

Scoping study

Monitoring and Evaluation of Research Communications

Catherine Butcher and Gil Yaron

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Executive Summary

This scoping study on the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of research communications was carried out over a period of 15 days to:

- Provide a broad overview of the key issues in the monitoring and evaluation of research communications
- Draw out differences, if and where they exist, between M&E of research communications compared with M&E generally
- Identify characteristics of good practice in the M&E of research communications and highlight implications for those involved

In reviewing the literature the study addresses three questions:

- What approaches have been used in monitoring and evaluation of research communications?
- What methods and tools are currently being used to monitor and evaluate research communications?
- Is there anything special about M&E of research communications?

In producing this study the authors worked closely with members of the Research Communication M&E steering group. The steering group is made up of representatives from a number of organisations with an interest in monitoring and evaluation of research communications. An early focus on M&E of research communications for development was agreed with this group. The study is based on a list of relevant literature provided by the steering group and telephone interviews of varying lengths with 16 practitioners working in the field of M&E of research communications. Five case studies were produced drawing on the telephone interviews, the authors' own experiences and where available, published material. Telephone interviews and case studies produced information on practitioners' current experience and the challenges they face in carrying out M&E of research communications. Interviewees, case studies and the literature also provided information about the issues which are the most important for those directly involved in M&E of research communications and findings from the literature were cross-checked against interview findings to identify lessons that could be shared.

The scoping study provides an overview of key approaches and methods used in research communication, a series of case studies of research communications M&E, a checklist drawn from the literature of initial questions for those carrying out M&E, a conclusion which identifies a number of implications for funders, evaluators and implementers of research communication projects or programmes, and an annexed literature review.

When asked about key challenges interviewees spoke about the importance of having a sound conceptual framework for research communication programmes, the difficulty of monitoring unexpected impacts of research communication programmes, of defining potential stakeholders and audiences at an early stage, and of identifying long-term impact as opposed to 'snap-shots' of impact in particular contexts and at particular times.

The most commonly used conceptual framework for M&E was found to be the logical framework. However the use of log frames often presented difficulties in capturing 'network'

aspects of communications. Alternative frameworks such as mapping of potential communication pathways were potentially more useful in monitoring the relationship between networks and research communications, but could also become unwieldy for complex projects involving many potential stakeholders and possible communication routes.

Stakeholders including target audiences and knowledge intermediaries were often identified only in the broadest terms. Several interviewees mentioned that less was known about potential intermediaries, especially when it came to targeting policy makers as an audience for research communication. However, interviewees also noted that establishing an ongoing relationship with audiences and intermediaries could enhance the uptake of information and therefore act as a proxy indicator of impact.

A range of methods and tools are currently in use and interviewees generally used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods were more commonly used for ongoing monitoring. Semi-structured interviews were most frequently used in evaluations. A number of interviewees referred to difficulties experienced in designing good interviews, whether structured or semi-structured. No examples of the use of the 'Most Significant Change' method were found in the context of research communications but this is an area which many thought to have potential.

Case studies which appear in boxes throughout the scoping study highlight approaches used and challenges faced with regard to M&E by a number of practitioners in the field of research communications. Key challenges included unidentified bias resulting from cultural factors or self-selection, difficulties in establishing impact within the time scale of projects or programmes, difficulties in attributing the impact of research communication to the project or programme activities themselves and lack of strong analysis of project or programme stakeholders.

The conclusion of the scoping study identifies a number of implications for funders, evaluators and implementers of research communication projects or programmes. For implementers, or those involved directly in M&E the most important issues were the need to collect better baseline data, the need for regular monitoring as well as evaluation, the need for greater identification of audiences and pathways for the communication of research and the need to build space for reflection and learning throughout the project cycle. Whilst these reflect understanding of good practice in M&E generally, they were found to be areas which are particularly difficult to monitor and evaluate in research communications programmes.

1 Introduction

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are key instruments to encourage on-going learning for the improvement of development interventions. The benefits of conducting good M&E include improvement in management and performance in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and value for money, and an increase in accountability and transparency.

The ultimate aim of monitoring and evaluation is *to learn* what has worked and what has not. However a second question has to be added: what has worked and *for whom?*

Increasingly those working in development are under pressure to demonstrate and learn from the impact of their work, to show the long-term effect of their work *on intended beneficiaries*. This increased pressure has shifted the emphasis in M&E away from just demonstrating that inputs have been used wisely and activities have been carried out, to an emphasis on what the long-term and sustainable benefits are for those that an intervention is intended to help. Therefore the focus of this study is on outcomes and impact although other areas are covered and monitoring of activities remains important in understanding why outcomes and impact have come about – in recording and explaining the steps along the way.

1.1 Study purpose and approach

There are many different types of M&E – which can be categorised by who is involved in M&E (self-M&E, participatory M&E, external evaluations) or by subject matter (projects, programmes, research communications). Due to time constraints, the focus of this study is on the M&E of research communications for development, rather than on M&E generally.

The purpose of the study is to:

- Provide a broad overview of the key issues in the monitoring and evaluation of research communications
- Draw out differences, if and where they exist, between M&E of research communications compared with M&E more generally
- Identify characteristics of good practice in the M&E of research communications and highlight implications for those involved.

In producing this study the authors worked closely with members of the Research Communication M&E steering group. The steering group is made up of representatives from a number of organisations with an interest in monitoring and evaluation of research communications. An early focus on M&E of research communications for development was agreed with this group. The study is based on a list of relevant literature provided by the steering group and telephone interviews of varying lengths with 16 practitioners working in the field of M&E of research communications. Five case studies were produced drawing on the telephone interviews, the authors' own experiences and where available, published material.

The study builds on a workshop held in February 2006: as a first step in assessing the options available and opportunities for learning, representatives from a range of organisations¹ met at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) to explore current work and experience relating to research communications and M&E of research communications. It was agreed to take three lines of action forward: 1) a series of lunchtime meetings to further the discussion; 2) development of a summary of each research communication programme; 3) development of a concept note and possible follow-up workshop.

¹ Healthlink, IDS, IIED, INASP, Panos, ODI, SciDev (with apologies from DFID)

Two key questions emerged from the workshop:

1. What specific methods are people using to evaluate the effectiveness of models of research communication and how might they be used in different situations?
2. Why is assessing research communication different from, or similar to, other forms of communications impact assessment?

This study addresses these two questions, and its findings are intended to feed into discussions which will take place during the follow-up workshop taking place on 5th - 6th September 2006.

1.2 Working definitions

For the purposes of this study working definitions were agreed for the concepts of 'Research', 'Communication', 'Evaluation', 'Activity', 'Output', 'Outcome' and 'Impact'.

From the definitions given and from discussions with practitioners, it can be seen that both research and communications cover a broad range of development interventions. Many, if not all, development interventions include an element of both communication and research. Research communication, as with all good communication, should be a two- or multiple-way process and research findings can be generated in a range of settings from research stations, to social research carried out in the community or people in their everyday lives.

The working definitions are as follows:

Research: any systematic learning from theory building and data collection to evaluation action research. This includes published academic research, research conducted by NGOs to support campaigns and unpublished 'grey' literature, often produced in consultation with poor communities. The study considers both scientific and social science development research recognising that there may be different aspects to monitoring and evaluating their communication²

Communication: all processes of dialogue, exchange of information and resources, and the negotiation and decision-making that surrounds any particular issue in all walks of life.

