 16 2020).

Also, a remarkable number of projects were covered in national media (press, television, radio), namely 29 projects. Table 9 below shows the percentage of projects that have been reported across different media, by TRG. On average, two-thirds of the projects received media coverage, but there are remarkable differences across the TRGs, varying from a low of 25% for CBMS projects to 82% for PMMA projects. This suggests that CBMS projects have either attracted less interest from media outlets or CBMS research projects were relatively weak and/or ineffective in terms of their media engagement strategies. While we cannot assess the former, we think that the latter has played a role here. As we noted before, CBMS projects lack the detailed policy context analyses and dissemination plans as developed in other TRGs. Also, CBMS teams were advised/supervised in policy outreach by their TRG mentors, while most other TRG teams benefitted from being assigned a mentor from the new PEP Policy Outreach Committee. Having a specialized mentorship service around outreach has probably encouraged the non-CBMS teams to focus more on media outreach.

Table 9. Reporting of project results in media, by channel (percent of projects)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRG</th>
<th>Press (newspapers)</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Television</th>
<th>Web</th>
<th>Any Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBMS</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPIA</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIERI</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>48</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>66</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

PEP has not monitored the extent to which research teams have made payments to media as part of their dissemination strategy. This is standard practice in many developing countries, including travel allowances and per diems, and this may make actual media coverage a noisy signal of genuine media interest. Probably it would be a good idea for PEP, and especially its POC, to develop a policy on payments to media, especially considering the increasing emphasis on research impact.

4.3 Continuous Policy Engagement

The PAGE II programme is committed to continuous policy engagement, indicated by the extent to which (former) PAGE II researchers participate in follow-up policy analysis in related areas partly due to their involvement in this initiative. Two achievements can be noted in this respect. First, 80% of the PAGE II researchers (160 out of 201) are already using tools from the PEP Toolbox in other (parallel) policy research work. This suggests that participation in PAGE II has supported these researchers to continue doing policy research, or at the very least in the absence of a counterfactual, that they are eager to utilize the tools they are learning. Second,

According to the CBMS RD, “tapping the media at the stage of the CBMS projects is not a priority in the target channels of dissemination.”
41% of the projects (19 out of 46) have resulted in successful grant applications, due (at least in part) to the experience gained through the PAGE II project, suggesting that there is also a strong demand for the skills taught within the PAGE II programme 36.

Of course, these reported achievements could be overstated as they are based on self-assessments and without the possibility of observing counterfactuals. Researchers are being asked by PEP about the utilisation and impact of skills acquired through PEP, and we cannot exclude the occurrence of some kind of ‘gift exchange’. However, considering the scope, intensity, and quality of PEP’s (and PAGE II) grants-plus approach, we consider it unlikely that such biases will be able to explain away the reported achievements and that they are therefore real.

5. The Changing Environment for PAGE II Research: COVID 1937

Since we began this review, the world has changed in a very dramatic way that will have significant impact on how PAGE II research is done. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic is certainly going to affect the capacity of researchers and their mentors to engage fully in the activities that they have planned. As nations have experienced the pandemic in different ways, they have also responded in different ways, with varying debates about “health versus economics”. In many places, schools and universities were closed early and restrictions on all social gatherings were put in place. Some countries were interested in early lockdowns, while others were slow to consider it. In some countries that had lockdowns, this was limited to specific cities, while others had a nationwide approach. Some countries provided various forms of relief to vulnerable people, while others did not think it was essential or could simply not afford it. Some also extended assistance in a more universal manner. Some took care of businesses, including small businesses. Many did not. The approaches have varied and so will the outcomes, both in the short term and in the long term.

There are several questions that immediately pop up:

- What are the obstacles that will hinder the effective conduct of research as a result of concerns about disease spread and infection, restrictions on movement of people, limitations on gathering of people and social distancing, etc? Will access to data be significantly affected? Can workshops be organised? Will policymakers have time for researchers? Will universities and research institutions be open and supportive of research?
- How will the environment for the conduct of research be affected by people’s perceptions of changing personal or individual priorities?
- Does the COVID-19 pandemic introduce new issues of interest in relation to the PEP and PAGE II priorities? Do lockdowns work and at what cost? Is social protection being redefined? Has unemployment changed in scope and definition? Will working from home be the new norm and how will it affect productivity? What is the scope for new growth after significant collapse in demand and commodity prices, with no clear sense

36 Section 4.1 of the PAGE II report (highlights).
37 Even though this discussion falls outside of the Terms of Reference, we consider an introduction to the subject to be useful for a discussion of the way forward after this review.
of how long it will last? What is likely to be the long-term effect of the pandemic on economies and how should this affect the priorities of PEP?

