



African Community Access Programme: Getting research into use

RESEARCH UPTAKE CASE STUDY

About this case study

This series shares learning from DFID-funded research programmes about what works and what the challenges can be in research uptake. It aims to contribute knowledge and support other research programmes as they seek to get their findings into use.

About AFCAP

The African Community Access Programme (AFCAP) aims to improve the rural transport sector in Africa through research and uptake. It involves research on design standards and maintenance of low-traffic rural roads and research on transport services. The intended impacts are:

- safer, cheaper, more comfortable and more reliable road transport
- easier access to services and employment opportunities
- savings in road construction to give governments increased choice of investment,

- environmental benefits including reduced extraction of natural materials for road construction and greater resilience to the effects of climate change.

The core participating countries are Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, South Sudan and DR Congo. There are also projects in South Africa, Zambia and Nigeria and a regional project with the Southern Africa Development Community. The first phase of the programme will be completed in June 2014.

Programme successes so far include the publication of government-approved manuals for the design of low volume roads in Ethiopia, Malawi and South Sudan. These are guiding road investment projects in those countries. They are also a reference point for rural road design standards being developed for Mozambique, Tanzania and Kenya.

Programme design

From the outset, the programme design included activities that would facilitate adoption of the

research findings in the countries where the research was carried out and sharing of findings with other countries in Africa.

A key objective is to produce technical documentation (e.g. road design manuals and technical specifications) that reflects the research findings and are endorsed by partner governments so that road projects are required to benefit from the research. Other activities include building demonstration sections of roads, assisting governments in developing local research capacity, study visits, conferences, workshops, advice and training.

Transport services research projects include road safety action research aimed at reducing motorcycle-taxi accident rates and the development of a Transport Services Indicator which can be applied as a complement to the Rural Access Indicator. Transport services research projects were commissioned slightly later in the programme. The scope of uptake of this component is therefore nascent.

Activities that support research uptake

Securing buy-in from end users

For the road design component of the programme, governments of the core participating countries are key end users. Steering Groups were set up with these governments from the outset of the programme. Local champions were identified. These might be working at a high level within the government ministry or road agency, or they could be junior engineers, private sector representatives or NGO staff, who understand the issues and want to find solutions. Commitment to the programme at senior levels has been key to the success of AFCAP. For example, partner governments have almost matched DFID funds in value.

Ensuring demand-led research

At the start of the programme, a series of workshops was held for local industry and policy-makers in the participating countries. In addition to identifying research needs, this interaction led to involvement of local industry in reviewing and updating the manuals and guidelines that were produced.

Building on the past

AFCAP built on the experience of the DFID-funded South East Asia Community Access Programme, in part through involving personnel from that programme, to ensure that lessons learnt could be integrated into the new programme. In addition, many of the researchers are world experts who have worked in the sector and in Africa for many years, so are respected, trusted and listened to.

Research into roads requires long-term commitment. Reliable conclusions from trial sections of road may only become apparent after a decade or more. The programme therefore sought to learn about existing roads in the region that were built to unconventional standards as these could offer important data on long-term performance. Back analyses of existing roads in Malawi, Botswana, Mozambique and South Africa are leading to interesting findings which, in the longer term, are likely to inform led new manuals and guidelines.

Sustainability

The programme has a capacity-building component which includes support to participating countries to manage their own programme of research in order to expand their knowledge base and to independently improve and update the manuals. Training has been provided to over 700 practitioners in the public and private sectors, on the road design process, construction activities and technical monitoring for the research and demonstration roads. In addition to enhancing local involvement in programme delivery, it is expected that these skills will be put to good use in the future and will support the demand for further research.

Knowledge-sharing

Before AFCAP, work by respected organisations was not well known beyond their country or sub-region. The programme has played an important role in supporting dissemination and localisation of methods.

Conferences and study visits have been used to facilitate knowledge-sharing and dissemination and have helped governments to articulate their needs and identify appropriate solutions. For

example, at a conference in Maputo, experiences shared of using sand in road-building in Mozambique inspired demand for research into similar roads in other countries with similar sand.

The programme has developed a virtual Community of Practice for the rural transport sector, which consists of around 750 individuals. This has enabled sharing of knowledge and experience from the programme and has built the capacity of technical experts in the Africa region through related conferences, workshops, seminars and training courses.

Challenges

Where possible, AFCAP has involved, and built the capacity of, government laboratories and technical staff to carry out the research. However, in some cases, these “up-skilled” staff move on to better-paid jobs in the private sector. While this had implications for efficient delivery of the programme, most of the technicians remained in-country or in the region, so the programme has contributed to the development of the transport sector as a whole in Africa.

Conclusion

The practical nature of AFCAP’s research and its outputs, which are tangible and visible, may have facilitated uptake beyond what might be expected by research programmes in other disciplines. However, many of the principles and activities are likely to be relevant to other types of programme, albeit with some adaptation.

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