# THE GDNET LEGACY

*Reflecting on the achievements, outcomes and learning of the GDNet programme, 2010 to 2014*

## June 2014

GDNet was piloted in 1999 as the online presence for the Global Development Network (GDN) and as a key component of GDN's capacity building and networking activities. The programme closes at the end of June 2014 and this publication seeks to record the GDNet story, share its lessons and review what it leaves behind.

### Introduction from GDNet's Programme Director

There is an African proverb, which says "If you want to go quickly, go alone; if you want to go far, go together." As the GDNet programme draws to a close, we have spent time reviewing our journey as a team, and collaboration, partnership and connectedness stand out as being the forces that have helped us along our way. We have also considered what we have learned during this period and what we will leave behind. This legacy document shares the fruits of this reflection and analysis, focusing particularly on the outcomes and sustainability of our efforts:

- How have GDNet's online knowledge services enabled Southern researchers to inform policy?
- What have we learned about the challenges facing Southern researchers when they apply what they have learned through GDNet's capacity building activities?

I am immensely proud of my team, our achievements and the journey we have travelled together since GDNet began in 1999. During that time we have produced thousands of summaries of research, run numerous training workshops and generated hundreds of social media items. Despite this, I believe GDNet's legacy lies within the people with whom we have connected: their knowledge, their attitudes and their abilities. Ultimately what GDNet leaves behind when the programme ends will not be publications or data, but a greater global commitment to enabling knowledge from the South to have an impact on development decision-making.

### *"I believe GDNet's legacy lies within the people with whom we have connected: their knowledge, their attitudes and their abilities."*

This legacy document is accompanied by a series of shorter publications through which we reflect on what we have learned about supporting Southern researchers to contribute and debate research in development thinking, policy and practice:

1. *Listening to the South:* What GDNet has learned about Southern researchers, their challenges and their needs.

2. *Becoming Better Capacity Builders:* What GDNet has learned about developing researchers' confidence and ability to communicate their research.
3. *Making Connections:* What GDNet has learned about using social media to raise the profile of Southern research.
4. *Learning by Design:* Perspectives on monitoring and evaluating a Southern-focused knowledge service.

The main insights are reflected in this legacy document. However, I warmly encourage you to explore the publications to learn more about specific aspects of GDNet's work.

*Contact:*
**Sherine Ghoneim**
**Programme Director, GDNet**
**Email:** *sherine.ghoneim@gmail.com*

## Contents

## What did we set out to achieve?

The Global Development Network (GDN) was launched by the World Bank at the 1st Annual Global Development Conference in Bonn, Germany in December, 1999, as a group of seven Regional Network Partners from developing and transition economies. GDNet began the same year as a pilot activity of the GDN and was temporarily housed at, and run in partnership with, the Institute of Development Studies in Brighton, UK. In 2004, the GDN Cairo office became the new home for GDNet with the technical platform moving there in 2006. Partnerships have been an important part of GDNet and we have worked with many organisations and individuals during the lifetime of the programme, particularly GDN's Regional Network Partners, who supported the production of the GDNet portal's Regional Windows, for example.

As part of our funding from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) for the 2005-2009 phase of GDNet, an Output to Purpose Review (OPR) was carried out by Itad, specialists in monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Itad went on to work with GDNet in the design and implementation of the M&E framework for the 2010-2014 phase of DFID funding. In our publication 'Learning by Design', Robbie Gregorowski (Principal Consultant at Itad) shares his perspective on this process. A key recommendation from the OPR was that we should develop a 'theory of change' for the 2010-2014 phase about how Southern research can contribute to development. By articulating our theory of how change happens, we were able to clarify the core areas of work we should pursue. GDNet firmly subscribes to the premise that good policy research, properly applied, can accelerate development and improve people's lives through informing better policy-making. Thus, GDNet's outline theory of change is that supporting better research in the South and communicating that research within the global research community and hence to policymakers, will lead to better policy-making in those countries (as illustrated below).

This theory was translated into a logical framework (or logframe), which informed GDNet's planning and decision-making. The logframe also formed the basis for GDNet's (M&E) framework through which the programme collected evidence about its implementation, and contribution to change, and learned about how to improve its work. We have shared this learning with others as much as possible.

