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Assessing the Impact of International Development Research: Lessons Learned from the ESPA programme (2009-2018)

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Research for international development

Increasing share of the UK Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) budget devoted to research

ODA-funded research is an increasing share of the UK Science Budget

ODA budget increasingly managed outside of DFID –
increasingly important role of UKRI



Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)

- £1.5 billion (2016-2021)

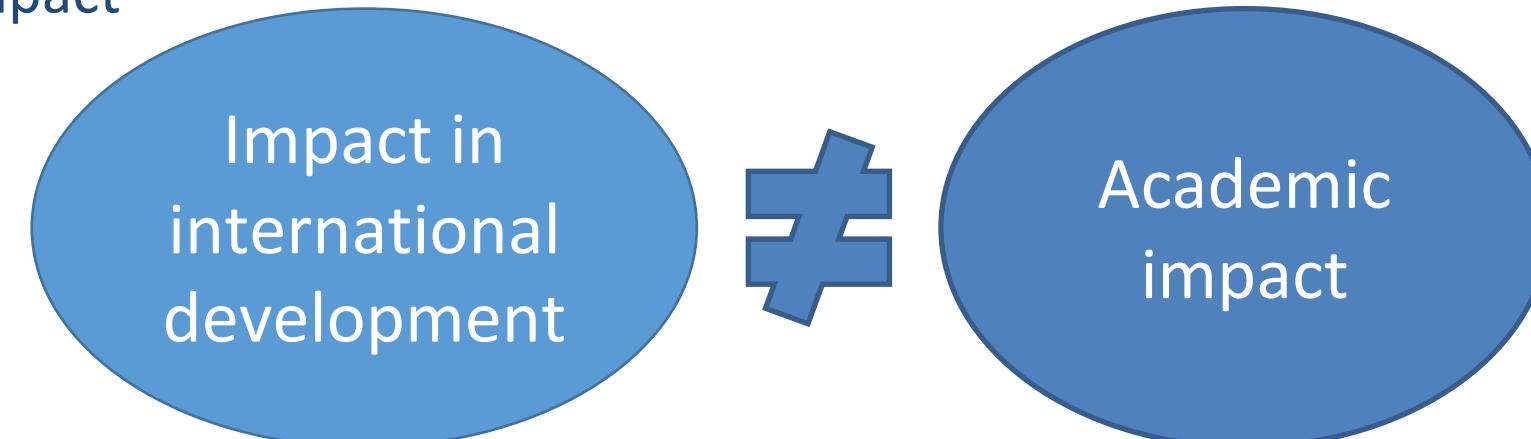
*“[GCRF] marks a **change in the overall pattern of UK government funding for science and research**, making a notable part of this funding contingent of whether or not the research themes fall within the international [Official Development Aid] definition”*

International Commission for Aid Impact



How is ODA-funded research for development different from ‘normal’ research?

- ODA compliance
 - Geographical focus: OECD list of ODA countries
 - Purpose: research should have the primary purpose of promoting economic growth and welfare in ODA countries.
- Parliamentary scrutiny
- Impact





Key question: are current approaches to reporting impact suitable for assessing development impact of ODA-funded research?



Using Researchfish to report on development impact: A case-study of the Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme



What was ESPA?

- An interdisciplinary research programme to explore the links between the environment and human wellbeing
- 2009-2018
- Funded by DFID, NERC and ESRC



ESPA in numbers

922
Researchers

50% from developing countries



53
Countries

where research has taken place



8,516
Citations

from 419 papers



125 Research Projects

supported by ESPA

£43.9m
Total value of
ESPA programme





What impact did ESPA projects have?

Influencing policy (global, national, sub-national);
Influencing legislation and regulation;
Influencing investments and business practices;
Mobilising citizens action;
Scientific base and 'proof of concept' for development funding;
Providing direct benefits to local communities through pilot activities.

In most cases, only initial indications are visible – impact takes longer than the average research project

The image displays four separate impact stories from the ESPA program, each featuring the ESPA logo and the tagline "ecosystem services for poverty alleviation".

