

LESSONS LEARNT ON DESIGNING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

REPORT OF A WORKSHOP HELD AT DFID
26TH JULY 2006

CENTRAL RESEARCH DEPARTMENT¹ AUGUST 2006



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* Is a separate document and can be found at www.dfid.gov.uk/research

INTRODUCTION

In September 2004 DFID produced the Research Funding Framework 2005-2007², which details DFID's commitments to research funding to the end of 2007. This document identifies getting research to users as a priority area. It recognises that 'research needs to communicate with a wide range of stakeholders, including NGOs, civil society and the private sector, who not only play an important role in stimulating policy debates, but are also key in delivering new knowledge and technologies to poor people'. In meeting this objective, DFID took the bold step of making it a requirement that for all DFID-supported research programmes (i) a draft communication strategy must be produced during the inception phase of a programme and (ii) a minimum 10% of the research budget must be assigned to communication.

Since 2005 all new research programmes have been tasked with designing a communication strategy. Researchers have good experience in communicating their research, though in many cases this tends to be ad hoc, dealt with at later stages in the research cycle and reported through traditional media such as professional journals. Planning for research communication from the start of research, allocating resources to communication and determining clear management responsibilities (which may include a communication officer/specialist position in the research team) are relatively new concepts to research management. DFID's policy has been put in place to improve the uptake and use of research products at all levels from communities through to policy implementers and planners.

DFID has produced Communication Guidance Notes³ to assist research programmes with designing their communication strategies. In early 2006, DFID conducted a short review to follow-up on the use of these guidance notes. During this process a number of research programmes indicated a desire to hold a lesson sharing workshop.

This workshop was the first of its kind in DFID, as it brought together participants from 22 DFID-supported Research Programmes across the majority of DFID's priority research areas (health, education, social science, agriculture). Attendance was 100 percent, which indicates value and need for such workshops. There were also participants from specialist communication organisations (see Annex 2: List of participants).

This report chronicles the main discussion and learning points that arose during the workshop. Not all these points were responded to during the workshop, as some were general statements, some were practical learning points, and some required much more in-depth discussion. They are presented in this report as a record and to be referred to and taken-up in future workshops and learning events.

² www.dfid.gov.uk/research/newresearch.asp

³ www.dfid.gov.uk/research/guidance.asp

OBJECTIVES OF THE LESSON SHARING WORKSHOP

The main objective of the workshop was to share lessons and experiences from designing research communication strategies. Specifically the workshop aimed to:

- Provide an opportunity to give feedback to DFID's Central Research Department (CRD) on the process and expectations in designing and implementing a communication strategy.
- Give researchers the opportunity to share experiences across research programmes.
- Identify how and where CRD can provide support to research programmes on communication.
- Create a space for networking across research programmes and to meet with other research programme communication/policy officers to see how resources might be shared.

THE WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

The workshop was opened by Dylan Winder, Team Leader of CRD's Communication Team. Dylan emphasised the importance of research communication to improving access to and uptake of research. He also highlighted the importance of research to DFID's overall work in alleviating world poverty. The new white paper (2006) makes a commitment to double research funding by 2010. The full programme is given in Annex 1.

The first presentation outlined the strengths and weaknesses of research communication strategies, based on an analysis of Research Programmes' Communication Strategies included in their Inception Reports. The list is not exhaustive, but provides an indication of the main strengths and weaknesses (see presentations slides in Annex 4).

The main part of the day was given to presentations from six research programmes⁴. These presentations were selected because they provided very different experiences and approaches to research communication. Three research programmes (marked *) were established in 2000/01 and are now in their second 5-year phase, whilst three are new programmes. Each presentation was selected to give participants a broad view to what a strategy might look like and how it might be implemented. The presentations also provided an opportunity to share lessons learnt, constraints and solutions in designing and implementing the strategies. The following table indicates the main features of the six communication strategies.

⁴ Only five presented as the Communications Officer for the Realising Rights RPC was unable to attend. The presentation has been included in this report.