Between 2010 and 2014, GDNet received funding from the World Bank, the Directorate-General for International Cooperation (Government of the Netherlands), and DFID. Our funding from DFID during that period has been for a programme of work entitled: 'Research Communications from and for the Global South' (see p.3). Although GDNet's overall purpose, vision and mission for this programme were not changed between 2010 and 2014, the objectives and the tactics we used to meet them were reviewed and adapted over the years in response to changes in the external environment, demand from Southern researchers and GDNet's learning from its M&E activities. For example, social media, which had become integrated into all of GDNet's activities by 2014, were not even a feature of the programme at the outset.
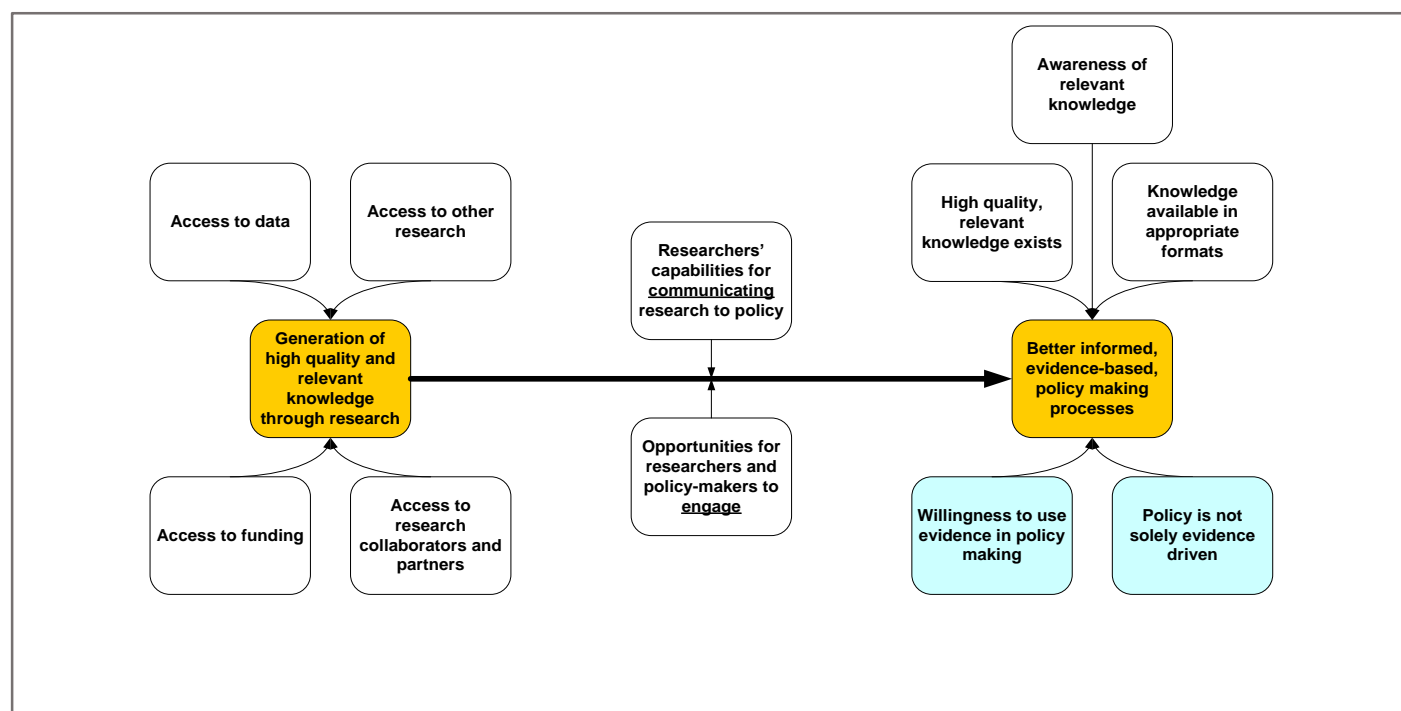
## GDNet – Research Communications from and for the Global South: Five Year Strategy 2010-2014

**"This new phase will mark a change in the scope of GDNet's activities towards a much greater focus on policy outreach. GDNet will shift from being a knowledge management organisation to being more active in policy outreach."**
*Extract from GDNet's 2010 to 2014 project record on DFID's Research for Development portal.*

**Vision**: Policy processes better informed by outstanding research from the South.

**Mission**: GDNet is a knowledge hub that brings together and communicates policy-relevant research from the Global South. It aims to be an internationally-recognised focal point/ knowledge-broker for development research to inform policy debate. GDNet is a partnership with regional networks and leading experts in the field. GDNet provides access to online journals and data, synthesises and communicates Southern research, and strengthens research communications capacity.

**Goal:** Better research enables better policy.

**Purpose:** To communicate the best available development research output from the Global South to inform policy.

### Strategic Objectives 2010 – 2014
**Southern research is better informed by current ideas and knowledge**.



*The Agriculture Thematic Window on the GDNet portal*

*Example activities:*
- Maintaining and growing the GDNet Knowledgebase of policy-focused summaries of Southern research, and profiles of researchers and organisations;
- Providing online services including access to JStor and Project MUSE e-journals, online datasets and details of funding opportunities.

**Researchers are better able to communicate their research to policy.**



*Participants at a GDNet-AERC Policy Brief workshop*

*Example activities:*
- Designing and facilitating a series of regional and thematic capacity building workshops for Southern researchers in collaboration with GDN's Regional Network Partners;
- Providing a research communications help desk and mentoring for participants.

**Knowledge networking between researchers and with policy actors increased.**
*Example activities:*
- Designing and piloting an online collaborative workspace for Southern researchers;
- Using a suite of social media tools to facilitate interactions between researchers, and between researchers and policymakers.

**Lessons about effective knowledge-brokering in the Global South learned and communicated.**



*The GDNet team at the May 2014, Reflection and Learning Retreat.*

*Example activities:*
- Presenting at conferences, workshops and seminars;
- Contributing to intermediary and research communications networks;
- Producing publications on GDNet's lessons learned about aspects of its programme.

