Many types of organizations, aside from Think Tanks, potentially influence policy processes and content

Think Tanks

- Source of new policy **ideas**
- Most attention on rankings
- Research in Western countries
- Elitist, dated, gender-blind
- Ambiguous & diverse definitions limit understanding of role(s) in knowledge systems
- In 2022 Wellstead & Howlett Introduced the concept of **Knowledge-based Policy Influence Organizations**

https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12528

Policy Influencing Organizations

Knowledge role
- Generate new
- Re-interpret and share
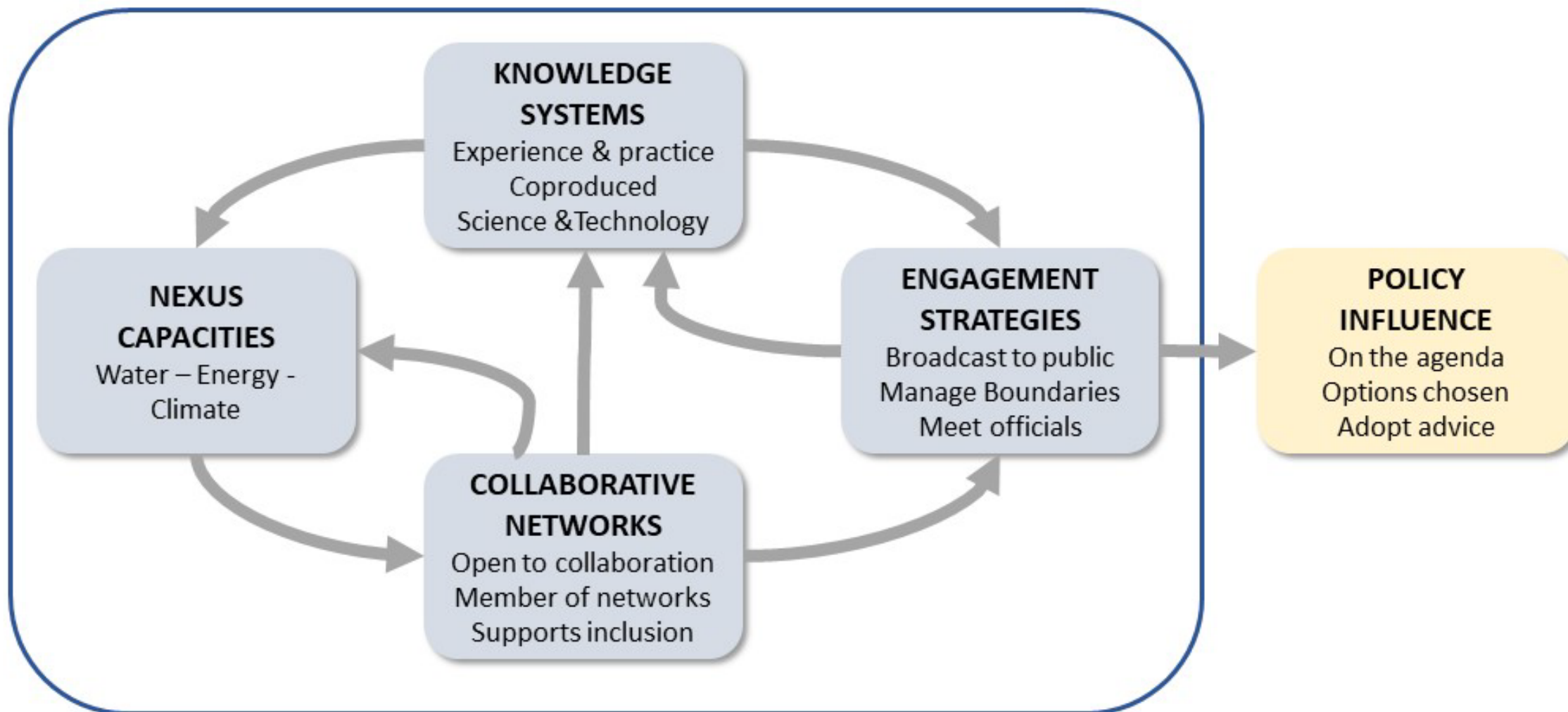- Apply and refine