Research Programme	Main features of the Communication Strategy
Chronic Poverty Research Programme* www.chronicpoverty.org/index.html	Communication and Engagement Strategy Wide experience in policy research and media engagement Developed a comprehensive Policy Influencing and Media Engagement Resource Pack
Crisis States Research Centre* www.crisisstates.com/index.htm	Policy and Communication Strategy Dealing with very sensitive political issues. Requires a different approach to policy engagement and communication
Citizenship, Participation and Accountability Development Research Centre* www.drc-citizenship.org/	A bottom-up approach to communication, which is integral to the research itself. Emphasis on social awareness, internal communication, reflection and learning. Creating spaces for peer learning is important Communication Strategy for the RPC, for each partner country and for research themes
Implementing Educational Quality Research Programme Consortium	A new RPC. The Communication Strategy is developing into 'handbook' for researchers. Putting in place good internal communication is emphasised RPC communication strategy, national communication teams and national strategies
Realising Rights Research Programme Consortium www.realising-rights.org/index.htm	A new RPC Advocacy focus as dealing with many sensitive issues (sexual and reproductive rights); emphasis on the power of the media for communicating these issues Strong emphasis on using existing networks and building capacity of partners Communication for partnership building
Research into Use Programme	A new £37 million research programme under the Strategy for Research on Sustainable Agriculture. Looks to promote and scale-up/our natural resources research outputs, which have been developed during the 10-year long DFID-supported Renewable Natural Resources Research Programme 4 focus areas: communication and advocacy learning amongst stakeholders; communication strategy for the programme; information markets; programme communication and information management Full-time Communication Manger and Policy Manager

DISCUSSION POINTS

During the above presentations and throughout the day, questions and responses were sought to issues raised by participants. This section groups the discussions under five themes:

- 01 Relationships with stakeholders**
- 02 Internal versus external communication**
- 03 Management (responsibilities and leadership)**
- 04 Capacity building for improved research communication**
- 05 Risk – in implementing and achieving the objectives of the communication strategy**

Some participants shared insights and offered guidance based on their own experiences and we have captured these under 'Principles of Communication' in each theme. Other participants raised issues and challenges to effective communication, which are captured under 'Issues'.

01 Relationship With Stakeholders

Most discussion centred on how to engage with stakeholders in a meaningful way that is relevant and appropriate to their needs and that results in useful research knowledge that is actively taken-up.

Principles/Good Practice in research communication

- Engage with stakeholders at the start of a project
- Demand/pull from stakeholders is important for research uptake (as well as 'push' or dissemination by researchers). To stimulate demand, we need to understand the constraints that the potential users are under – i.e. to understand how and where they access information/ what they already know etc.
- Undertaking a comprehensive stakeholder analysis at the start and at key stages throughout the life of the project (because the situation changes)
- Research outputs need to be crafted to meet the needs of policymakers, e.g. simple, short and to the point. Workshops and conferences are often not effective for this specific audience because they take up too much time.
- Policy implementers (e.g. teachers, doctors, local administrators) are a different and important audience (distinct from policy makers). For some researchers the tools in the ODI RAPID Tools for Policy

Handbook were helpful in working through the distinctions (<http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/rapid/tools1.pdf#search=%22RAPID%20Handbook%22>).

- It's important to 'Globalise the evidence – localise the decision; to make research knowledge widely available, but also useful to meet local contexts. This includes always designing outputs for the intended audience.
- Don't work in isolation: you need to know who else is working in your subject area/country.
- Communication activities must be planned and take place throughout the life of the research programme as part of a systematic approach to communication. This involves in-country partners spending time conducting "shuttle diplomacy" to keep stakeholders actively involved and 'on board'.

Issues

- How to encourage demand/pull from stakeholders as well as push from researchers?
- Overlooking audiences because you don't think they have a role
- How to coordinate communication activities (e.g. meeting with the same stakeholder) with other researchers/programmes? What can DFID do to support research programmes in coordinating communication activities in countries/across themes?

02 Internal Vs. External Communication

Participants recognised that effective internal communication in a research programme is a pre-requisite to achieving effective external communication. This involves communication between research partners across countries, across themes, and between different layers of management. Different models work for different research programmes.

