



POLICY BRIEF

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Combining Research and Services at Swiss Research Institutions to Accelerate Sustainable Development

Research, taking a pro-active role in fostering synergies between research and project implementation services can help achieving the goals and targets outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By bridging the gap between Research and Services for Development (R&S4D; see Definitions), research can pass on best practices outside academia; in turn, research takes inspiration from the most acute development needs.

Entities that work at the interface of R&S4D are the most efficient and high-quality implementation agents as they put science to practical use and build capacity. Moreover, they give rise to professionals with qualifications that are highly relevant in the sustainable development arena.

However, working across sectors is often challenging, and many research and academic institutions already struggle to communicate across their own departments.

Based on insight generated from Swiss academic and research entities, this Policy Brief aims to highlight the importance of bringing R&S4D closer, at research entities in Switzerland and elsewhere, and how to go about doing it. Specifically, this Policy Brief presents Swiss research entities doing both types of activities (e.g. research and project implementation services) in LMICs and describes the benefits, needs and best practices, as well as their strategies.

Definitions

LMIC Low- and middle-income country

'Development cooperation', 'development' and 'sustainable development' pertaining to LMICs are used interchangeably in this Policy Brief, given today's strong alignment of development cooperation with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Services for development in LMICs refer to implementation services of projects and programmes, guided by the beneficiaries' needs and partners' requirements. Research plays no or only a marginal role and the level of scientific rigour necessary for peer-reviewed publications.

Research for development is used as a broad concept pertaining to research that is development-oriented, aiming at providing answers and solutions to key development challenges in LMICs.

Entities as used in this Policy Brief represent institutions, universities, laboratories, groups, centres, departments and schools with double-competency in R&S4D.

Editorial

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EFFECTS OF COMBINING RESEARCH & SERVICES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Benefits to Individuals

People with specific competencies in R&S4D are able to apply a scientific standard of work to achieve an objective, while operating in cross-national, multilingual and multisector areas. Double competencies in research and services renders individuals highly employable and opens a broad and interesting spectrum of opportunities at non-governmental and multi-lateral organisations, governments and the private sector. It also opens the spectrum of funding sources.



Benefits to Projects

Research, as part of an implementation programme, can enhance the quality of products, and allow for a continuous optimisation of the programme by contributing update, context-specific knowledge and high methodological rigour. Implementation needs, in turn, can shape research proposals and research trends to make them more relevant to local and contemporary contexts. Arranging research around programme implementation services (or vice versa) and in the same setting, allows for efficacy and continuity drawing from the same networks and solutions to problems.



Benefits to Entities

Three main areas of benefit from in-house double competency in R&S4D are funding, sharing of resources and visibility. Having the capacity to do both offers strategic flexibility to move between R&S4D activities with the economic/political and funding environment. Main resources shared are partnership networks, staff and knowledge, allowing for efficiency and continuity of activities and partnerships and cross-fertilisation among groups and departments. Having the whole innovation to implementation cycle gives an entity an edge with funders knowing that this range of expertise can be covered by a single institute.



Types of R&S4D entities in Switzerland

Relative level of services	Structure of entity	Examples of entities
Low	Research clearly prioritised over services; only teaching, training-related services or minor short-term assignments (e.g. expert opinions) offered	CODEV ^a /EPFL, EXAF/EPFL
Low to medium	Research and services conducted but prioritizing research; researchers do both and often contribute with research expertise when involved in services	Eawag/Sandec/ETH, Transdisciplinary Lab/ETH
Medium to high	Research and services are conducted at a similar priority; the research spectrum ranges from applied to basic; three different staff profiles observed: (i) researchers; (ii) consultants; and (iii) hybrids <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and services, including staff separated into different units and departments • No structural separation of research and services. 	Swiss TPH IZB/PH Zug, swisspeace
High	Research and services are conducted at a similar priority; in addition, the research focusses on applied research; often, staff works by a combined approach. Per statutes obliged to offer services as part of their educational mandate	Centre for Development and Cooperation/SUPSI, Hugo P. Cecchini Institute/HAFL

^aDissolved in 2019; CODEV, Cooperation and Development Centre; EXAF, Excellence in Africa Initiative, IZB, Institute for International Cooperation in Teacher Education

Potential Negative Effects and Challenges when Combining R&S4D

Four main risks and challenges are observed: (i) risks that negatively affect research (e.g. losing scientific approach/rigour because service mandate dictates results and impose considerable time-pressure making quality suffer); (ii) risks that negatively affect services (e.g. research components with questionable value may drain resources and impair efficiency from the actual service implementation); (iii) risks and challenges that apply to both research and services (e.g. different level of quality/rigour, demands, measures of success and timelines and difficult to get people with the necessary double competencies); and (iv) lack of hybrid career path and jobs in Switzerland (e.g. researchers often find themselves between the high demands of both without acknowledgement of that transdisciplinary expertise and without career path and lack of job opportunities for persons that want to keep pursuing a mixed R&S approach).

