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DFID Research Learning Event

September 17th and 18th 2007

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The DFID Health Resource Centre (HRC) provides technical assistance and information to the British Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and its partners in support of pro-poor health policies, financing and services. The HRC is based at HLSP's London office and consists of an international consortium of four organisations: HLSP Ltd, UK; Ifakara Health Research and Development Centre, Tanzania (IHRDC); ICDDR,B - Centre for Health and Population Research, Bangladesh and Sharan, India.

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1. CONTEXT OF THE MEETING

Development Research Centres were introduced by DFID in 2000 to improve the integration of economic and social research, policy influencing and southern capacity building. Their aim was to generate policy relevant research which would help the wider development community and DFID to achieve their objectives, including the International Development Targets by 2015

Research Programme consortia were established in 2004 under DFID's Research Funding Framework (2004) which set out priorities for long-term research: research that contributed to a global pool of new knowledge and technologies for development. Through its bilateral funding arrangements and the commissioning of Research Programme Consortia (RPCs), DFID sought to improve the integration of research, knowledge, policy influencing and developing country research capacity. In practice, the RPCs were very similar in structure and objectives to the DRCs.

The meeting in September 2007 was held to provide research partners with a forum to discuss their work and share experiences. At the time of the meeting, DFID was also seeking views to help it develop a new research strategy. The new strategy will start in April 2008 and replace the Research Funding Framework 2005-2007. One of the purposes of the meeting was to feed experiences and views into this process.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The meeting held on Monday 17th and Tuesday 18th September involved all twenty eight research programme consortia (RPCs) and development research centers (DRCs). Funded by DFID through the central research department (CRD)

The main aim of the meeting was to bring together partners from the RPCs and DRCs to discuss their work, share experiences and lessons learned and identify areas of common interest. The meeting also provided opportunities to build links between researchers working in the same countries/regions. It focused on lessons learned about research processes rather than the findings of research itself.

The objectives of the meeting were to facilitate forward looking discussions to identify:

- How well the RPC and DRC model is delivering overall
- What can be done to improve the RPC and DRC as models for future research
- Identify strategies that are working to build long term capacity to embed research in practice in developing countries
- What DFID, specifically CRD, can do better to support the research programmes
- What mechanisms will facilitate sharing/learning between programmes

3. PROCESS FOR THE MEETING

All consortia were asked to identify key issues in advance of the meeting and these were used to inform the agenda as well as to contribute to the written summary of the event. DFID made a short factual presentation about the current policy context but otherwise the meeting was devoted to group discussion giving participants the maximum opportunity to discuss and debate. Material from small group work and plenary sessions, together with written input collected during the meeting, were documented by note takers and are summarized in this paper.

4. WHAT MAKES SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS?

There was recognition that not all partnerships were the same in that they were not working on similar themes nor in a similar context and therefore it was not possible to identify a single successful model. It was felt that building relationships is a long term process involving valuing existing partners and looking for new stable relationships. However, there was a high degree of consensus on certain key elements that were necessary in all partnerships.

4.1 Research Capacity

There was a strong view that research excellence on all sides is the key element for sustainable, successful partnerships. This required strong intellectual leadership whether this was from a northern or southern lead partner, together with respect for partners' ideas and opinions. (Strategies for developing this capacity are documented under section 11)

4.2 Developing the Framework

It was necessary to have sensitivity to the research context, both nationally and internationally, when agreeing research priorities and it was essential that the research framework should emerge from discussions/ engagement with country partners and be owned by all. Although in general English was the common language, the point was made that the meaning of terms and even words change in different languages and it was essential that this was "unpicked" so that all partners had a common understanding of the underlying concepts from the start.

4.3 Size of consortia and choice of partners

There was recognition of the inherent conflict between the benefit of establishing a large partnership which potentially might have greater research potential and the resultant consequences of more complex communication, potentially higher transaction costs and less available funding for each partner. There were perceived to be advantages in long term relations between partners and thus putting forward proposals with organisations where there were existing links, although a recognition that this could limit creativity or perpetuate internal prejudices. The benefits of "follow on"funding to perpetuate established partnerships was stressed by many participants.

The benefits of working in North / South alliances were well recognised, although there was a view that, in future, the lead role should increasingly be taken by southern partners (although little debate on how this might be achieved or rewarded and it's affect on group and individual dynamics) and consortia might be exclusively from the south.

Whilst the possibility of an increasing number of south; south partnerships was envisaged, experience suggested that these needed careful consideration as transaction costs could be high due to inadequate infrastructure. It also needed to be recognised that in country priorities were very different (In one project, the priority in the Asian country was TB and in the African country it was malaria, so synergies were difficult)

Language difficulties between Anglophone and Francophone countries were recognised as a barrier to communication and efficient working. On occasions this could lead to "power relations" putting the minority language partner in a weak position.

