



THIS WORKING PAPER ON STIMULATING DEMAND FOR RESEARCH IS ONE OF A SERIES OF 10 PAPERS PUBLISHED ALONGSIDE DFID'S RESEARCH STRATEGY 2008-2013. IT PRESENTS THE CASE FOR DFID-FUNDED RESEARCH ON STIMULATING DEMAND – DRAWING ON THE RESPONSES GIVEN DURING A GLOBAL CONSULTATION THAT DFID CONVENED IN 2007 ABOUT ITS FUTURE RESEARCH.

The purpose of the Working Papers is two fold: to record the key issues raised during the consultation; and to spell out DFID's decisions on new directions, as informed by the consultation. As such, they constitute an important part of the feedback process, and provide an opportunity to clearly articulate DFID's strategic response to the consultations and to other global drivers of research. They also provide guidance to those implementing DFID's research strategy in the future.

Each Working Paper reviews the current state of DFID's research on a given theme, highlights the key questions asked during the consultation process, and documents the main feedback received. The Papers then tease out the implications of the consultation findings on DFID's work, and end by spelling out DFID's future directions on each priority theme. Where possible, each Paper makes clear how DFID has drawn upon the consultation responses to shape its plans.

Other titles in the series are: Economic Growth, including Infrastructure; Climate Change; Better Health: Education; Political and Social Science Research; Sustainable agriculture and renewable natural resources; Research Communication; Capacity Building; and Mainstreaming Gender in Research. Note that issues which are not directly addressed under this paper may appear in others (for example the impact of agriculture on climate change is largely addressed in the paper on Agriculture).

More information on DFID funded research can be found on the website [www.Research4Development.info](http://www.Research4Development.info). This also offers the facility to sign up for e-mail alerts covering different sectors.

## WHERE WE ARE NOW

1. DFID's Research Funding Framework 2005-2007 made a commitment to respond to the demand for research when setting priorities by:
  - engaging with other international funders about opportunities and gaps;
  - working through inter-governmental organisations<sup>1</sup> in the South and with reference to international consultations<sup>2</sup> and consensus documents to hear what research topics developing countries want;
  - collating existing studies on demand and commissioning new ones;
  - taking opportunities to locate research within major international development initiatives; and
  - using horizon-scanning processes across DFID to help identify research and policy agendas 10 to 20 years ahead.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. NEPAD, ASARECA, FARA

<sup>2</sup> E.g. the Commission on Intellectual Property Rights and Health

“We wish to promote the influence of poor people and developing country institutions as potential users of research – raising the “demand/pull” for research, so that it is more relevant. We do not underestimate the size of the challenge, and we will need to develop our ideas on how to take this forward as we engage in the task.” DFID Research Funding Framework 2005-2007.

2. Progress has been made on all these fronts through our programmes: some examples are shown below.
  - The second phase of DFID’s Climate Change Adaptation in Africa programme is consolidating demand for future, well targeted research among an array of national and local stakeholders.
  - DFID’S planned support to regional agricultural organisations in Africa and South Asia will put financial and technical resources directly behind these partners’ business plans.
  - During the lifetime of the Research Funding Framework, we have devised better ways of calling for research proposals that promote greater openness to bids from southern research institutes.
  - The Research into Use programme in agriculture looks explicitly at the demand for research to better understand how and why uptake happens.
  - Our directly managed research programmes enable research users to take part in setting research questions, thereby requiring researchers to be systematically engaged with the users of their work.
3. However, we recognise that the different research stakeholder groups – farmers and health professionals, developing country policy-makers, development practitioners and top international research scientists and academics – differ in their ability to articulate demand, not least because the capacity to do, use and ask for research are closely linked.
4. An independent performance assessment of the Research Funding Framework was conducted in 2007 (Thomson & Currie 2007). It recommended that DFID strengthen its processes for priority-setting by consulting developing country stakeholders and research users more actively. It also suggested providing more space for innovative and agenda-setting activities, including learning how other UK Government Departments plan their research.
5. An internal review of research management raised similar points, highlighting specifically that DFID could do more to “scan the horizon for scientific potential”, as well as reach out to developing countries to test the demand for research and enhance research and policy linkages.