- Impact Story June 2018:** An equity framework helps ensure that protected areas are fair to people
- Impact Story May 2018:** Mangrove conservation is protecting both livelihoods and carbon stores
- Impact Story May 2018:** Integrated environment and development modelling to benefit the poorest in coastal Bangladesh
- Impact Story May 2018:** Research helps ensure that forest conservation does not harm the poorest
- Impact Story May 2018:** Traditional knowledge improves water management in rural and urban Peru



ESPA's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

- **DFID Logframe**
- Reporting to NERC
- Reporting to Programme Executive Board
- Directorate's own learning process
- DFID's Independent Reviews (mid-term and end of programme)

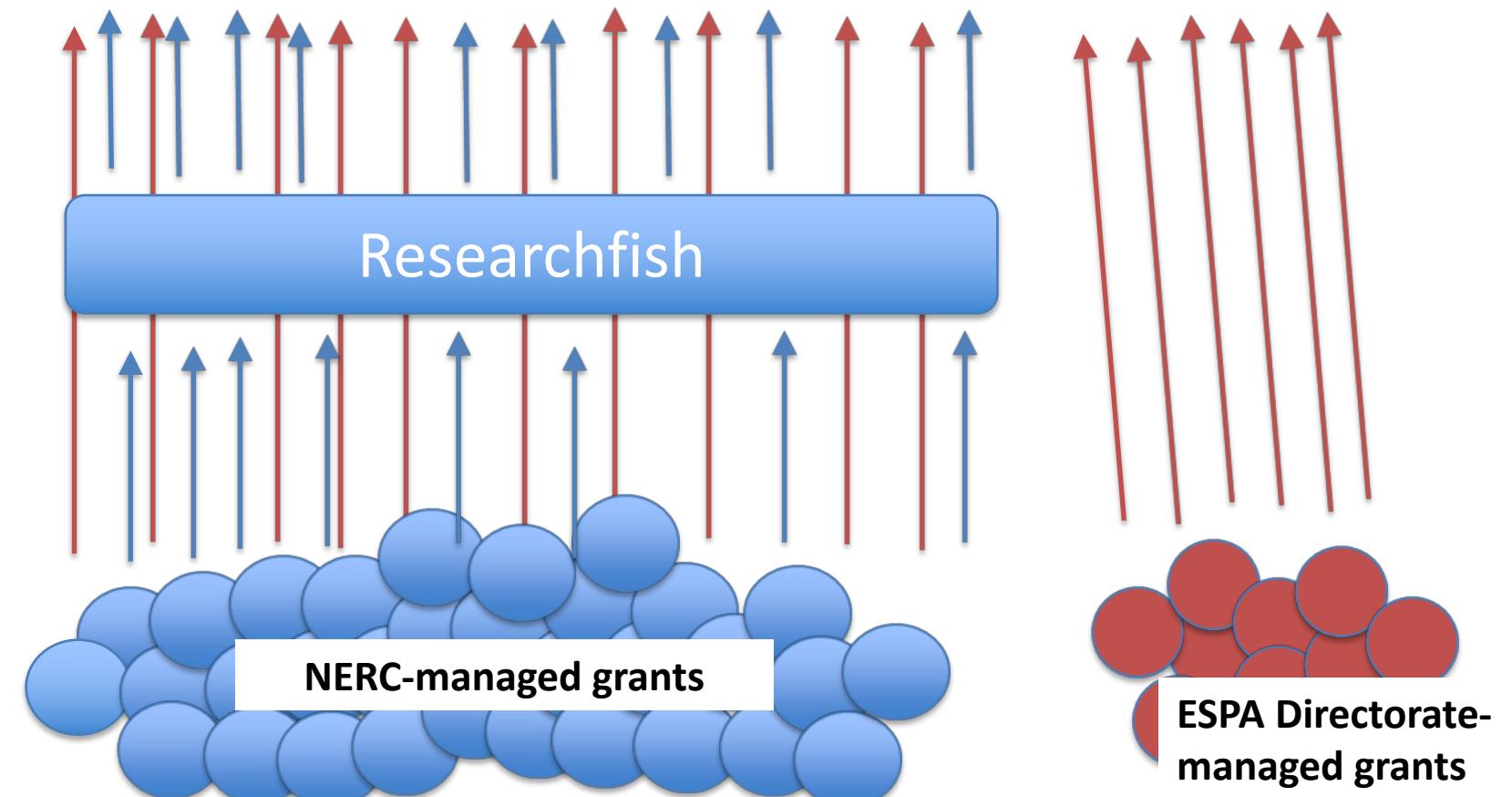
Researchfish was a key source of data and information for ESPA's MEL