Monitoring: the process of collecting and analysing information to track project implementation progress

Evaluation: the analysis and assessment of information in order to judge value, worth or impact of a project or programme

Activity: actions taken or work performed through inputs such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources, mobilized to produce specific outputs³

Output: the products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention; may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes

Outcome: the likelihood of short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs

Impact: positive and negative, primary or secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention

1.3 Structure of the Report

The report is structured around a number of key questions. These are:

- What is the current state of play in M&E of research communications? (Section 2)
- Is there anything special about M&E of research communications? (Section 3)
- Implications for stakeholders (Conclusion)

² Definitions of research, communication, monitoring and evaluation are from Terms of Reference

³ Definitions of activity, output, outcome and impacts are from Guidance on Evaluation and Review for DFID Staff, July 2005, Department for International Development Evaluation Unit.

2 Overview: What is the current state of play in M&E of research communications?

2.1 Key Findings from the Literature

A number of findings from the literature seen as particularly relevant to the M&E of research communication are provided below. Further details of the literature reviewed are provided in Annex 1.

2.1.1 Context for research communication

A number of authors have emphasised the importance of capturing elements of context in M&E of communication research. O'Neil (2005) drawing on a formal evaluation of 22 IDRC-supported research projects in developing countries that specifically examined the dynamic interactions of development research with policy-making, recognizes that:

“the influence that research has on policy is determined in the particulars of time and place, both in the character of research and of the researcher and in the politics and processes of making and conducting policy”.

She identifies three essential elements if development research is to have an influence:

- **Intent:** Researchers must want to communicate their research
- **Direct engagement** with (in this case) the policy community. This means more than communicating information; rather, it means forming relationships with policy-makers that can endure over many years.
- **Public Participation:** “To have real and lasting influence on policy (in this case), members of the research community must become participants in democratic governance, active at every level, from community deliberation and decision making to national and international policy-making.”

In terms of M&E, intent, direct engagement with audiences and the involvement of researchers in the development process are areas of potential focus and the three elements listed above can be adapted to act as indicators.

By starting with a view of how research is communicated and where effects are expected to be achieved, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) can focus on each stage of the research communication. This will allow for monitoring and evaluation of key areas provided the view, model or conceptual framework is a reasonable representation of reality or is sufficiently flexible to capture unforeseen effects. It allows the assumptions about how and to whom research will be communicated to be clarified and agreed, and subsequently tested.

Huw Davies et al (2005) present six models of research use (noting that most applied work has used the first three). They note that these models encapsulate different types and processes of research use and imply different ways of approaching the assessment task:

1. *Classic, knowledge-driven model:* a linear view that research findings may be communicated to impel action;
2. *Problem-solving, policy-driven model:* a second linear view that begins with the end-users of research and the problems they face, before tracking back in search of useful findings;

3. *Interactive model*: here the process is modeled as a set of (non-linear; less predictable) interactions between researchers and users, with research impact happening through complex social processes of ‘sustained interactivity’⁴;
4. *Enlightenment model*: this models eschews the notion that research impacts are simple and instrumental in effect; instead research is seen to have an effect through ‘the gradual sedimentation of insight, theories, concepts and perspectives’;
5. *Political model*: here research findings are seen as but more ammunition in adversarial systems of decision making;
6. *Tactical model*: in this model, research becomes a resource to be drawn on whenever there is pressure for action on complex public issues, and may be used not just to bolster decision making but also to stall and deflect pressure for action.

Other practitioners will have their own conceptual frameworks or models which may not fit neatly into the categories above. However from an M&E perspective, articulating and agreeing such a model, even if it subsequently changes, will assist in knowing where to focus M&E efforts.

2.1.2 Approaches – tracking forwards or tracking backwards?

There are two alternative approaches to monitoring and evaluating the effects of research:

1. Tracking forwards - from completed research to see where and how it is communicated, and to what effect.
2. Tracking backwards - examining policy choices, organisational management and professional practice to explore how research is sought out and used in these areas, and to what effect.

For tracking forwards, it is important to have an idea of where to look for effects. Davies et al (2005) identify five categories to capture the multi-dimensional nature of research output:

1. “knowledge production (e.g. peer-reviewed papers);
2. research capacity building (e.g. career development);
3. policy or product development (e.g. input into official guidelines or protocols);
4. sector benefits (e.g. impacts on specific client groups); and
5. wider societal benefits (e.g. economic benefits from increased population health or productivity).“

For tracking backwards, interviews with research users can involve postal surveys through to in-depth case studies. Nutley et al report an innovative variation used by Molas-Gallart et al. 2000⁵ in which longitudinal data was gathered from user panels over the life of a project. Both the Molas-Gallart et al and Hanney et al studies use a combination of tracking forwards and tracking backwards. In fact, it can be difficult to categorise studies with this approach as where ever they begin, discussions with stakeholders will lead the subsequent investigation.

A WECD (2000) study notes that there is considerable difficulty in measuring the effects of the dissemination pathway rather than the effects of the research itself. This is due to the need to disentangle the effect of information from the many other contributory factors.

2.1.3 Stakeholders

Another way of looking at research communication is through the stakeholders that are expected to play a role in the eventual impact. An example from DFID’s Natural Resource Systems Programme (NRSP) is given below. Here DFID look at stakeholder domains or groups of people who they expect to play a role in promoting or using research. Roles may

⁴ Some illustrations of non-linear, network learning (broadly model 3) are given by Rick Davies (www.mande.co.uk), see Annex 4 **Error! Reference source not found.**

⁵ *Assessing research impact on non-academic audiences* (Molas-Gallart et al; confidential report to the Economic and Social Research Council, 2000)

differ from intermediate communicators to ultimate beneficiaries but they provide a broad framework of where and with whom M&E could be conducted.

Conceptual Impact Model (CIM)	DFID's Natural Resources Systems Programme (NRSP) model of 'uptake promotion' of 'research products' for 'developmental impact'. The model identifies 5 generic 'stakeholder domains', Domains V, W, X, Y and Z, that specify the beneficiaries/stakeholders with whom NRSP can achieve or make progress towards developmental impact.
Domain V	Primary stakeholders/ultimate beneficiaries of a project in the target site of the project.
Domain W	Intermediate/secondary stakeholders, located near or in the target site(s) of a project, who are well informed about a project and may (ideally) be project partners.
Domain X	National level target institutions (NTIs) in the target country where a project is located.
Domain Y	International level target institutions (ITIs) to whom a project and the programme can readily disseminate research findings and products through publications and other media channels.
Domain Z	Primary stakeholders/ultimate beneficiaries located in non-project sites in the target and non-target countries, together with local intermediate/secondary stakeholders.

2.1.4 Methods and tools

M&E of health research communications is one of the better developed areas of research communications M&E and draws on a long tradition of seeking to understand the determinants of behaviour change⁶.

The methods and measures used to assess the impact of research communication in the health research literature are identified by Hanney et al⁷ as:

1. **Documentary analysis and in-depth interviews.** These are the most commonly used techniques and are often combined. The authors note the value of interviews for tracing networks between researchers and users. The heavy reliance on interviews with policy makers to assess the communication of medical research is also illustrated by Invaer et al (2002)⁸ who systematically review 24 impact studies based on 2041 interviews.
2. **Insider knowledge** – which is a possible misnomer as it refers to **reflective collaborative research** between researchers and policy makers⁹.
3. **Questionnaires** – have been less widely used and one study is quoted to illustrate that postal questionnaires in particular are vulnerable to inaccuracy (two fictitious studies were included in the list sent to policy makers and almost 20% claimed to have seen these with some saying they had been influenced by them).
4. **Bibliometric analysis** – analysis of the literature, sometimes used as part of wider studies
5. **Historical and contextual analysis** – only two studies were cited for the medical research literature

A WECD review of methods for assessing impact of dissemination pathways is based on review of the development and communications literature and is given below, see Table 1.