It was felt essential that partners shared a common approach to research and to management. This was not always easy to ascertain in the limited period whilst a proposal was drawn up.

In choosing partners the importance of identifying individuals and organisations with proven national and international networks and influence was felt to be important to achieve policy impact. In addition to research excellence, a mix of competences was needed in partners including those relating to:-

- Management of programmes, people and resources
- Internal and external communication (including consultation, negotiation, advocacy, dissemination and strategic influencing)
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Capacity building

4.4 Leadership

The changing leadership role was identified, with several Directors recognising that this was a managerial role and might therefore be inappropriate for a senior researcher whose competence was primarily in that field. It was not clear whether all participants would be prepared to accept a different structure with, for example, a management lead and a research lead.

Whilst the need to transfer leadership over time to a southern partner was seen as desirable it was acknowledged that current Directors might find the change in role quite difficult. It was felt desirable to identify performance measures relating to progress towards this

It was recognised that the lead partner was the sole point of contact with DFID which could cause tensions. This was sometimes related to lack of consistent and comprehensive communication to (and from) other partners, particularly given the costs and time required for this. It was clear that some information and guidelines provided by DFID had not been disseminated uniformly. It was felt that it was essential that the Director was in a position to "track" DFID (i.e. changes in priorities, structure and personnel) and communicate this information in a timely manner. However, this required a time commitment and an understanding why it was valuable to the partnership as a whole

The need for strong leadership during the inception period to build a functional team of partners with shared values and objectives (with time and resources to achieve this, preferably face to face) was felt to be crucial. This affects the achievement of the whole logframe as local partners need to feel they own the research questions, in order to undertake the work and to communicate effectively. i.e. if they haven't participated in formulating the questions, they will lose interest both in undertaking the research and will neither involve stakeholders during the research process nor disseminate outcomes.

Directors recognised the tensions in obtaining a shared ownership of both the research framework and the processes to achieve this (facilitative leadership) with the need to deliver agreed outputs/ activities which could need “line management”.

Whilst there was some commitment to devolving responsibility (decentralisation) this was not felt appropriate by others due to the current lack of managerial competence by some partners (both north and south) and the potential increase in transaction costs.

5. GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

There were significant differences in the understanding of governance and how good governance could be achieved. However there was wide support for a number of principles, although not always examples of how these principles could be achieved beyond regular meetings involving individuals from all organisations and ensuring that decision making was inclusive.

- Shared mission and vision (achieved by face to face discussion at proposal and inception stages)
- Mutual accountability and shared ownership of goals and objectives, work plan and research framework (achieved by an inclusive process at both proposal stage and during inception period and recognizing the multiple accountabilities including to DFID, to “home” organization, to partners, to stakeholders and to the community where research is taking place)
- Transparency (particularly in relation to joint/ equitable allocation of resources)
- Mutual respect. (playing to identified strengths and building on these/ mechanisms for ensuring all partners views are sought and acted upon)
- Clarity on processes and procedures (including developing written procedures as early as possible with flexibility to modify these in the light of experience)
- The need for excellent systems for internal communication recognizing logistic problems in electronic communication (email, VOIP, videoconferencing) and the costs of convening conventional meetings.
- The need for outcomes to be equally attributed within the consortium (e.g. joint (co-authored) products)

6. MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Whilst the importance of good management was acknowledged it was clear that this was not the main priority for many participants. Indeed there was a feeling expressed that the role of administrators and managers was not adequately recognized. This highlighted the expressed difference between researchers and management. There was general agreement that it was important to have efficient, timely processes and that agreed systems needed to be documented and adhered to. Some of these systems could be common to all RPCs and there were benefits from sharing procedure manuals or having them available through an intranet.

7. FINANCE

There was a general appreciation that this form of consortium provided funding in a way that was exclusive to DFID and this was valued as it provided unique opportunities for southern partners. The totality of funding was felt to be limited however and there was a lack of understanding why some groups were funded for different periods or to different levels.

The perverse incentives in relation to consortium size were a frequent theme and the relatively modest sums which resulted from larger consortia were felt to be a constraining factor. Larger consortia also required higher travel budgets to operate effectively. Recognition was needed that RPC funding formed only a small part of the totality of funding for many partners and, as they already had well developed policy agendas, it was sometimes inadequate to influence these.

The need for transparency in internal allocation (and indeed in relation to the allocation process) was felt to be important although there were differences in opinion about the extent to which budgets should be devolved/ decentralized. In general, this was because either there was not the capacity to manage these funds in some partners or because some of the economies of scale would be lost.

There was an issue that the lead partner had sole accountability to DFID for both performance and finance. This tended to discourage devolvement and the gradual transfer of power to southern partners. RIPPLE was the only consortium who had a change in lead partner (north to south) written into their contract. The difficulties in achieving what was generally seen as a desirable aim were recognized, including the contractual change which would be required and the resultant power shift with the original lead partner reducing their position and influence.

