Knowledge Services, Research Uptake and Evidence-Informed Policy

Better understanding how new knowledge informs policy and practice

itad

Results in development

Overview

New knowledge has a key role to play both in directly improving the lives of poor people and through its application to policy and programming decisions. We believe that positive change can take place rapidly if the decisions made by policy-makers, practitioners and the poor themselves are based on robust and reliable research evidence. Our services include both supporting the supply of new knowledge and the demand for research evidence.

Research uptake covers all the activities that contribute to the use of new knowledge and evidence by policy-makers and practitioners. New knowledge can foster innovation and the development of new technologies, uncover more effective ways to deliver development interventions, and provide the evidence to inform new and better policy decisions. Itad is at the forefront of monitoring, evaluation and learning in what is often a highly complex, emergent, and intangible field. Our work covers four overlapping areas:

Strategic planning

Defining new approaches to better understand, explore and illustrate research uptake and evidence-informed policy processes and pathways. We support researchers and knowledge brokers to map out coherent and credible uptake pathways. We have particular expertise in the participatory development of theory of change based approaches.

Monitoring systems

Designing bespoke monitoring systems (monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, results frameworks, and management information systems) for projects, programmes and organisations with mandates to generate and share new knowledge. The monitoring systems we design and build often incorporate qualitative and quantitative research uptake indicators together with a range of appropriate data collection and data analysis tools. We have particular expertise in developing 'higher-order' research uptake indicators which are relevant, robust and measurable.

Evaluation and assessment

We are known for producing reliable and independent evaluations of projects, programmes and organisations involved in the field of research uptake. Operating in complex contexts, we have applied a range of methods (including Contribution Analysis, Most Significant Change Technique, Outcome Mapping amongst others) to define and understand credible contribution (as well as direct attribution) to change. All our evaluation work aims to better understand how research contributes to development.

Capacity development and lesson learning

We place strong emphasis both on ensuring our work contributes to a wider pool of knowledge on the use of research and evidence in development, and transferring the skills we have developed in the field to others. We place importance on sustainably transferring skills and knowledge to those we work with and for, both through formal training and more informal knowledge sharing. Our work in this field is demonstrated in the Case Study below which illustrates the strategic support we provided to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Evaluation Office to enhance their thinking on capacity development.

OUR PROJECTS

Evaluation of Approaches to Build Capacity for Use of Research Evidence (BCURE)

The effective use of research by those who make policy in the Global South can have a real impact on decision-making. DFID launched their 'Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence' Programme (BCURE) to increase the capacity of decision makers to use research effectively.

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Itad is leading a team of 10 evaluators with expertise in research, communications and policy processes to conduct a multi-country and multi-year evaluation of BCURE. The evaluation has a realist design, and seeks to understand how different approaches work to build the capacity of decision makers to access, appraise and apply evidence in order to improve policy quality. The evaluation has three main components, structured around a common theory of change:

1) Case evaluations of six BCURE projects, collecting primary data from eight countries over three years.

2) An Evidence Review, using a realist synthesis methodology to examine the evidence base on capacity development for research use and other relevant literatures.

3) A synthesis, bringing together the findings from the case evaluations and Evidence Review to assess what approaches work to build capacity for evidence-use, for whom, in which contexts, and why.

> To find out more about this project visit **www.itad.com/projects/evaluation-of-approaches-to-build-capacity-for-use-of-research-evidence-bcure**

Review of, and strategic support to, GDNet

GDNet is the knowledge services programme of the Global Development Network. It supports researchers in developing countries to contribute and debate ideas in development thinking, policy and practice. GDNet includes a comprehensive internet knowledge base of development research produced in developing countries, and runs a capacity building programme to improve researchers' communication of their findings.