## WHAT THE CONSULTATION ASKED

6. The consultation asked how DFID could work most productively with different stakeholders to support relevant, high-quality cross-country development research as a “global public good”. We asked how developing country research partners and end-users of research could be given a bigger say in setting DFID’s agenda for centrally funded research. We sought advice on successful techniques in research demand-appraisal and the lessons learned in applying them. We noted that DFID might decentralise some of research management functions and have permanent local research offices in some regions.

## WHAT WE HEARD

### BETTER PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PRIORITY SETTING

7. The consultation endorsed the need to involve research users in developing countries, including the representatives of poor people, more actively in shaping DFID’s research agenda. Respondents generally felt that this would help to ensure that DFID asked more of the right research questions and became more accountable as a research funder. DFID’s willingness to engage directly in consultations at country level about research was broadly welcomed.

“Our experience of links with southern partners confirms the thinking behind this [consultation] question that they are much better placed to discern research needs and the potential applications of research.” International e-consultation respondent.

8. The country consultations highlighted a number of **limitations** in the current priority-setting for international development research. Sounder and more systematic mechanisms were needed to enable developing country civil society (including community based organisations, farmers’ organisations, women’s groups, organised youth) to feed into research priority-setting and project design. Other contributors emphasised the need to listen to those typically under-represented by leading civil society groups, such as the marginalised and disabled.
9. The Nigeria consultation suggested that more research should be situated **within** development projects to create more potent coalitions for change. This theme was echoed by a number of participants in the global consultation (see below), including one major international research funder.

Build in research as a part of creating projects that deliver against citizens' actions... In other words, don't 'do research' and then 'do policy' and then 'do action', but do them altogether. International e-consultation respondent.

DFID can improve the way research responds to user demand by strongly promoting an "innovation systems approach". This implies not only giving end-users a bigger say in developing research agendas, but also a bigger role in implementing research. Or better still, where possible, give research a bigger role in existing attempts at innovation. International funder.

10. A second concern expressed in the country consultations was that indigenous knowledge tended to be undervalued in development research processes and should find a way in.

"We found that researchers often take a very dim view of farmers' knowledge. They would speak down to them and be disrespectful, and would refuse to accept that farmers possessed in depth knowledge that researchers rarely have of their ecosystems." NGO contributor to the e-consultation.

11. The corollary of this was "donor-driven" rather than locally-owned research.

Respondents in developed and developing countries appeared to agree that this was a particular concern for global health research. Related to this, one leading international NGO suggested that DFID should pay much more attention to building ownership of research processes at national level. But other respondents felt that DFID's network of country offices enabled it to articulate demand for research on behalf of partner countries and identify relevant cross-country and regional knowledge needs.

[unless DFID research processes] "empower developing countries to lead the intellectual response to development challenges and generate their own ideas about how to tackle them, then developing countries will remain marginalised in international policy debates and future development efforts are likely to fail." NGO e-consultation respondent.

## BALANCING DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDER DEMANDS

12. Most respondents agreed that research was “rarely a demand-driven activity as such”, but rather required “the building of expertise and capacity among different stakeholder groups to identify, prioritise, facilitate and then direct nationally or regionally relevant agendas for research. “Some contributors cautioned DFID against taking demand at face value, not least given the need to counteract “demand failure” by the public sector in such areas as AIDS and governance.

“It would be a mistake to expect the research that is most needed to be accurately indicated by the existing effective demand. Enquiries within countries would need to be conducted very carefully to avoid getting stock, “expected” answers. Respondent from a DFID research programme.

“Too much emphasis on ‘stakeholders’ defining research will produce conflict within paradigm priorities. Respondent from a DFID research programme.