Flexibility in the use of resources was seen as desirable over time as the balance of work changed (e.g. more capacity building in early years/ more advocacy later in the programme) Whilst ring fencing for particular activities was seen as a useful protection measure, it was felt it might be better to average it over the lifetime of the programme rather than have a fixed proportion each year. There was also a wish to be able to vireo between budget headings and carry forward unspent budgets between years although there were recognized to be problems with this both in relation to DFID but also to the processes within partner organizations (income forecasting)

There was a strong indication that the implications of full economic costing which was being introduced in UK academic institutions would impact heavily on future RPCs and DRGs as currently there was a degree of subsidization in terms of senior staff time which would not be possible in future.

Many participants identified the difficulty that funding covered core costs but was inadequate for research, particularly intervention research. Some players felt it was useful for leveraging additional research funding although others felt the transaction costs of so doing absorbed too much of the core funding. There was a need identified to reinstate a degree of short term project funding to reinvigorate the research funding process and increase the speed of multiplier funding. It was felt that these project grants could be incentivised for

- Policy relevance
- Cross-consortium work with country programmes
- Co-funding from other funders

RPCs could apply for these in competition with other RPCs and other research bodies. The point was made that the sort of research valued by DFID (applied/ operational /

systems research) was not well covered by other funders such as ESRC, Wellcome, Gates Foundation, MRC etc

The current retrospective payment mechanism was problematic in relation to all partners but particularly southern partners. All lead organizations (including southern led RPCs) were having to advance resources “at risk” which, it itself had a cost.

Although not strictly a financial issue, many partners could not obtain professional indemnity insurance (including Vietnam. Peru, India, China, Nigeria, Tanzania and Pakistan) Other than the UK, the only country able to arrange this was South Africa. This has implications both for some research processes but particularly for advocacy activities where the partner could be held accountable for the consequences of “advice” given.

8. TENDERING PROCESS

There were concerns about the tendering period and also the support needed to draw up proposals. Some partners did not have the resources to put together adequate proposals. In addition, internal bureaucracy in potential partner organisations could result in significant time delays in signing off proposals and internal agreements. This meant that there was a need for additional time between the tendering notice and the submission deadline.

There was real concern about proposals, costs and budgets being “set in stone” at this early stage when they could lack reality and rigour. There was a view expressed by several delegates that there were advantages in starting with a small number of partners in the initial proposal and building up over time, as the need arose. However, conversely, this could lead to a division between “first line” and “second line” partners and potentially divisive power dynamics.

Whilst the benefits of setting up partnerships which were multidisciplinary were acknowledged, these could take longer to pull together into a proposal due to lack of knowledge of potential partners and their capacity and capability.

9. DURATION OF RPC CONTRACT

Consortia take time to develop and work well. The inception period is valued as time to build an effective partnership but this may take longer than the time allocated. In a five year contract it only leaves four years of optimum working and this can be shortened by positioning for future contracts in the final year. Certain desirable activities (such as increasing the number of PhD researchers (and benefiting from them) could not sensibly be achieved in a five year period

It was recognised that there may be a need to change the makeup of consortia over time, either to cease working with a partner who is unable to deliver or to add new and additional competences, networks etc. This flexibility would be welcomed but again would require time for alliance building

10. RELATIONSHIPS WITH DFID

In general, relationships with DFID were perceived as cordial and constructive. The RPC/ DRC model was seen as a useful one and unique to DFID. There was agreement that there was a wish amongst DFID Research staff to engage, be flexible where possible and to consult.

Some negative comments were received about the difficulties associated with turnover of link staff and the affect this had on continuity. There was also a wish expressed for greater contact with DFID in-country staff and greater communication between DFID Research staff and country level advisors. (See Section 15.4)

Additional DFID support requirements were identified (see Section 15)

11. CAPACITY BUILDING

It was interesting that there was significant debate about the definition of capacity building (CB), what it covered and whose capacity was being strengthened. There was a recognition that this could include:

- Individuals
- Institutions
- The RPC/DRC corporate
- Wider networks including building a capacity amongst communities and policy makers to understand the process and outcome of research

Capacity building needed to be based on assessment and this required evaluation of individual and institutional development needs during the inception period. Whilst other areas of RPC activity might attract additional funding, it was very difficult to find finance for CB thus it was important to ring fence (and possibly increase) CB allocations. The only other funding source identified was in the form of commonwealth scholarships which were much appreciated and hopes were expressed for their continuance.

It was important to have a common understanding of individual and institutional CB needs, to agree a programme of CB and to have identified funding. This understanding needed to be both internal (within the RPC) but also with DFID in respect of the logframe and evaluations.

