







The influence of research on development policy and programming


Ujjwal Krishna and Prof. Chris Roche

What is the Developmental Leadership Program?

- An international research initiative that explores how leadership, power and political processes drive or block successful development.
- Founded in 2006 by the late Dr Adrian Leftwich and Steve Hogg of AusAID. The aim was to produce a body of research to address an important gap in knowledge about the role of leaders and coalitions in the politics of development. Now in its third phase (2019-2023).
- Funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through a strategic partnership between the Development Policy Division, the University of Birmingham, and La Trobe University.

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18TH DECEMBER 2019

How Can Aid Agencies Support Developmental Leadership?


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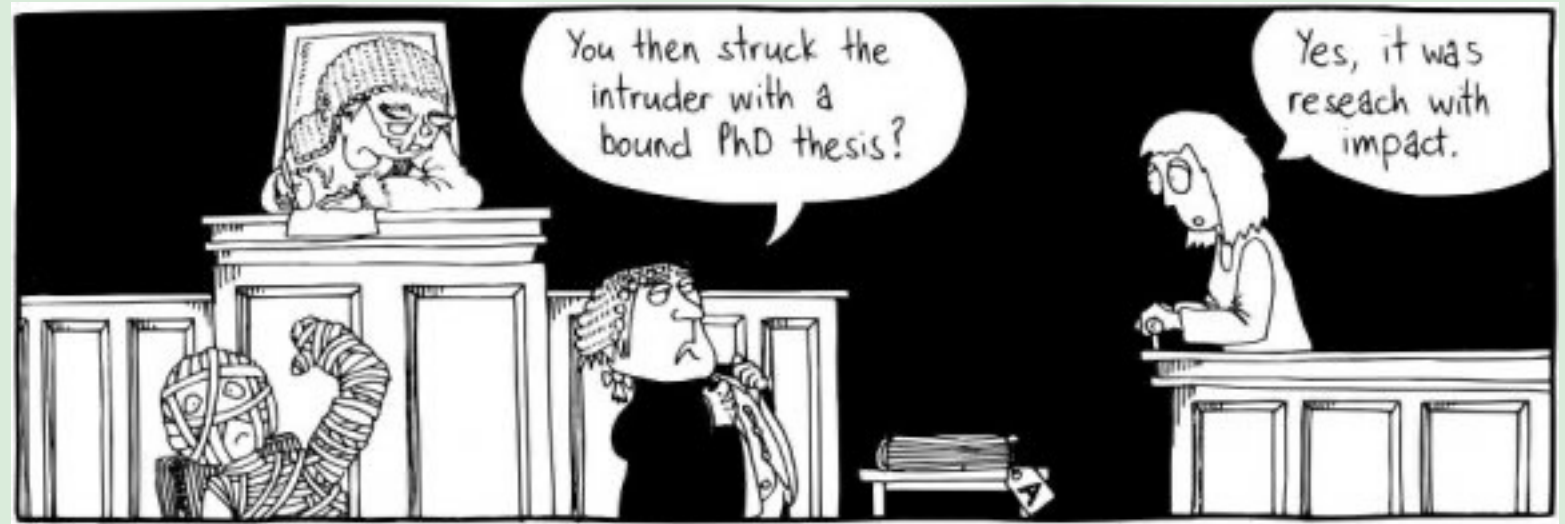
12TH DECEMBER 2019

Acting Together: Harnessing the Power of the Collective for Reform

SOHELA NAZNEEN



The Embedded Impact Research Project



- To '**accompany**' the program as a '**critical friend**'
- To collect and analyse information on the process, the **networking**, the **influence** of the research portfolio, the changing **context** and relationships, and the outcomes to which DLP is contributing
- As a **full-time resource**, to lend a critical perspective, enabling structured analysis and learning vis-à-vis conventional evaluation processes
- To conduct PhD research on the **links between research and policy uptake**, and the factors that influence decision-making processes

Some background

- Reviews of the **integration of AusAID into DFAT** in November 2013 have pointed out that post-merger, a substantial amount of **development expertise, leadership, and capacity exited government**.
- With integration, and policy shifts due to COVID-19, it is argued that **decisions** on Australian aid policy and programming have been increasingly determined in closer coordination with the government's **foreign policy priorities** and the '**national interest**'.
- Do these circumstances still leave **room for bureaucrats to engage with research expertise** emanating from outside DFAT, and in what ways, if at all, does this contribute to shaping development policy and programs?



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Research Question: To what extent does research influence development policy and programming?



Image credits: DFAT

- What are the mechanisms through which research products and insights are utilised by bureaucrats?
- What factors determine how these research products and insights are received?
- In what ways do these research products and insights gain influence and legitimacy?

Data collection

- **Primary observation** of DFAT's organisational dynamics and of DLP's engagement with DFAT and project teams.
- Literature review of **other experiences** in research-to-policy interface.
- 50 interviews/focus groups with: current **DFAT staff** at HQ and at overseas Posts (n=21), and with external development actors including **academics** and **professionals** who have engaged closely with DFAT (n=29), including managing contractors, consultants and independent researchers.
- Many ex-DFAT staff among the now external development actors (n=11).
- All participants had **backgrounds in development** and/or **diplomacy**.

Emerging findings (1 of 3):

What are the mechanisms through which research products and insights are utilised by bureaucrats?

- Research products can be **commissioned** by bilateral agencies, and **produced** in the form of reports, policy briefs, analysis, evidence, evaluations etc. Design stage is important.
- Insights from existing research can be **captured** for DFAT by their thematic or functional teams, or **disseminated** through DFAT's existing internal communications mechanisms.
- However, the **consumption** of research depends on the ability and capacity of producers of research to **contextualise** this research to ensure relevance.

Emerging findings (2 of 3):

What factors determine how these research products and insights are received?

- **Institutional incentives and hierarchies:** Bounded rationality – under limitations, actors make decisions that are satisfactory rather than optimal
 - Generalists valued
 - Organisational culture
 - 'Prosecuting existing agendas' rather than a learning exercise from scratch
- **Networks and coalitions:** personal relationships and familiarity tend to matter
 - Reshuffle of players post-AusAID integration from government to managing contractors, consulting, academia etc.
 - Coalitions more effective when they form organically and address a specific issue

Emerging findings (3 of 3):

In what ways do these research products and insights gain influence and legitimacy?

- **Framing:** agreement across the board that the way research is framed matters
 - Bureaucrats in bilateral agencies are increasingly time-poor
 - Capacity of research-centric functions and teams at DFAT much reduced
 - Short and sharp, one-page summaries, blogs, infographics
 - Context is key – how does this relate to the bureaucrat's current priorities and agenda?
- **Influence and legitimacy:** strong sway of prominent actors and institutions
 - Ideas advocated by US and UK academics and an exclusive set of think tanks have disproportionate sway
 - Locally grounded expertise can be either ignored or filtered through a Western lens

Key takeaways

- DFAT's internal **capacity** to pro-actively seek, engage with, and translate research has **declined**.
- Research can make a difference if it is relevant to the **context** within which bureaucrats operate, and **framed** intelligently.
- Findings can be socialised effectively if researchers appreciate the **internal dynamics** and **priorities** of donor agencies.
- **Relational** work should not merely be an instrumentalist tactic, but amplify **local voices** over already-loud Western expertise.

Research is perceived as beneficial by non-academic audiences when the following are considered:

- (i) sensitivity to **context***
- (ii) representation of diverse **voices***
- (iii) management of **power** dynamics*

Reed and Rudman (2022)