13. A number of UK respondents, including UK research councils, called on DFID to address the underlying causes of weak demand by working more actively with universities to build research capacity. These same respondents also encouraged DFID to target capacity development efforts towards key government sectors in order to generate better informed demand for policy research (for instance by helping officials in the ministries of finance or education to access and use research).
14. Contributors also drew attention to the different types of research that DFID supports and the appropriate demand mechanism for each. For instance, some respondents suggested that policy research questions are typically generated very differently from questions about changing trends. (The second would be best determined with reference to the emerging science in the literature and in conferences etc). Other contributors agreed about the need to distinguish different “modes” of knowledge production in setting research priorities, for instance as is the current practice in the UK NHS (see below).

The National Coordinating Centre for National Health Service Delivery and Organisation R&D Programme uses two methods to prioritise research. These represent an attempt to strike a balance between two modes of knowledge production: in mode one, the main objective is to produce new knowledge, which builds on a solid stock of prior discipline-based, peer reviewed knowledge. In mode two, the main objective is to develop problem solving capabilities in a society at large. The value of that knowledge is mainly found in its use for non-academics. In order to increase the likelihood of research findings being put into practice by decision makers in the National Health Service, the potential users of that research have been consulted extensively about their priorities. Since its inception in 2000, the Service Delivery Organisation R&D programme has undertaken three surveys of research users: the first consisted of a series of focus groups of decision makers, following an expert forum to advise on the balance

of membership of those groups (Lomas et al 2003); the second was a postal and email based survey (Cherry & Anderson 2002); and the third used the Internet interactively to reach a large number of people (Christian & Anderson 2007). Each time, these user-generated priorities have been refined in the light of the current state of 'mode one' knowledge before being considered by the SDO programme board, which makes the decisions about the programme's research priorities. Respondent from a DFID research programme.

15. Related to this, a significant number of research suppliers urged DFID to make more space to fund "blue skies" research and respond to innovative proposals. This would ensure that DFID was "ahead of the curve" and able to anticipate user needs as well as respond to them.

We believe that there is an important role for strategic and blue-sky research to develop new technologies even when the problems they address have not been articulated. Data on user needs need to be validated by rigorous scientific procedures given that farmers may not fully understand the abiotic and biotic constraints that affect their crops. E-consultation contributor.

... the answer is to have a series of 'windows': some research finance mainly intended to meet real, clear and practical needs (e.g. new technologies for dry areas; some research finance mainly intended to build up capacity in developing countries; some research intended to be cutting edge, blue-sky - where a responsive mode is probably most effective; and some finance in broad areas of clear importance (e.g. fragility, or environment) where a competitive process allows researchers to define the areas to be researched. E-consultation contribution from a DFID research programme.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR CONNECTING WITH USER DEMAND

16. Respondents provided a range of suggestions and lessons for engaging well with stakeholders, end-users and research intermediaries to reveal and consolidate research demand. Chief among these was good communication of existing research feeding demand for more (see also the working paper on research communication).

"Our practitioner publication FMR has benefited from a lengthy build up of expertise – these things take time – and is now recognised as the leading publication linking scholarship to policy and practice in the field of forced migration. Links with local NGOs and INGOs has been a crucial element in developing and ensuring its success and relevance. International respondent to the e-consultation.

“Effective channels of communication are an essential component of any policy designed to ensure effective user-input into the creation of research policies and agendas. DFID should ensure that it provides sufficient support to intermediary organisations and other bodies to maintain such communication channels. It should also help to develop the professional skills required to ensure that these channels are used effectively (for example, by providing sufficient information on research-policy related issues to encourage informed input and dialogue).”  
E-consultation respondent.

17. A number of respondents recommended that DFID should use not only existing international, regional and sub-regional mechanisms to inform research priorities but also key civil society forums. Other commentators suggested that DFID should actively share in the demand assessments of other research funders. In this respect, one respondent noted that collaborating with a broader set of international research funding partners would enable DFID to improve its appreciation of demand.