⁶ See for example, R.J. DiClemente, and J.L. Peterson (1994) (Eds.), Preventing AIDS: Theories and Methods of Behavioral Interventions. New York : Plenum Press

⁷ **The utilisation of health research in policy-making: concepts, examples and methods of assessment** Stephen R Hanney, Miguel A Gonzalez-Block, Martin J Buxton and Maurice Kogan, *Health Research Policy and Systems* 2003, 1:2 <http://www.health-policy-systems.com/content/pdf/1478-4505-1-2.pdf>

⁸ Innvæ S, Vist G, Trommald M and Oxman A **Health policy-makers' perceptions of their use of evidence: a systematic review.** *J Health Serv Res Policy* 2002, 7:239-244

⁹ An important reference being Milbank Memorial Fund/The Cochrane Collaboration **Informing Judgement: Case Studies of Health Policy and Research In Six Countries.** New York 2001,

Table 1: Methods for assessing the impact of dissemination pathways

Method	Comment
1. 'Bean counting' (records of requests; distribution figures)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A basic form of tracking information. The National Centre for the Dissemination of Disability Research (NCDDR) promotes the use of electronic forms. The advantage is that all transactions can potentially be recorded. This method provides no insight into the use made of information and its consequences (health information forum) • Scott (1999) rejects the idea of taking dissemination measures such as these as a proxy measure of impact; they should at least be supplemented by additional methods (e.g. user opinions) to provide a valuable triangulation of data for evaluation (Glaser and Strauss, 19968)
2. Recording web site hits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is not a totally reliable method as a web site hit does not necessarily represent an incidence of use by a single user. It does however, indicate increases and decreases in web site traffic
3. Budget expenditure tracking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts may be reflected in savings made due to dissemination output. This may be in terms of time saved. Not all impacts can easily be quantified as a monetary value, for example, additional information may result in greater levels of skill and a higher quality output, but may lead to no time savings
4. Citation analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are strong arguments both for (Broadus, R.N. 1985; Kelland, J.L. and Young, A.P. 1998) and against (Line M.B. 1985; MacRoberts, M.H. and MacRoberts, B.R. 1996) the use of citation frequencies as an indicator of document use or value
5. Documentation of target audience changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This relies on secondary sources and external agendas and interpretations of impact that may not address the main areas of concern
6. Feedback cards included with materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This method allows brief feedback. It relies on action by the receiver to return the card, therefore response rates are poor
7. Follow-up telephone calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instigated by the sender, so a higher response is expected. The depth of feedback varies depending on the nature of the survey
8. Questionnaire to all recipients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This relies on action by the receiver to send back. Response rates are poor • Several versions of the questionnaire may be more useful than a single generic version
9. Secret ballot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'Stepping Stones Gambia' programme (a collaboration between 5 organisations from the UK and Gambia) used secret ballots to assess changes in behaviour and knowledge following an HIV awareness campaign. They found that respondents did not always understand that a negative response could be correct and was permissible. These may be particularly useful if the nature of the information is sensitive or not usually discussed
10. Structured questionnaires and interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A stratified sample should be used, recognising the country, subject and institution • Questions specific to specialist groups are required
11. Unstructured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A stratified sample should be used, recognising the country, subject and institution • Access to rich, specific and anecdotal evidence is possible • Interviews are more likely than questionnaires to uncover

	criticisms
12. Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These should comprise individuals who reflect the characteristics of the target audience. Access to rich, specific and anecdotal evidence is possible
13. Case study analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within this approach, a range of methods may be used such as focused interviews and policy document analysis.

In the case studies and discussions undertaken as part of this study, methods 1, 2, 6, 7 10, 11 and 12 have been used in monitoring and evaluation with others intending to use method 13. Methods 2, 10 and 11 being the most commonly used.

2.1.5 M&E Toolkits

There are three communications M&E toolkits that provide useful tools and techniques that carry over to research communications. Annex 1 gives an overview of the DFID M&E for ICD toolkit prepared by Myers (2005), the CTA/KIT/IICD (2005) Smart Toolkit for evaluating information products and services and the ODI Rapid Successful communication Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations by Hovland (2005).

These toolkits are written for different audiences with different objectives (very roughly summarised as policy makers who commission M&E and field-based practitioners). Guidance is provided on using M&E over the project cycle and a wide range of useful tools are described. Research communications projects should draw on this material to plan and commission M&E that will improve their performance. However, there is a danger that although the significant resource requirements to do M&E are identified, little indication of the complexity involved in the techniques is given.

2.1.6 The role of indicators

Quantitative indicators have been used to assess progress against research communication outputs (who has been reached and how) and outcomes (policy or other behaviour change) as a result of the communication.

One of the more ambitious applications of quantitative indicators for evaluating research outcomes was an EU-funded project¹⁰ that developed indicators based on case studies in eight developing countries. The evaluation followed a number of key stages:

1. In each country a policy was identified along with the content, conclusions and recommendations of the relevant research.
2. Next, a series of questions was put to the stakeholders and points allocated according to their recall of the content etc.
3. Further scoring points were allocated depending on the references to the research made in speeches, statements, guidelines and similar sources.
4. Finally, the stakeholders were asked to rate on a five-point scale a range of factors, including research that influenced their decision making.

The researcher who led this work found this approach did not work well with policy makers. "You can't go to policy maker with an article in your hand and ask him whether he has seen this research. You can't ask "exam" questions to a policy maker" (Ansgar Gerhardus, pers. Com 2006). Hence he suggested using the proposed indicators as a tool box – selectively drawing on a couple of indicators rather than the whole lot.

Indeed, Hanney et al. advise thinking carefully about **how** numerical indicators of research impact will be used before going down this route. For example, "an assessment system that

¹⁰ Gerhardus A, Dujardin M, Kiet PHT, Siddiqi S and Sauerborn R **A Methodology to Assess the Use of Research for Health Policy Development. Discussion Paper 04.** Heidelberg, University of Heidelberg Medical School 2000,

resulted in more dissemination in general, as opposed to more targeted dissemination of relevant knowledge, would be repeating the dangers of increasing the overload on policy-makers¹¹.

Although the use of numerical indicators has been advocated by some, in an area such as the assessment of research and its utilisation in policy-making, behaviour or perception change, where measurements are so difficult to make, caution is usually recommended¹². There would be dangers in using simple indicators outside of a wider qualitative assessment. They would become decontextualised."

When M&E is focused on research communication outputs (e.g. used by whom or using which media) there is greater consensus in using quantitative indicators. A good illustration of the value of user surveys is provided by the id21 evaluation¹³ which found that the actual users differed considerably from the expected target audience. Moreover, the process of generating numerical information can have significant policy impacts. Patel (2001) argues that providing basic information on issues such as where Mumbai's slum dwellers came from, what work they did and how they traveled to work enabled these "invisible" households to identify as a group and made it difficult for policy-makers to ignore their existence.

