

Intermediary Impact

Case studies of intermediary influence

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www.ids.ac.uk/go/ikmediary-group

Around the world information and knowledge intermediaries are working to increase access to and use of research by those trying to alleviate poverty and tackle the pressing issues of our time. Their work is helping to shape discussions, inform decisions and inspire action within policy, practice, academia and communities.

These case studies were undertaken by members of the I-K-Mediary Network in seven countries and explore how their services are being used. Together they illustrate how intermediaries are enabling greater use of research in micro, local, regional and national processes.

These processes include:

- **design and evaluation of development projects**
- **scoping and implementation of research studies**
- **livelihood decision-making by grassroots stakeholders; and**
- **agenda setting on key issues at national and international levels.**

Based on interviews with intermediary service users, each case study highlights ways in which the information accessed from using intermediary services is applied and the outcomes of that information use. The case studies are unusual in that they focus on outcomes of the services, not the services themselves.



Filipino intermediary SERP-P helped to identify gaps in research around infrastructure for rice production

The extracts featured on the following pages form part of a larger collection of evaluation data which is being collected by the I-K-Mediary Network to analyse the impact of intermediaries in greater depth. This brief is a modest first step in that process. Themes emerging from these and the other case studies from the Network are presented at the end.

Information and knowledge intermediaries

Intermediaries of research knowledge working in development are those who 'seek to meet perceived knowledge needs of different social change agents and capture and interpret information by adapting it to the appropriate contexts, adding to it, packaging it, communicating it and facilitating exchanges between and among other groups' (adapted from Fisher and Vogel).¹ The I-K-Mediary Network brings together organisations that facilitate access to and use of research by providing portals, gateways, resource centres and related services. For more information see back page.

¹ Locating the Power of In-between: How Research Brokers and Research Intermediaries Support Evidence-based Pro-Poor Policy and Practice (2008). See www.ids.ac.uk/go/sli-publications

Case Studies

1 Highlighting information gaps in the Philippines

Ever Abasolo is a senior economic development specialist at the Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDCo) in the Philippines. Ever and his colleagues were conducting research on the impact of infrastructure support on the rice sector. They used the Socio-Economic Research Portal for the Philippines (SERP-P), an online database of economic research, to assess what studies had already been undertaken. As they combed through the various methodologies used in similar studies, they noticed that few examined the issue of technical efficiency of infrastructure support.

As a result, they decided to focus their study on this under-researched angle. They presented their findings to a range of policymakers, and various efforts are now underway to fast-track the construction of farm-to-market roads, the rehabilitation of existing irrigation and the creation of new irrigation systems in Mindanao.

This case demonstrates the valuable role that intermediary services can play in helping to identify information gaps, which can then lead to new and/or extended areas of research.

Case study undertaken by Jennifer Liguton, SERP-P
Website: <http://serp-p.pids.gov.ph/>

2 Providing access to practical livelihoods advice in Bangladesh

Saidul Islam from Bangladesh had been cultivating shrimp since 2001. After five successful years and considerable investment, he began to find that profits were falling due to a viral infection on his farm. He was introduced to a local D.Net telecentre (Pallitathya Kendra), set up to provide

members of the community with access to practical livelihoods information through the support of infomediaries. These infomediaries are trained to help local people access and make sense of livelihoods information. In this case, the infomediary, Mohidul, used a searchable offline livelihoods database in Bangla to discover that water purification would probably be the most effective solution to Saidul's problem. Mohidul then visited Saidul's farm several times and guided him through the water purification process from what he had learned.

Saidul is once again making a profit and now provides advice to others on how to protect their shrimp farms from viral infections. He has also become a vociferous advocate of Pallitathya Kendra.



D.Net infomediaries support Bangladeshi farmers to access and use digital material

This case illustrates the value of combining different kinds of intermediary work: Compiling information into databases and then actively supporting people to access and use that information can help to ensure maximum impact.

Case study undertaken by Masum Billah, Development Research Network (D.Net)
Website: www.dnet-bangladesh.org/

3 Supporting the 'time-poor' in South Africa

Gail Kirchmann works for the Border Rural Committee (BRC), a

rural development NGO in South Africa which supports local communities to participate in local economic development programmes. Gail designs questionnaires to support fieldworkers in grassroots needs assessments.

Gail does not actively look for information but regularly skims through the titles of the email alerts she receives from the Population and Development Information and Knowledge Centre (PDIKC). On one occasion, an email alerted her to a document on gender and agriculture, which she described as 'a gem'. She discussed the paper with the field workers, who then decided to focus more on gender issues in their work with local communities. Gail also incorporated more gender-related questions into her surveys and questionnaires.

This case study demonstrates that email can be an effective way of getting information through to users who have limited internet connectivity and who may not proactively search for online information.

'The service is simple, the title indicates clearly what the email is about and the information is current'.

Case study undertaken by Carol Lombard, PDIKC
Website: <http://tinyurl.com/ykwnvch>

4 Collaboration amongst intermediaries in India

P.K. Jain works as a Librarian at the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG) in New Delhi and often collaborates with other libraries and networks to locate resources requested by the researchers at their institutes. Until recently, Jain had found it difficult to find information on Indian social science research. Little did he know that volunteers at the Open Index Initiative (OII) were indexing exactly

that kind of information, and presenting it free of charge through an online database. Since discovering the service, Jain has used the OII to identify gaps in the IEG's collection of social science research and requests whatever is missing from other libraries. According to Jain, the search process on OII has greatly increased the efficiency of his library services in locating relevant literature.

