



BACKGROUND

This project attempted to understand the existing state of evidence regarding the wide variety of approaches for putting research into use in order to achieve developmental impacts. A structured review was undertaken, on a sample of the available published academic literature. The principal question addressed by the review is:

What is the state of evidence regarding approaches for putting research into use for sustainably managing the environment and human wellbeing?

METHOD

The search was based on a set of keywords that covered the three focal aspects of the research question: Research into Use, Environment and Human Well-being. Trial searches were conducted through the ISI Web of knowledge and Scopus in order to test the number and relevance of the hits. Subsequently, search terms that did not generate any hits were removed. The resultant set of search terms were used with individual terms separated by Boolean 'OR' and sets combined using 'AND'. Wildcard symbols (*) were used where appropriate. While the search was conducted in English only, care was taken to ensure that American and British English spelling were included in the search. The search was limited to journal articles published since 1990.

Two databases, the ISI-Web of Knowledge and Scopus were used to search for relevant articles. The searches generated 1984 hits on ISI-Web of Knowledge and 3642 hits on Scopus. Only 34 journals registered more than 10 hits each, accounting for a total of 530 hits. The number of relevant articles increased over time, with more than 25% of the articles published between 2011 and 2013. The bibliographies created through Scopus and Web of Knowledge were combined, and duplicates were removed in order to prepare a final set of 4032 unique articles. A 20% sample was extracted through systematic random sampling. After a Kappa analysis to check for researcher bias, one reviewer proceeded to interrogate the 806 articles in detail, using the conceptual framework for this study to filter out irrelevant papers. This process eventually resulted in a final selection of 65 papers, dominated by published work in the field of health and medicine (see table).

Table: Sector-wise Coverage of Included Articles

Climate Change and energy	5
Conservation and Ecology	3
Corporate governance (policy and practice)	3
Education	1
Environment, risk, pollution, soil	7
Health (Public health and Medicine)	31
Land, land rights, land use (forest and agriculture), food security	8
Water, irrigation, floods and coasts	7
Total	65

Key findings and knowledge gaps

The full text of the 65 included articles was systematically interrogated using the review protocol. The extent and quality of information contained in the articles was varied. Only 13 articles contained any information relevant to the research question. Of these, 7 articles referred to translation of research into practice and 6 articles concerned the research-policy interface. In terms of geographical spread, the relevant articles spanned both developed and developing countries with 3 articles from the United States, 2 from South Africa and 1 each from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Ireland, Angola, Chile and the Netherlands.

Key findings from the structured review are:

1. Information relevant to RIU in published literature is scanty, although the language of RIU is being used quite extensively and more so in recent years.
2. Impacts can take varied forms
3. Research impact requires not only effective dissemination of research findings but also the understanding of organisational cultures, politics, requirements and constraints. Personal contact and engagement, along with relationship building, are therefore important. This is a longer-term engagement that may go beyond the timeframe of any one study.
4. In order to be relevant, research must respond to the knowledge needs of the policy or practice context.
5. Dedicated funding is needed for research translation.

The sample of papers that was selected for detailed review did not address a number of key aspects that are relevant to understanding the ways in which research is put into use, as elaborated in the conceptual framework. These included:

Contextual questions: What were the incentives for putting research into use? What was the motivation for undertaking a research into use project?

Research and knowledge: What were the sources of knowledge used? Were some sources used more than others, and why?

Stakeholders and networks: What factors enabled collaboration among stakeholders? What types of networks and collaborative approaches worked/did not work?

Communication: What was the communication strategy? What time frames were experienced for translating research into communicable outcomes and for experiencing the impacts of communication? What was the role of the popular media, if any, in the translation of research into policy/practice?