An important aspect of recent approaches to M&E is the participatory development of indicators, either quantitative or qualitative as part of participatory M&E. In their "Guiding note on indicators for communication for development", Danish Aid Agency Danida stress the value of using participatory methods to derive indicators and provide guidance on general good practice. They note that "Because indicators depend on the actual goals of communication, interventions determined by the diagnosis of the problem, the type of strategy, and approach selected, it is impossible to produce a general list of indicators."

There are also examples of M&E that are "indicator free". The "most significant change" method developed by Davies and Dart (2005)¹⁴ is a form of M&E that records change through stories told about the most important changes recalled by stakeholders rather than indicators. The most significant change method can be used for both monitoring and evaluation and if respondents are prompted for numbers and figures during the telling of their stories, can be used to collect quantitative M&E data.

2.1.7 Some New Developments

A new approach, the Theory of Change (ToC) approach, has roots in business school analysis of organisation change¹⁵ and in negotiated change¹⁶. ToC highlights the importance of attitudes and behaviours of intermediaries and partners as well as those of the target group. It provides a broad framework for analysing how a project with a desired impact (such as research communication) can achieve its intended goals and hence can generate targets for M&E. An example of Theory of Change in planning and indicator development is given below.

¹¹ Knott J and Wildavsky A **If dissemination is the answer, what is the problem?** *Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization* 1980, 1:537-78

¹² i) Cave M and Hanney S **Performance indicators for higher education and research.** *In: Output and Performance Measurement in Government (Edited by: Cave M, Kogan M, Smith R) London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers* 1990, 59-85. ii) Croxson B, Hanney S and Buxton M **Routine monitoring of performance: what makes health research and development different?** *J Health Serv Res Policy* 2001, 6:226-232. iii) Carter et al. 1992 Op. Cit.

¹³ **Id21 (2002) 'Tracking routes towards impact: id21 study on research to policy linkages'** (see: <http://www.id21.org/id21-info/impact/report.pdf>)

¹⁴ <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://leadertoleader.org/leaderbooks/L2L/summer99/kanter.html>

¹⁶ Shapiro, Ilana. "Theories of Change." *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. January 2005
http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/theories_of_change/

Box 1- Project Superwomen: Guided Example of Theory of Change

Based on an evaluation of a programme formed from the collaboration between a social service provider, a non-profit employment centre and a domestic violence shelter to help female abuse survivors, Project Superwomen provides an example of applying Theory of Change methods. This example is taken from the literature and is included to show how ToC might be applied in a real life situation, see www.actknowledge.org

5 stages are described:

Stage 1: Identifying Outcomes and Assumptions

ToC participants discussed, agreed on and specified long-term goals and designed a simple map of the preconditions necessary to bring about the long-term goal.

Stage 2: Backwards Mapping and Connecting Outcomes

Building on the initial simple map, the map is further developed, participants continue to map backwards from goals until a “story” is developed that is assessed as appropriate for planning processes. It is expected that the map will go through several revisions before an agreed framework is formed.

Stage 3: Indicators

This stage focuses on how to measure the implementation and effectiveness of the initiative. In the “Superwoman” example key outcomes were identified and for each the following questions were asked:

- Who is changing?
- How many people do we expect to change?
- What kind of change / how much is good enough?
- By when do we expect this change needs to happen?

Stage 4: Identifying Interventions

The map is revisited. Solid lines are used to represent connections that would happen without the intervention, dashed lines are used to indicate where project interventions are needed. Each intervention is given boxed numbers indicating activities that need to be completed to achieve the outcome.

Stage 5: Writing the Narrative

The writing of the narrative is seen as important to collect assumptions, interventions, indicators and pathways to change into a single document and recheck understanding of the framework. It is also seen as important in explaining to outsiders.

The narrative included:

- Background: what is the context and the need?
- Long-term goal: the ultimate desired outcome
- Intermediate goals: What and how these goals are important?
- Assumptions and justifications: The reasons behind the initiative features
- Interventions: The initiatives activities
- Programme logic: The understanding that guides every step of the initiative.

Another method, Mixed Method Indicators (MMI) uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis. Two aspects of MMI that are particularly relevant here and can be combined. They are:

1. Using qualitative analysis to define the questions that quantitative analysis then focuses on. So, rather than following the typical process undertaking stakeholder interviews at the same time as sending out surveys to users, the interviews can be used to better formulate the survey questions.
2. Scoring stakeholder perceptions using a coding system which can then be quantitatively analysed. While this has been applied to identifying development project effects¹⁷, the technique has come from the market research field and can be applied directly to research communication.

¹⁷ See Yaron G., Blauert, J and A. Guevara (2005), What determines successful sustainable development projects? in *Methods in Development Research*, Edited by J. Holland with John Campbell, ITDG, UK

2.1.8 Summary of key issues relevant to M&E of research communications – from the literature

A number of areas of particular relevance to M&E of communicating research highlighted in the literature reviewed are given in Box 2.

Box 2: Summary of current state of play in M&E of research communications – from the literature

- Given that research impact can take very different forms, one size of M&E does not fit all and no single model or approach is likely to fit all.
- It is important to recognise that unexpected or even dysfunctional consequences of research communication may occur
- A number of conceptual frameworks of research use exist. Having such a model can help in focusing M&E.
- M&E may involve tracking forwards or tracking backwards – generally a combination of both are used
- It is difficult to measure the effects of the dissemination pathway independently of the research being disseminated
- Defining key stakeholders at an early stage assists in defining their role in an intervention and in M&E
- A number of toolkits exist in the field of communication which can be adapted to research communication. However the challenge is in developing the skills to use them and using them to ask the right questions and with the right people
- A number of new methods exist but documented experience of their use in research communications is limited at the present time
- Many impacts are long-term. Taking a “snap shot” to assess impact may be misleading

Box 3 is intended to provide an initial checklist for those involved in M&E of aspects highlighted as important in the literature.

Box 3: Key questions relating to approach of M&E of research communications – from the literature

- Purpose and intent of research communication – what is the expected effect of the research communication and/or M&E?
- What conceptual framework (if any) has been used?
- Will the M&E use tracking forwards or tracking backwards or a combination of both?
- Who are the primary and intermediary target audiences?
- What are the key elements of the process of communicating research – e.g. building up a relationship with members of the target audience, encouraging wider public participation to influence policy or others?
- What questions will be asked?
- Which stakeholders will be involved?
- What methods or tools are most appropriate for the questions to be asked and the stakeholders involved?
- When is the best time to monitor and evaluate?

2.2 Key Findings from Discussions and Case Studies

Telephone interviews were held with 16 practitioners selected for their experience in M&E of research communications. 5 case studies have been developed derived from these discussions, the authors' own experience and where available, written material. A summary of key points raised (made by interviewees) are given below together with summarised case studies.

A number of general observations are made first. Contacting potential interviewees in the western hemisphere during the holiday period is not ideal. This was largely beyond the control of the authors. As might be expected contact was considerably easier where the potential respondent already knew of the study. A potentially interesting organisation in Ghana was willing to talk face-to-face but not over the telephone. (This is a similar finding to research communications more generally where research communications were more likely to be used if there was a relationship between the disseminator of information and those using it). Unless they were specialists in M&E, and despite efforts to make interviewees feel at ease, M&E is often seen as a daunting subject area.

2.2.1 Purpose

The purpose of the research communication in some instances appeared to influence the value those involved put on M&E. It was believed that where research was used for activism and social change, there was greater interest in knowing what effect the research had had on bringing about changes in society.

