



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Research for Better Aid

An Office of Development Effectiveness Evaluation

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Evaluation question

To what extent is the Australian aid program managing its investment in research appropriately, effectively and efficiently?

- **Nature of research investments**
- **'Value' (uptake) of research investments**
- **Factors helping & hindering research uptake**



Evaluation approach

Strategies and policies, expenditure data, 9 case studies, interviews, focus groups, survey

173 DFAT staff & external stakeholders

Analytical framework

- **Appropriateness / Effectiveness / Efficiency**
- **Demand / Supply / Intermediaries / Enabling Environment**

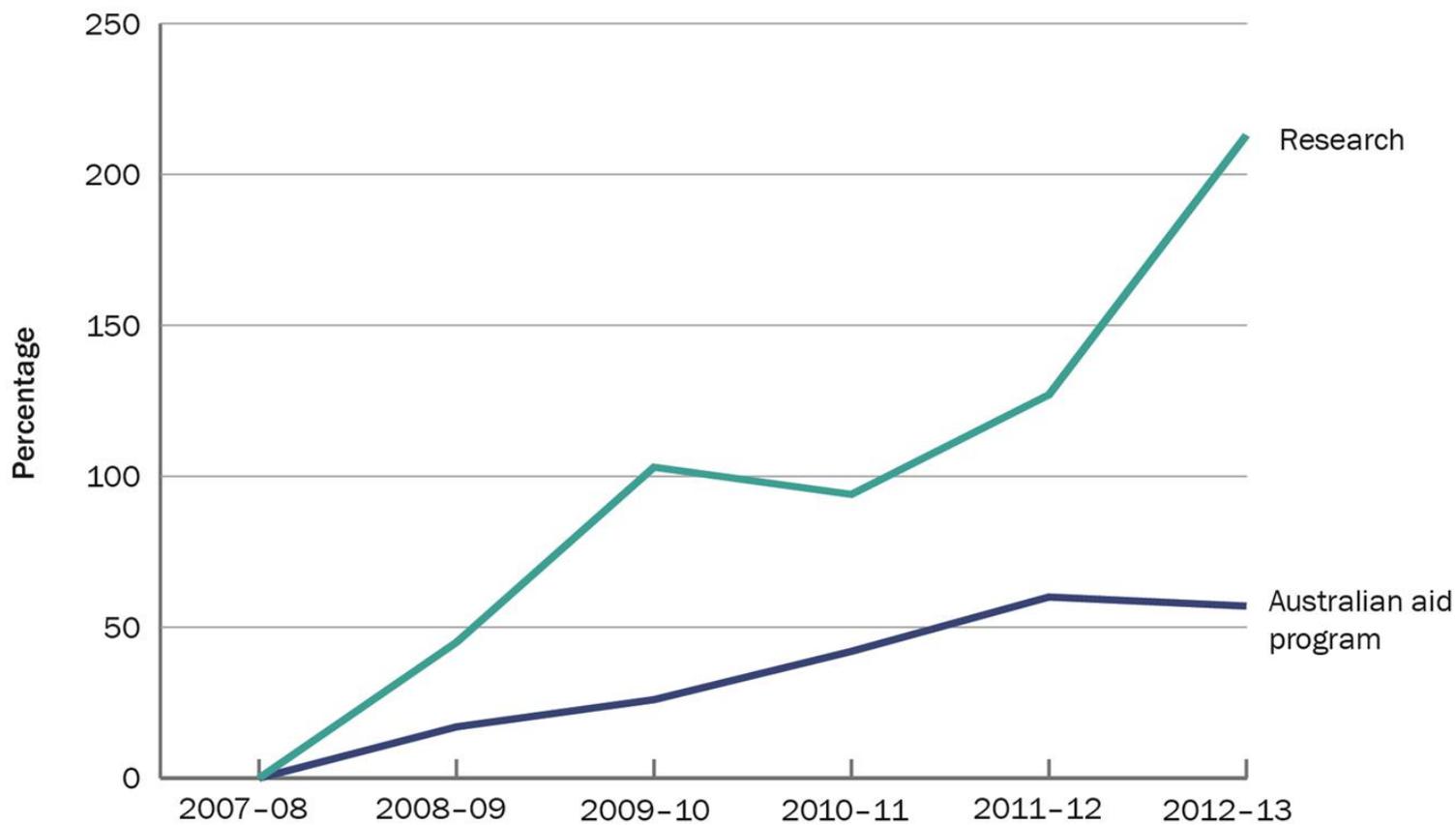
Comparison with other donors



Nature of research investments

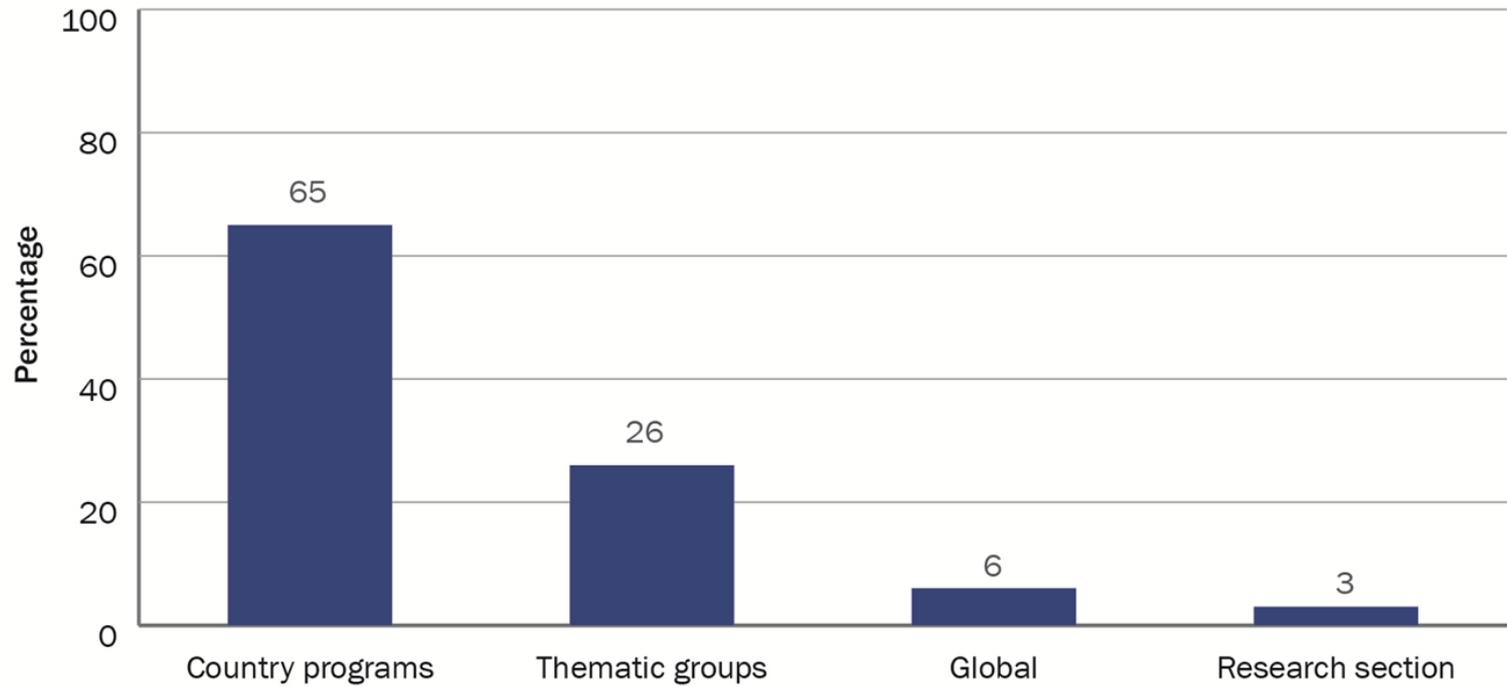


Trends in research funding