## Charting GDNet's Journey

**During a multi-year programme there will always be highs and lows and it can be easy to forget how far you have travelled and the lessons you learned along the way.** We spent time, as a team in early 2014, creating a 'River of Life' for GDNet through which we mapped our personal and collective journeys using a sailing metaphor. This visual narrative tool helped us to review GDNet's landmark moments, our times of crisis and celebration, and to identify recurring challenges and enabling factors. We present below some of the key moments for GDNet, from the last few years:

### Pre-2010

**GDNet's Output to Purpose Review** (February 2009) observes the fact that GDNet is faced with two options: continuing to pursue excellence as an online repository or reorienting itself around a Purpose that is clearly focused on policy processes.

### 2010

**Current phase of GDNet begins** with a strong policy orientation and a new logframe, strategy and Theory of Change. The GDNet team is expanded and staff develop new skills in line with the research-to-policy focus of the programme.

### 2011

**January 25th: revolution in Egypt**. An "interesting" time for the Cairo-based staff. The GDNet website stays live and GDNet members have uninterrupted access to services thanks to GDNet's use of cloud-based hosting.

**July**: First 11 **GDNet Thematic Windows are launched** with the full set of 23 online by November, making it easier to browse the GDNet database.

### 2012

**April:** GDNet provides multimedia coverage of (and participates in) the K* conference, a global event in Ontario, Canada, focusing on the work of knowledge intermediaries.

### 2013

**March:** GDNet uses an online survey to enable Southern researchers and practitioners to share their lessons learned from development policy planning and implementation with a High Level Panel Seminar where the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals are discussed.

**June:** The GDNet Presentation Skills Training for Awards & Medals Finalists at the GDN Annual Conference brings the total number of researchers trained by GDNet so far this phase, to more than 200.
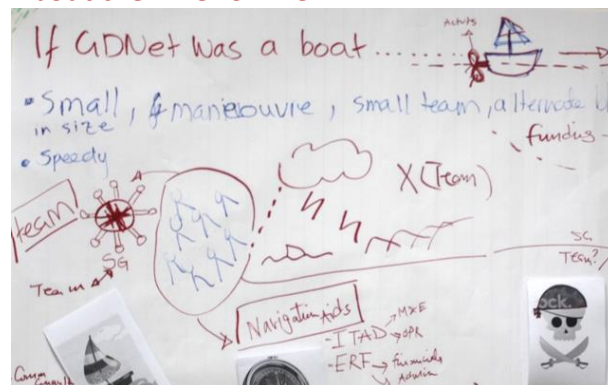
### 2014

**May:** GDNet's Year 3 M&E report records that the GDNet website received an average of 40,103 visitors per month in 2013 (up 16%, year-on-year from 2011).

### About the River of Life



The River of Life is a useful tool to help identify moments where learning has taken place. It can also be used at the start of the programme to work out what will need to be done to reach the goal and objectives.

There are several guides to carrying out a River of Life exercise. We used these sources to help to plan ours:

- The University of Arizona's Community Health Worker Evaluation Toolkit (see 'River of Program Life').
- River of Life page in the Knowledge Sharing Toolkit.

## GDNet's values: keeping us focused on the South

GDNet's orientation evolved over time from being an online repository of Southern research to a programme dedicated to creating an enabling environment for Southern researchers to inform policy. This evolution was prompted by changes in the external environment: new opportunities presented by advances in technology and internet access, changing needs among Southern researchers, shifts in donor priorities, the emergence of new players and potential partners in our field, to name but a few. When navigating fast-moving and unfamiliar waters, a reliable compass is essential and for GDNet, this has come in the form of a set of programme values that we established at the start of the programme as part of our 2010-2014 strategy:

### GDNet's Values

**Foster Southern ownership** – GDNet wants to develop in such a way that our objectives are aligned with our regional partners' objectives, and activities are jointly planned and monitored.

**Promote and strengthen a Southern voice** – GDNet is committed to amplifying the voice of researchers in the Global South. Together with our networks, we will provide channels to communicate research from the South.

GDNet will work to **empower researchers from the Southern countries** to access global knowledge and to engage in development policy debates.

We have found that whenever we have been presented with a choice of paths or opportunities our decision has been made easier by looking to our values. In some cases, keeping our values in mind has prompted us to develop new activities and strike out in a new direction, as was the case with GDNet's 'Connect South' campaign. Sherine Ghoneim, GDNet's Programme Director, used her keynote presentation at the opening session of the World Association for Sustainable Development's conference, in late 2011, to share GDNet's learning about the needs of Southern researchers and to call on research and policy communities to 'Connect South'.

The Connect South campaign was then launched in 2012 to encourage members of the development research and policy communities to adopt a more inclusive approach to Southern research. At that time we were seeing more written about the need for research and experience from the South to inform responses to global problems. Other organisations and knowledge services were committing resources towards raising the profile of Southern research. Meanwhile, we were learning more through our M&E and research activities about

the pressing challenges facing Southern researchers in being heard and connecting with policymakers, and about the particular value that their research has to offer. Our Connect South campaign centred around a Charter of Commitment through which we pledged our support to Southern researchers and invited others to make their own pledges.

### The Four Principles of GDNet's Connect South Pledge

1.  **Working in partnership**: We cannot achieve our ambitions alone and recognise the need to identify others who share our commitment to helping Southern research have a greater global impact.
2.  **Leading by example**: As champions of Southern research, we will trumpet success and share good practice.
3.  **Sharing learning**: We will reflect on what we have learned and share our experiences and lessons with others.
4.  **A commitment to transparency**: We will publish details of our work promoting Southern knowledge including any policies, plans, processes and results in a format that is useful and accessible.