The purpose of the M&E generally included a combination of formative (learning) and summative (proving) objectives though the balance between these two objectives differed. For example, in the Lao Fisheries case study illustrated below, on-going M&E was aimed at improving project delivery to villagers. This example also provides an illustration of the benefits of directly involving stakeholders in the M&E process. This M&E was carried out by representatives of the intended beneficiaries themselves – village representatives, together with district and provincial officials. Active involvement of beneficiaries assisted in the learning from and use of M&E by a broad range of stakeholders over and above project staff.

Box 4: Case Study – Lao Fisheries

This is an example of multi-level evaluation: participatory M&E undertaken by local communities as part of the adaptive learning process and a more traditional impact assessment at the end of the project. Research communication plays a critical role in adaptive learning as improvements to management (of fisheries in this case) can only be made if adaptive learning generates the information desired and this information is subsequently disseminated and utilized.

Purposes: 1) M&E undertaken by local communities as part of the adaptive learning process – for on-going learning with primary beneficiaries to ensure that interventions meet their needs (this is the focus for the case study described below) 2) to assess impacts at the end of the project – primarily for funders and implementers

Summary of evaluation approach

An evaluation framework for adaptive learning was drawn up in the form of a flow diagram and formed the basis for assessing learning outcomes. Questions included in the flow diagram included:

- Was the information generated what was expected?
- Was the information disseminated to people who needed it?
- Was information utilised and management adapted?
- Was information worth it? i.e. Were benefits worth the costs?

Formal research on what management practices worked best was initially undertaken and results were then evaluated by all stakeholder groups in terms of their implications for future management. Repeated cycles of M&E allowed comparison over time. By incorporating the views of various stakeholder groups, triangulation (cross-checking of results) was possible.

Methods

Used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods -

- Group discussions in district workshops
- Group discussions in village workshops
- More formal meetings
- Individual questionnaires in district workshops
- Self evaluation through questionnaires and round table discussions

These methods were used by evaluator teams made up of district staff, village representatives, and provincial staff

Challenges faced

- Cultural factors: local beneficiaries were concerned not to appear rude to outsiders – this suggested that outside evaluators (anyone from outside the area) may find a bias towards success rather than failure.
- Time consuming for local people

In general, evaluations that take place relatively early in the implementation cycle place greater emphasis on formative or “improvement” aspects of evaluation, for example mid-term evaluations or reviews, while those that take place later, at the end or after the end of the implementation cycle tend to place greater emphasis on summative aspects – proving that something happened.

The Panos Relay case study provides a clear example where both formative and summative aspects were valuable. The evaluation took place earlier in implementation than was originally planned (due to the funder being in the process of developing their own communications strategy). The evaluation took place after only one year of implementation. The evaluation needed to demonstrate achievements to satisfy funders but learning around the ‘why and how’ was said to be useful in designing the next phase of implementation. All recommendations from the evaluation were built into the second phase.

Box 5: Panos Case Study – Evaluation of Relay Programme , Southern Africa

Purposes: 1) for internal learning to feed into and to improve a second phase and 2) to allow the funder to assess whether the programme was progressing in a way that it could support.

Timing

The evaluation took place towards the end of a first year of a stand-alone programme launched in 2004. However this was a change from an original plan for a three year programme.

Summary of evaluation approach

A combination of tracking forwards and tracking backwards - the evaluation was carried out by a combination of internal and external evaluators and based around four key questions. These were:

1. Has RELAY successfully communicated information on core development themes?
2. Has relay increased capacity of Southern journalists to cover research-related stories?
3. Has RELAY built strategic relationships with research institutes working on core development themes?
4. Has RELAY ensured the take up and promotion of print and radio outputs by media in the South?

Methods

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods -

- Face-to-face interviews with journalists and disseminators
- Face-to-face interviews with researchers
- E-mail interviews of commissioned journalists
- Peer reviews of features
- Feedback from workshops
- Media analysis of coverage of outputs in Zambia
- Online surveys of print and radio editors
- Review of statistics from web page and review of monitoring and reporting data from project partners and reports
- Interviews with Panos London staff involved in implementing the programme

Indicators

Indicators were based on the logical framework which was part of the original proposal for funding as follows:

- Panos RELAY features produced and published/broadcast
- Public debate generated (i.e. letters to the editor, radio talk shows, etc)
- Quality of RELAY features
- Quality of print and radio fellowships
- Number of partnerships established and outcome of partnerships
- Qualitative feedback from partner institutes
- Amount and quality of promotion (i.e. cosyndication agreements, workshops and report launches)
- Public debate generated (i.e. letters to the editor, radio, shows etc.)
- Coverage of research on core development themes in the media
- Use of the media by researchers

Challenges faced

- Timing of the evaluation. As the study was conducted after only one year, it was unlikely to be able to determine impact and issues relating to sustainability were unlikely to give meaningful results. Advantages in the early timing included the incorporation of learning into a second phase and an early focus on M&E
- Assessing the extent and impact of media coverage using spot reviews (reviews at one point in time and in six countries) - difficulties in assessing how representative the sample was, in terms of those selected to interview.

2.2.2 M&E Frameworks

As with the Relay Case Study above, the majority of the case studies illustrated have a logic model, usually a logical framework, as part of the project or programme design. However there is a belief, tentatively expressed in some cases, that logical frameworks are not fully adequate either for capturing the flow of research or the relationships that are important for encouraging that flow.

Mapping of expected pathways had helped some to clarify aspects of importance in M&E, e.g. interfaces between service providers and users. However if potential pathways are simplified for manageability, there may be a tendency towards representing and visualizing a linear pathway and mapping of the intended flow of information in complex projects could be cumbersome resulting in large pieces of paper or incomplete maps.

2.2.3 Backwards / Forwards Tracking

In discussions, M&E generally used (or intended to use) a combination of forward tracking and backward tracking of information flow. The starting point is usually known – this may be research findings to be disseminated or the organization disseminating information. The end point may be known – the expected development outcomes.

However during discussions, for more complex projects, the area of less clarity was said to be the “black box” between these two points. One interviewee made a comparison with a project aimed at the provision of clean water. In water projects it was felt that possible points on the pathway to people’s improved health through the provision of clean water were largely known. Although these points may not be reached in practice, a (relatively) well-established picture of what “should” happen exists. This allows M&E to make a comparison between what “should” happen and what actually happened through on-going monitoring and subsequent evaluations.

In tracking forwards, others experienced greater challenges with distance away from where the information was generated as larger numbers of influencing factors were seen to come into play. This made attribution to project interventions difficult. Another respondent expressed the view (of projects in general) that adequate basic monitoring was frequently not done. “Therefore you are lucky if you have to deal with the question of attribution” as often the basic information to begin dealing with this question is not available.

2.2.4 Stakeholders - audiences

From discussion, the audience emphasis for research communications differed and ranged from policy makers to the poor and marginalized. The point was made in several discussions that the audience for communication of research is not always totally clear. For example government policy makers may be the target audience for communication but who these people are is not always well defined. The case study of shared health care highlighted the failure to undertake effective stakeholder analysis at an early stage. This was seen as one of the factors that led to poor uptake. This also has implications for M&E. Unless there is a clear definition of who information is meant to reach, then it is difficult to assess whether they were in fact reached.