Knowledge-base:
- Expert scientific / engineering
- Local, practice-based

Policy Advice
- commissioned or unsolicited
- verbal or written
- support or criticize

Policy influence of organizations depends on many things,

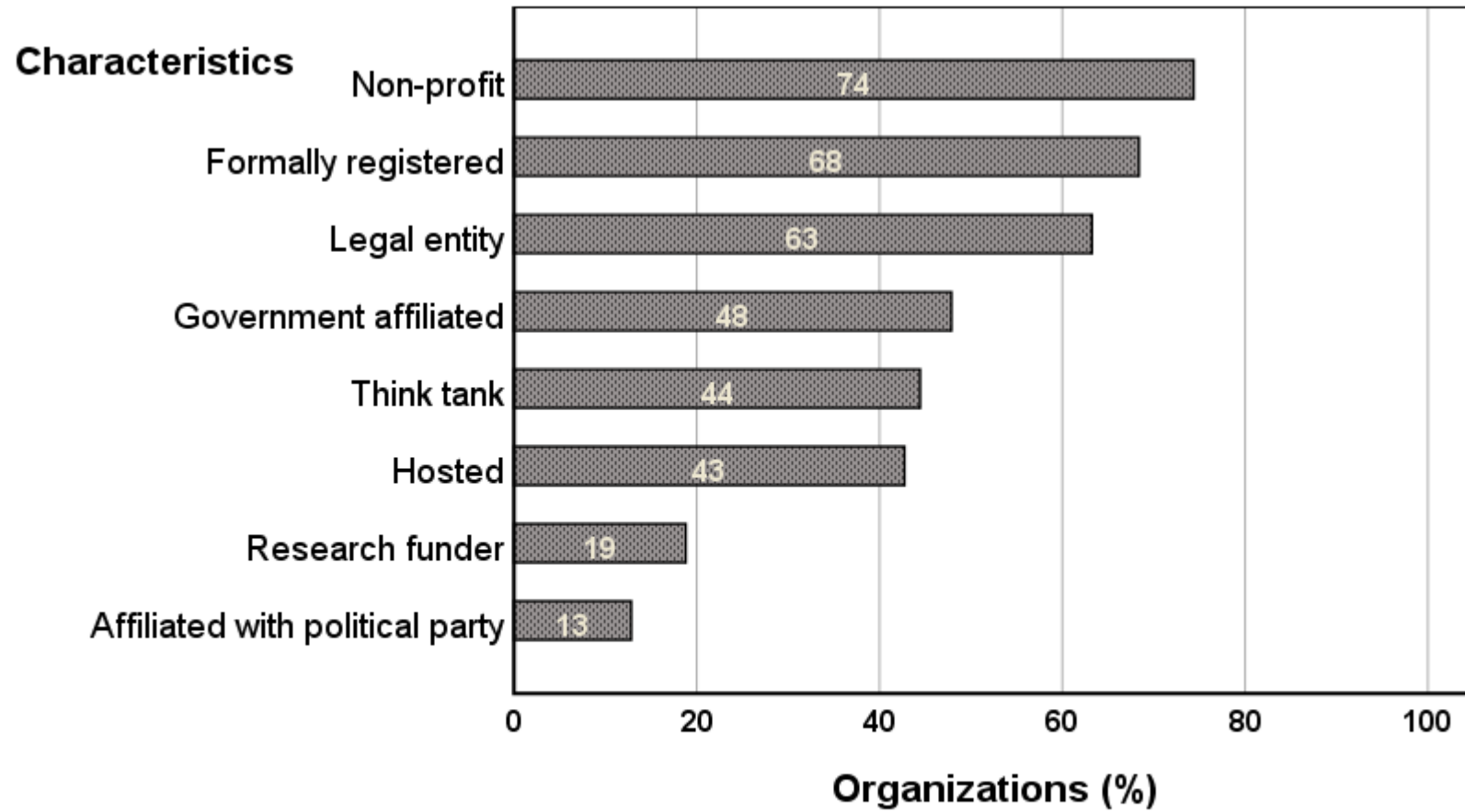# Scoping study survey of Mekong PIOs working in nexus issue areas

