



# UNDERSTANDING HOW RESEARCH IS PUT INTO USE

The conceptual framework guiding this study focuses on four inter-related dimensions which influence the ways in which research is put into use: the **context** within which the research-policy-practice interface is situated; the nature of **research and knowledge** generated, including diverse types and sources of information and data; the **stakeholders and networks** involved in putting research into use; and the **communication** strategies adopted by research stakeholders.

## CONTEXT

- What political/institutional/environmental variables influenced the process of putting research into use?
- Were the researchers involved in the creation of opportunities for research into use?
- What were the incentives for putting research into use?
- What was the motivation for putting research into use?

## RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE

- What types of research were used?
- Was the purpose of research to influence policy/practice?
- What were the sources of knowledge used?
- Were some sources used more than others and why?

## PUTTING RESEARCH INTO USE

## STAKEHOLDERS AND NETWORKS

- Who are the key stakeholders?
- How did stakeholders come to a shared understanding of putting research into use?
- What factors enabled collaboration among stakeholders?
- What types of networks and collaborative approaches worked/did not work?
- What role was played by knowledge brokers?
- What was the role of funding agencies and donors in facilitating collaboration

## COMMUNICATION

- What was the communication strategy?
- When was research communicated?
- What were the tools of communication? Were particular tools more effective at different points in the research process?
- What time frames were experienced for translating research into communicable outcomes and for experiencing the impacts of communication?
- What was the role of popular media, if any, in the translation of research into policy/practice?

## Background

The Ecosystems Services for Poverty Alleviations programme (ESPA) is a £40 million international research programme, funded by the UK's Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the Department for International Development (DFID), and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The programme aims to deliver high quality, cutting-edge research that will improve the understanding of the contribution of ecosystems services to poverty reduction and inclusive growth processes. In its aim to maximise the spread and meaningful use of research that is generated through its programme, ESPA has commissioned this study to understand the process of putting research into use, particularly within the context of the developing world. The project undertook a review of current and emerging practices of putting research into use, to distil lessons from experiences in different disciplines and sectors that may be relevant to ESPA.

## Terminology And Approach

This study uses the terms 'research' and 'impact' in a broad and open sense. Borrowing from Court and Young (2003), research has been defined as **any systematic attempt to increase the stock of knowledge**. Impacts have been defined to include any **direct and indirect influence that research may have exerted on policy and practice over time**. As the point of departure, at least five types of impacts have been considered: intellectual, conceptual, capacity building, attitude change, and building connectivity.

The process of putting research into use has traditionally been viewed as a linear one, where research is undertaken and completed before it is pushed into use. In such a view, research and policy/practice are seen as distinct spheres with gaps between them, which may be bridged by technical, capacity and communication 'fixes'. Recent studies of the research-policy-practice interface have challenged this linear conceptualisation. They have revealed a dynamic, multi-directional, and messy relationship between research and policy/practice. The conceptual framework used in this study presents the relationship between research and policy/practice as multi-stranded and multi-directional. As a result, **the process of putting research into use is conceptualised as a 'trajectory' that involves multiple pieces of research that may be brought into use at different points in time, with varied outcomes, all contributing towards building and enhancing knowledge, leading towards impact**.

## Framework

The framework which has been used for this study focuses on four interrelated dimensions of research influence:

- 1.) **The context** within which the research-policy-practice interface is situated. This includes the range of political, institutional and environmental factors that influence utilisation of research. Contextual factors change with time, and include unexpected, trigger events that may create opportunities and constraints for putting research into use. The framework recognises the role of a wide range of potential stakeholders in actively shaping the context which creates conditions conducive to research utilisation.
- 2.) **The nature of research and knowledge** generated: the type of research (scientific, experimental, social science based, interdisciplinary) and the research process (including participatory and collaborative research) through which different kinds of knowledge are generated can influence research utilisation. The framework also attends to various sources of knowledge – such as open access, media reports, commissioned studies, research projects – to understand preferences associated with these.
- 3.) **The stakeholders and networks** involved in the process of putting research into use: a diverse group of actors including researchers, research users and beneficiaries, knowledge brokers, and champions of change are involved in research utilisation. The framework does not distinguish between 'demand side' (researchers) and 'supply side' (users) stakeholders. Rather, it focuses upon the roles that different stakeholders and their networks play at different stages of the research and the process of its utilisation. The framework also looks at formal and informal processes of engagement that enable stakeholders to arrive at a common understanding of how research may be put into use. These include consultative and participatory processes, which enable users to be involved with the research.
- 4.) **Communication strategies** adopted by research stakeholders. Effective communication is an important factor for generating a shared understanding of particular problems and their solutions. The translation of knowledge into action involves developing communicable products that can engage diverse segments of research stakeholders. Social media, popular media and advances in information and communication technologies may influence both the ways in which research is communicated as well as its impact. While focusing upon communication of research findings and their dissemination, the framework also attends to both the timing of communication with reference to the research process as well as the timeframe for research to be communicated and then translated into use.