Box 6: The Case of “Shared Care” in Burkina Faso

Following a series of studies on health services, care-giving at the household level, and inter-household distribution of disease, *shared care* was proposed by a group of researchers from the Ministry of Health (MOH) in the late 1980s. The *shared care* approach was based on the idea that mothers and health workers could jointly assume and complement each other in informed recognition, care-taking and treatment-seeking for childhood illnesses.

Evaluation Purpose

The researchers saw themselves as advocates for a *shared care* strategy and actively sought to communicate with the officials from the MOH. However convincing intuitively the concept has not been implemented until the present day. This box summarises the results of a study undertaken to elucidate the factors constraining the implementation of *shared care*.

Evaluation methods and approaches

Document analysis was carried out in order to identify the major stakeholders in *shared care* and to better understand the *shared care* agenda as proposed by the researchers. We compiled and reviewed the following documents:

- Published articles and monographs resulting from collaborative research conducted by the University of Heidelberg and the MOH, Burkina Faso
- Research proposals on *shared care* submitted by the University of Heidelberg researchers
- Minutes and reports of meetings and workshops conducted during 1988 and 1999 regarding *shared care*.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with decision-makers and researchers in order to get a better sense of the environmental context at the time *shared care* was proposed, to determine the stakeholders' relative involvement and influence in the process and to determine to what extent research results played a role in the decision-making around *shared care*.

Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with target groups, including health centre (CSPS) staff, women's groups and mothers. Since these groups had previously not been included in the discussions around *shared care*, the focus groups had the purpose of finding out to what extent these groups were aware of the ideas of *shared care*, and whether they felt the ideas were practicable.

Challenges faced

This evaluation found that the researchers managed to disseminate their results and that decision-makers were aware of them. However, these were not discussed or “translated” into an intervention study. Qualitative analysis identified the main constraints to be the failure to undertake effective stakeholder analysis early on, to account for the policy context and to allow for the limited time available to key decision makers for processing information.

Source: Ansgar Gerhardus et al.

Looking at the influence of research communication on policy makers specifically, during telephone discussions, opinions ranged from “policy makers only want to know that they are doing fine” to the practical difficulties of tracking back from policy makers – the difficulties of asking policy makers to identify what research had influenced them and for what reasons. Another difficulty in evaluating this particular area is the (continuing) lack of knowledge of the policy process and the very real effect of the context – the particulars of time and place. Others highlighted the effect of context for a broader range of audiences including farmers.

A number of sources emphasise the importance of establishing a relationship with those that the research is intended to benefit. This would appear to apply whether the audiences are, for example policy makers, the media or sections of the general public. There would appear to be at least three elements to this: 1) potential users are more likely to use the research if the research (and source of research) is trusted, 2) research is more likely to be assimilated if it comes through routes that people are familiar with, 3) the influence of research findings is likely to be cumulative and needs to be built up over time. This relationship may, of course, take many forms from a working partnership to relating to the characters in a favourite soap opera.

2.2.5 The long-term nature of impact

Increasingly funders ask for the demonstration of impact, recognizing that much of M&E in the past has concentrated on inputs, activities and outputs rather than the effects on intended beneficiaries such as improved livelihoods or changes in behaviour.

A couple of further points were made concerning longitudinal studies. Such studies were seen as being very rarely carried out as they may be expensive and entail long-term commitment on the part of funders. This was thought to call into question whether funders are “really interested in impact”. Much of M&E takes place before impact could reasonably be expected to have occurred. The WWF case study below used a variety of methods and included an evaluation of impact at the very local level – natural resource users. In the Kenya WWF project, research findings were used to build a case for the certification of carving woods. Although this process was well under way and impact would be expected in the future, certification had not yet been achieved and therefore the impact of certification at user level was difficult to determine at the time of the evaluation.

Box 7 – Case Study: Evaluation of WWF People and Plants Initiative

The People and Plants Initiative (PPI) was a 12 year programme to promote the sustainable use of plant resources through stimulating applied ethnobotany in selected areas of the developing world. Its purpose was to build local capacity for community-based conservation and sustainable use of plant resources. Part of the programme is still running.

This study looked at effects of research communication of ethnobotany at a number of levels including effects on local people’s livelihoods

Evaluation purposes:

1. To provide a general review of the whole PPI programme from its start up to the present.
2. To determine whether PPI has achieved its objectives as per the original plans and log frames.
3. To extract lessons for use by WWF and other conservation agencies in terms of the design and implementation of the programme.
4. To determine how the programme is contributing to meeting the objectives of the Partnership Programme Agreement (PPA) of WWF-UK and DfID.
5. To provide recommendations for possible follow up activities in Phase 3 of the PPI.

Timing

The evaluation described here took place after 12 years of operation of the PPI programme.

Evaluation approach and methods

Six principal methods were used to perform the evaluation:

- A questionnaire was prepared and sent out to 800+ people by post and email. 115 responses were returned from a broad range of individuals from many different countries.
- 39 people involved with, or users of PPI, were interviewed by the principal consultant.
- Two consultants specialising in livelihood issues were contracted by WWF and advised a team of local consultants.
- Main methods used in identifying livelihoods impacts were semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions sometimes incorporating PRA tools
- The principal consultant and one of the livelihood evaluators attended the 2004 annual meeting of PPI at WWF UK to listen to reports and discussion and to carry out some further interviews together.
- PPI publications, videos and web site were all consulted extensively.

Challenges faced

- Self-selection of response rate from questionnaires
- Establishing impact – indications were that wood certification would take place, but had not taken place during the period evaluated.
- Attributing effects to the programme when there are a number of other influences that inevitably have played a role.

A further comment was made more generally of evaluations that attempt to assess long-term change. Although they remain rare, a few evaluations do take place after the cessation of outside funding. However, as they no longer fulfill the role of specific project improvement, the results may not be used. Results are frequently so context specific that they may be difficult to generalise.

2.2.6 Methods and Tools

M&E in the case studies and discussions used a range of quantitative and qualitative methods. Each of the case studies used a range of tools and methods, both quantitative and qualitative. These and related comments made by those closely involved with tool use are summarised in Table 2. Monitoring, usually but not always, tended to focus on quantifiable outputs, and less on the reasons why numbers of users had increased or decreased. Monitoring included number of web-hits, number of articles produced based on research communications, for example.

The SciDev.Net evaluation below illustrates a range of methods used. Web-site visitors are monitored on a regular basis and assessed by the management team. Evaluation used a combination of quantitative (mainly questionnaires) and qualitative (questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus groups) methods. The evaluation also looked at non-users, an important potential source of learning not explicitly covered in the majority of case studies.

Box 8: Case study - SciDev.Net Evaluation

The Science and Development Network (SciDev.Net) aims to provide reliable and authoritative information about science and technology for the developing world. Information is provided on the SciDev free-access website and SciDev.Net's goal is "to help both individuals and organisations in developing countries make informed decisions about how science and technology can improve economic and social development". Seen as "the New Scientist" for developing countries its aims are to 1) increase the public understanding of science, 2) inform policy processes involving scientific information.

Purposes of the evaluation

1. To assess how far the organization has achieved the broad objectives identified in its original business plan and its strategic plan for 2004-2008
2. to evaluate whether grants awarded to SciDev.Net since 2001 have been used effectively and for the purposes for which they were awarded
3. To identify SciDev.Net's opportunities for future growth and for increasing its contribution to development goals
4. To indicate actions that may be required to increase the prospects for SciDev.Net's financial sustainability

Timing

The evaluation took place 4 and half years after full operation was started and before an intended further 5 year phase.