Initial objectives

1. **Identify and classify** PIOs working in nexus issue areas

2. Document **engagement strategies**

3. Assess how **influence** policy

4. Document capacity building needs and interest in a regional **alliance**
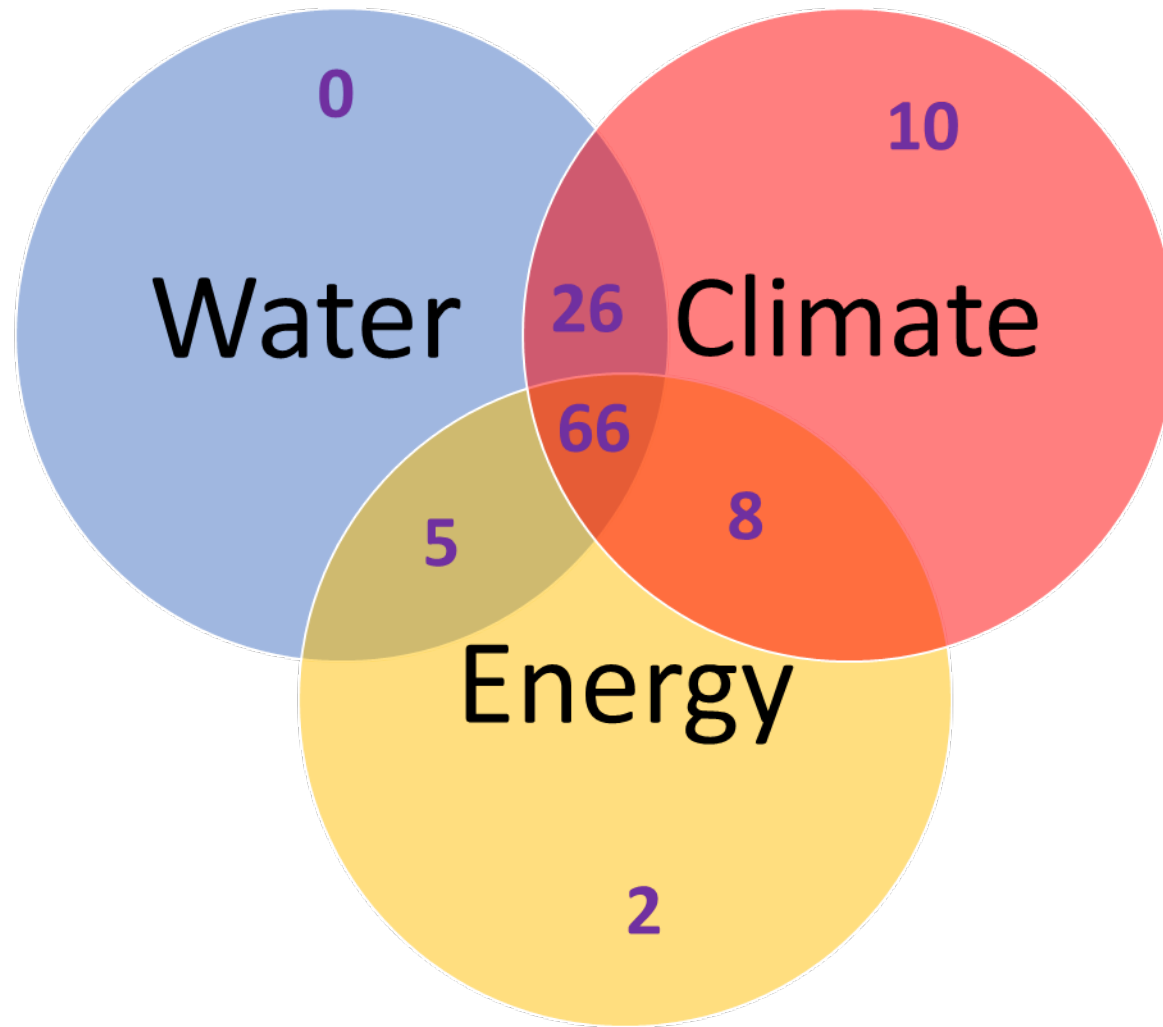
Methods