There was a recognition that much of the capacity building was unrelated to research but could be classified as institutional strengthening. This needed to cover both building systems and increasing managerial competence (finance, human resources, information, quality assurance, contracting and procurement) but also communication, dissemination and advocacy given that these were explicit objectives of RPC/DRGs. Capacity building was also linked to both personal and institutional empowerment including developing active change agents.

Delivering institutional CB was perceived as difficult, given that not all researchers saw it as a priority, nor as their personal strength and resources to undertake this work were not easily obtainable. The use of external support (see section 15) was identified as one possible solution.

A second solution suggested was to provide funding for research across a number of different departments in a single academic institution. This might be through a single multisectoral themed RPC or several RPCs working with individual faculties. The cumulative affect and the economies of scale could deliver real impact in strengthening the institution (both in management and in research) and make sustainability more realistic.

There was a recognition that, as the aim of RPCs is to promote quality, data driven research, this must be a prime CB activity. In the short term, this meant:

- A strong focus on core academic research skills.
- Increasing capacity to be reflective practitioners and agents of change
- Targeted skills training including improving capacity of local teams to manage field research
- Increasing number of southern researchers through PhD training –

Although PhD training was an acknowledged need, it was felt to be a problem in that, if the research group wanted an output within their five year period, then they wouldn't want their research students to leave to do PhDs. These were felt to be a first step towards leadership, and also institutions' next generation of researchers
CB could be achieved by both formal training and through developmental activities (learning through doing, collaboration within the RPC and with other RPCs, mentoring and e-mentoring.) These informal approaches needed to be recognised more fully.

The delivery of a CB strategy could be undermined by

- high staff turnover
- lack of career development structures based on merit and capacity (no incentive to improve individual competence
- migration (and the possibility that "offshore" CB encouraged this)
- political volatilities and hostile regimes (i.e. the risk of investment which might not be realized)
- obtaining visas for partners (new immigration rules in the UK made this more difficult)
- North-south models of CB It was important to note that whilst different models could be complementary there were also mixed expectations. i.e. "personal development" against acquisition of paper qualifications.
- overloading staff who had competence to build capacity in others at the expense of research or managerial activities

Capacity building to achieve policy change was recognised as complex. There was significant debate as to whether it was appropriate for researchers to advise (what policy or activity should be changed) or merely to inform (what the research findings were). This would affect whether CB should take place in strategic influencing and advocacy or in dissemination and promoting understanding through excellent communication.

12. COMMUNICATION, DISSEMINATION AND POLICY INFLUENCE

12.1 What is the appropriate role?

Whilst recognising that communication of research findings and influencing policy and practice was an integral part of the work of RPCs/ DRCs this appeared to be the element which raised most concerns. There was a difference of opinion as to whether it was the role of research to provide high quality results which it provided to stakeholders as information (e.g. maintain a position of neutrality) or whether researchers should seek to influence and advocate on the basis of research outputs.

Informing and advocating/ influencing were perceived as a separate function requiring different competences and different networks. Whilst recognising enabling factors (see section on Partnerships) there was significant debate about the timing of communication and the difficulty in reaching policy makers.

There was an ethical issue also identified in that some researchers identified the need to be explicit about what was being given back to the communities studied/ the feeling was that researchers should be evaluated by the degree that they communicate their findings back to their research community. This could be difficult if the expectations of the community were not carefully managed (i.e. they do not expect quick “wins” which influence their quality of life in some way) it was important to recognize that researchers were generally trying to observe and evaluate a situation or activity, not change it.

It was felt to be important to start early on in the process, involving policy-makers in formulating the research questions and throughout the process. The consortium is useful as a platform/infrastructure to reach policymakers, develop trust and create long term relationships with them and it was important to identify and use established personal and institutional contacts.

12.2 Dissemination of findings

In general this activity worked well where the partners had access to powerful intermediaries who understood the process of research and its implications. Participants gave examples of feeding into the Cochrane technical review panel, country level co-ordinating mechanisms (GFATM CCM, Swap forum etc) OECD/DAC and of “infiltrating” other institutions through staff who worked with other organisations. This allowed the intermediary to advocate if appropriate.

There was a view expressed that it was easier (and more effective) to work with international bodies rather than with country institutions as they appreciated the implications of the evidence and had established processes to use it. In some cases the research does not always produce “knowledge” (e.g. findings) that are easy to communicate but it can lead to other questions or process related outputs and these bodies may help in taking this forward.

12. 3 Communication Strategy

There was recognition of the need for an appropriately funded, phased communication strategy based on stakeholder analysis at all levels; local, national, regional (e.g. SAADC, Nepad, African Union) and international. It should incorporate an understanding of what these stakeholders need to hear/ contribute to and the best means of achieving this, what their sphere of influence was as well as their appropriateness with regard to the research theme.