We were delighted to see that the Connect South call to action resonated with our fellow knowledge services and share a few of their pledges here:

"My pledge is to redouble our efforts to feature even more Southern content on the Capacity.org (www.capacity.org) web platform. There's need for more two-way traffic to strengthen development research, policy and practice."

"I pledge to continue to work to increase access to, and demand for, Southern produced research among decision makers and policy actors through the Eldis website and dataset. I will support and promote the principle that knowledge is a public good and should be freely and openly available to all."

"Research to Action (www.researchtoaction.org) pledges to continue to provide helpful resources and fuel discussions that will help Southern based researchers communicate their research better, with the hope that in doing so, that research will have a positive impact on the lives of the poor and disadvantaged. Big thumbs up for Connect South!!!"

"My colleagues at 'Stability: International Journal of Security & Development' (www.stabilityjournal.org) strongly support this initiative. We encourage you to contribute to Stability."

All pledges can be viewed at the Connect South LinkedIn Group.

## Mapping GDNet's contribution to Southern research uptake

GDNet's goal has been to support better use of Southern research in development policy processes but identifying and demonstrating a reliable connection between knowledge-brokering and capacity building, and Southern research uptake by policymakers is challenging. The solution proposed by Itad was to produce a representative, rigorous set of case studies where GDNet members' research had informed policy. A three-stage process was used involving researchers registered with GDNet in the selection and validation of the 'most significant' cases (using an analytical framework adapted from the Most Significant Change technique). By May 2014, GDNet had a set of 21 cases that provide insights into the nature of research-to-policy processes, and of Southern research, and how Southern research can and does inform policy and practice.

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**GDNet's Research Into Use case selection process**

*1. Case identification:* Potential cases were identified through the annual GDNet Members' online survey, which asked respondents to give an example of where their research had been used by decision-makers or people involved in a policy process. Responses that were too brief or unclear were filtered out.

*2. First selection and validation panel:* This was a 90-minute session with GDN Awards and Medals Finalists; a group of around 25-30 talented Southern researchers from diverse backgrounds. In groups, the researchers discussed a different set of cases and agreed upon the 3-5 cases that they considered to be the most significant based on: likely impact on poverty reduction, how directly the research informed policy and the extent to which they could most clearly relate to the case as researchers. Cases were presented to the wider group for discussion, filtering and triangulation. The group was specifically asked to consider:

- critical factors contributing to research influencing policy;
- any patterns / lessons (research approaches, communications mechanisms, etc.) that could be applied in the future to support research uptake;
- how GDNet's role and contribution could be enhanced.

*3. Development and Validation of Most Significant Cases*
The authors of the resulting 10-12 selected cases were invited by Itad to take part in a telephone interview to clarify the cases' objectives, methodology, findings, and impact, and to explore the determinants of success and the implications for GDNet. In subsequent years, Itad also revisited authors of the previous sets of cases to get an update on progress.
**See**: *GDNet Baseline and M&E Framework*, Itad, April 2011

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## Southern research can have a dramatic impact on policy and people's lives

GDNet has been dedicated to raising the profile of Southern research, and understanding and publicising the challenges that the researchers face, compared with their Northern peers, e.g. insufficient access to journals and data, lack of funding for research, limited opportunities to interact with other researchers, etc. One should not assume from this, that Southern research fails to have an impact on policy and the lives of poor people; rather, GDNet's M&E uncovered many instances of local researchers witnessing dramatic and swift responses to their research findings.

From analysing the cases of Research Into Use, it is clear that there are some success factors or approaches that researchers can use, which will increase the likelihood of their research being used. We have identified several areas of good practice in research uptake that Northern researchers could also benefit from adopting. However, the reality is that many Southern researchers face significant barriers to implementing them and it is these challenges, and their potential solutions, that GDNet wishes to draw to the attention of those who fund and manage research capacity building and knowledge-brokering programmes.

## Critical Success Factors for research uptake identified from GDNet's cases of Research Into Use

**Demand for research from the start.** Researchers in GDNet's cases tended to be investigating issues in which policymakers were already interested or about which they had even explicitly requested information. In other cases, the research was commissioned by donors in order to improve a specific intervention and was very likely to be used.

**New or unusual findings and a rigorous evidence-base where it had been previously lacking**. Findings that are counter-intuitive or surprising attract attention and when they are supported by good quality data, can have an impact on policy. In one case study, the researcher had not set out to influence policy with his research on foreign direct investment in resource-rich Gulf Cooperation Countries, but the quality and originality of his research was such that it generated a lot of interest.

**Findings are presented with a policymaker in mind**: Good practice relating to this in GDNet's cases includes writing specific and practical policy recommendations, proposing innovative solutions and making an economic argument for a recommendation that is well-supported by evidence, (see case study on p.8).

**The research focuses on a prominent issue**: This could be one that is sensitive, such as childhood disability, or an issue that affects the livelihoods of a large proportion of the public, or one that will attract the attention of the media (and therefore the attention of the government), such as child labour.

