

ROYAL ACADEMY FOR OVERSEAS SCIENCES

Evaluation of Development Research: A Working Paper

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1. Introduction

The Academy has been concerned for years (actually since its 75th anniversary in 2003) with the questions raised by the evaluation of development research, and it has set up a Task Force composed of members of the Academy representing the three Sections, to study the issue more in depth. The outcome of the Task Force's efforts is the organisation of the "Day on Evaluation of Development Research", Brussels, 5 June 2009

2. Presentation of the Working Paper(WP)

The present text is a working document prepared by the Task Force. It is intended for all the active participants in the Day. Its aim is :

- to clarify the purpose of the meeting
- to assist the invited speakers in providing answers to the specific questions raised by the Task Force.

3. The Problem

There is a general consensus on the fact that evaluating development research is a difficult endeavour. The issue is further complicated by disagreements about the definition of "development research" itself.

In addition there is a general feeling that bibliometric indices and "valorisation" as usually practised, are not fully satisfactory instruments for those who have to make decisions about research in and concerning developing countries.

The central theme here is given by different names such as "development research", "recherche au service du développement" according to IRD; "ontwikkelingsrelevant onderzoek »; or even "that contributes strongly to knowledge that could benefit development in the South", according to the Development Cooperation Price of Belgium.

Such definitions therefore do not include scientific research conducted in the South, but whose objective is not development, at least in the short or medium term

4. The questions

The Task Force has identified four basic questions and expects the Meeting to attempt to answer to :

(1) How do we define development research ?

(2) What is good development research ?

(3) How can we recognise a good researcher potentially contributing to development ? Who are the researchers who deserve to be supported ?

(4) What should we do so that countries in the South themselves produce the best possible research useful for their development ? Note : two levels of answers could be considered :

- what researchers in the South and their institutions can do,
- what researchers in the North and their institutions can do.

5. The Guidelines

The purpose of the meeting is to exchange views, to deliberate, to reach as much as possible a consensus, and anyhow to provide elements that would help the Academy produce Guidelines for people who have among their duties the evaluation of development research, such as:

- The researchers themselves
- Organisations funding research in or related to developing countries
- Universities
- Publishers and reviewers of scientific journals concerned with development
- Agencies involved in development : bilateral and international cooperation, NGO's, governments, etc.
- International courses for scientists of developing countries.

The Guidelines will be a short and well-structured document, made widely available by the Academy.

6. The Meeting

Members of the Academy, invited speakers from interested organisations and researchers from overseas countries will briefly present their views on the overall theme.

All speakers are specifically invited, in addition to their spontaneous comments on the general subject, to prepare their answers to at least two of the four questions mentioned above (they are not committed to answering all four questions if they don't wish to). They are of course free to add their own questions.

The audience will include members of the Academy, guests from interested organisations (such as VLIR, CIUF, FNRS, FWO-VI), PhD candidates from overseas countries, etc. Announcements will be posted to university departments dealing with research in or on developing countries.

There will be ample time for questions and comments by the audience so as to ensure a rich exchange between speakers, and between the audience and the speakers. In addition a Round Table will close the day.

7. The Round Table

The Round Table, chaired by a senior scientist, will attempt

- to reach a consensus among the answers provided to the four questions,
- to point where further discussion is still needed,

- to identify other topics or issues raised during the day,
- if necessary, make recommendations on future Guidelines.

It will be an open, but structured debate, which would focus on specific issues such as the questions raised above, the Guidelines, the possible reconsideration of the Bibliometric Project, etc. All participants in the Round Table will receive the present WP in advance.

The audience will be free to participate in the discussion.

8. Follow-up of the Meeting

(1) Guidelines.

Drafting and publishing, by the Academy, of “Guidelines for the Evaluation of Development Research”. The Academy will also consider evaluating the applicability, the effective use and the usefulness of the Guidelines, about four years after their publication, and decide about necessary amendments or additions.

(2) Proceedings. The papers presented during the Day and a summary of the Round Table discussions will be published in the “Orange” series of the Academy, as an official publication.