- Developed questionnaire
- Representative of relevant PIOs identified & invited to participate
- Apply inclusion/exclusion criteria to refine list and dataset
  - 128 completed questionnaires
  - 11 excluded
  - 117 used for analysis
- On-line self-administered

Surveyed organizations in 4 countries were diverse in form, age and size

- 26 % were NGOs/CSOs
- 61% established for 20+ years
- 51% had 50+ staff
- 40% worked in more than one Mekong country
- Mix of organization types varied among countries

GeoScope

Cambodia Laos Thailand Vietnam Regional

Form
- An international organization
- Part of domestic government
- Non-governmental organization (NGO)
- Private company or business
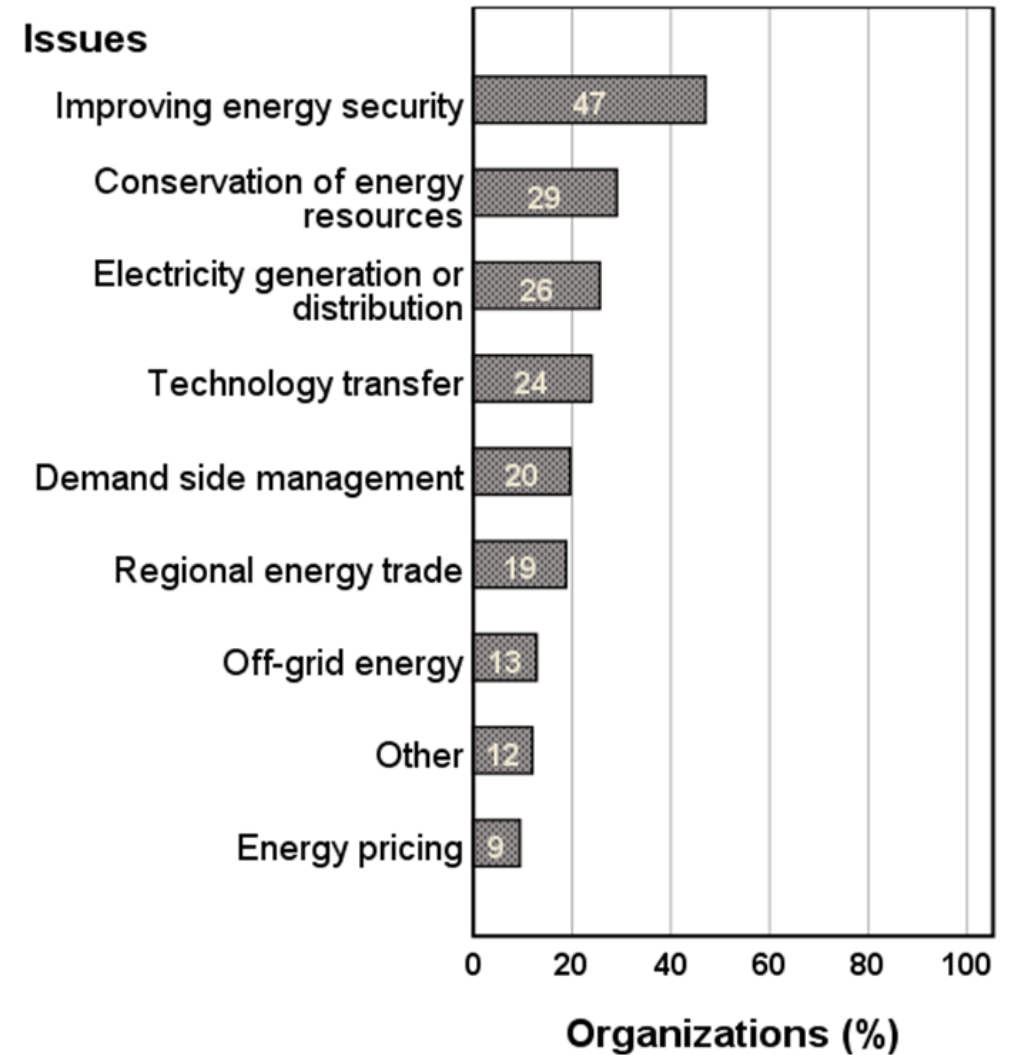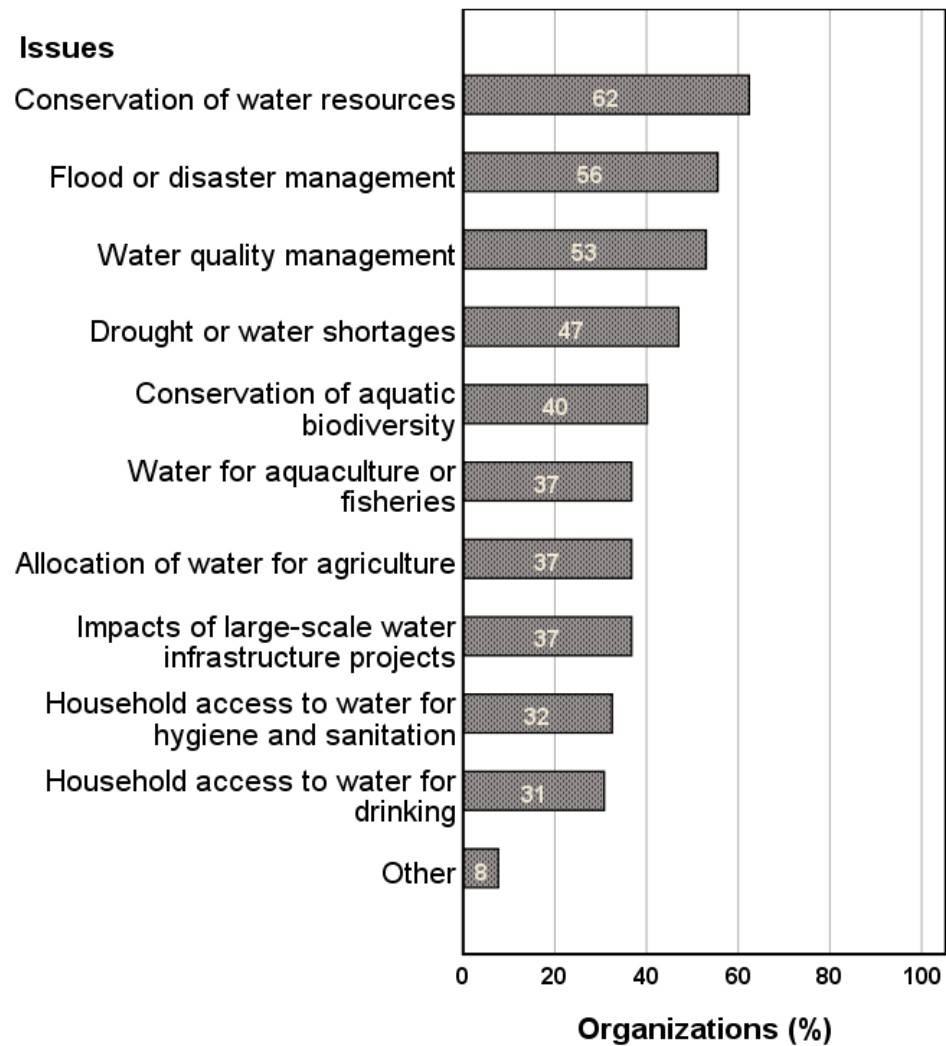- Research institute
- University

A third of PIOs were informal organizations. Almost half considered their organization to be a *Think Tank*.

