

Lessons for improved uptake of research in policy and practice

Introduction

The development impact of research can be increased if policy makers and practitioners use research results. Ensuring this can happen has implications for all aspects of the research process, from design to evaluation. This fact sheet documents what SPLASH has learned about how the use of research in policy and practice can be improved.



The purpose

The key lessons learned and presented here are based on the results of a number of specific SPLASH activities. They highlight important considerations for the design, management, communication and evaluation of water research to allow research results to be better used.

Headline facts

The partnerships, processes and products within the research cycle are key to improving the use of results.

Getting the partnership right

What are the lessons learned?

- The active involvement of all relevant stakeholders in research is important, but remains a challenge.
- There is insufficient involvement of southern organizations in European-funded research programmes.
- North–South research partnerships are often unequal.
- Capacity building within research programmes can lead to brain-drain from the country concerned if there are insufficient opportunities to apply their acquired experience and competencies.
- Low levels of national research funding may provide few opportunities to utilise research skills.



These lessons all relate to different aspects of the problem of stakeholder involvement in the different stages of research. It is important to adopt a participatory approach, conduct stakeholder analysis and provide adequate funding in order to create more symmetrical research partnerships.

Getting the process right

What are the lessons learned?

- Generally the timing of research and policy cycles is not synchronised, with the research cycle often too short to influence rapidly developing policy making processes.
- Programme objectives are unclear so that effective monitoring and evaluation is difficult.
- Good research management includes defining the roles of partners clearly, and making sure that those partners can fulfil these roles.
- Complex application and reporting procedures are an administrative burden for research organizations.

Getting the product right

What are the lessons learned?

- Dissemination of research results is inadequate.
- Research can be duplicated and existing research results are not used to their full potential.
- Intermediary actors and organizations play an important role in getting research results used, however, how they do this and how they can be supported is not well understood.
- Assessment of the impact and outcomes of research is weak.



These lessons relate to maximising the use of research results, through effective dissemination and communication of research outputs and the subsequent monitoring and evaluation of their impact.

Recommendations

Based on these key lessons, SPLASH outlines recommendations resulting from each lesson which apply to different audiences, including research funders, researchers, research managers and potential research users. These are outlined in SPLASH fact sheet 4.



Further information

This is one of a series of SPLASH fact sheets available on the SPLASH website www.splash-era.net

If you would like to receive the quarterly SPLASH newsletter 'Making a SPLASH', please contact era-net@dfid.gov.uk

SPLASH is funded under the EC 6th Framework Programme (FP6)

Photographs front: Kyung Shik Chung (UN Cote D'Ivoire) and Hazel Jones (WEDC), back: Wayne Conradie (Picturing Africa)