DFID
Department for International Development

Research Programme Consortia

GUIDANCE NOTE ON RESEARCH COMMUNICATION

DFID Research

June 2009
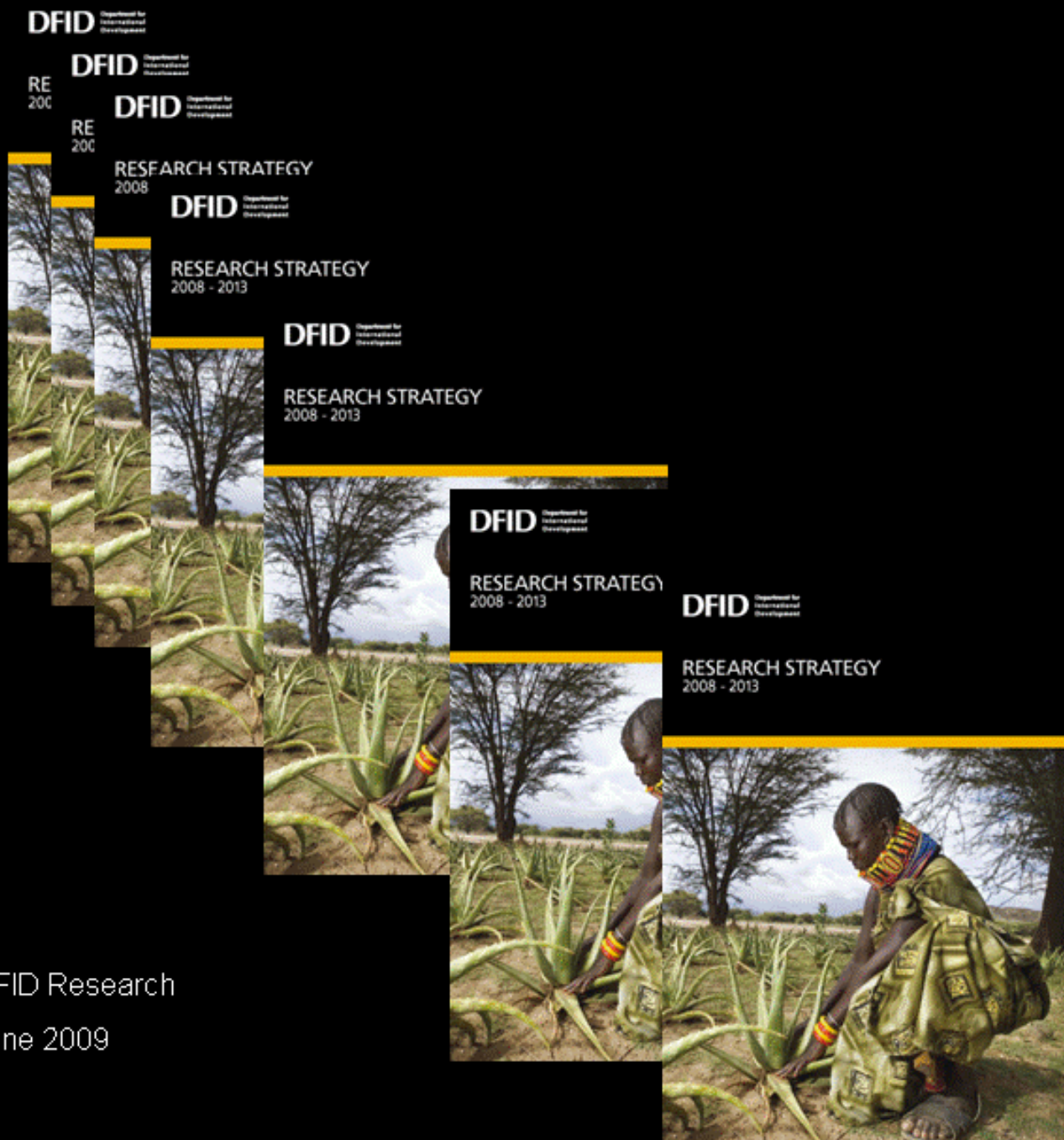
Guidance Note on Research Communication
for DFID Funded Research

This note should be read in conjunction with the documents referred to below and in particular with the technical guidance to be followed by research programmes during implementation (http://www.research4development.info/PDF/Publications/communication-research.pdf) which outlines the various stages of developing, implementing and monitoring a communication strategy: DFID funded Research Programme Consortia (RPCs) should also refer to the RPC Terms of Reference. All DFID directly supported research programmes must include a Communications Strategy and it is expected that 10% research programme funding should be allocated to communications.