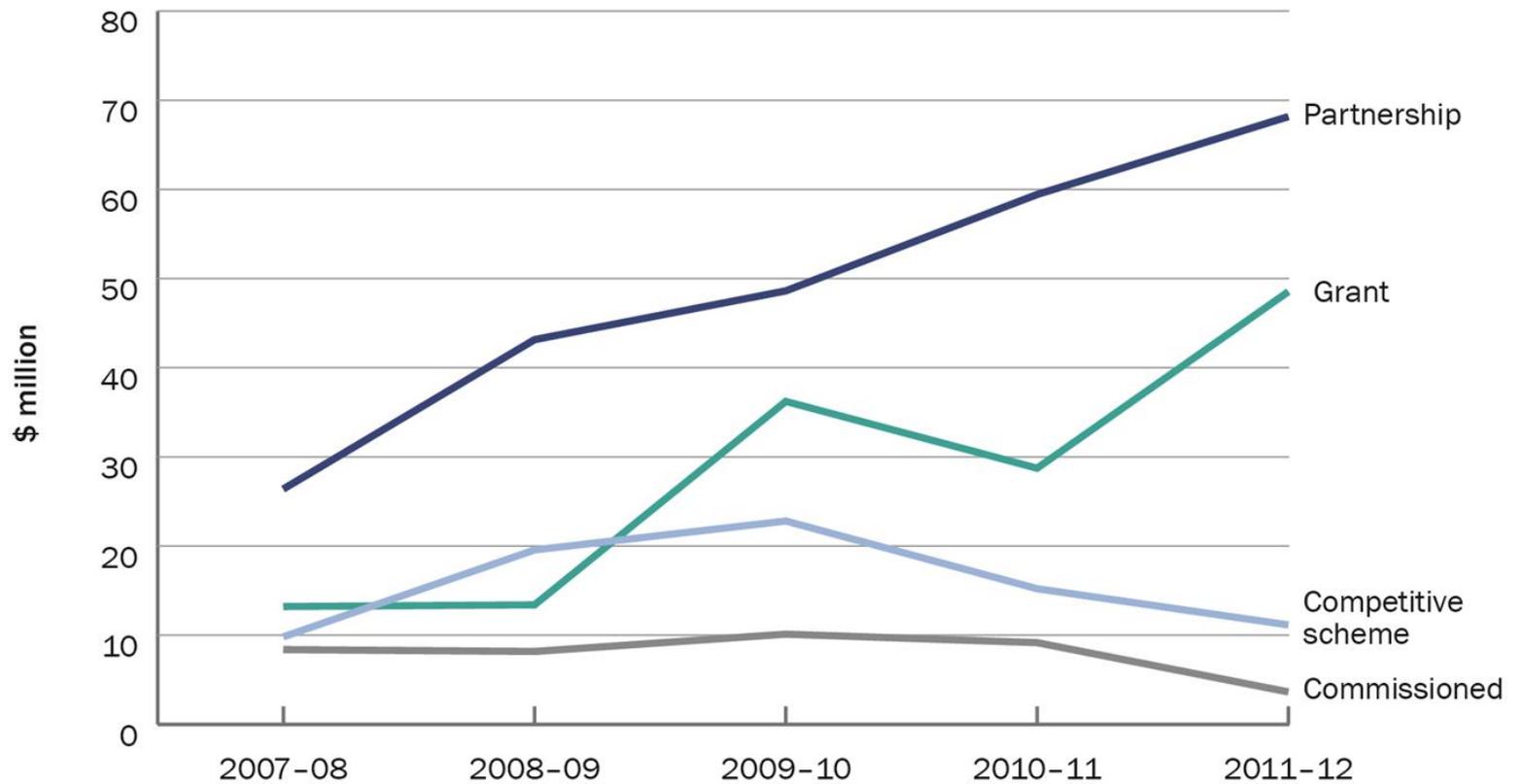


Country vs thematic vs global



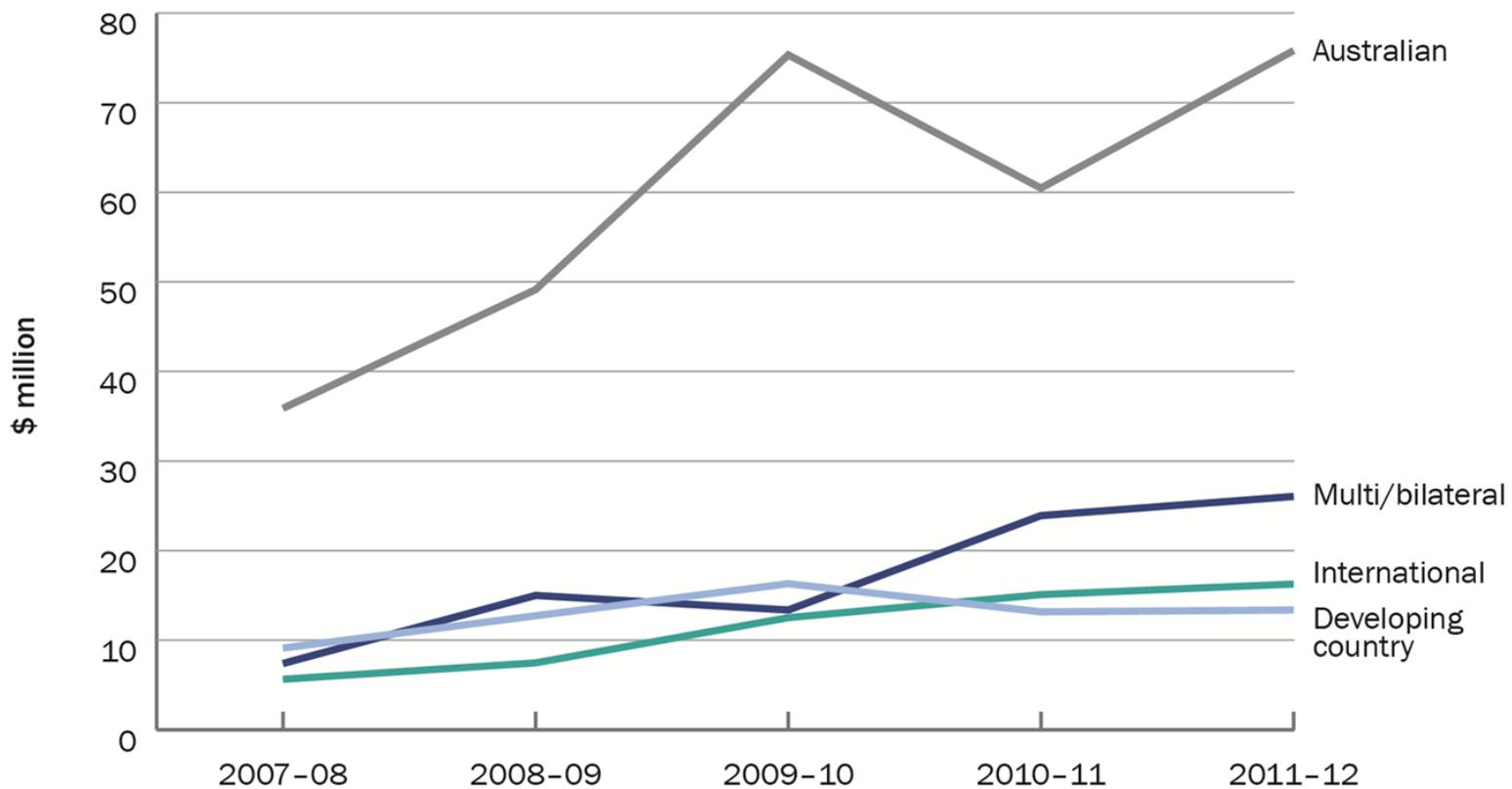


Modes of funding



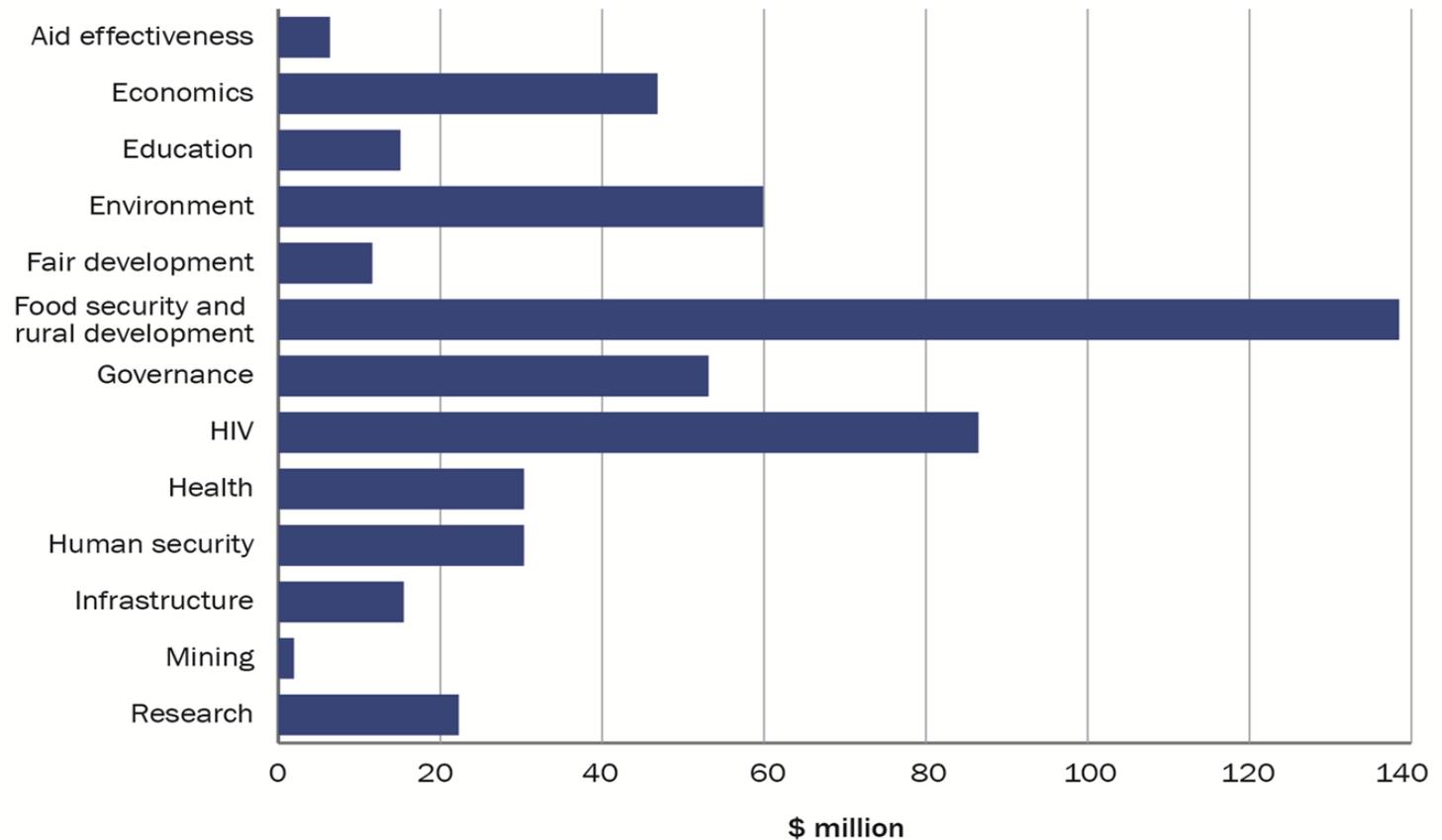


Recipients





Appropriateness (total funding 2007/8-2011/12)

