

## Research-into-Use: a short guide

**What is RIU?** Research-into-Use (RIU) refers to a planned process by which important findings from a piece of research or from a body of research are used to influence relevant practices and/or policies.



**Why RIU?** If a body of research has exposed weaknesses in current practice, and if it has revealed better ways of doing things, then it is clearly important that change takes place. Changes may be needed to the practices of individual organisations or the entire sector; and changed practices should be reflected in alterations to policies.

**Systematic planning, blended with pragmatism.** Getting research into use is important, and it must be systematically planned and budgeted for. A great deal more could be done to communicate research findings simply and effectively in ways which connect with key stakeholders. However, the ways in which the evidence generated by research influences changes in practice and policy are complex; they involve politics and personalities, power and vested interests; and so we need to be realistic about what can be achieved.

**How can RIU be achieved?** It is important to be systematic about this, and to plan RIU activities from the outset of a piece of research, or a programme of research. The thinking and planning which you need to go through should include the following:



1. Identify the broad objectives of your RIU activities, even before the research has been started – in what areas do you wish to see things change?
2. Think who needs to understand the findings of the research – carry out a stakeholder analysis in which key individuals, organisations and coalitions, documents and processes are identified.
3. Figure out **how** you need to involve the various stakeholders.
4. Work out **when** are the key times for involving stakeholders. Once the research is completed distil the key messages which you wish to convey, in a readily accessible form.
5. Determine how you will know if you are achieving change – both the change you intend, and unplanned changes.
6. Ensure adequate resources are available, not only to undertake your research, but also to implement your RIU plan.

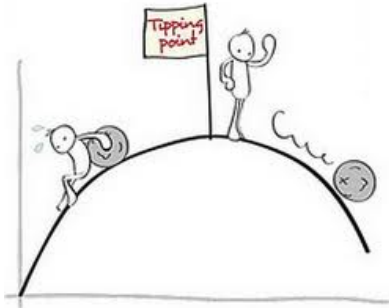
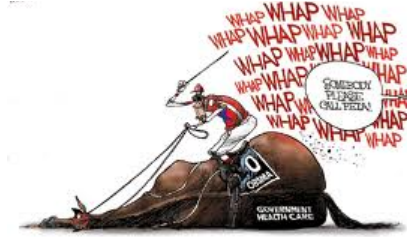


**Communicating** research findings requires a mix of skills, ranging from having an in-depth understanding of the research methods and findings; being able to translate those findings into simple (but not simplistic) messages targeted to specific audiences; and finding new and eye-catching ways of persuading key stakeholders to engage with research findings.

## Things to think about

The idea of RIU is very simple. However its achievement is more complicated and full of uncertainties.

Some research is of limited value, and hard decisions need to be made about whether or not to invest effort into disseminating inconclusive or insignificant research findings. As the saying goes, ‘don’t flog a dead horse’.



It is more likely that change will result from a 'critical mass' of research on a topic, and perhaps from a particular 'tipping point', than from an isolated research project. For example much field research and experience up to the early 2000s had shown the very limited outcomes achieved by sanitation programmes. The sector was ready for something new, so when CLTS and sanitation marketing emerged, the combination of demonstrated effectiveness and concerted promotion by charismatic individuals and influential organisations triggered rapid change.

The ways in which practices and policies change are not simple. In hygiene promotion it is not enough to tell people “*washing your hands is good for your health*” – this does not produce behaviour change. Similarly, it is not enough to tell stakeholders “*our research has shown X, so you need to do Y*”. Practice and policy are unlikely to change. Many political and personal factors combine to influence the uptake of evidence into changed practice and policy.

## RIU is political



### Are there any examples of RIU in the WASH sector?

The growing body of research about the impacts on health of improved hygiene and sanitation is bringing about a changed emphasis in WASH, with increasing focus on these areas compared to water supply. Much recent research has exposed the poor sustainability of rural water supply, and practices and policies are changing. Many other examples exist.