Background

DFID's Research Strategy 2008-2013 makes the effective communication of research one of its top priorities (http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/research-strategy-08.pdf). It promises to 'strike a balance between creating new knowledge and technology, and getting knowledge and technology – both new and existing – into use'. The strategy commits to investing up to 30% of its budget by 2010 in making research available, accessible, and useable through a range of means in order to increase the impact of research. For further information, see also the Research Strategy working paper on research communication: http://www.research4development.info/PDF/Outputs/Consultation/ResearchStrategyWorking Paperfinal_communications_P1.pdf.

The focus on research communication began with DFID's Research Framework 2005-2008. This stated clearly for the first time that communication was an essential and necessary part of making sure research informed development policy and practice. The Framework required its newly-funded Research Programme Consortia (RPCs) to spend a minimum of 10% on research communication, and to produce a Communication Strategy at the end of the Inception Phase.

In 2008, an ODI review of the '10% Policy' identified a number of achievements made in both the policies and practices of RPCs in communicating its research. This document builds on the analysis in the ODI report and from lessons learned by a growing Community of Practice of researchers and communications staff within DFID-funded research. Their learning, and more resource materials, are available on the Communications Corner of DFID's Research Portal www.research4development.info. The review of the 10% policy can also be found on R4D:
http://www.research4development.info/SearchResearchDatabase.asp?OutputID=179707

No academically-recognised benchmarking exists for research communication. DFID's aim is to develop and test, together with the Community of Practice interested in getting research into use, a set of benchmarks for the different elements of an effective research strategy. An improved set of '10 Guiding Principles' sets out the basic components of effective, strategic communication (see below). These will be used to guide and assess research strategies.

Guidance for DFID Research partners on Developing a Communication Strategy

DFID expects all directly funded research programmes to develop a Communication Strategy utilising at least 10% of programme funding. A set of Guidance Notes is provided to help research programmes to understand and respond to the call for more systematic

communication   (http://www.research4development.info/PDF/Publications/communication-research.pdf).

The Communications Strategy will be developed during the research programme Inception Phase and agreed with DFID.

DFID Research programmes produce annual reports and are subject to mid-term reviews and strategic evaluation. Research programmes will report against progress in implementing the Communications Strategy during all such phases.

RPCs will be expected to employ a highly skilled senior communications specialist to oversee the implementation of the Communications Strategy.

In developing the Communications Strategy, the following ten principles should be adhered to:

10 Guiding Principles for effective research communication

1. Each Research Programme Consortium (RPC) should develop a Communication Strategy that is agreed by all programme collaborators during the Inception Phase. The design of this strategy and operational plans should be led by a dedicated Communications Manager, with the support of the RPC CEO and Director.

2. The Communication Strategy should assess the policy, communication, and research/innovation environments, and include an assessment of the assumptions and risks that would undermine implementation of the Strategy. A Communications baseline should be developed within the first six months, to show what is the awareness, knowledge and use of the relevant RPCs proposed research topic/hypothesis; what are the relevant policy narratives; what are the communications and policy influence skills of the team etc. This will make it possible to track and attribute progress made during the research programme.

3. The Communication Strategy, when implemented, should identify, reach and engage with institutional and policy targets and processes.

4. There should be mechanisms in place to reach and involve user groups and build relationships with them, at relevant stages of the research project cycle.

5. The RPC should convene multi-disciplinary teams (made up of researchers and specialist communications staff) that include skills to explore, understand, and undertake various scanning/risk assessment, communication, and policy activities that collectively meet the Programme's communications goals. RPCs should consider convening a Communications Advisory Group, which draws on external stakeholders who can help identify policy opportunities and reach intended audiences.

6. The Communication Strategy should include a rigorous monitoring and evaluation process that prompts regular reviews and subsequent modification of communications activities so that they optimally achieve the Programme's communication objectives. This monitoring and evaluation process should be accounted for in the research programme Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy and be guided by principles and techniques outlined in a M+E Research Communications Wiki.

7. Information should be generated throughout the research project cycle for different levels of user-group as identified in the Communication Strategy, and this information should be communicated appropriately.

8. The Communication Strategy should seek to develop the capacity of target user groups to engage with, adopt, and adapt research knowledge and products.

9. A distribution strategy to ensure continuous and easy access to research is in place throughout the research project and beyond (post-research).

10. <u>At least 10%</u> of the overall research budget should be spent on communication of research.

Expertise and authority of communications staff

Research programmes employ researchers with high levels of the precise skills and experiences needed to produce robust, high quality research. In the same way, serious consideration should be paid to the skills and expertise required in staff responsible for designing and carrying out the communication of research.