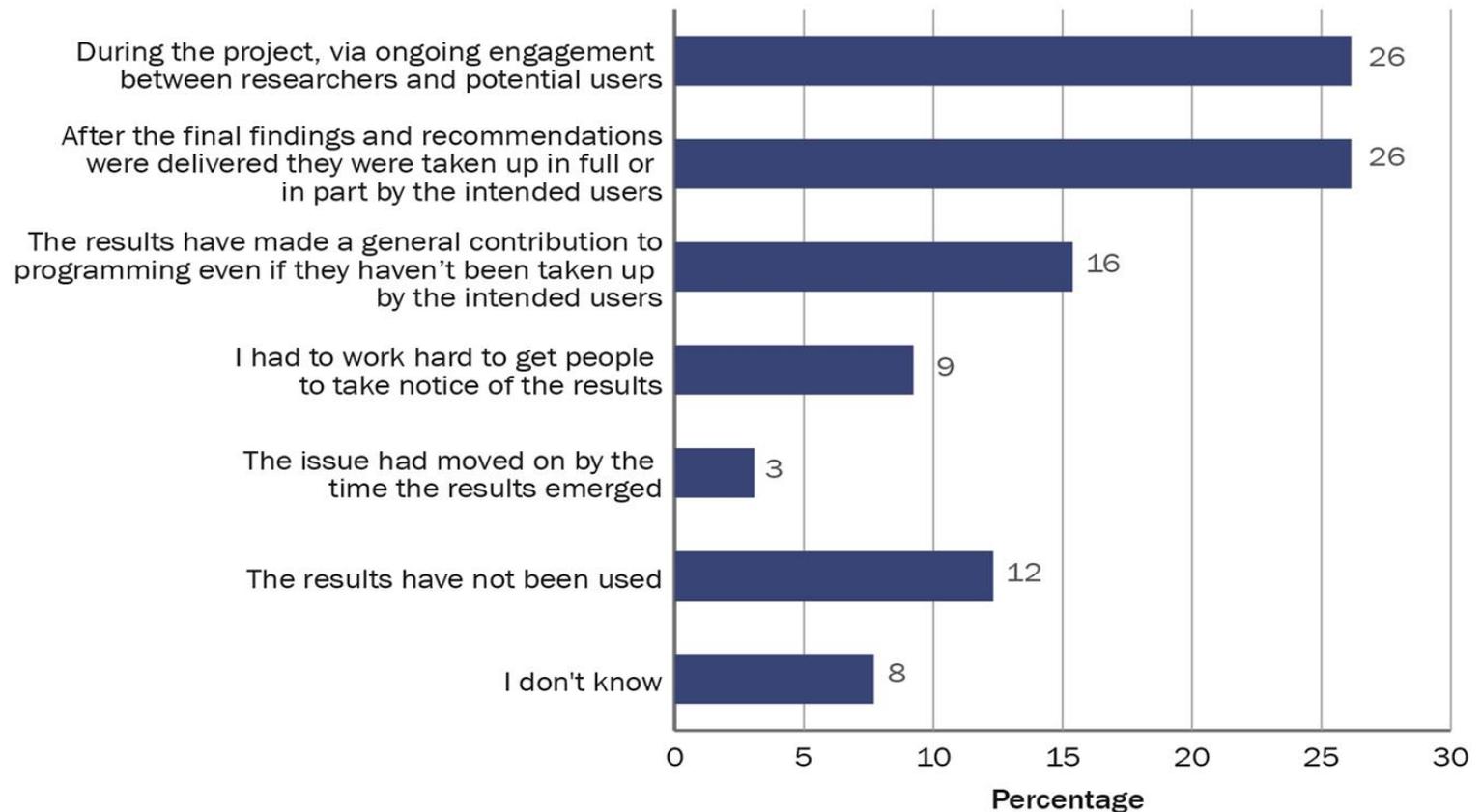




The 'value' of research