Itad was originally contracted by DFID Research and Evidence Division to conduct a mid-term review of GDNet. We reviewed its effectiveness, networking, user experience and sustainability. This review was well received and GDNet subsequently took us on to assist in developing its five-year Strategic Plan, which included developing a theory of change for GDNet, which was then extended to design an M&E system. This involved designing tools and data collection methods, and establishing a baseline for the production and use of its knowledge services, as well as building staff capacity to use the system.

> To find out more about this project visit **www.itad.com/projects/gdnet-me-technical-support-2009-2014**

Researchers in developing countries need to be better networked, they need better access to research and funding, and there needs to be better linkage between researchers and policy makers.

Strategic support to the Panos Relay Programme

Itad evaluated Panos' Relay Programme and subsequently supported them to develop a theory of change for the second stage of the programme. Funded under the DFID Research and Evidence Division portfolio of knowledge service programmes, Panos Relay aimed to promote and strengthen approaches to building the capacity of the media in developing countries to report on research. In addition to the evaluation, Itad was requested to: facilitate the development of Relay's theory of change; help Panos test and refine their approach to action research; and design, build and train the team in monitoring, evaluation and learning. The assignment involved country field visits to Zambia, Malawi, Uganda, Kenya, and India. Key features of the assignment included our design of an appreciative evaluation approach based on USAID's After Action Review, and conducting a series of M&E training workshops for Relay programme field office staff to build their capacity in M&E and to adapt the Relay theory of change to local contexts.

> To find out more about this project visit **www.itad.com/projects/strategic-support-to-the-panos-relay-programme/**

Itad facilitated the development of Relay's theory of change; helped Panos test and refine their approach to action research; and designed, built and trained the team in monitoring, evaluation and learning.

CASE STUDY

Re-thinking capacity development for the Global Environment Facility

Itad is at the forefront of creative thinking on capacity development as illustrated by the strategic support we provided to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Evaluation Office to enhance their thinking on capacity development. The GEF is charged with building the capacity of partner governments to fulfil essential requirements to various global environmental conventions – supporting the demand-side of evidence-informed policy-making. A team from Itad was engaged by the GEF to refine and advance their approach to capacity development. The team was asked to develop a new and enhanced approach to GEF capacity development – 'Capacity Development 2.0 (CD2)'. Central to the 'CD2 framework' we devised is the idea that 'capacity' itself is an emergent property of the functioning of the different processes in a system. It is not a single 'outcome' that can be influenced by a single intervention or organisation.

The CD2 framework adopts a systems perspective to support a country's own processes of knowledge creation rather than transferring knowledge from North to South. The framework promotes capacity development as a process over time that is built on a close analysis of the context; encompassing the enabling environment before choosing appropriate capacity development tools.

We defined five concepts as significant components of a CD2 framework:

1. **Systems perspectives** – CD2 approaches draw on insights from complexity science.

2. **Four dimensions of change** – personal, relationships (both mapping to individual level), collective patterns of thinking and action (maps to organisational and network level); Systems and structures (maps to enabling environment level).

3. **Behavioural Competencies** –Skills training can be seen as a typical activity of a CD1 if not also taking into account the necessary behavioural competencies which are a core link between individual and organisational and network levels of capacity development.

4. **Elements of an enabling environment** – Core to our CD2 framework is that we see 'capacity' as emerging from the combination of appropriate behaviours within an enabling environment that is responsive to the complexity of the context.

5. **Digital competencies** – Engagement with digital devices and the internet is key to any conception of CD2. We use the concept of Digital Competencies to help us navigate through the range of tools and activities which could be linked to a CD2 framework. Itad's thinking on capacity development 2.0 has been picked up and taken forward in a number of other arenas. A blog series on capacity development was published on the Itad website, distilling the ideas and presenting them for further discussion in the public domain. This was picked up by various interested organisations including the Learning Network on Capacity Development. Similarly the CD2 concepts we developed have been applied to other sectors including supporting a unifying concept of adaptive capacity to be applied to the field of climate change adaptation monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

> To find more about this project visit **www.itad.com/knowledge-and-resources/capacity-development-2/**

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