Two-thirds of surveyed organizations had worked in the three issue domains.

PIOs worked on a variety of water-related issues. There appeared to be fewer organizations and issues energy-related.

Organizational learning was measured as improved effectiveness in aspects of work

Has your organization become more effective (proficient) at the following:

Has your organization changed how it thinks about a policy issue as a result of interacting with other stakeholders?

Communicating and engaging policy stakeholders
Communicating with the wider public on policy issue
Explaining climate change to stakeholders
Identifying entry points for planning or policy inputs
Coordinating work with other organizations and networks

PIO practices and strategies related to knowledge and connections predict organizational learning

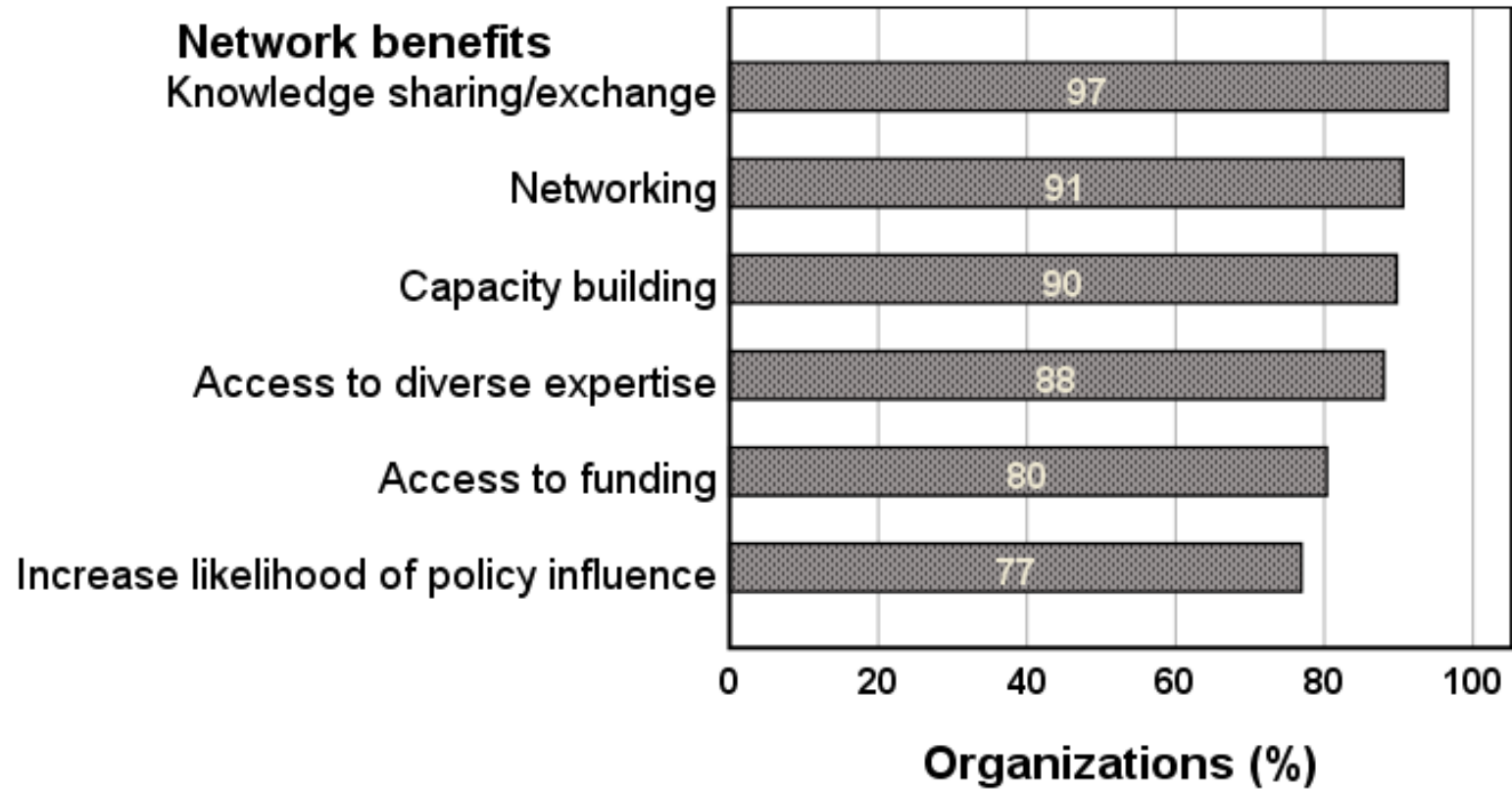| Predictors (number of questions)	Organizational learning B-coefficient & significance
Boundary management score (7)	0.53 ***
Learning Opportunities (10)	0.23 ***
Experience-based knowledge (7)	-0.27 **
Nos. funding sources	0.10 *
Network connected (6)	0.33 **
Openness to collaboration (5)	0.24 *