- If national policy priorities change in view of the pandemic, what will be the best way for PEP to respond?

We believe it will be important for PEP to factor into all discussions of PAGE II the likely effects of the various national responses on work that is currently going on, and also how the research programme is going to adjust its priorities to deal with the new normal in most countries. The future of the research programme is going to be affected in very significant ways, especially as researchers begin to pay attention to what policies work best in a pandemic situation and what will be most effective in the long-term post pandemic era.

6. Summary and Conclusion

The review is to assess whether PEP has delivered on what it set out to do with respect to PAGE II in three distinct areas. These were (a) policy research, (b) capacity building and promotion of southern expertise, (c) policy engagement and research communication. We did this review by comparing what the actual outputs were against an agreed target figure or indicator.

Under policy research, we looked at scientific quality of research, policy relevance and research innovation. Looking at the numbers of peer-reviewed publications in PEP WP series, publications in highly regarded peer-reviewed journals, as well as presentations at international conferences, we conclude that PEP has more than achieved set targets. We looked at a sample of 12 projects closely across the different TRGs and observed that the scientific quality of research was generally high, even if there were some variations across them. PEP has good reason to be proud of the quality of work coming out of PAGE II, despite the fact that some projects and their researchers need to pay greater attention to the presentation of their analysis and results. The relevance of most projects was also ahead of the target. Researchers needed to show evidence-based policy recommendations and most of them did more than was expected. The most significant innovation has been in the development of three bilingual online courses as well as the update of the trademark DASP software.

For capacity building and the promotion of southern expertise, there were six areas of interest, including training delivery, quality of training and mentorship, research and policy integration, professional development, institutional capacity enhancement and focus on gender equity. For all the indicators provided, the performance exceeded, sometimes by far the target set where applicable. There is a strong sense among researchers that the training programme has been beneficial and facilitated their professional development as researchers. In some cases, they have been able to transfer the knowledge gained to others in their countries. The PEP performance on gender equity is certainly commendable as there is generally good balance in most areas. More than half of researchers are female. The lowest female participation rate was 38% for researchers who went on a study visit.

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38 We have been made to understand that PEP has already begun this consideration.
In the area of policy engagement and research communication, we looked into policy research design and evidence-informing policy, policy outreach and targeted research communication, and then continuous policy engagement. We are glad that the targets set for policy research design and evidence-informing policy were achieved. There is no doubt that considerable effort goes into bringing research to the attention of policymakers. What is still not clear is how much of that research actually goes into policy, despite the interest shown by the latter. We see evidence of significant policy outreach and the production of targeted research communication, including 48 policy briefs. In terms of engagement with different types of media, we observed the role of newspapers, radio, television, worldwide web, and any other media. The level of engagement varied by TRG with MPIA having the most newspaper mentions, while PMMA led by far appearance on national television. There are strong indications that PEP researchers continue to apply tools they acquired from the network even when they are done with their PEP projects.

This review has shown a very positive set of activities and associated outputs from PAGE II. There is no doubt that the targets that were set for each of the components have been achieved, sometimes well beyond what was expected. This is certainly commendable and can be attributed to a well-designed set of interventions and solid management of these from the GS and the TRGs. For the medium to long term, however, it will be necessary to look beyond the self-assessments and nominal activity targets and begin to focus on in-depth surveys of policy makers and researchers for a more objective assessment of the policy environment.

We do not provide a long list of recommendations at the end as this is not necessary for a project that is going so well. Any necessary changes should be in the form of tweaking already well-functioning arrangements, and our suggestions for doing that in relation to quality of research and training have been made in those sections.

39 PEP reports from ‘impact stories’ that for PAGE II, this is so far 53%, up from 33% for PAGE I. The PAGE II impact stories and evidence will be ready in early June.