**Researchers spend time communicating with the beneficiaries**: In one example, a study into an aspect of pest control in crops, it was essential to build trust and understanding among the farmers in order to carry out the research and this also encouraged commitment to the subsequent policy recommendations. In another case, the researchers communicated the findings to the research subjects first, and when parliamentarians realised how well informed the people were, they were pushed to take action.

**The researcher, or their intermediary, is connected to, and respected by, the government and seen as neutral:** In some cases this required the researchers to use their funder or international partner organisation to communicate the findings to policymakers; in other cases isolated researchers have benefited from joining networks.

**Being opportunistic and flexible with communications:** The cases show that researchers are more successful if they are able to use a variety of communication tools and communicate at different levels. Visual documentary evidence (photos and videos, supported by reliable data) proved to be particularly effective for attracting the attention of influential people or to gain media coverage in more than one case. For example, research carried out about children involved in rat-hole mining in India, (see p.9) used small cameras and video cameras to document the nature of the work and conditions in the mines. The researchers reported that this material, combined with the emotive nature of the research (another Critical Success Factor), facilitated strong engagement with the research from the media.

**Engaging funders and those responsible for policy-making from the outset of the research:** Many of the cases involved key decision-makers throughout the research process and in more than one case, policymakers contributed research data themselves, which presented opportunities for discussion. During a study into unequal educational opportunities within public education systems in Brazil, for example, the lead researcher asked to interview the Rio Secretary of Education, which resulted in a discussion in the preliminary findings. This chance conversation lead to the Municipal Board of Education introducing a random selection process, managed through a computerised process, for primary school selection across Rio. Another benefit of this approach is that in some cases the researchers have been able to broker relationships and build trust between policymakers and other stakeholder groups.

These are some of the Critical Success Factors that were identified from analysis of GDNet's Research Into Use case studies. However, it is likely that it was a combination of factors that led to the uptake of the research and it is unclear which, if any, of the factors made the biggest contribution. There may also have been other unidentified contextual factors at play that contributed to the research's impact, such as if the evidence supported established policy.

The Critical Success Factors suggested by GDNet's cases of Research into Use correspond with many of the recommendations made by members of GDNet's Policy Panels about what researchers should do (see below). The Policy Panels were sessions within GDNet's research communications capacity building workshops in which local policymakers explained to participants the practical challenges they faced in accessing and using research evidence for policy-making.



*GDNet's Policy Panels helped workshop participants learn more about the research communication needs of local policymakers.*

**Members of the GDNet Policy Panels recommended that Southern researchers should:**
- identify policymakers' needs. What are the policy gaps regarding emerging strategic issues?
- establish their credibility as sources of reliable research and build their reputation;
- involve policymakers in their research early on;
- think of timing - respond to policymakers' current needs and target a topical issue of national interest;
- offer constructive criticism and actionable policy recommendations;
- present their research in an appealing design and format;
- offer policy options that are supported by research evidence rather than based on their own opinions.

*Extract from 'Becoming Better Capacity Builders', Z. Sabet, GDNet, June 2014.*

## Two GDNet Research Into Use case studies

Below we present two of GDNet's cases of Research into Use, that took different approaches to research uptake, and which demonstrate the research excellence and innovation that is found among the Southern research community. The case studies have been adapted from the set of 21 cases in GDNet's Year 3 M&E Report, Itad, 2014 (available to download from http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/Project/60734/ )

### #1 Study of e-waste recycling gives policymakers a reliable and holistic view of the issue

This case study was produced in 2012.

**About the Researcher:**

Martin Oteng-Ababio won Joint Second Prize at the GDN Awards and Medals Finalists competition held at the GDN Conference in Budapest in June 2012 for his research entitled: 'Exploring E-waste Recycling, Health and Food Security at Agbogbloshie Scrap Yard Accra', University of Ghana. The photo below shows Martin at the GDNet-facilitated workshop on research communications held just before the conference.



**Research Objectives:**

E-waste recycling (electrical goods, such as TVs, air-conditioning units, and computers) provides informal livelihood opportunities for large numbers of urban poor in Ghana. At the time of the research, there was no regulation or legislation to govern the practice. The research set out to understand better the costs and benefits of e-waste recycling for those directly engaged and for the ecosystems (heavy metals into soils potentially leading to contamination of plants and animals).

**Research Methods:**

The team from the University of Ghana interviewed e-waste recyclers to understand the dynamics of the informal recycling sector. Alongside the interviews, the researchers tested soil and blood samples to assess the extent of any contamination to plant, animal and human systems.

**Findings:**

The initial findings (analysis of the blood and soil samples is ongoing) indicate that e-waste recycling provides significant direct livelihood benefits to those involved in the repair and recycling of electrical goods. In addition there is evidence of significant downstream benefits in terms of the provision of affordable technology, particularly affordable computer access through the purchase of second-hand repaired and recycled units, to many hundreds if not thousands of Ghanaians who could not otherwise afford to access Information and Communication Technology (ICT) equipment.

**What strategies did they use to encourage research uptake?**

1. Provided the government with *independent and reliable evidence*; this was the first peer-reviewed research to be conducted on e-waste recycling outside the environmental lobby.