“It is good to see partnerships expanding, but it is a very Anglo-Saxon and trans-Atlantic group... To improve the way research responds to user demand DFID should consider enhancing its partnerships by:

- expanding beyond the Anglo-Saxon and trans-Atlantic group;
- seeking stronger partnerships in continental Europe, Asia, South America and Africa that would expand access to intelligence on demand in other geographic and linguistic groups” Consolidated response to the e-consultation from a UK research institute.

18. Some contributors welcomed DFID’s suggestion of creating some decentralised capacity for research management. However others raised questions about whether research management could be “outsourced” to a greater extent for efficiency reasons.

“While it is important to maintain some core competence at DFID in development research, the decentralization of the approach is recommended; for some of the activities it could be more efficient and effective to contract the priority setting as well as the research management to international, sub-regional and national research institutions.” International contributor to the e-consultation.

“Support local research offices in some DFID country offices, with a regional mandate to:

- conduct regional consultations on knowledge needs and capacity: networking the research offices with other multilateral, bilateral, INGO, NGO, government and private sector research offices based in the region - to promote cross learning, amplify influence and avoid creating a DFID satellite office;
- build in greater downward accountability to research end-users than upwards to DFID regional or central managers;
- redefine the normal idea of research management so that the role of the research offices encompasses capacity building, communication and convening. - Consolidated response. to the e-consultation from a UK research institute and DFID research partner.

19. Finally, a range of suggestions were made about new mechanisms for accountability to research stakeholders. These included making global calls for research proposals made better known to developing country researchers, and involving more developing country researchers and NGOs in evaluating DFID’s research proposals and on-going projects.

To be responsive to demand the research programme supported by DFID would need to provide for the participation of user representatives in the research project approval process and the management of research consortia. UK E-consultation respondent.

One practical way to get access to the research demand in partner countries is publishing research ads in the name of DFID in public websites, papers and so on, make sure the ads can be acquire by scholars, researchers, policy-makers, and provide support for the key research areas. International respondent to the e-consultation.

## IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

20. Demand is neither necessary nor sufficient for good research. Fundamental research may have no user-orientation. Research can be fundamental and user-oriented but still owe little to popular demand (for example the invention of the smallpox vaccine). However, when development research reflects authentic demand and is not “funder-driven” it is inherently more usable and stable than when it does not.
21. It is generally easier to identify demand for national research than research that relates to global, regional or cross-country themes. DFID is committed to determining its global research priorities in more pluralistic ways that take better account of developing country researchers and local knowledge and concerns. This will help to improve the relevance and action-orientation of the research that we fund.

22. Enabling different stakeholder groups to identify research topics and weighing these views has been an important consideration in designing this strategy, albeit within the confines of a global research agenda relevant across a range of developing countries, as opposed to a country specific and community-driven one. Over six months we:

- held consultation events in seven DFID partner countries involving over 1000 participants, including suppliers and consumers of research and “knowledge intermediaries”. Separate reports of these consultations are at X, providing details of the stakeholder groups we consulted);
- consulted electronically on DFID’s website and research portal. Over 600 institutions and individuals read our survey, around half of whom provided substantive replies (the full summary of the e-consultation can be found at <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/research/Electronic-C-summary.pdf>);<sup>3</sup>
- promoted an easy-to-download version of the electronic questionnaire directly to developing countries and received 120 individual and 2 institutional responses;
- held interviews and discussions with twelve international research funders to get their views; and
- talked to other government departments and the UK research councils.

23. Our consultation has been the most ambitious assessment of the demand for research that DFID has undertaken. It reaffirms the need for DFID to be attuned to a range of stakeholder demands and to do more to contextualise its research lessons and processes so that they are more relevant to country needs.

24. We will develop more systematic and sustained ways of cultivating the “pull” for research in three areas over the strategy period.