Model fit: R^2=0.57   * P<.05 ** P<.01 *** P<.001

Predictors of an organization adopting three broad engagement strategies

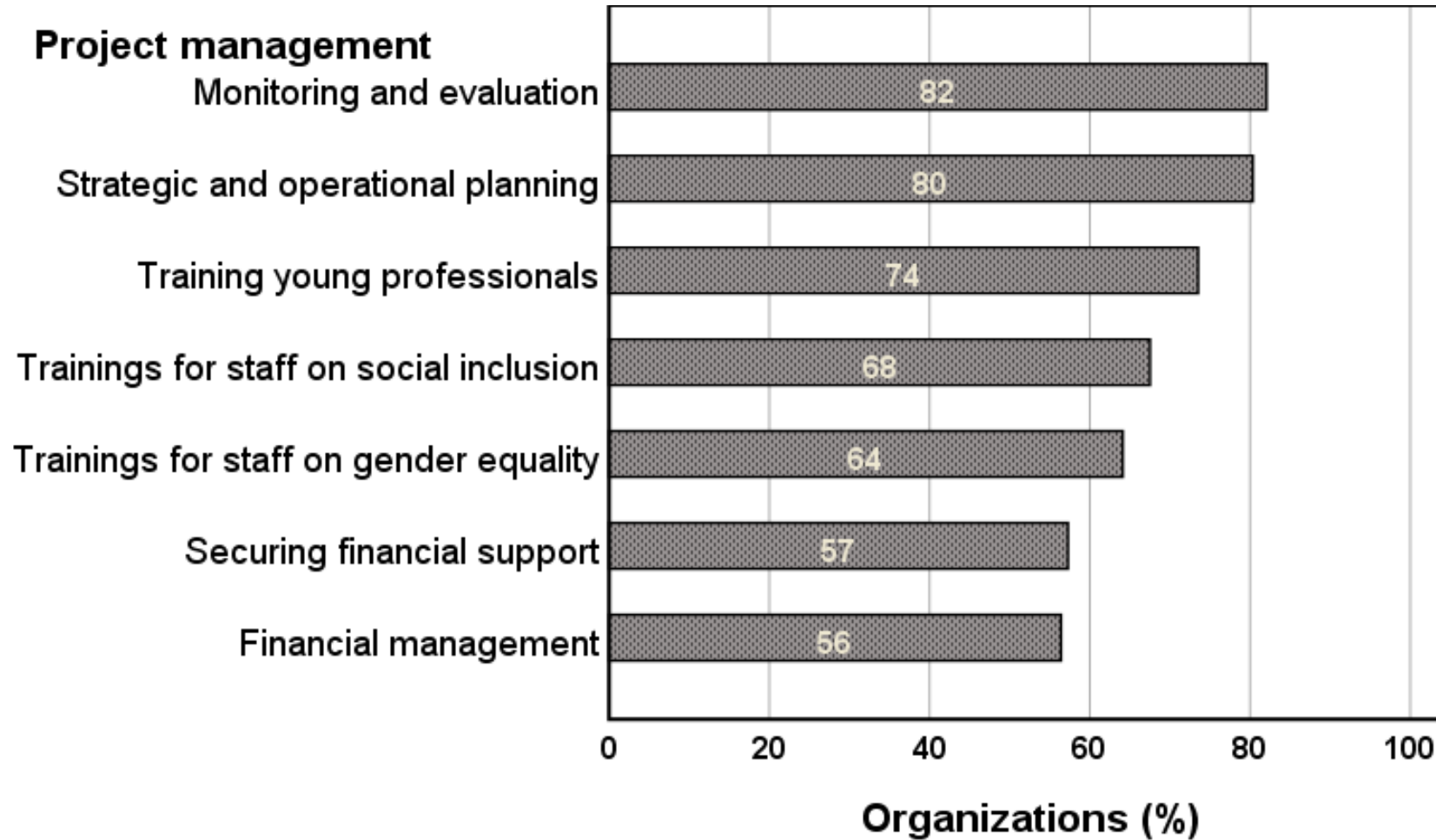| Predictors	Meet Officials Strategy	Broadcast to Public Strategy	Manage boundaries strategy
Learning Opportunities score	0.27 **	-	0.25 ***
Experience-based knowledge score		-	0.51 ***
Network connected score	0.46 ***	-	-
Work on energy - related issues	-	-1.50 ***	-0.47 *
Nos. information sources	-	0.32 ***	-
Non-profit	-	-1.15 *	-