Information flow

Programme-level

ESPA Directorate - Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Project-level





Key benefits of Researchfish

- A reporting requirement for PIs (not an add-on) – thus reducing the burden for researchers
- 5 years after end of project (enables the assessment of longitudinal impact)



Key issues and challenges (1)

Only partial overlap between the information required by Researchfish and information needed for the ESPA's logframe

Different terminology (or same terms used in different ways – particularly **impact**).



A few examples from ESPA's logframe...

1.2	ESPA research projects produce high quality research outputs addressing issues of ecosystem services and their link to poverty alleviation in a range of formats.	1.2.1	Total ⁴ number of journal articles attributed to ESPA projects.	0	20	100	200	RCUKJournalArticle
		1.2.2	Number of other research outcomes (books, book chapters, briefing papers, conference papers, grey literature).	0	20	300	600	RCUKOtherPublicationReport, RCUKOtherReport, RCUKTechnicalReport, RCUKConferencePaper, RCUKWorkingPublication, RCUKBook, RCUKBookChapter
		1.2.3	Percentage of total journal articles published as open access.	0	25% since start of programme	50% since previous milestone	100% since previous milestone	RCUKJournalArticle Marked Open Access



A few examples from ESPA's logframe...

1.4	ESPA research teams produce practical products that support decision-makers to deliver evidence-based policy and investment decisions.	1.4.1	Number of models / tools / datasets / frameworks produced to support decision-makers to deliver evidence-based policy and investment decisions.	0	ESPA Directorate develops guidance	5 new frameworks, methods, tools and models from ESPA projects. Disaggregated as so: 30 models 25 tools and datasets 10 methods/ frameworks	65 new frameworks, methods, tools and models from ESPA projects	Manually coded and extracted from ESPA Management Information Systems based on data obtained from ResearchFish.
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A few examples from ESPA's logframe...

1.3	ESPA research produces publications which are highly cited and influential in terms of promoting conceptual advancement in academic circles.	1.3.1	External citations of ISI journal ⁵ articles from ESPA projects in research publications.	0	2	600	5000	Imported from Web of Knowledge.
		1.3.2	Global average citation rates of journal articles from ESPA projects published from 2009 to 2015.	0			Matching global average citation rates for environmental science between 2009 – 2015 reported by ISI/ Web of Knowledge in 2015	Global average citation rates for environmental science between 2009 – 2015 reported by ISI/ Web of Knowledge in 2015.



A few examples from ESPA's logframe...

0.2	Decision-makers demonstrate recognition of ES for PA as a major development intervention and show increased demand for evidence on ecosystem services to support implementation.	0.2.1	New ESPA-related projects or activities funded by agencies outside the ESPA programme i.e. extending or continuing ESPA research.	0	£2 m	£31 m	£41 m	RCUKFurtherFunding
		0.2.2	Development activities or investments informed by or utilising ESPA research.	0	£2 m	£30 m	£40 m	RCUKFurtherFunding



Key issues and challenges (2)

Multiple reporting of same results among different projects
(need for data cleaning and Quality Assurance)

Variance in the level of detail and evidence provided in
Researchfish submission

Lack of Southern voices and perspectives



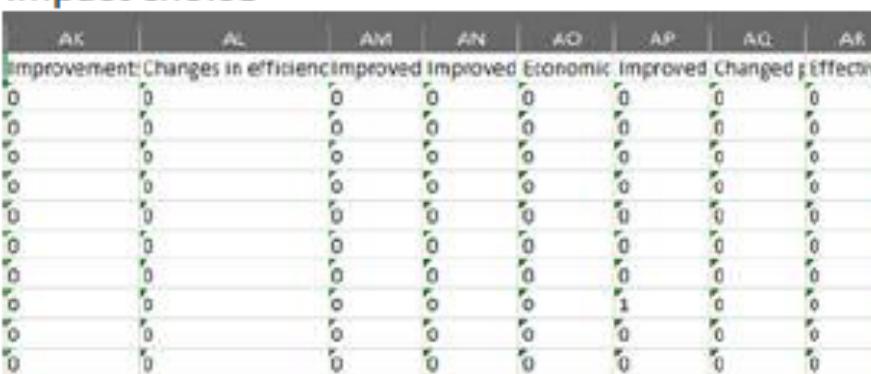
Key issues and challenges (3)