Principles/Good Practice in research communication

- Building partnerships between researchers early on in the research programme – workshops that bring people together is a 'leveller' and cements relationships
- Different visions are possible if there is a basis of understanding and mutual respect
- Good facilitation of workshops to bring research teams together

Issues

- What are the structures and processes that get the internal communication right and enable external communication to work well?

03 Management

Connected to the previous theme of effective internal communication, is the challenge of managing research in a way that encourages, supports and promotes effective communication.

Principles/Good Practice in research communication

- Embed communication planning in research programme management.
- The Communication Strategy should be an active document that captures communications ambitions and plans, and is constantly refined as the research unfolds. It should be used as the team's learning document that constantly changes, as well as serving as a handbook e.g. containing tools and processes for research communication, that can be shared with others outside the project, and beyond the life of the project (i.e. after the DFID-funded programme has ended).
- Everyone has insights into communication. The more you capture these individual experiences the better the strategy. The strategy should be developed by bringing together those who implement and consequently own it, for example in a workshop: such forums provide opportunities for peer learning.
- Leadership from management is important.

Issues

- Making time and planning workshops during the inception phase to bring people together to develop the strategy.
- Ten percent (DFID guide to the minimum research communication spend as a percent of the overall research budget) sounds like a lot, but it's not much when you start to spend it. However, it should be enough to hire the best communications specialists to complement existing skills in the team.
- How to get a balance between centralised M&E and M&E activities of partners?
- How to capture communication ambitions in the outputs of a logframe?
- Getting senior managers to buy-in and support research communication.

04 Communication Capacity Building of Researchers

Principles/Good Practice in research communication

- Researchers are already communicators; they need to recognise which audiences they are good at communicating with, and where they need extra help from other specialists.
- The role of the Communication Officer is to guide communication activities rather than 'do them' (Crisis States DRC). You need to give all researchers a responsibility for communication, and enable them to see the connection between communications and their research objectives.
- Researchers need to be involved in drafting the strategy and active in getting the material out. It should not be left to the Communications Officer alone.

Issues

- It is difficult to get researchers to see communication as an important part of their job. They see communications activities eating into the time they have to do research, and often want extra funds for communication activities.
- How to incentivise researchers to take-on additional research communication function when it's a new role to them (n.b. this comment was made by a participant belonging to a Development Research Centre that had already completed a DFID-funded five-year programme prior to the requirement to follow a Communications Strategy)? Useful ideas came from the Education Quality RPC, which has country-level communications advisory groups; and the Citizenship DRC, which uses participatory video to help researchers think about what they can do better.
- Providing incentives to researchers for good communication – at present the current environment does not support them to do this well.
- Researchers need to think about what changes they expect as a result of communicating their research.

05 Risk

Assessing the risks of achieving research communication objectives was something new to all participants, but some useful ideas emerged from the presentations. The process of undertaking a risk assessment as a group was useful in highlighting different perceptions of what is possible through communication, and what are the different roles of each of the team members.

Principles/Good Practice in research communication

- Where research results are not welcome locally – e.g. may not be politic to publish them locally – it is particularly important to get local researchers and communications staff to design the strategy. They will be closer to, and more aware of the local environment and risks associated with communicating different areas of the research outputs.
- When using communication channels it's important to recognise that some are more trusted than others by the audience. Therefore it's important to think about the level of trust/reliability of a channel before using it.
- Undertaking a risk assessment of the strategy helps define roles of the researchers (e.g. in the Crisis States DRC, the London School of Economics published the research of their Ugandan colleagues due to the sensitive nature of the research findings).

In addition to the discussion above, loosely grouped into five categories, participants also highlighted a number of general methods and process that they've found to be useful in communication:

- Communication is reciprocal – be prepared to listen, it is also an iterative process;
- Strategies must have achievable and realistic aims;
- Need to think beyond information to what affects uptake (i.e. a need to understand the context in which research is taken-up, used and accessed);
- Some people think broad story telling leaves a real impression but some think this oversimplifies and want to concentrate on facts and figures – you learn from stories and should therefore report both negative and positive;
- Need to map the information environments of the stakeholders;
- Expanding the network for policy contacts through getting researchers to put all their contacts in a central database.