2. Took a *constructive, balanced approach to engagement with the government* on a sensitive issue. The researchers presented the benefits of e-waste recycling (livelihoods and cheaper Southern access to technology) and the need to manage the environmental hazards without killing off the informality of e-waste recycling, which makes it such a productive and vibrant niche industry. The research team encouraged the government to include e-waste recycling as part of its national priority to increase access to ICT, making ICT more affordable and available.

3. Offered government planners and policymakers *innovative solutions* to what had previously been viewed as a hazardous informal activity.

4. *Engaged the government in dialogue* with a view to ensuring that any regulatory or legislative process was holistic in nature; protecting the environment while realising the livelihoods and wider societal benefits of the informal e-waste recycling.

5. Focused on a *topic of regional interest*; the research has the potential for much wider applicability and replicability across the West African sub-region, as Martin discovered when he discussed his research with fellow participants of the GDNet workshop. The research team has entered into dialogue with other research groups in Western and Southern Africa to share the findings further.

**See:** Martin's chapter in the open access book 'Sustainable Development - Authoritative and Leading Edge Content for Environmental Management', edited by Sime Curkovic, 2012.

## #2 Research shines a light on child miners in India

This case study was produced in 2012 and updated in 2013.

**About the Researcher:** Hasina Kharbhih, founder of the NGO, Impulse, won Second Prize in the Japanese Award for Most Innovative Development Project at the 2011 GDN Awards and Medals Competition for her research into children engaged in rat hole mining in the coal mines of Jaintia Hills District, Maghalaya State, India. As team leader, Hasina presented the research at the 2012 GDN Conference having participated in GDNet's Awards and Medals Finalists Presentation Skills training workshop.



*Hasina worked on her GDN presentation during a GDNet workshop*

**Research Objectives:** The research team set out to explore the nature of the work the children undertake in these informal and unregulated mines (hours of work, wages, work conditions, level of freedom, seasonality etc.) as well as the original nationality and ethnicity of the children, typically crossing the border from Nepal and Bangladesh.

**Research Methods:** The team trained researchers to carry out informal interviews with the children to assess their opinions, motivation and behaviour. This was supplemented by primary needs assessments and case studies. The team conducted approximately 200 interviews with child miners to supplement a sample of 900 interviews. These interviews, which had to be conducted without the permission of the mine owners, were also used to inform the child miners of their rights and highlight any violations of them. This subtle and participatory process was used to build a network of informal contacts within the mines, beyond the knowledge of the mine owners. Small cameras and video cameras were used to document conditions in the mines.

**Findings:** The team was able to map the origins, age distribution and gender of the children working in the mines as well as to observe and document the nature and conditions of the work, average wages and typical hazards. These were cross-referenced with secondary data sources, such as the volume of coal generated and exported from the district. The combination of sources allowed the team to demonstrate and document the fact that children were actively being trafficked into the mines and in clear violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been ratified by the Indian Government. The researchers were also able to demonstrate that as the coal produced was being informally exported to Nepal and Bangladesh on the black market, the state was receiving no tax benefit from the industry.

**What strategies did they use to encourage research uptake?**
1. Used a *variety of communications approaches targeted to different stakeholders*: As well as a formal research report, the team issued press releases to the Indian national and international media, and sent early findings to Indian government stakeholders and invited them to meetings and workshops to discuss the research.

2. *Gave access to the research subjects*: The team enabled the media and other interested groups (BBC, CNN, Asian Human Rights Commission etc.) to visit the mining areas and meet some of the child miners so that they could produce their own reports and advocacy campaigns.

3. *Generated visual evidence* to substantiate the interview data, and to engage the media and influential stakeholders, such as the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Trafficking.

4. *Established a small network of media partners* across India who helped Impulse have a greater impact by transforming their research into media-friendly messages.

**What happened next?**
- The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Trafficking questioned the governments of India, Nepal and Bangladesh on the process.
- International mining companies that might have been involved in purchasing coal from these mines reviewed their suppliers' coal producing practices in order not to have child labour in their supply chain.
- The Indian Government sent an investigating team from the National Commission for Child Rights to investigate the process of rat hole mining, which sparked a national debate on the practice and the legislation and regulation needed to control it.
- A small number of criminal cases were filed against mine owners.
- Impulse received the India Positive Award from CNN/IBN for involving the media in positive stories for change.

**See:**
*GDNet's Interview with Hasina at the GDN 2012 Conference*
http://gdnetblog.org/2012/06/16/meghalaya-model-to-fight-against-human-trafficking/

## Examples of GDNet's contribution to the set of cases

Our purpose in selecting and developing the cases of Research Into Use was to identify connections between GDNet's activities and Southern research uptake. In all cases, the researchers were engaged with GDNet and consequently had access to various online services, depending on their eligibility. The researchers in the 21 cases identified the following specific examples of how GDNet had contributed to the quality of their research and its uptake:

- Training researchers in presentation skills and giving them learning materials for future reference;

- A GDNet research communications training workshop gave one African participant the opportunity to share his research with others in the region, who indicated that it was applicable to their own country contexts.

- Providing access to peer-reviewed journals through JStor that was more up-to-date than that provided by the researcher's own institution;

- Storing and sharing their research papers through the GDNet website; this was said to be encouraging and motivating for researchers who otherwise tended to feel that their research was not read or available to anyone outside of their country.

- Making important published research from the South available through GDNet's open access portal, which researchers were able to use to inform their own research.