Summary of evaluation approach and methods

The evaluation was carried out by a two external evaluators selected from an initial list of five. The trustees of the organization (one of whom has considerable experience of evaluation) were keen to see an independent or external evaluation. A sub-committee of the board of trustees has taken responsibility for the evaluation.

The evaluation was based on the following methods:

- Questionnaire sent by email – 2,200 responses from 20,000 sent
- Five focus groups held around the world
- Series of telephone interviews (approximately 30) with users
- Series of telephone interviews with key informants (approximately 40)

Questions in the questionnaire include:

- Basic information about the respondent
- History and regularity of use of site
- Assessment of website content and its usefulness, interest, etc
- Use of other online sources of news and information about science and technology
- Suggestions for additional features including web-base features, networking, meetings, contact with the media, on-line self teaching
- Attitudes towards advertisement on the site

Monitoring of web site visitors has been carried out on a weekly basis to provide weekly reports to the organisation's management team and is aggregated on a 3 monthly basis for the executive committee.

Challenges faced

- Identifying non-users to interview presented a challenge in itself and where they are identified often difficult to get a response. Contacts available to the interviewer was the main route used to identify non-users.- "the kind of people who should be using SciDev.Net"
- Placing users in categories also was seen as not straightforward. A pull down menu was provided but many respondents fell into more than one category. They might be academics who worked as consultants or NGO board members who also acted as policy advisers.
- It was also noted that it is extremely difficult to design a good written questionnaire.
- It was felt that purpose 4 – identify sources to increase financial sustainability would be the most difficult to achieve in the time available to the evaluation

Table 2: Methods used in case studies and discussions

Method/tool	Brief description	Comments from interviews
<p>Structured surveys of users and/or non-users</p>	<p>For quantitative information.</p> <p>May be conducted face-to-face, by post, by email.</p> <p>Frequently the sample of respondents is self-selecting especially when received by post or email.</p> <p>Used to count outputs and to a lesser extent outcomes.</p>	<p>Those conducted by post or email have lower response rates.</p> <p>Providing information on "hot" aspects of research communication.</p> <p>If great consistency across projects and organisations would allow comparisons and inform analysis.</p> <p>If carried out on web, responses are selected and therefore bias in sample to be assumed.</p> <p>Particularly difficult to elicit responses from non-users.</p>
<p>Semi-structured surveys, open-ended interviews / discussions of users and</p>	<p>Frequently used method with a range of audiences, perhaps the</p>	<p>Useful background information – "intelligent" but not necessarily carried</p>

<p>non-users</p>	<p>method most frequently used to collect qualitative data. Quantitative data (e.g. scoring of perceived impact) can be collected but linking qualitative & quantitative data remains rare</p>	<p>in a rigorous manner Time consumed to analyse qualitative data. Interviews with non-users of the target audience may be difficult to collect systematically reliance heavily on assumptions of what target audience should</p>
<p>Focus group discussions</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews held in a group context. Less good for sensitive information but useful for the stimulation of ideas between focus group members</p>	
<p>Workshops</p>	<p>Used for a range of functions including assessment of progress.</p>	<p>Frequently the basis of records e.g. workshop minutes may not be taken independently for M&E purposes</p>
<p>Systematic collection of anecdotes</p>	<p>Opinions, perceptions and ideas</p>	<p>Danger of collecting anecdotal claims</p>

	usually recorded verbatim.	much their production this is area t “funde seem like”. Adds human to quanti inform
Case study development	May be used for gathering quantitative and qualitative information. May be a preferred method to answer “how” and “why” questions, particularly where there is less control over events. Sometimes classified as explanatory, exploratory or descriptive ¹⁸	A number of organizations (IDS, Panos, WWF) planning include in future M&E.
Advisory groups, Peer review	Use to assess and maintain quality of research information	Not always seen as M&E, usually include evaluation reports being useful assess quality comm ions

¹⁸ From Yin, R.K. Case Study Research: Design and Methods

<p>Counting of web-hits (may or may not include counting of particular areas of web pages), number of leaflets distributed, number of articles, television or radio programmes produced, etc.</p>	<p>Specialist software may allow hits to different parts of web pages to be counted.</p> <p>Generally a measure of output but where there are several intermediaries between the source of information and ultimate intended beneficiaries may help in tracking flow of information.</p>	<p>For nu of web if grea consis across projec progra s and organ s wou allow compa s and inform analys</p>
<p>Participatory methods, e.g. the use of drama¹⁹, stories of significant change.</p>	<p>Many of the methods listed above may be used in a participatory manner.</p>	<p>If desi well, a more meanin to a w range stakeh s.</p> <p>Partic metho may b consu for int benefi s.</p> <p>To me funder object evalua often be qui and cl and partici intent</p>

¹⁹ Used in Nigeria (pers. Comm.. J. Wheeler) where a play is performed. At critical points in the play, the play is stopped and community members complete the performance showing what they would like to happen. Further monitoring is carried out using a variety of methods to see whether aspirations were met.

		cannot realize May be difficult to communicate to diverse evaluation audiences
Delphic panels	A systematic and iterative method for reaching consensus, often within a group of specialists	Used developed evaluation questions Some criticisms from the literature that if not handled carefully allow strong powerful voices to dominate

Semi-structured interviews were a frequently used method for collecting evaluation data. The asking of “why” and “how” questions which are best served by qualitative methods, were of particular value given the number of possible variables involved in research communication. A number of areas of particular relevance to M&E of communicating research highlighted in discussions, are given in Box 9.

<p>Box 9: Summary of current state of play in M&E of research communications – from interviews and case studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reasons for carrying out M&E vary but are generally a balance between learning for improved project delivery and proving (for increased accountability particularly to funders) • Involvement of a range of stakeholders in designing M&E and carrying out M&E can improve the M&E and its important component, learning • Given the scope of research communications initiatives, M&E needs to be tailor-made to the particular context in which initiative operates. • It is important to recognise that negative as well as positive effects may occur • Logical frameworks alone may not be the most appropriate framework for M&E of research communications • Defining intended audiences at an early stage assists in defining their role in an intervention and in M&E • Building relationships enhances the uptake of research and is a difficult but important area for M&E to capture to enhance learning. • A wide range of methods are used, usually in combination, to ask “how many”, “how” and “why” questions • A number of new methods exist but examples of their use remains limited • When effects of research communications are measured is important and many impacts are long-term. It may not be realistic to measure impact within the lifetime of a project.
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3 Is there anything special about M&E of research communications?

A number of areas have been put forward, both in the literature and in discussions that make M&E of research communications different from M&E more generally. Many of these differences are difference of degree rather than in absolute terms. Some of the differences highlighted apply to M&E of communications more generally rather than M&E of *research* communications per se.

- **Large number of variables involved in the communication of research findings**

A large number of factors are potentially of relevance in understanding why or why not the communication of research has had an impact. These include, but are not limited to:

- The needs of research users (improvement of agricultural production, improved health, evidence for policy-making processes, etc)
- The characteristics of potential beneficiaries (education level, previous experience of research information, their own conceptual models of the world around them, etc)
- The availability, accessibility and content of other types of information
- The type of research (action research, scientific research, etc)
- The type of communication (in terms of content, format, media, relationships, etc)
- The source of the information (research station, community action research, etc) and the perceived trustworthiness of the source
- The intent of the research generators and of intermediaries
- The interactions between the above.