In identifying stakeholders it was also essential to "track" their current agendas; their staff (recognising fast turnover was a problem) understands their motivation and identify their interest in the research area, particularly if this could create strategic synergy. Identifying lead communicators with individual stakeholders could prove both effective and efficient (targeting activity and reducing transaction costs)

12.4 Mechanisms for Communication

Many consortium members stressed the need to be innovative in communication and to use a variety of media targeted at the recipient. Examples were given including using radio, TV and videotapes, electronic fora, newsletters, participation in high profile events (e.g. the Rio carnival) letters in newspapers as well as conventional publication.

Participants recognised the importance of southern partners in this process given their national knowledge but although NGOs, for example, were skilled in communication they may not have adequate understanding of the research process (e.g. they might want "fast" results to communicate when this was not possible). The communications "market" is highly competitive, and it may be difficult to find space among many voices. They felt that the costs of communication in both engagement and logistics were underestimated (e.g. time of senior people, cost of publications and venues, the need to pay government officials per diems to obtain attendance at meetings)

One barrier to the dissemination of research was identified which related to less stable locations. Researchers might not wish to communicate their research findings for reasons of self interest (or indeed self preservation) the case of working in Iraq and fears for personal safety based on identification of association with the UK was cited.

It was felt that alliance building was easier for certain themes but "controversial" issues (religion, feminism) needed careful thought before entering alliances as this could affect how the consortia was viewed more widely. Likewise some themes were easier to communicate through the media as they were perceived as topical, controversial or interesting whilst others did not attract engagement.

It was important when forming consortia to involve partners with existing networks (with other researchers, NGOs, CBOs, professional associations, trade unions, government, donors etc) as well as partners with communication/ advocacy skills. One group identified that "This can be a necklace not a spider's web" i.e. It can multiply the connections and diffusion power through partner's networks. Increasingly the need to identify "networks of networks " was recognised although some participants felt that poor communication infrastructure made identifying south/ south networks more difficult.

It was important to identify appropriate language and tools (recognising that in some countries the language of policy makers varied from that of the community as a whole) Communication was not just about dissemination but was equally important during the inception phase to gain ownership from key stakeholders.

One group suggested that it might be possible to include policy makers within partnerships themselves or on CARGS although there was recognition that this could have governance problems if they were not members of the institutions of the RPC (i.e. had no formal position of authority or responsibility)

In order to be effective the consortia needed to establish credibility, perceived neutrality, legitimacy and trust. There is sometimes a problem with communicating findings that contradict current government policy. It could be easier to communicate difficult issues at the international level (e.g. changing malaria protocols) than at the country level.

The benefit of links with other related RPCs in countries was stated as was the need to input to development partners other than DFID. Annual, in country DFID Research Symposia involving government, donors and the NGO community were felt to be an efficient way of sharing activities, approaches and findings. (See Section 15.4)

Many participants identified the difficulties of identifying the right level to influence policy (recognising what was realistic) but also that timing had to be right (which required knowledge of local politics and the local agenda) and that incentives and leverage was sometimes needed to engage stakeholder's interests.

13. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Issues arose both about the process of monitoring and evaluation (how) and the indicators used (what) There seemed a degree of consensus that;

- There was a need for M&E capacity building at all levels, and particularly at inception. This would ensure an understanding of the logframe and would increase motivation for M and E. It was suggested that, in some cases (new consortia), the inception phase might need to be longer to ensure that systems were operating efficiently and effectively
- There was some sense from teams that directors could be too focused on the research and pay less attention to reporting mechanisms and other processes. Indeed, one group suggested that researchers are reluctant to be involved in the M&E process as they considered it 'beneath them'.
- M and E should be recognized as being of mutual benefit and not merely to satisfy DFID. It should be perceived as a diagnostic tool and the basis for learning.
- DFID should facilitate cross-fertilization and lesson sharing opportunities on M and E among programmes. Consortia could, for example, look at one another's frameworks, reporting templates etc or indeed DFID could produce "model" documentation.
- One group felt that indicators may not be sophisticated enough and should be better developed but, conversely, others suggested that there were simple tools which might be used more widely
- A view was expressed that indicators should be more holistic and also, for example, measure DFID performance and engagement in respect of the consortia (contact in country and from the centre, performance in relation to speed of payments etc)
- The need for sustainability was recognized and institutional capacity was key to this, including capacity in forming and maintaining networks both nationally and

internationally, yet it was perceived that current evaluation did not capture this adequately

The value of logframe was clearly contentious. This, in part, appeared to stem from a variation in understanding about how they evolved, how they would be used to drive and evaluate the work and for whose benefit they could be used. Views varied significantly and this seemed to stem from the attitude of the lead organization. In one group less than 50% of those present used their logframe internally for review purposes

There was a clear lack of understanding about how much flexibility could be exercised in changing and under what circumstances. One Director expressed the view that this could be perceived as inequitable with those "in the know" being able to renegotiate, whilst others did not know when and if this was possible. There was a widespread feeling that some flexibility was necessary, as assumptions and the external environment changed.

