



Maximizing the benefits of water research to international development – What research programmers can do

To maximize the return on funding investments into water research, it is important that research results are made known to potential users. Evidence suggests, however, that this is rarely the case, due to the gap that exists between those carrying out research and research users, such as practitioners and policy makers. Reasons for this are:

- the value of research is not fully recognized by practitioners and policy makers;
- practitioners and policy makers are not involved in the design or implementation of research, and so researchers do not meet their demands for knowledge; and
- research results are not communicated effectively.

Consequently, research findings may not be known or applied in policy or practice. However, those who finance research can directly influence the degree to which research is used through more effective programme design.

This briefing note summarizes how good practice can be incorporated into programme design through consideration of the research **partnerships**, research management **processes** and research **products**.

Key messages

- Equitable power sharing amongst researchers in the North and the South can be mandated within programme design. This can improve the relevance and ownership of results
- Systematic analysis and early engagement of stakeholders ensures effective research networking and that demands for research evidence are articulated and met
- Long term collaboration between research stakeholders supports capacity development
- Effective communication is a prerequisite for the use of research findings, and a funded dissemination strategy should be integral to proposals
- The influence of research on policy making can be measured by outcome and impact assessment

Main recommendations

Long term planning

Ensure long term planning for research partnerships to develop their full potential. Transparency on funding helps programmes to plan, with a positive impact on research programmes in developing countries. Long-term funding is a prerequisite for effective links between national regional networks and institutions.

Stakeholder involvement

Support demand-led research agendas and increase their social relevance by making stakeholder participation a prerequisite for funding. The gap between research programmers and potential users can be bridged through funder and stakeholder representation in research governance, and active participation of programmers in multi-stakeholder dialogues or platforms.

Capacity development

Require capacity development components in research, to develop stakeholder capacity to facilitate the uptake of results, and for southern partners to administer research programmes.

Effective communication

Require plans for systematic communication of research, with funds dedicated to scoping and planning activities. The aggregation of results can strengthen evidence in support of policy development.

Monitoring and evaluation

Support the need to monitor and evaluate research outcomes and impact, including non-academic impact.

Partnerships matter: Ensuring more equal North-South research partnerships

Establishing research partnerships between organizations in the North and the South can be an equitable way of channelling research funding. Challenges exist, however, which research programmers can help to alleviate:

- North – South partnerships are often northern-driven, with an unequal share of responsibility. Research programmers can require a stakeholder analysis and collaboration based on an equal research partnership
- Expectations by research programmers can provide a strong incentive for achieving capacity strengthening impact for southern researchers. Complicated administrative procedures are required by the different EU Member State funders. This imposes a high burden on developing countries and diverts efforts away from the research. Simplifying and harmonizing these procedures can reduce this
- Guaranteed long term funding of research partnerships allows them to achieve their potential impacts. EU funders can implement national funding and co-funding schemes and provide a dialogue platform for programme formulation.

Piloting southern-led partnerships

Initiatives outside the water and sanitation sector show that southern-led research partnerships avoid asymmetric power relations and strengthen research management capacities in the South. DANIDA is currently piloting collaborative research on climate issues in Tanzania and Vietnam. The southern partner is in charge of problem identification, proposal development and project management, with the Danish partners invited as equal participants with local partners. With decision-making power held in the South, research is more likely to be based on local demand and to contribute to the development of local research management capacities.

See DANIDA (2008) at

<http://www.danidadevforum.um.dk/>

Processes matter: Improving research management

Good research management is vital to achieve scientific excellence and to ensure that research has a positive impact. However, SPLASH has identified a serious

lack of knowledge about good research management, including programming, implementation, communication and evaluation. Research programmers can stimulate improvements in this by the following:

- Funding scheme criteria can include strategic and operational goals, stakeholder participation, consultative research procedures, effective communication and dissemination of research, and outcome and impact evaluation
- The use of research management instruments ensures good practice. Staff training in the use of these instruments helps to formulate clear strategic and operational research objectives
- Commission research which anticipates strategically important concerns in advance of political decisions
- Relations with independent policy research institutions in developing countries can be fostered, e.g., through Think Tanks
- Research programmes can engage with intermediaries to use local dissemination mechanisms providing end-users with cost-effective and appropriate materials. It can also result in capacity strengthening for intermediary organizations and better cooperation with EU partners.

Products matter: Ensuring development impact and outcomes

Effective communication is a prerequisite for maximizing the use of research and its development impact, but it is often not integrated into research funding schemes. As non-academic outcomes of research cannot be measured through peer reviewed publications, research programmers can require detailed outcome monitoring as evidence of the poverty impact of programmes.

Dissemination check list

- Evidence of systematic communication of research through a dissemination strategy (at least 10% of total budget)
- Findings published and available free of charge in hard copy or as downloadable documents
- Links between research and potential intermediary institutions, which can improve the use of research for development
- Reporting systems include monitoring and evaluation of dissemination.

Further information

This is one of a series of SPLASH briefing notes available on the SPLASH website www.splash-era.net If you would like to receive the quarterly SPLASH newsletter 'Making a SPLASH' please go to www.splash-era.net/enquiries.php

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