

DOING RESEARCH

ASSESSING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Introduction

The **Doing Research** program seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research environment. This includes looking at the policy framework, institutions and informal relations, and how these can influence the organization of social science research, including its quality, quantity and social relevance. The project expects to make a significant contribution to the development of a methodological framework for systematically assessing the research environment in developing countries.

The pilot phase of the program is generously supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Agence Française de Développement (AFD), French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). It involves seven teams researching 11 developing countries.

The program aims to:

- ✿ Identify and develop objective measures of the key factors impacting the ability to undertake quality research, and to communicate it effectively to a broad range of stakeholders.
- ✿ Expose important shortcomings and barriers to academia, policy-makers, civil society and donor organizations in order to mainstream the need for an enabling research environment, create research support and develop the demand for it.
- ✿ To build a framework to study the research environment with a systematic methodology that will help to observe, analyze and document the research environment in a large number of countries, in a consistent and comparable way.

Seven Case Studies

PERU, BOLIVIA, PARAGUAY	The Production of Social Science Research in Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru: A Comparative Study	GRADE (Peru), CADEP (Paraguay), Fundacion Aru (Bolivia)	Maria Balarin, Fernando Masi, Miguel Vera
CAMBODIA	Doing Research in Cambodia: Making Models that Build Capacity	Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP)	Sovachana Pou
CAMEROON, CÔTE D'IVOIRE	"Doing Research" Index in Social Science and Knowledge Production in Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire	Université de Yaoundé II (Cameroon), Université Félix-Houphouët-Boigny (Côte d'Ivoire)	Benjamin Fomba Kamga, Alban Houré
INDIA, BANGLADESH	Assessing the Environment for Social Science Research in India and Bangladesh	Jawaharlal Nehru University (India), Unnayan Bhawan (Bangladesh)	Saumen Chattopadhyay, Tawheed Reza Noor
INDONESIA	Reforming Research in Indonesia: Policies and Practices	Universitas Indonesia, Centre for Innovation Policy and Governance	Inaya Rakhmani, Fajri Siregar
NIGER	Restauration de la recherche en sciences sociales au Niger	Think Tank Economie Politique et Gouvernance Autonome	Rahmane Idrissa
SOUTH AFRICA	Assessing the Environment for Social Science Research in Developing Countries: The Case of South Africa	University of KwaZulu-Natal	Cheryl Potgieter

Selection of findings

- * **Research infrastructure**, such as access to libraries, existing databases and recent international research, as well as good quality of IT infrastructure is an important barrier, especially in Africa. This also includes the research ecosystem in a broader sense, with the possibility to be part of a research network or to access capacity building such as mentoring, workshops and conferences. High teaching loads have accompanied the democratization of higher education, with a negative effect on time allocated to research.
- * **Funding** is often donor-driven, creating international pressure on the agenda to focus on trends on which researchers have low influence. There is a preference to fund hard sciences, engineering or technology, and social science research is too often commissioned, impeding blue-sky research as well as the independence of findings. Demand for social science research happens increasingly with international donors, while the supply takes the form of consultancy led by think tanks and private firms, leaving the two traditional actors (the State and universities) in a blind spot for doing research in social sciences.
- * **Institutional frameworks and practice** provide an enabling environment for researchers with fair and transparent rules of the game. Creating this framework of incentives for productivity, promotion and performance remains a crucial aspect to improve research systems. This can take place at the government level, through the establishment of research authorities or a national policy for research, helping to define national standards and exert a positive climate for research uptake by institutionalizing research. A strong institutional framework should also be balanced to avoid overwhelming bureaucracy and careerism.
- * **Professional management and leadership** are key in overcoming structural barriers, lack of funding or limited international networks. Stronger leadership at the organizational level should then be considered as a *sine qua non* factor for quality research. This is especially the case regarding financial management capacity, mentorship within the university or the allocation of time for research. Amongst the current incentive systems that seem to be active at the organizational level, careerism and 'Publish or Perish' types of behaviors are the most important.
- * **Networking and collaboration** can take place at different levels between stakeholders of the knowledge sector, as well as across countries and disciplines. Creating collaborative spaces also helps to sustain capacity building efforts by fostering peer learning, good practices and transparency. It also facilitates the dissemination effort and fosters the link between social science research and action within advocacy and policy communities. Networking also helps interdisciplinary research, often perceived as a sign of a well-functioning research system.
- * **Dissemination and visibility** is signaled by a large majority of teams as one of the major difficulties in ensuring the research uptake. Research should appear more outside of academic networks and reach research users such as policy makers, NGOs or the private sector. Visible research helps connecting research producers and users, in addition to bringing the topic into the public debate.



Next Steps: Scale Up

The **Doing Research** program aims to Scale Up in its next phase, by drawing lessons from the pilot and developing an original framework to assess and measure the performance of research systems in a large sample of countries. The framework will serve as an innovative policy tool, and GDN will aim to create a community of practice (COP) to use the tool to create more enabling research environments.

During scale up, GDN plans to group major research issues highlighted by the eleven research teams, and to propose a comprehensive synthesis. Supported by the COP, GDN will develop a comprehensive overview of the methodology, rationale, tools and scope of the final **Doing Research** framework. This process will result in a working paper and a concept note, encompassing all the necessary aspects to operationalize a pioneer benchmarking tool for research environments. It will take place in three successive steps:

1. Pilot Phase Synthesis

The synthesis report covers three areas: (i) best practices in terms of approach and methodologies, (ii) emerging findings from country reports, and (iii) implications for scale-up. It is a combination of desk reviews of the final reports, interviews with the teams and an additional literature review. It is currently ongoing and the synthesis report will be finalized by 15 May 2016.

2. Methodology Design

The methodology design consists in gathering the project stakeholders, as well as a larger community of practice to gain insights from interested parties to set out the foundations for the future Doing Research policy tool. It will take the form of a design workshop to be held on 26-27 May 2016, along with an on-going discussion supported by two webinars to be held in May and June 2016.

3. Methodology Drafting

With the inputs from both previous activities, the GDN team will operationalize the policy tool and propose it to the academic and policy communities. This will result in a concept note detailing the mechanism of the tool, and a working paper asserting its rationale and theoretical underpinnings, to be readied by 31 August 2016. The working paper will be submitted for publication in a relevant journal by the end of the year.

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FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE PROJECT: www.gdn.int/dr

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