



Conceptual framework: Multiple dimensions of impacts of collaborative research for development

Introduction

The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) will be hosting a colloquium on collaborative research for development on June 6-7, 2005. Funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and in collaboration with the Canadian Association for Studies in Development (CASID) and the Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research (CCGHR), the event will be held in the IDRC auditorium in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

The theme is *Highlighting the Impacts of North-South Research Collaboration Among Canadian and Southern Higher Education Partners*. The colloquium will profile selected papers featuring the multiple dimensions of impacts, in Canada and in the South, of research collaboration between Canadian and Southern university researchers. The following conceptual framework articulates the six principal categories of impacts of particular interest.

Definitions

For the purpose of this colloquium, “research impacts” will be defined broadly to include not only the final results – since it can be difficult to make direct correlations to the research project – but also the continuum of events leading to aggregate development changes. As a starting point, “impacts” will be defined more in the sense of “results” to include development impacts, outcomes, reach, as well as any unanticipated results¹.

We are also including the various mutually beneficial knowledge transfer activities, both North-South and South-North, that take place within research projects and in their outcomes. Keeping such aspects in mind and drawing on helpful elements developed by IDRC staff as well as academics, we have identified six categories of impacts with useful examples (recognizing that these are only illustrative of a broad range of potential examples to be highlighted at all levels of intervention and in both the Southern and Canadian contexts).

¹ Here we use IDRC’s definitions of results, development impact, outcome and reach as listed in *Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs* by Sarah Earl, Fred Carden and Terry Smutlyo, IDRC: 2001.

Results: the external effects (outputs, outcomes, reach and impact).

Development impact: significant and lasting changes in the well-being of large numbers of intended beneficiaries.

Outcome: Changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities, and/or actions of a boundary partner (partners with whom the program interacts directly) that can logically be linked to a program (although they are not necessarily directly caused by it).

Reach: Describes how actors were touched by their interaction with the activities and/or results of the program.

Categories of impacts of collaborative research for development

1. Policy influence at the community, regional or national level

For example, a collaborative research project has contributed to:

1.1 Expanding policy capacities:

- Improving the knowledge/data of certain actors
- Supporting recipients to develop innovative ideas
- Improving capabilities to communicate ideas
- Developing new talent for research and analysis

1.2. Broadening policy horizons :

- Providing opportunities for networking/learning within the jurisdiction or with colleagues elsewhere
- Introducing new concepts to frame debates, putting ideas on the agenda, or stimulating public debate
- Educating researchers and others who take up new positions with broader understanding of the issues
- Stimulating quiet dialogue among decision-makers

1.3. Affecting policy regimes:

- Modification of existing programs or policies
- Fundamental re-design of programs or policies

2. Development impact at the community, regional or national level

For example, a collaborative research project has contributed to significant and lasting changes in the well-being of large numbers of intended beneficiaries by:

- Introducing new technology/knowledge/processes, or adapting existing technology/knowledge/processes used by a community to address a development challenge (e.g. new variety of drought-resistant crops developed)
- Influencing community behaviour and actions toward the problem identified in the context of the research project (e.g. farmers adopted the new seeds)
- Contributing to poverty alleviation or increasing community well-being (e.g. the new crops contributed to improving nutrition among farmers' families and/or improved their financial situation)

3. Research capacity building at the individual, institutional or national level

For example, a collaborative research project has contributed to building research capacity by:

- Strengthening research institutions/centres, and/or creating new institutions/centres
 - Developing laboratories and improving physical infrastructure
- Strengthening research capacity of researchers (training of researchers)
 - Improving capacity to initiate research projects
 - Developing or enhancing networking capacity (e.g. enhancing dissemination of results, participation in seminars and conferences, strategic collaboration with other partners, linkages with local communities)
- Strengthening research management capacity of institutions and researchers



- Increasing capacity to coordinate the administrative and scientific aspects of research projects
- Enhancing capacity to integrate multiple resources necessary to do research (e.g. enhancing research administration, physical infrastructure, financial resources, human resources)
- Enhancing capacity to obtain funding, develop proposals and navigate the “research system”

4. Reach of research activities

The “reach” of a research project describes how actors were touched by their interaction with the activities and/or results of the project. The reach of a research activity stems from both research processes and findings. A collaborative research project may have reached different stakeholders through their participation in the research activities and/or through broad dissemination of research findings.

For example:

- Outreach during process can include participatory methodology and involvement of stakeholders
- Outreach to disseminate findings can include workshops with stakeholders and government officials

Elements of “reach” to consider:

- Who has been reached; how many people; how have they been reached; how do we know they have been reached; how is reach being manifested?
- Is there evidence that the partners are acting, speaking, thinking differently as a result of receiving or absorbing the research?
- Are the manifestations different for different groups –i.e. gender, age, class?
- Do these manifestations suggest relevant potential influence towards development goals?

5. Innovation and commercialization of research at the community, regional or national level

For example, a collaborative research project has contributed to developing or adapting technologies or production processes to apply relevant solutions to development challenges in the Southern or Canadian contexts. This new technology has an element of innovation or breakthrough that leads to commercialization, or shows the potential for commercialization.

6. Impacts on individual researchers

A collaborative research project for development can also contribute to impacts on Canadian and Southern university researchers themselves. For example:

- Did they approach research problems differently as a result of this collaboration?
- Did they design the research methodology differently as a result of this collaboration?
- What is their perspective on the benefits of collaborative research for development?
- Dissemination of research: were there publications or co-publications, participation in international conference as a result of this project?
- Did the initial research project led to additional research funding?