

Development research: real-world impact?

By Jenny Vaccari
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It is the elusive goal which every researcher is being increasingly asked to achieve: demonstrate your work's impact in the 'real-world' (i.e. beyond your citation rates or publication figures). We see this reflected in the new [Engagement and Impact Assessments](#) required under the [National Science and Innovation Agenda](#), and research institutions are grappling with what this means for how researchers are trained, tasked and reporting on their work.

In the field of international development, we are perhaps at a slight advantage - the nature of the research and evidence production has always inherently sought to have tangible consequences on society, the environment or the economy. Our lofty goals of the betterment of lives and the sustainability of the planet have pointed us in the right direction when it comes to demonstrating impact.

And yet, when it comes to articulating our impact, our practice reflects that we are still not getting it right. The link between research outputs and research impact are not being made.

Research communications[\[1\]](#) and **research uptake**[\[2\]](#) are key determinants of whether any given research has impact (recognising that they are certainly not the only determinants). Academics and practitioners have been thinking about how we bridge the research production and use divide for decades (see examples [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), however we still do not have a solid understanding of why the pathway to impact is so often broken.

We have not been able to effectively identify, socialise and train our research producers and users in the enablers and barriers of research use.

It is with this in mind that the [Research for Development Impact \(RDI\) Network](#) is undertaking an [open survey](#) of the international development sector on the topic of research communications and uptake.

The survey is designed to be completed by those who produce research, or play an active role in research translation or knowledge brokering for research users (broadly defined as any audience who may apply research findings in policy or practice).

The results from this sector-wide exercise will be used to inform a 'snapshot' of the state of

the international development sector in terms of the practice of research communications and uptake (open to all geographic locations).

You are invited to [complete the survey today](#) - responses are welcomed until 31 January.

[1] “The ability to interpret or translate complex research findings into a language, format and context that people who are not experts in that particular issue can understand.” (DfID)

[2] “The application of research outputs by users, resulting in outcomes. This may involve complex processes over time, whereby research outputs... are adapted, built upon and operationally applied.” (Australian Research Council)

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