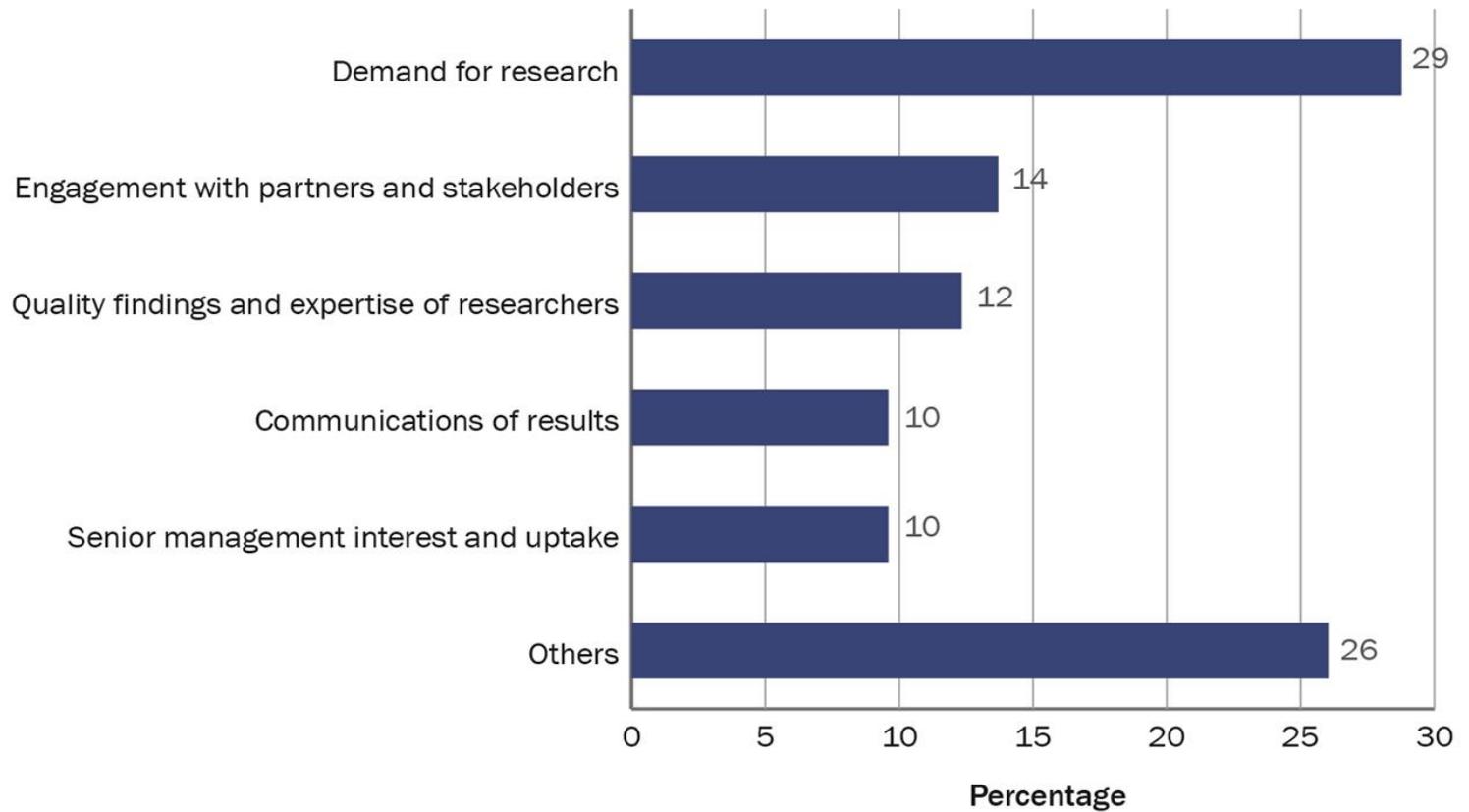


Was it used?





What influenced use?