* P<.05 ** P<.01 *** P<.001

Network benefits

PIOs perceived multiple benefits from being a member of a network or alliance

Predictors	Policy Advice Adopted Odds Ratio
Gender equality & social inclusion score	1.39 **
Network connected score	2.20 **
Foreign funding	3.33 *
Work on energy-related issues	3.63 *

Having had policy advice adopted was more likely for PIOs better connected, foreign funded and with gender equality and social inclusion policies in place

Project management

Category	Percentage
Monitoring and evaluation	82
Strategic and operational planning	80
Training young professionals	74
Trainings for staff on social inclusion	68
Trainings for staff on gender equality	64
Securing financial support	57
Financial management	56

Organizations (%)

PIOs needs for capacity building include project management, policy research, and stakeholder engagement themes

The scoping survey has many limitations, leaving plenty of room for future work

Limitations

- Lack of comprehensive sampling frames across sectors and countries meant an *ad hoc* approach was adopted and interpretation made for "*surveyed organizations*" with likely biases

- Sets of questions to measure key factors (like organizational learning) were crude and simple and do not capture much of what is going on

Future work

- More, comparative studies of subsets of more similar PIOs (eg CSOs, faith-based organizations, industry associations)

-

- Detailed qualitative research on knowledge roles of PIOs with attention to learning, engaging and connecting

Despite these limitations, several conclusions and illustrative recommendations can be drawn for program components

Conclusions

- PIOs are aware of the benefits of belonging to networks (alliance)

- PIOs experiences working on water, energy and climate issues puts them in a good position to address the nexus

- PIOs adopted a variety of strategies when engaging officials and other stakeholders on policy and plans

- PIOs are interested in building capacities and professional development

Recommendations

- **Program C1**: expectations of PIOs regarding network benefits should be anticipated in recruitment and design

- **Program C2:** grants should include support for policy studies that focus on interactions in the WEC nexus

- **Program C3**: Organisational strategies and practices on engagement are partially reflected in policy influence

- **Program C4**: involve PIOs as producers and as trainers in activities

Thanks to Co-authors, partner leaders, and advisors for inputs into design of survey instrument, data collection and/or feedback on the findings:

Louis Lebel (leader, presenter)

Phoummixay Siharath

Chau Thi Minh Long

Phimphakan Lebel

Hap Navy

Chayanis Krittasudthacheewa

Chu Thai Hoanh

Boripat Lebel