COMMITMENTS: THE NEXT STEPS

The final session of the day was to seek feedback from research programmes on how and where DFID can continue to support them in designing and implementing Communication Strategies (see presentation in Annex 4). As a result of this presentation a number of commitments were made by participants and DFID. The following section lists these commitments along with some that were identified from the workshop evaluation (see Annex 3).

Participants agreed to:

01 Most research programmes are keen to work together and share experience etc., but they may need more resources. Suggestions included:

- Share details of good communication partners in country.
- Use this meeting as a basis of a community D-Groups (though no decision was reached on who might manage a D-Group)

02 All programmes should look at lessons learnt –

- Should the communication officer also monitor learning?
- Useful to have guidance on learning, impact etc., Who can provide this?
- Learning about which products are useful for different audiences
- Sharing learning across organisations is difficult unless they have common issues
- Need a repository for lessons and sharing experiences – possibly R4D (www.research4development.info), where this learning can be shared
- Produce short, two-page, un-edited ‘thought pieces’ that chronicle a particular aspect of learning which they want to share with others (along the lines of those submitted by participants to the 2003 DFID Research Communications Review. See the case studies at www.dfid.gov.uk/research/newresearchbg.asp)

03 Use the contact list from this workshop to start informal discussions and information sharing amongst research programmes.

DFID agreed to:

The workshop evaluation highlighted that participants would prefer future workshops to be (i) theme focused and (ii) more interactive and participatory, with time for small group discussions. In response to these suggestions we will ensure that the next workshop (between April and July 2007, including at least one in Africa) meets these requirements.

The following is a list of suggestions made by participants, with a response from DFID on what we can deliver on and when.

01 Guidance on monitoring and learning lessons learned by DFID. What does DFID require each RPC to report on and capture in lesson learning on communication strategies?

- DFID has produced standard reporting requirements and these detail when and how the communication strategy should be reported on (see www.dfid.gov.uk/research/evaluations.asp)
- DFID CRD is supporting a 2-day workshop on Monitoring and Evaluating Research Communication (5th – 6th September 2006). Nick Ishmael-Perkins (Healthlink) will send details of this meeting to all workshop participants. The scoping study that informed the workshop and the workshop report will also be sent to participants.

02 R4D communication corner/repository for all communication strategies, reviews of strategies and reviews of lessons learned about strategies.

- R4D is still being developed and project records and documents are being added on a daily basis. This suggestion will be put to the next Management Meeting for R4D (scheduled for 5th October 2006). If agreed at the management meeting, we will set-up the area on R4D by December 2006

03 Revise DFID guidance notes.

- In view of comments received about the Guidance Notes a revised and shorter version will be produced by October 2006.
- DFID will consider producing a further publication on practical experiences in implementing research communication strategies. This will be produced by autumn 2007.

04 Provide guidance on how to move from strategic level communication to ‘how-to’ action plans.

- This guidance will be incorporated in the ‘Practical Experiences’ publication mentioned above. This publication will be produced on the back of the second research programme communication workshop/meeting on putting a Communication Strategy into action. The workshop is planned for April 2007.

05 Timelines for sharing external events on the communication corner of R4D and/or the DFID site.

- The best place for this is probably R4D. This will be discussed at the next R4D management meeting (5th October 2006). CRD maintains a list of external events on its intranet so we anticipate that making this available on either R4D or the DFID site will not be a problem. We do, however, rely on research programmes to provide us with information to keep this up-to-date.

06 Guidance Notes on communication learning (in annual reports):

- The DFID Guidance on Monitoring and Evaluation for Research Programmes (www.dfid.gov.uk/research/evaluation) includes a section on lesson learning in the research programme and from the communication strategy. We encourage research programmes to complete this section in detail.

- CRD will consider compiling this learning from all annual reports and making the information available in one file on R4D.

07 Two-page communication approaches / case studies from 2003 Research Communication Review to kick-start a D-group discussion.