It was suggested that it was desirable to have a "bank" of evaluators who worked across all RPCs/ DRGs, not only measuring progress against the logframe but also having a developmental role in spreading good practice between consortia. With long term engagement there would be a greater understanding of the challenges (and successes) as well as the context.

One of the areas felt to be most difficult was evaluating the impact of research on policy and practice. This appeared to be partially a result of a tension between the priorities of academics (i.e. publishing research) and of DFID (research into practice) and there was a need expressed to resolve this tension recognizing the legitimacy of both. There was a feeling that evaluation by the academic community might be very different from evaluation by the development community, by the local country based community or indeed an evaluation based purely on achievement of objectives as outlined in the logframe.

It was felt that some form of peer evaluation of research activity might have merits and could be conducted across RPCs/ DRGs.

Attributing policy change to the work of an RCP/DRC (which may be one link in a chain triggering change along with other external factors and events) was one difficulty. The second related to the perceived time required to achieve change and whether it was realistic for a five year programme.

Whilst indicators likely to result in influence were being used (membership of country level policy groups, advocacy activities etc) many participants felt that real, measurable, observable change was unlikely in the timescale, partially due to the time required for credible research findings to emerge. In addition, many consortia faced considerable hurdles in obtaining acceptance of research findings from senior public sector bureaucrats and the private sector. It may there fore be necessary to focus on process/ activities likely to influence change including discussion of unpublished work with stakeholders, advocacy initiatives, involvement in technical working groups etc. One suggestion from a group was an indicator relating to "creating space within the country dialogue to discuss an issue"

One of these processes currently used was the extent to which networks had been developed but there was a real problem about assessing the efficacy of these. An evaluation based on headcount might suggest successful networking but influence might be better achieved by more discriminatory targeting of effort. It was suggested that 360 degree evaluation of stakeholders might be a better way to measure whether policy or practice had been affected.

The ability to attract co-funding for existing projects could be used as a proxy for showing that the issue is recognised as important by others and proof of obtaining national government funding was particularly indicative (e.g. . Future States RPC had Government of Punjab interested in co-funding informal institutions)

14. THE NEED FOR FLEXIBILITY

There was extensive debate on both the need for flexibility in the RPC contracts and ways of operating, but also the amount of flexibility which already existed. There were some partners who felt that there was already adequate flexibility and barriers were largely imaginary. This seemed to suggest the need for increased communication between RPCs and DFID and consistency of both formal and informal guidance. Some partners were perceived to obtain greater flexibility because they had personal links or were located in the UK and this was felt to be inequitable. It was felt to be important that all RPC partners knew “what the rules are”.

Areas where flexibility was felt to be necessary included

- Allocation of financial resources over time
- The research themes and focus in the light of experience
- Financing high risk projects
- Configuration of partnerships (i.e. the ability to add or subtract partners) although other participants felt that this could cause instability and was inadvisable
- Logframe (although there was no common view on whether this was practical or desirable)

There was considerable debate about flexibility in the length of RPC contracts in the light of concern about the practicality of achieving substantive outputs in five years. It was suggested that RPCs be appointed with a provisional commitment for X years (10-15) funding but with the option of either terminating or extending it at three year intervals on the basis of evaluation.

15. EXTERNAL SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS

The RPC and DRC participants identified a number of needs for external support. Whilst some of this was in the form of additional resources (for follow on research activity, funding additional PhD students, for additional communication funding etc) many of the identified requirements were for technical support, cross RPC networking and training and development. Much of the training and development was needed during the inception phase whilst the following was required at bid stage:

- Support for collective proposal writing
- Costing and budgeting

15.1 Training and Development

Much of the training and development identified under this section was felt to be uneconomic to deliver by individual RPCs and / or difficult to access trainers. There was there fore felt to be a role for the CRD or a CRD funded Resource Centre (see Section 15.6)

- M and E including use of logframe and setting up reporting mechanisms and templates
- Training in converting research findings into policy briefs, press releases (including an understanding of media relations in various countries)
- Training in e-communication including skill based
- Training in partnership facilitation for key personnel (Director, administrator)
- Training in international leadership (recognizing different motivation cultures, different institutional contexts)including how to set ground rules and build teams
- Training in strategic influencing techniques
- Understanding and managing contractual relations

Note; the point was made that the need for managerial training was not confined to southern partners

15.2 Facilitating networking

- Support for cross-referencing/ networking with other similar in country research, (perhaps by DFID country offices)
- Consortia sharing experiences at regional level with key stakeholders (with potential spin-off of attracting other funders)
- DFID CRD to bring together consortia and other researchers to exchange research ideas (see Annex 2)
- Creation of a research development intranet with dedicated space for individual RPCs and opportunities for exchange (DFID CRD or Resource Centre)

15.3 Access to Knowledge

There was a view expressed that some southern partners had inadequate support in accessing knowledge. They appeared to need funding for subscriptions and online access, suggested bibliographies and guidance/training on how to use existing online resources. It was noted that there are already initiatives organized by some northern partners: e.g. Future Health Systems have set up a library group for capacity building at all levels; IDS is experimenting with providing support to partners (e.g. Citizenship, Realising Rights, Future States) in the form of access to BLDS (British Library for Development Studies) based in Brighton whereby all partners can request and borrow documents which are either emailed or posted to them. IDS also provide support in accessing its online resources.