Disconnect between the timeframe of ESPA logframe reporting and RF reporting

Data migration and interoperability issues between RF and ESPA's MIS (e.g. inconsistencies in data formatting from one year to the other)



Examples of differences in data formatting in different years (1)

2017	2018
<p>22 columns of data</p> <p>Does not include Funding Value or Award Submission date, Country</p>	<p>51 columns of data</p> <p>Includes Funding Value, Award Submission date, Country</p>
<p>One True/False column for each possible Policy Impact choice</p> 	<p>Comma-separated lists of Policy Impact choices</p> 
All dates as yyyy-MM-dd	Mixture of yyyy-MM-dd and dd/MM/yyyy dates



Examples of differences in data formatting in different years (2)

All dates as yyyy-MM-dd	
F	G
Start Date	End Date
2010-09-01	2013-02-15
2013-09-01	2017-08-31
2012-05-01	2016-04-30
2010-09-01	2013-02-15
2012-05-01	2016-04-30
2012-03-01	2016-08-30

N	O	P
Award Sta	Award End Dat	Award Submission D
2010-09-01	2013-09-30	15/03/2018
2013-11-01	2016-06-30	15/03/2018
2012-03-01	2016-12-30	13/03/2018
2010-09-01	2013-09-30	15/03/2018
2013-11-01	2016-06-30	15/03/2018
2012-05-01	2013-07-22	14/03/2018
2012-04-30	2016-12-31	21/02/2018
2013-07-01	2017-11-30	15/03/2018
2013-07-01	2017-11-30	15/03/2018
2010-09-01	2013-09-30	15/03/2018
2013-11-01	2016-06-30	15/03/2018
2010-09-01	2013-09-30	15/03/2018
2013-11-01	2016-06-30	15/03/2018



Considerations for future ODA-funded programmes

(1)

- Formalise agreement between UKRI/RF and programme management, establishing clear lines of responsibility in relation to data
- Reconcile reporting timeframes



Considerations for future ODA-funded programmes (2)

- Scope out ‘data journey’ and allocate sufficient resources (data analyst/interpreter)
- Anticipate the technical challenges relate to the migration of Researchfish data into (bespoke) database
- Provide tailored guidance to researchers on how to report to Researchfish



Considerations for future ODA-funded programmes (3)

- Develop quality assurance protocols early on
- Complement Researchfish with the programme's own reporting system
- Capitalise on the 5-year post-project reporting window



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THANK YOU!

....Questions?

For more on ESPA's learning about how to do research with development impact:

www.espa.ac.uk/impact

The image shows two documents from the Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme. The top document is a 'Policy and Practice Briefing' from March 2018, titled 'Research for development impact: The role of equitable partnerships'. It features a blue and green design with text about research partnerships between North and South institutions. The bottom document is a 'Working paper | 008' from June 2018, titled 'Research with development impact: Lessons from the Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation programme'. It has a light blue background with text about lessons learned from the programme. Both documents include the 'espa ecosystem services for poverty alleviation' logo.

Policy and Practice Briefing
March 2018

espa
ecosystem services
for poverty alleviation

Research for development impact:
The role of equitable partnerships

The Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) research partnerships between institutions in the North and South. The research highlights some important lessons learned, such as the experience of structural asymmetries, unspoken assumptions, and the need to consider how constraints can affect equity, in spite of good intentions.

Key messages

Working paper | 008
June 2018

espa
ecosystem services
for poverty alleviation

Research with development impact
Lessons from the Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation programme

June 2018

www.espa.ac.uk