- The workshop did not discuss who might be willing to manage a D-group, but CRD does not have the resources to do this. CRD will make available all the case studies that were produced as part of the Communications Review (www.dfid.gov.uk/research/newresearchbg.asp) that informed the Research Funding Framework 2005-2007.
- Research programmes need to decide whether or not a D-group can be managed and who is willing to do this.

08 DFID policy makers an enigma to people outside! – is it possible to have a workshop to meet them?

- Each research programme should have a link advisor. The majority of these advisors are in policy division or directly linked to policy division through the advisory groups. This is your direct link to policy makers in DFID. In the first instance you should contact the link advisor, or the CRD Deputy Programme Manager responsible for your research programme.

09 DFID to make research programmes aware of activities funded by CRD communications team and how to make contact with these.

- There is a full list of activities funded by the CRD Communications team available on R4D (<http://www.research4development.info/researchTopics.asp?topic=Information%20and%20Communication>). Contact details are provided with each record about the project/programme. For further information contact the Communications Team (d-poad@dfid.gov.uk or alan-hamilton@dfid.gov.uk)

10 DFID will identify opportunities to continue cross-programme collaboration on aspects of communication.

- The research programmes inception reports, annual reports and other reviews provide CRD with valuable information to look at cross-programme learning; especially across sectors. We will monitor the themes and lessons coming out of research programmes' communication work and identify ways to make this available to all research programmes (either through thematic workshops, R4D or other events).

11 DFID to think about supporting a programme (of research?) to look across research programmes on how learning is captured and the lessons emerging.

- We will consider this as part of the follow-up work to the Research Communications Monitoring and Evaluation workshop.

ANNEX 1: WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

Wednesday 26th July 2006

Department for International Development, 1 Palace Street, London

Time	Session	Presenter/Facilitator
09.45 – 10.00	Arrival and Coffee	
10.00 – 10.05	Welcome	Dylan Winder – Team leader, CRD Communications Team
10.05 – 10.10	Purpose of the workshop	Abigail Mulhall
10.10 – 10.30	Introductions	Megan Lloyd-Laney
10.30 – 11.00	CRD summary of comments on inception phase communication strategies - strengths and weaknesses	Megan Lloyd-Laney
11.00 – 13.10	Presentations from 6 research programmes to introduce their communication strategies, problems they face, where things worked well.	Kate Brincklow, IDS Joost van der Zwan, LSE Angeline Barrett, Bristol University Joanna Wheeler, IDS Caroline Harper, ODI Wyn Richards, NRInternational Ltd
13.10 – 13.30	Discussion and action points	Megan Lloyd-Laney
13.30 – 15.00	Lunch and networking opportunity – walk-round session	All
15.00 – 15.15	DFID's Press Office – Role and how they can assist research programmes	Nic Fearon-Low
15.15 – 15.30	ID21/Mobilising Knowledge for Development Programme	Geoff Barnard Louise Daniel Caroline Knowles
15.30 – 15.40	R4D	Dale Poad
15.40 – 16.00	Summary of comments on the Communication Guidance Notes – what support do Research Programmes need?	Abigail Mulhall
16.00 – 16.20	Discussion and action points	Megan Lloyd-Laney
16.20 – 16.30	Close	Dylan Winder
16.30 – 17.00	Coffee and further networking opportunities	

ANNEX 2: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Research Programme/Organisation	E-mail Address	Participant
HD3 Research and Capacity Building in Reproductive and Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS in developing countries London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	onno.dekker@lshtm.ac.uk	Onno Dekker
HD4 – Realising Rights: improving sexual and reproductive health for poor and vulnerable populations Institute of Development Studies and HD106 – Future Health Systems: Making Health Systems Work for the Poor Johns Hopkins University	s.reddin@ids.ac.uk	Samantha Reddin
HD5 – Achieving MDGs 4 and 5 Institute of Child Health	ipu@ich.ucl.ac.uk dominique.behague@lshtm.ac.uk	Sarah Ball Dominique Behague
HD7 – Effective Health Care Alliance Programme Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	cjdhel@liv.ac.uk	Helen Smith
HD105 – Consortium for Research on Equitable Health Systems London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	Nicola.lord@lshtm.ac.uk	Nicola Lord
HD 205 – TARGETS London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	alexandra.coldham@lshtm.ac.uk ruth.mcnerney@lshtm.ac.uk	Alexandra Coldham Dr Ruth McNerney
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HD 9 Implementing Education Quality in Low income countries University of Bristol	angeline.barrett@bris.ac.uk RCDuggan@bath.ac.uk	Angeline Barrett Rita Chawla-Duggan
HD 10 Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) University of Sussex	f.m.hunt@sussex.ac.uk	Frances Hunt