<sup>3</sup> 30% of respondents were from the UK, 23% from Africa, 17% from Asia, 10% from Europe 7% from North Africa, 4% from Central and Latin America and 1% from Australasia. Other respondents did not list their location. In terms of respondent affiliations, 25% were from NGOs, 20% universities, 14% research institutes and 6% research funders. The remainder of respondents either did not list their affiliation or were private individuals

## WORKING WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

25. Our first priority will be to broaden and deepen our research partnerships in developing countries as a direct route to accessing research demand (see page 2). A new generation of our research programme consortia model will enable us to hear from developing country research providers more frequently and directly. We will also focus on engaging more actively with developing country policymakers and practitioners to better determine opportunities to support their needs. In doing this, we will emphasise linking research not only to policy design but also to policy implementation and practice. We will work to situate more of our research within regional processes with strong political momentum. We will support research networks in developing countries specifically to feed back views on future priorities. Our research communication (see separate working paper) will reinforce these activities.
26. We have good made progress in involving such research end-users as farmers in research priority-setting. We will build on these techniques in other areas of our research portfolio. DFID's capacity to do participatory demand-appraisal at community level through a global research strategy is limited. However we will ensure that systematic processes address the limited "demand power" of certain user groups as part of individual research scoping exercises (i.e. once the basic research areas have been determined).

Some previous DFID-funded research had made some headway involving farmers in identification, planning implementation and evaluation of research needs and results. These successful pilot schemes require building on and expanding. E-consultation contributor.

## WORKING WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

27. We will strengthen our scientific advisory capacity to manage a larger research budget. New senior staff will help us to better identify the research questions with the greatest potential for development gain across the physical, natural, economic and social sciences.
28. We recognise that existing demand for research is not a reliable indicator of future research needs and that anticipatory research has an important role. We will institutionalise processes for periodic research "horizon-scanning" with developing country partners. We will also support more "blue skies" research, including by expanding our current responsive research programmes with the UK Research Councils.
28. We will continue to engage with member of the UK Collaborative on Development Science to identify future research opportunities that are particularly relevant to poverty reduction. Building our strong links with such research funders as Canada's IDRC, the Wellcome Trust and the Gates Foundation, we will engage with a broader set of international research partners over the strategy period, particularly by strengthening collaboration with EU partners but also with the private foundations.

## MORE RESPONSIVE RESEARCH STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

29. Our current research programmes already tell us a great deal about user demand. We will harvest and exploit this knowledge through more active learning across the portfolio (see separate paper on Research Communication).
30. We will establish an overseas research management network with hubs in Africa and Asia. This will respond to the research priorities of our developing country partners and engage directly in getting research results used.
31. We will ensure high standards of transparency in the way the research budget is managed, in particular how global calls for research proposals are advertised.
32. We will continue to ensure that our research programmes articulate demand in their proposals and in the formulation of research questions, and that they show evidence of this demand. Related to this, we believe that “innovation system” approaches hold much potential for demand-led research that benefits poor people. We will therefore consider how these can be factored into the management our research.
33. We will work with partners and other organisations to build the capacity of researchers to better define and articulate demand within research programmes, through better engagement with research users. This will also include ways to judge stakeholder demands against existing peer reviewed knowledge.

## REFERENCES

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The Department for International Development (DFID) will spend up to £1 billion on research between 2008-2013. DFID's Research Strategy describes how the money will be used for maximum impact on reducing poverty in developing countries.

This paper is one of ten Working Papers which were produced to accompany the Strategy. Their purpose was twofold: first to record the key issues raised during a global consultation that DFID convened in 2007 about its future research; and second to spell out DFID's decisions on new directions, as informed by the consultation.

Each Working Paper reviews the current state of DFID's research on a given theme, highlights the key questions asked during the consultation process, and documents the main feedback received. The Papers then tease out the implications of the consultation findings on DFID's work, and end by spelling out DFID's future directions on each priority theme. Where possible, each Paper makes clear how DFID has drawn upon the consultation responses to shape its plans.

The full series of Working Papers are: Inclusive Growth, including Infrastructure; Health; Sustainable Agriculture; Climate Change; Education; Political and Social Science Research; Stimulating Demand for Research; Research Communication; Capacity Building; and Mainstreaming Gender in Research.

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DFID is the UK Department for International Development: leading the British government's fight against world poverty. For more information visit [www.dfid.gov.uk](http://www.dfid.gov.uk)