The large number of variables that need to be considered in M&E is a characteristic of M&E of communications more generally and is not unique to the M&E of research communications in particular. The importance of context makes the understanding of outcomes complex and attribution will inevitably be difficult where there are a large number of factors working in combination to affect outcomes.

- **Lack of current knowledge of the role of research information in policy processes.**

Not much is currently known about the impact of research on the policy process. Particularly in the communication of research there may be a series of intermediaries in the communication process, multiple pathways for reaching policy makers and other audiences and flows of information may be non-linear in nature.

The development of models and/or possible pathways of research information flow as an aid to identifying indicators or areas of relevance in M&E is based on a limited information base. Although perhaps not unique to the M&E of research communications, as compared with other types of communications, it would appear less is known of possible pathways. Thus comparing a planned pathway with an actual pathway in M&E is more difficult.

- **Tradition of research dissemination through peer-reviewed journals**

Applicable mainly to research emanating from academic sources, researchers are frequently unaccustomed to presenting results in a form that is accessible to wider audiences. There is often a concern over how the information may be used. Added to this there is a conflict in the culture between scientist and the media (or other disseminators) which may result in mutual suspicion. This presents a number of barriers for the communication of research findings. Understanding these barriers and resulting lack of uptake (where it occurs) is a challenge for M&E.

There is frequently a gap in responsibility for dissemination of research findings and as such a role of M&E is to assess whether this gap has been filled in the most appropriate manner. However, due to the importance of learning within research culture, whether in a research institute or in action research, the importance of M&E and learning from past experience presents an opportunity for the M&E of research communications.

- **Identification of audience**

Audiences for research communications may be ill-defined. Although the eventual audience may be the general public, the route of research communications is generally through a number of intermediaries who may also be poorly defined. Stakeholder analysis or applied research is needed to know who the key players are to increase uptake. M&E has a role in assessing whether key players were accurately targeted. However with rapid changes particularly in communication technology, the potential audience can change throughout the life of a project.

- **Importance of relationships**

A number of sources in the literature and from discussions emphasized the importance of building on-going relationships in influencing the intended audiences. This applies to a range of audiences whether they be journalists, presenters, policy makers or farmers. This would appear to be particularly true with research findings that cannot be neatly packaged are communicated and on-going communication aids their understanding. This has implications for M&E which needs to be able to capture the number and quality of such relationships to try and understand how and why identified outcomes have occurred.

- **Cumulative and long-term nature of research communications influence**

Although measurement against intermediate indicators may be possible within the lifetime of a project, aspects of attitudinal or behaviour change may not follow a smooth trajectory over time or may occur over the longer term. This may mean that the *potential* for impact can only be measured using intermediate indicators. Measuring the trajectory of likely impact is probably a better bet than taking a snap shot of impact at the end of the project and the limitations of one-off evaluations need to be recognized.

- **Desired outcomes are often qualitative in nature**

Trust of the source of research communications is both a pre-requisite of outcome and a desired outcome of research communications. Aspects such as trust are frequently difficult to measure and may require specific M&E skills.

4 Conclusions: Implications for Stakeholders

Largely based on telephone discussions and case studies but also from the literature a number of conclusions are drawn, see below. They are presented as implications for different stakeholder groups, though there will be some overlap between the groups.

Implications for Funders:

- **Incorporation of a communications strategy in research projects.** Research projects have a tradition of disseminating results through a narrow number of channels and to a narrow audience. A communications strategy should be built into research proposals that goes beyond narrow channels and considers partnerships with organizations specializing in dissemination of information.
- **Realism in timing and resource allocation for research communications M&E.** Measuring impact of research communications requires on-going monitoring and long-term commitment and may not be realisable until after the end of the project or programme. Funders need to be realistic about the amount of resources required to M&E research communications and what can be achieved.
- **Sharing and dissemination of research communications M&E.** Smaller organizations rarely have the resources to disseminate their M&E findings more widely. Funders have a responsibility to ensure that learning is collated, that smaller organisations have the opportunity to take part in relevant fora at a variety of levels to present their learning.
- **Learning is likely to be maximized** where those directly involved in research communications are actively involved in evaluation design. Many organizations are currently inexperienced in M&E, transferable models are rare and evaluating the less

tangible aspects of research communications presents particular challenges in monitoring and evaluating the communication of research. The independence provided by external evaluators is often appreciated by funders and implementers alike. However a capacity building element should be considered through the involvement in evaluation design of those actively involved in research communication.

Implications for Evaluators

- **One size does not fit all.** Generic quantifiable indicators have value for measuring outputs (who is using research communications, what formats and media are being used by audiences) and consistency in M&E at output level may allow aggregation of data for comparison across projects. However, in general the context in which research is communicated is crucial to the success or otherwise of the communication. Therefore evaluation methods need to be appropriate to the context in which the communication takes place.
- **The measurement of conceptual change presents a challenge.** Conceptual change, stimulation of debate and the assessment of relationships that assist the flow of information requires qualitative approaches and skills. Evaluation teams should ensure that these skills are included even where the research being communicated is scientific in nature.
- **Non-users present a challenge.** The reasons why some people within a target group do not use the information disseminated is important to improve research communication. Although difficult, these people should be actively included in M&E. This is particularly so where no base line study exists.
- **Acknowledge the potential for unexpected and even dysfunctional consequences** of research communications. In M&E, negative as well as positive consequences, where they occur, should be identified.

Implications for Implementers

- **Baseline data collection.** In the identification of non-users and unforeseen, including negative effects, and to assess change that would have occurred anyway, the collection of baseline data would seem important. Baseline data allows before and after (and during) comparisons. Although there are challenges, this is an area where learning from M&E more generally would be beneficial. Participatory methods may be appropriate in some circumstances, such as the use of citizens' juries.
- **Regular monitoring is important to improve evaluation and regular learning.** Not unique to research communications, the regular collection of data and continual assessment will assist in project or programme design. This is perhaps particularly important in the communication of research where there remain many unknowns. For measuring how many people have been reached and by what means, quantifiable indicators that are consistent across projects may have a role to play in cross-project analysis. Although demanding in terms of resources, qualitative measurement (to answer why and how questions) should also be included in on-going monitoring. This may be part of the building of relationships with key players which is seen by many as important to the success of research communication and contribute to learning about the context in which dissemination takes place.
- **Greater definition of intended audiences and pathways.** This applies to those disseminating research findings but also to those generating research. Stakeholder analysis to identify key players will not only assist M&E but also help in designing programmes to respond to the needs of those who are expected to benefit from research communications. Identification of clear dissemination pathways will similarly help in M&E focus.
- **The need to build space for reflection and learning** from the M&E activities and consider how M&E findings will be shared and disseminated. Organisations are often under pressure "to deliver" but taking the time to share and reflect on M&E findings is an important element of M&E.

Possible ways forward

In taking learning forward in the area of research communications, a number of key areas are proposed for discussion. These are:

- The need for **further investigation into the models of information flow** – how does research from research institutes (from research institutions based in the west or in developing countries) reach specific audiences in developing countries in the light of ever changing technologies?
- The need for **further investigation into approaches beyond logical frameworks** such as outcome mapping and network analysis in the context of research communications. How can these help in the understanding of relationships and processes?
- Research into **Does good M&E feed into better research design?** In what ways? How can researchers learn more from experiences of those who use the research?
- What **lessons can be learnt** for research communications for development **from the private and public sector** ?