15.4 Supports from DFID Country Offices

There was a perceived need for greater liaison between DFID UK and DFID in country to ensure ownership of the goals and activities of RPCs and DRCs active locally. This could enable support to be provided from DFID locally to facilitate interaction between research and policy makers although it should not interfere with the contractual relationship with DFID UK. Local networking events between RPCs could also be arranged.

One group identified the need for greater understanding of the local policy context. There was a feeling that researchers did not always understand the levers and mechanisms available. It was suggested that this might be facilitated through the British Embassies at local level and that they might also act as a liaison with government or advocate.

DFID country offices were felt to have a potential significant role in supporting the change agenda. They had local influence at policy level but did not always appear to have either the knowledge of or ownership for DFID funded research in country. Opportunities for greater engagement were sought and this was a recurring theme.
One caveat was identified however and this related to the danger of being seen to be closely associated with British interests in some countries, due to the risk of reprisal.

15.5 External Facilitation

A need was expressed for external facilitation when a partnership had major internal conflicts or when it had gone “stale” and needed an external “spark” to regenerate motivation and direction.

15.6 Proposed Delivery Mechanism

Participants felt that much of the identified external support might be delivered by a common RPC/ DRC resource centre (RC) with a specific remit to provide support and training on a call down basis. This could either (preferably) be funded from new resources or might, in future, be top sliced or bought into, using capacity building funding. The RC could arrange networking events, offer standardized and customized training and development and deliver products such as reporting templates. There was a suggestion that it might be southern based. Alternately a small central fund against which RPCs could bid for additional activities such as conferences and cross RPC workshops was suggested

Participants also identified the need for support with publication of various materials (not solely research findings) given that there were economies of scale to be obtained. Whilst web access was efficient, not all partners could obtain access and it was therefore necessary to produce and ship hard copy from the UK.

A further suggestion was a DFID database of accredited support consultants (national, regional and international) in fields including communications, institutional development, logframe development, health economics, technical editing, proof reading etc

ANNEX 1

Immediate outcomes from the workshop

As a final plenary session participants were asked to identify the immediate benefits they had received from attendance at the workshop. These were as follow:

Enhancing networks and communication

- Appreciated opportunity to interface informally with DFID
- Benefited from exposure to different research programmes taking place in different parts of the world, including in own country (India and Zambia)
- Opportunity for more "horizontal" communication with other RPCs both nationally and internationally
- Useful to meet with other RPC managers to know they suffer same challenges. The contributor will now be more comfortable approaching them for advice and guidance
- A new RPC felt was useful to speak to more experienced RPCs
- A non RPC (Young Lives) gained a great appreciation of what they are and opportunities to work with them. Works with an alternative model with 15 partners, and feels confident now to advocate for the RPC/DRC model

New Perspectives

- Contributor felt had widened their perspective to appreciate the importance of management aspects not just research content and process
- Reassured to find there is an RPC consensus on getting support from DFID country offices
- As one of the only south based RPCs contributor has a better understanding of their unique nature and importance of forming S-S relations.
- New RPC partner found it helpful to understand that some flexibility is possible in the way RPCs operate

Examples of practical benefit

- IDS literature – 'SharePoint'(how to set up a password protected website)
- New idea for a capacity building activity (to do with MA programmes) under umbrella of RPC
- Head for a joint RPC workshop on common themes
- Innovative ideas for dissemination. E.g. Story of someone hiring a lorry and setting up a float at the Rio Carnival.

ANNEX 2

Suggested topics for RPC/DRC Learning Events

This list is a direct transcription from a "sign up" sheet. As there was no discussion about the suggestions, they have been reproduced as they were written.