There are others who have committed to support the uptake of Southern research (see p.6) such as Eldis, INASP and the British Library for Development Studies. *It is essential that Southern researchers avail themselves of the free services and opportunities such programmes offer, given the enabling influence we have seen that they can have.*

We are pleased to see that new, specialised knowledge-brokers are emerging in the South, for example Gobeshona, which aims to make research in Bangladesh on climate change more effective. *We believe that more of these local programmes should be encouraged.*

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## What do GDNet's Members say they need to help them increase the impact of their research?

The GDNet team has been in contact with thousands of researchers during the life of the programme and heard directly from them about the challenges they face in doing research and influencing policy. Our publication 'Listening to the South' shares what we have learned about these challenges and what researchers have said they need in order to overcome them. We highlight, in their own words, their main recommendations:

**Support Southern networking and dissemination:**
"A platform should be established to facilitate cross-border research between researchers."
"Southern researchers must be given more opportunities to present their papers in the knowledge fairs."
"We also need more South-South cooperation and opportunities to travel to seminars, conferences and workshops…we also need more sources of funds to attend such meetings."

**Provide access to data and research:**
"Southern researchers need access to more online journals, databases and subject specific softwares."
"Provide and publicise access to online publication to Southern researchers from the francophone countries. A lot of good researches are being conducted there."

**Fund research capacity building:**
"Put more funds in training researchers rather [than] carrying out secondary research in analysing policies which are not practical to the community needs because we need current information to address the daily challenges."
"Efforts to improve Southern research should focus on bring it closer to 'Northern research' standards, to 'Northern' researchers and their networks."

**Ensure there are Southern-focused online services:**
"…the interests and the understanding in Southern countries is usually not understood and valued in Northern countries."
"…it provides an alternative source of information that features Southern researchers' perspectives."
"Southern researchers need a platform to share their research and connect with other researchers."
"…the Southern-focused development challenges will be drowned by other global issues."

**See:**
'Listening to the South: What GDNet has learned about Southern researchers, their challenges and their needs', Shahira Emara and Cheryl Brown, June 2014.

Available at http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/Project/60734/ together with GDNet's other key publications from this phase.

# Helping others on their journey: what changed as a result of GDNet's capacity building?

As part of the M&E of GDNet's capacity building in research communications, we asked our workshop participants to provide an assessment of their confidence and ability going into the workshop and at the end. These scores provide some useful insights, for example, GDNet learned that female researchers tended to arrive at our workshops with lower confidence than their male peers, but experienced much higher increases by the time they left. However, we have always understood that increased confidence and ability immediately following a capacity building event is not particularly meaningful in itself; of greater importance is a long term and sustainable increase in confidence and ability and for this to translate into action.



*What happens to the learning after participants leave a workshop?*

Our method for tracking, and to some extent, prompting this change, was to ask participants to make a 'pledge' about what they would do differently as a result of attending the workshop. The pledge started: "Within the next three months I will…" and participants were told that they would be contacted by GDNet three months later to see what had happened. A selection of workshop participants with interesting or promising pledges was then invited to tell us about the extent to which they had been successful in implementing their pledges, the changes this had brought about or what had constrained them if they had been unable to implement them. In some instances, GDNet was able to revisit some of the pledges a full year (or even longer) after the workshop and this follow-up in particular has highlighted the complexity of any change pathway from enhanced research communications capacity to informed policy.

Our publication 'Becoming Better Capacity Builders' has more details about this method, its rationale and what we have learned from applying it. In this publication we present what we have learned through the pledges about the legacy of our capacity building workshops.

A key element of GDNet's capacity building approach has been to incorporate mentoring to help the learning take root in the participants and to support them in applying it when they return home. The mentoring starts before the workshop when GDNet makes personal contact with the participants. In the Policy Brief workshops, we introduced 'surgeries' during which participants received individual feedback from people who had analysed their policy briefs beforehand. This was followed with post-workshop assistance provided by the GDNet help desk through which participants were given the opportunity to work on revised briefs and share them with us for final feedback.



*Mentoring has been a key element of GDNet's capacity building.*

## Some examples of change

The pledge follow-up analysis highlighted many examples of change at the level of the individual who made the pledge, or the organisation in which he or she worked, which the participants credited to GDNet's training, including:

**Gaining TV coverage for their research** "If I hadn't participated in the workshop, I am sure my intervention would have never been that successful."

**Commitment to continuous improvement in research communication:** "I presented my paper…at the CSAE seminar. The feedback I received show that, relative to the past (i.e. before the workshop in Nairobi) I made a lot of progress regarding two points: (1) the abstract, and (2) policy implications of the results…from the feedback I received, I still have some problems on how to present the results, namely the background information. Any assistance from you or GDN is still welcome."

**Greater success with communicating to different audiences:**
"The personal guidance extended by your communication team was superb and excellent… My presentations… have been greatly appreciated. Further, the communication skills learnt at Budapest…are bearing significant results in my access to governmental apparatus"

**Remembering and applying key messages from the training:**
"As I was writing, I had at the back of my mind that I am writing this article for health policy makers. I tried…to make the presentation of results attractive and informative to my audience by use of graphs to show trends over time. Before attending the workshop I had been struggling…because I wasn't taking into account that I should know who I am writing to - my audience."

