

VIEW FROM PRACTICE

How ICT4D Research Fails the Poor

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Research can improve development policies and practices and funders increasingly require evidence of such socioeconomic impact from their investments. This article questions whether information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D) research conforms to the requirements for achieving socioeconomic impact. We report on a literature review of the impact of research in international development and a survey of ICT4D researchers who assessed the extent to which they follow practices for achieving socioeconomic impact. The findings suggest that while ICT4D researchers are interested in influencing both practice and policy, they are less inclined toward the activities that would make this happen, especially engaging with users of their research and communicating their findings to a wider audience. Their institutions do not provide incentives for researchers to adopt these practices. ICT4D researchers and their institutions should engage more closely with the users of their research through more and better communications with the public, especially through the use of information and communication technologies.

Keywords: ICT4D; research; policy; practice; impact

1. Introduction

The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has acknowledged that research can have powerful influences on both policies and institutions in support of development objectives and is therefore likely to be an essential element in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and reducing poverty. Research has a crucial role to play, it says, in helping to develop evidence-based and innovative approaches to international development. However, while journal articles remained the predominant output of DFID research, this form of output, says the report, inevitably constrains the impact that the research will have on the problems being studied, as it relies on a trickle-down mechanism from readers of journal papers which is hard to justify. Accordingly, DFID needs to invest in uptake pathways in which there is a need to go beyond research and dissemination (Surr et al., 2002). By 2013, the guide for DFID-funded research had announced that research programs are expected to plan and implement a research uptake strategy, which should encompass stakeholder engagement, capacity-building, communication and monitoring and evaluating uptake (2013).

Alongside this development, the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), which invests around £3 billion annually in research, has announced that it expects that the researchers it funds will have considered the potential scientific, societal and economic impact of their research. In recent years, says ESRC, the government has placed increasing emphasis on the need for evidence of economic and social returns from its investment in

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