- 'Phase 4' –type evaluations of implementation of ideas from research: scale up, impact evaluations, etc
- Policy influencing (pluses and minuses)
- Role of social protection programme in reducing vulnerability and increasing access to services
- Innovation in governance
- Informal institutions for service delivery
- Expanding services/implementing high quality services in fragile states/post conflict states
- Science & Technology literacy—Training Institute on Science and Technology Policy Analysis
- Quality assurance issues
- Infrastructure-related RPCs
- Research into use
- Women's empowerment/gender
- Democracy/Development/Modernization
- Development vs. Missionizing

ANNEX 3

List of Participants

Name or RPC/ DRC	Names of Attendees and Country of Residence
Achieving MDGs 4 & 5: Strategic Research to Develop Mother and Infant Care at Facility and Community Level	Anthony Costello- UK Shrestha Bhim Prasad- Nepal Rasmane Ganaba-Burkina Faso
Addressing the Balance of Burden in AIDS	John Gyapong- Ghana ; Bertha Nhlema-Simwaka- Malawi; David Haran- UK
Africa Power and Politics	Sonia Sezille- UK David Booth- UK Frederick Golooba-Mutebi-Uganda
Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity	Frances Stewart- UK Graham Brown- UK Rosemary Thorpe- UK Adolfo Figueroa- Peru Riwanto Tirtosudarmo- Indonesia
Chronic Poverty Research Centre	Andrew Shepherd- UK Julia Brunt- UK Charles Lwanga-Ntale- Uganda Amita Shah- India
Citizenship DRC	Bettina von Lieres- UK Steve Abah- Nigeria Alison Dunn- UK
Communicable Diseases	Anthonia James- UK Helen Counihan- UK James Newell- UK Amir Khan- Pakistan
Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity	R. Govinda- India Joseph Ghartey Ampiah- Ghana Frances Hunt- UK Angela Little- UK Keith Lewin- UK
Consortium for Research on Equitable Health Systems	Kara Hanson- UK Obinna Onwujekwe- Nigeria Nicola Lord- UK Susan Cleary- South Africa
Crisis States	James Putzel- UK
Effective Health Care Alliance Programme	Helen Smith- UK Qin Liu- China Emeka Nwachukwu- Nigeria

Evidence for Action on HIV Treatment & Care Systems	Annabelle South- UK David Ross- UK Benson Droti- Uganda
Future Health Systems: Making Health Systems Work for the Poor	David Peters- USA Hilliary Standing- UK
Future States	Andres Mejia Acosta- UK Joseph Ayee- Ghana Mick Moore- UK Winnie Vivianne Mitullah- Kenya
Implementing Quality Education in Low Income Countries	Mathramuthu Pillay- South Africa Leon Tikly- UK George Oduro- Ghana
Improving institutions for pro-poor growth - Centre for the Study of African Economies	Rose Page- UK Tessa Bold- UK Andrew Zeitlin- UK
Improving Institutions for Pro-Poor Growth- Manchester	Frances Bowcock- UK Olu Ajakaiye- Kenya Kunal Sen- UK Pradeep Mehta- UK
Improving Outcomes of Education for Pro-poor Development: Breaking the Cycle of Deprivation	Roger Jeffery- India Claire Noronha- UK Fatuma Chege- Kenya Christopher Colclough- UK
Mental Health Policy development and implementation in Africa	Alan Flisher- South Africa Crick Lund- South Africa Victor Doku- UK Mwanza Banda- Zambia
Migration, Globalisation and Poverty	Meera Warrier- UK Ann Whitehead- UK John Anarfi- Ghana Chowdhury Abrar- Bangladesh
Pathways of Women's Empowerment	Simeen Mahmud- Bangladesh
Policy Innovation for Systems for Clean Energy Security	Ronald Ajengo- Kenya Steven Hunt- UK Rwaichi Minja- Tanzania
Realising Rights: Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health in Poor and Vulnerable Populations	Eliya Zulu- Kenya Hilary Standing- UK Susannah Mayhew- UK
Religion and Development	Carole Rakodi- UK Surinder Jodhka- India
Research-Inspired Policy and Practice Learning in Ethiopia and the Nile Region	Alan Nicol- UK Marialivia Iotti- UK Seid Aman- Ethiopia Desta Dimste- Ethiopia

Research and Capacity Building in Reproductive and Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS in Developing Countries	Philippe Mayaud- UK Yaw Adu-Sarkodie- Ghana Baafuor Opoku- Ghana Susannah Mayhew- UK
Team for Applied Research to Generate Effective Tools and Strategies for Communicable Disease Control	John Porter- UK Alexandra Coldham- UK Joseph Banda- Zambia Fred Nuwaha- Uganda
Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts	Vivienne Wee- UK Maria Jaschok- UK Farida Shaheed- Pakistan Homa Hoodfar- Canada
Young Lives	Jo Boyden- UK Graham Bray- UK Le Thuc Duc- Vietnam Javier Escobal Angelo- Peru
Notetakers	Yasmin Hadi Claudia Sambo Clive Gabay Andrew Harmer
Facilitators	Liz Ollier Carol Bradford Sara Swords Sheena Crawford
DFID	Mark Clayton Sue Kinn Jim Keery George McLauglin Mary Thompson Malcolm Worboys Iain Jones Megan Lloyd-Laney Martin Smith Joanne Alston Andrew Steer Richard Thomas Jo Mulligan
DFID Health Resource Centre	Jody Tate Jasmine Jones