

A brief overview for the July 2010 Steering Group

The DFID-funded Research Into Use Programme (RIU) commenced its activities in July 2006 and following a year long inception phase started its implementation in July 2007. The programme follows substantial investment of £220m by DFID into the 11 year Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy (RNRRS).

The RIU has a purpose statement:

“to significantly contribute to the knowledge of and investment in innovative models that promote and increase the widespread use of technology, thereby contributing to poverty reduction and economic growth”.

The RIU is a flagship programme for DFID and in the early years activities were very much process orientated - indeed there was no blueprint of how to get research into widespread use. In short, the RIU struggled to find its way, to conceptualise how to do it and then implement the joint purpose statement and then management indecision and associated issues compounded things creating an increasingly problematic scenario.

In late 2008, DFID commissioned a Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the RIU, somewhat earlier than planned but DFID were clearly worried about the direction of the programme. The MTR concluded in early 2009 and was justifiably critical of many aspects of the programme. This led to a major change management process over the next six months which saw the recommendations of the MTR addressed. As a result the RIU is now unequivocally repositioned as a research programme under the strap line “sharing lessons to enable innovation in agriculture”. It has a lean, mean and fleet of foot management structure which is delivering on two clear objectives: achieving impact at scale and in the process generating lessons about putting research into use. The RIU now consists of a portfolio of around 30 experiments in putting agricultural research into use mostly located in Africa. The experiments fall into three main categories:

- Africa country programmes (in Tanzania, Rwanda, Malawi, Zambia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone), established with an explicit agenda of experimenting with ways of building capacity by way of innovation platforms largely commodity based;
- A portfolio of projects in Asia commissioned under an Innovation Challenge Fund and;
- RIU Best Bets.

The first two categories were established in the earlier period of the RIU prior to the MTR and the latter launched towards the end of 2009 which used a competitive funding mechanism, inspired by the BBC TV programme “Dragons Den”. This identified opportunities to put existing research outputs into use through partnerships in which the private sector plays a significant role.

In conclusion, the RIU is now in much better shape being more focussed and fit for purpose. It is delivering on its twin objectives and now projected to have an impact on more than 56 million people, thus having impact at scale. Furthermore important lessons are beginning to emerge on how wide-scale impact is being achieved e.g. the roles of innovation brokers, that of research champions and the active involvement of the private sector also seem to be extremely beneficial.

Further information

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