Recommendations to funders to maximise the impact of R&S4D done by Swiss research and academic institutions and entities

More opportunities for R&S4D hybrid work are needed

- From funders of development cooperation, a greater openness towards including a research component is desired to enhance the quality of projects. As a minimum, there must be scope for a comprehensive review of the literature during the design stage to operate by the latest evidence and best practice and to avoid stagnation, repeating mistakes and reproduction of work.
- Funders of development cooperation and decision-making boards should represent researchers to offer scrutiny on whether the latest evidence and best practice have been taken into consideration. In addition, they would move the balance towards proposals that do feature a research component and/or the necessary rigor of the projects design.
- More paired schemes between funders of research and those supporting development cooperation are desired to allow for establishing a coherent project without needing to apply to different sources for different aspects of the work.
- In addition to university partners, funders should demand for implementation partners, policy- and decision-makers to be involved as co- or principal investigator to take science to impact.
- Widen the applicant network within Switzerland. Some entities in Switzerland, especially among the universities of applied sciences and arts and entities that are lacking visibility in research are feeling marginalized by Swiss funders.

Better support individuals in their R&S double function

- Offer special funding schemes for persons who wish to remain at the R&S4D interface and change the measures for applicants to research funding. Greater weight should be given to the quality of the entire research output (e.g. publications, working with stakeholders, public communication, data sets, software, patents, conference papers and prizes)

Give more consideration to local partners

- Invest institutional funding in LMIC partner institutions to build and maintain capacity and allow for continuity of high-quality work.
 - Demand matched funding from LMIC partners even if minor (e.g. local accommodation and transport). This changes the perception of commitment.
 - Ethically sound research partnerships with clarified responsibilities, co-design of projects, mutual learning and fair distribution of merits should be condition to research funding.
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EXAMPLES OF INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE

In High-Income Countries

Do's and don'ts can be derived from institutions in the UK hosting two widely cited entities relevant to R&S4D – the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in Sussex and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) with its formerly affiliated Innovative Vector Control Consortium (IVCC). While the IVCC having been widely viewed as potential successful consultancy arm of the LSTM, in reality, IVCC became a successful product development partnership (PDP) that financially co-supported LSTM research.

Drawing from the academic expertise at the beginning, IVCC soon experienced constraints by the affiliation and a lack of mutual benefit and eventually disassociated. The gap here between PDP and academia has shown too wide. The IDS, on the other hand, has been successfully embedded in the University of Sussex structures. Most of the staff work on a spectrum of activities along R&S4D and are finding it easy to maintain academic acknowledgement besides the consultancy activities owing to the nature of development studies (i.e. applied and action-oriented).

In Low- and Middle-Income Countries

There seems to be a scarcity of LMIC institutions and entities with R&S4D double competency. There seems to be either a quality issue with regard to the research conducted or a lack of capacity regarding international project implementation. However, a few institutions, such as the Ifakara Health Institute (IHI) in Tanzania and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Vietnam, which is part of the GCIAR network, seem to be successful in conducting R&S4D at the national and international level, although both with a heavy focus on research.

For IHI and ILRI, services are mostly nationally mandated and funded. They often include research services and are mostly conducted by researchers. Scaling up the capacity for international project implementation and services seems to be challenged by the resource-intensity of the operations. However, the R&S4D expertise on national level, renders those institutions an important partner in the pursuit of sustainable development.



Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

IDS was founded in 1966 as an independent research institute based at the University of Sussex, UK. IDS, with its ~200 staff, has close links with the University, but is financially and constitutionally independent, registered as a charitable company and operating like a think-tank. IDS receives no core funding and roughly generated 40% of its funding from research, 40% from services and 20% from teaching. With regards to services, IDS is mostly commissioned to support larger development programmes and interventions with research, training and evaluation.

www.ids.ac.uk



Ifakara Health Institute (IHI)

IHI is among the most important research organizations in Tanzania and has also built a high international reputation and network. IHI hosts research, training and services to improve people's health and wellbeing; the latter including policy translation, technical services to the government, health systems support and national project implementation. The R&S4D double-competency and network specific to the Tanzanian context has made IHI a sought-after partner for national research and implementation projects.

www.ihl.or.tz