## The importance of 'passing it on'

There are limits to how many researchers can be reached directly through capacity building, which is why we have taken a 'training the trainers' approach to our workshops. It is very important to encourage and enable researchers to share the new learning they have acquired with their colleagues. We gave participants materials that could be photocopied during the workshop, and made the presentations, photos and handouts available online. We have heard, for example, how participants in a teaching role have passed their learning on to the next generation of researchers and seen results:
"I found out that their assignment results are much better and fruitful than before. I teach them to design simple and communicable presentations just as you taught me in Manila."

The pledge follow-up presented several other examples of where this encouragement to 'pass it on' has proved to be effective:

*"I have told many of my colleagues about the training. Made copies of the [workshop material] and circulated within colleagues in my institute".*

*"When I returned from that training, I shared the materials with my colleagues at the Economic Policy Analysis Unit of the ECOWAS Commission. I also made a presentation that helped them grasp the fundamental message from your training….To sum it up, your training was very timely and useful to all of us in research and policy analysis."*

*"We are also thinking about training other researchers from Universities, NGOs and research organization in Uganda…on how to write policy briefs using the experience from workshop."*

## GDNet's tips on designing and delivering capacity building workshops for Southern researchers

*Establish a relationship with participants beforehand*; social media tools are perfect for this purpose (we use a wiki to establish first contact and share workshop materials in advance). If participants are unfamiliar with social media you may want to include a session in your workshop so they can engage with the tools and materials afterwards.

*Learn about your participants beforehand*; pre-workshop surveys can be useful for this.

*Be flexible;* adapt the workshop to the participants' needs, particularly while it runs, as you get to know them better.

*Encourage participants to pass it on*: make resources available to help them share their learning with their peers.

*Be prepared to give more assistance to researchers who are not affiliated to organisations*, particularly when it comes to disseminating their work.

*Remember the importance of South-South learning*; avoid a purely North-South training approach, which might trigger hostility or resistance; call on Southern partners to share their experiences at workshops.

*Use online and offline methods:* If you want to reach as many researchers as possible, combine both approaches in your capacity building.

*Follow up with participants*. We used a mentoring help desk and asked participants to write pledges about how they intended to apply their learning. Several participants told us that our follow-up contact with them about their pledges encouraged them to redouble their efforts.

*Make time for M&E.* Develop a robust M&E mechanism that incorporates participants' feedback to improve the workshop design continuously.

**See:**
'Becoming Better Capacity Builders: What GDNet has learned about building researchers' confidence and ability to communicate their research', Zeinab Sabet, June 2014.

Available at http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/Project/60734/ along with GDNet's series of research communications workshop handouts and guides.

## What other lessons do we have to share?

In this publication we have shared some of the lessons we learned during this final phase of GDNet and what we believe we will leave behind. However, there are many other publications that contain our learning, advice and know-how that we would like to pass on as part of our legacy. Below are a selection of the documents you will find at our project record on DFID's Research for Development portal. We hope you will find them useful and we encourage you to share them with others.

**GDNet's forthcoming series of learning publications**
*All available at http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/Project/60734/*

'Listening to the South: What GDNet has learned about Southern researchers, their challenges and their needs', S. Emara and C. Brown, June 2014.

'Becoming Better Capacity Builders: What GDNet has learned about building researchers' confidence and ability to communicate their research', Z. Sabet, June 2014.

'Making Connections: What GDNet has learned about using social media to raise the profile of Southern research', by Z. Sabet and S. Emara, GDNet, June 2014.

'Learning by Design: Perspectives on Monitoring and Evaluating a Southern-Focused Knowledge Service', by S. Ghoneim (GDNet) and R. Gregorowski (Itad), June 2014.

**Conference Papers**
'Capacity building of knowledge management among research institutes: reflections from the GDNet experience', S. Ghoneim and C. Brown, 2011. Produced for the 20th Anniversary Summit of the African Capacity Building Foundation.

'Research in development: what does it take to make a difference? GDNet – Connect South – Challenges and Lessons Learnt', S. Ghoneim, 2011.
Based on a keynote presentation given at the opening session of the 2011 World Association for Sustainable Development Conference, New Jersey, USA.

**Series of 'Top Tips' on research communication, produced in collaboration with CommsConsult**
Presentation Skills A compilation of seven workshop handouts providing guidelines for how to give a great presentation.

Developing an Influence Plan A range of learning materials that cover the plan's implications, challenges and structure.

Effective Communication for Southern Researchers Topics include writing a policy brief and data visualisation.

Using Media to Communicate Research Outputs Covering topics such as how to give a media interview, how to make news and how to write for the media.

**The GDNet Blog**
In the Capacity Building category of posts we share our observations on building the capacity of Southern researchers to communicate their research to policymakers.

**Commissioned studies:**
'Implementing a gender audit of an online knowledge service: The experience of GDNet', Cheryl Brown, 2013.
Explores gender-based barriers to the use of online knowledge services and proposes a gender audit tool for GDNet to use with its online services.

'Are southern academics virtually connected? A review of the adoption of web 2.0 tools for research collaboration by development researchers in the South' Cheryl Brown, 2011.
Commissioned to help GDNet understand what it might need to do to help more Southern researchers use web 2.0 tools for research collaboration and knowledge-sharing.