The skills needed will vary, both to suit the different tasks (e.g. to analysing policy opportunities; mapping stakeholders; designing a communications strategy etc.) and over time (e.g. facilitating stakeholder workshops at the beginning of the research programme; writing for different audiences when research results begin to emerge; designing and organising large events when a robust body of evidence is ready for debating on a national/global stage etc.)

Research programmes may employ several communications specialists or engage partner organisations to support communications deliverables. However, priority should be given the employment of a highly skilled senior communications specialist to oversee the implementation of the Communications Strategy.

Developing a Community of Practice

A range of on-line support facilities are being developed to support and strengthen research communication skills. These include a M+E wiki and a Communications Corner on DFID's research portal www.research4development.info which offers a platform on which to host this virtual community.

The Communications Corner contains essential communications resources, details of DFID-funded communications officers and their strategies; and links to others doing work in the field. A set of two blogs will 'drip feed' researchers with advice and provide a channel to share progress with each other. Two blogs are planned , one a short weekly inspiration and best practice blog that draws readers' attention to the possibilities, the other an outlet for RPC communications officers (and researchers) to highlight a solid piece of research communications work that they have underway. The purpose is to forge partnerships, share lessons, and build up the science of effective research communication.

Research Communication Support Facility

A Research Communication Support facility is being developed to provide advice, training, and mentoring consultancy services to the DFID-funded research community. It will be available to buy expertise and experience at necessary parts of the RPC research cycle.

Selected website resources on communications

In addition to the DFID Research Resources noted above, the following resources may also be of use:

- The Centre for Development Communications: http://www.cendevcom.org/

- The Communication Initiative Network: http://www.comminit.com

- DFID's Research For Development (R4D) portal: www.research4development.info

- Development Communications Evidence Research Network addresses communications in the areas of agriculture, education, economic growth, governance and health http://www.dcern.org/

- Eldis, Institute of Development Studies, contains resource guides, manuals and toolkits, as well as publications on a range of topics including development communications. www.eldis.org

- The International Institute for Communication and Development: http://www.iicd.org/

- Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) includes a programme on Improved communication and information systems for policy and practice: www.odi.org.uk/RAPID

- The Sustainable Development Communications Network: http://www.sdcn.org/members.htm

- The World Bank Development Communication Division offers publications and training: www.worldbank.org/developmentcommunications/

Selected publications on communications

- Burke, A, 1999. Communications and development: a practical guide. DFID, UK

- DFID, 2009. Cracking the Code of Communications Monitoring and Evaluation: http://commscorner.wordpress.com/2009/07/03/cracking-the-code-of-communications-me/.

- DFID, 2006. Lessons Learned on designing communications strategies for research programmes. http://www.research4development.info/PDF/Publications/DFID_ResComm_WSReport1_26Jul06.pdf

- DFID, 1999. Social Development: Communications and Development – A Practical Guide, DFID, UK.

- ESRC, 2004. Toolkit for communicating research effectively, ESRC, UK.

- Hovland, I. 2005. Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations. London: ODI. http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/rapid/tools2.pdf

- Jones, Nicola and Cora Walsh, 2008. Policy briefs as a communication tool for development research. ODI, London.

- Jones, Nicola, 2008. Policy Briefs: A development research communication tool. ODI, London. Web-link: Policy Briefs: a development research communication tool

- Mefalopulos, Paolo, 2008. Development Communication Sourcebook. World Bank.

- World Bank, 2009. Information and Communications for Development. Extending Reach and Increasing Impact. World Bank, Washington DC.

Department for International Development
Leading the British government's fight against world poverty.

One in six people in the world today, over 1 billion people, live in poverty on less than one dollar a day. In an increasingly interdependent world, many problems – like conflict, crime, pollution and diseases such as HIV and AIDS – are caused or made worse by poverty. DFID supports long-term programmes to help tackle the underlying causes of poverty. DFID also responds to emergencies, both natural and man-made.

DFID's work forms part of a global promise to:

- halve the number of people living in extreme poverty and hunger
- ensure that all children receive primary education
- promote sexual equality and give women a stronger voice
- reduce child death rates
- improve the health of mothers
- combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- make sure the environment is protected
- build a global partnership for those working in development.

Together, these form the United Nations' eight 'Millennium Development Goals', with a 2015 deadline. Each of these Goals has its own, measurable, targets. DFID works in partnership with governments, civil society, the private sector and others. It also works with multilateral institutions, including the World Bank, United Nations agencies and the European Commission. DFID works directly in over 150 countries worldwide, with a budget of £5.3 billion in 2007/08.

Details of more than 5,000 DFID-funded research programmes and their results, can be found on the research portal http://www.research4development.info

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