32 examples of good research use

Nominated by interviewees

- **18 examples at country program-level**
 - 2 in the Mekong: children drowning, avoidable blindness
- **9 examples at thematic (health etc) level**
- **4 examples re global discourse about development**
- **1 example of capacity development**



The case studies

Global discourse:

- Australia Centre for International Agricultural Research
- Australia Development Research Award Scheme

DFAT policies

- State Society and Governance in Melanesia
- Strengthening the evidence on violence against women and girls in Southeast Asia

DFAT program-level strategies and operations

- Vanuatu drivers of change
- Improving the effectiveness of aid in the Pacific
- Indonesia Knowledge Sector Initiative
- Education Resource Facility

Capacity development

- PNG Institute of Medical Research



Conclusions from case studies

Some good research is feeding into global discourse about development issues, but aid staff are making little direct use of it.

More research is done on DFAT policy-relevant issues, but not extensively used because of disconnect between researchers and policy-makers.

Lots of research / analysis is done at program-level, and is frequently used, even though staff argued it was of variable utility & quality.

Investments in capacity-building yield good long term value.



Factors helping & hindering research use



Demand

“Research uptake has to be driven by the SES. If they don’t value it, why would anyone working for them?” (Q31-ID14)

“Internal politics have a large part to play in setting incentives around research. The prevalent incentives for analytical work are to provide things that can be counted such as hospitals or roads, which don’t in themselves require much research.” Focus group discussant

“Churn in policy direction can mean the entire thing [research project] is canned.” (Q31-ID41)



Supply

“domestic development researchers are stronger and are wishing to engage more with DFAT” Focus group discussant

“There is a strong relationship between senior academics at the Universities and [the department] and they are good at getting money” Interviewee

“A fundamental problem is that research contract and partnership agreements are not taken seriously enough in the research community. They are treated as ‘guidelines’ by many researchers—serious time overruns and under-delivery are commonplace.” (Q19-ID15)

“The output should provide a more practical evidence, less academic theory, and clear implementation strategy” (Q19-ID24)



Intermediaries

“[DFAT staff should] be prepared to invest funding AND human resources into research. Your program will use the research more if staff have been involved throughout the process (not just funded and got the end report in 3 years’ time).” (Q19-ID104)

80% of survey respondents felt that DFAT managers do not “put enough effort into actively sharing research results and brokering them to people who might not otherwise hear about them”

DFAT’s knowledge management systems and institutions do not adequately lower the transaction costs of accessing available research



Enabling environment

“Develop a culture that appreciates research beginning with senior management having higher standards of evidence.” (Q19-ID27)

“The aid program has a fragile, cautious and secretive culture, and does not welcome open debate and engagement with stakeholders.”(Q30-ID5)

“There is a long term and desperate need for better knowledge management in this agency. There is lots of surely great research about—but a single and easy repository for this information is severely lacking.” (Q31-ID22)



Conclusions

Appropriateness

- Research investment is largely appropriate, but
- Developing country researchers receive less funding than planned

Effectiveness

- Lots of good research being done and published
- Good uptake in DFAT at program / investment-level
- Weak uptake in DFAT at global / policy level
- Knowledge management / brokering very weak
- Unclear expectations from managers

Efficiency

- Decentralisation without governance and coordination ↑ risk of inefficiencies
- Balance between competitive sourcing and long-term partnerships is of potential concern
- Research management skills weak



Recommendation 1

DFAT should issue a clear policy on the priorities, preferred management processes and quality standards of the department's investment in development research.

As part of its policy on development research, DFAT should encourage operational areas to maintain their development research expenditure at recent levels.



Recommendation 2

DFAT senior executive should require that research-based evidence be used in policy and longer-term planning around global and regional development issues. This evidence should be clearly cited in policy and planning documents.



Recommendation 3

DFAT should clarify its criteria for directly investing in developing country research institutions, and

DFAT should commit to increasing its investment in institutions that meet these criteria.



Recommendation 4

DFAT should invest in a research governance and coordination system that lowers the current risk of department-wide inefficiencies in development research investment.

As part of its research governance and coordination, DFAT should clarify the standards it expects of departmental management of research investments. It should then enforce and support those standards through departmental guidelines, appropriate resourcing, planning (including workforce planning) and staff training. Where possible, this process should link with and support existing departmental activities, such as contracts management, improvements in knowledge management systems and the development of a workforce plan.



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