Research Programme/Organisation	E-mail Address	Participant
HD 11 Treatment and Care HIV	–	–
HD12 Social Context of HIV Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	t.jackson@liv.ac.uk	Teresa Jackson
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DFID Press Office, Information and Civil Society Department	Nic-fearon-low@dfid.gov.uk	Nic Fearon-Low Senior Press Officer

ANNEX 3: WORKSHOP EVALUATION

ONE BAD THING ABOUT THE DAY

- Could have done with more coffee!
- Some sessions a bit long and overrun.
- Too much passive listening. While spaces for Q&A etc. opened up, some people speaking. While others have things to say perhaps don't want to do it in public forum. Small groups would be good.
- Lunch – not enough space and variety/number of sandwiches was poor.
- Next time – once the relationships have been established – could have more participatory approach. A two-day workshop?
- Needed chair to speed things along and the 'coordinator' spoke longer than some of his speakers!
- More on practical experiences would have been good. Perhaps for the future? Excellent communication activities and less so showcased?
- Not enough time for working together (small groups?).
- Too presentation heavy and not enough time for networking and NO small group discussion. Not everyone feels comfortable talking in plenary.
- Difficult to think of anything negative.
- Felt some of the fundamental questions on the role of research in policy-making still need to be looked at critically (e.g. competition, implementation barriers, global coordination of research/policy priorities) sometimes I wonder if all this uncoordinated individualised advocacy won't also have negative impact.
- Room next door where lunch was served was too small so that it wasn't possible to move around and talk to people! Not enough sandwiches.
- Timing and depth of content.
- Not enough time and space to network. An email group following from this would be great.
- Not everyone spoke – look at format to create smaller groups for discussion.
- Discussion dominated by a few people.
- Afternoon session dragged. It would have been good to have a break so we could continue to focus all afternoon.

ONE GOOD THING ABOUT THE DAY

- Very useful to learn from other RPCs.
- Excellent day. Very informative and great to have communication contact with other RPCs.
- Air conditioning! To get to speak to so many people dealing with the same matters. To get better understanding of background why communication is so important.
- Very good mix between imparting information and listening to group's experience/exchange.
- Networking opportunity. Cross sectional approach/links. Sense of belonging to a new Communications team. Well facilitated. Look forward to an overseas based meeting where local suppliers and users are invited. Good on you! PS perhaps the next time they should have a specific thematic focus.
- Best thing was to meet comms-focused people from RPCs/DRCs i.e. networking.
- Good representation and participation of projects. Good coverage of issues and priorities. Liked reports by old and new projects. Opportunity to interact and discuss and exchange.
- Interesting to hear about other communications and challenges faced. Thanks for a great day.
- Networking opportunity and learning about what the RPCs are doing.
- Networking opportunity.
- Excellent opportunity to meet others working in the same area.
- Variety of presentations. Openness of discussions. Willingness to share and learn.
- Really enjoyed it – thanks and useful.
- Good practice and ideas shared.
- Very useful to share strategies.
- Very useful to finally have this information sharing session. Workshops follow-up success based on decent uptake of discussed steps.
- It happened! A real milestone!
- Networking and finding out about ID21 strengths and weaknesses of comms strategies.
- Multisectoral interaction/communication.
- Networking opportunity and space provided for this.
- Good to meet other people doing similar types of work.

THE DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: LEADING THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S FIGHT AGAINST WORLD POVERTY.

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