This case illustrates the value of collaborating across different organisations to ensure relatively lower profile material is visible to wider audiences.

Case study undertaken by Shamprasad Pujar, OII
Website: <http://oii.igidr.ac.in/>

5 Providing access to hard-to-find information in Tanzania

Audax Rwechungura is a Chief Executive Officer of the Africa 2000 Network Tanzania chapter which supports rural communities to negotiate and develop their own community action plans. Audax uses the Tanzania Online gateway to access information on local development issues.

'We find sometimes the communities we visit do not know where to find certain government policies, strategies and programmes. We usually refer them to Tanzania Online'.

On one occasion, he used resources from Tanzania Online to develop training on visioning, strategic planning, action planning, information management and the development of project proposals in three focal wards of Kisarawe District. Thanks to this support, the communities produced local action plans which were then integrated into ward and district plans.

Case study undertaken by Abdallah K. Hassan, Tanzania Online
Website: www.tzonline.org/

6 Supporting global debates on HIV and education

Justine Sass is the co-ordinator of the UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) on Education, convened by UNESCO. When organising the Spring 2009 Symposium of the IATT which focused on teachers and HIV, Justine enlisted the help of the HIV and AIDS Education Clearinghouse to compile relevant resources as background documentation for the Symposium.



HIV and AIDS Education Clearinghouse supported debates on teachers and HIV

The Clearinghouse also agreed to host a web forum before the Symposium to exchange experiences and lessons learned, and to promote dialogue. Around 450 participants from 80 countries participated in the forum. Many reported finding the exchanges interesting and instructive, and said that they would be sharing information obtained through the forum with others:

'I have shared the information with all members of staff in my organisation and will use most of the information for training our implementing partners in the districts where we are operating'.

This case study highlights the multiple intermediary roles played by the Clearinghouse: in the first instance, compiling resources already available in the Clearinghouse database, and secondly by

playing a more proactive convening role through the web forum.

Case study undertaken by Lynne Sergeant, UNESCO
Website: <http://hivaidsclearinghouse.unesco.org/>

7 Supporting programme design in Nigeria

Gloria Momoh works for the Association for Reproductive and Family Health in South West Nigeria, an NGO which provides information and services relating to reproductive health and rights. Gloria takes part in training and provides technical assistance and mentoring.

Gloria stumbled across the BRIDGE website in 2008. At that time Gloria's NGO was working on a proposal. Thanks to BRIDGE she was able to draw on experiences from other countries and much of what she learned was included in the concept paper and the proposal. The concept note has been accepted and Gloria is confident they will get the funds to implement the project.

'BRIDGE has really helped because I can get feedback on some of the things in my mind and see that they're achievable – I see that it works in Tanzania and Uganda. BRIDGE has improved my knowledge and changed my attitude'.

This case illustrates the value of being able to draw on and apply others' experiences when designing innovative and effective development practice.

Case study undertaken by Catherine Gould, Institute of Development Studies (IDS)
Website: www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/

Emerging themes

Intermediaries play an important role in adding value to existing research

Repackaging and presenting relevant research in a range of accessible formats can make it much easier to make sense of the wealth of information that is out there. If designed well, intermediary services can have the added value of identifying information gaps, which can be challenging if the information is dispersed. They can also provide access to information which would otherwise be hard to find.

Collaboration between intermediaries can greatly improve their effectiveness

One of the challenges of intermediary work is the investment in resources required for finding and processing relevant information. Collaboration between intermediaries can help to ease this strain by avoiding duplication and by sharing useful resources. It also allows intermediaries to connect their services up and broaden the impact of their interventions.

Identifying specific cases of impact is a challenge

Most instances of information use do not directly result in changes in decision-making. More often than not they contribute to broadening a user's knowledge and understanding of an issue. In other cases they may have an indirect impact by stimulating critical analysis, and contributing towards a gradual change in perspective or understanding of where change might be needed.

Institutional support is key to the success of intermediaries

For any intermediary service, being based within a reputable and supportive institution can be invaluable. The wider institution can offer not only technical and intellectual support but can also be an important ally in marketing efforts. Links between the service and the institution can also help to assure the credibility of the information provided.

Targeted marketing can improve the reach of intermediary services

It is worth investing resources in marketing intermediary services. As well as online marketing strategies such as email announcements and search engine optimisation, opportunities for face-to-face networking can be invaluable, including attending workshops and conferences, giving presentations and organising discussion forums. Encouraging satisfied users to spread the word can also bring great rewards.

About the I-K-Mediary Network

The I-K-Mediary Network is an emerging global network of organisations that play a knowledge and information intermediary role in development. The Network aims to enhance and enable the positive impacts of information and knowledge intermediary work by increasing the effectiveness of I-K-Mediary Network members and creating a more enabling environment for their work.

Next steps

This collection of case studies is one example of the collaborative monitoring and evaluation work that the I-K-Mediary Network is undertaking. The Network plans to build on this by:

- analysing a larger set of data to explore the impact of intermediary work in more depth
- identifying good practice on the evaluation of intermediary services and sharing and identifying effective approaches, tools and surveys
- exploring where information and knowledge intermediaries fit into policy and practice processes

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