



The University of Edinburgh

# Assessing the Impact of International Development Research: Lessons Learned from the ESPA programme (2009-2018)

Valeria Izzi

Strategy of Impact Conference 2018 - Data Sharing and Collaboration  
London, 15 November 2018





# Research for international development

Increasing share of the UK Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) budget devoted to research

ODA-funded research is an increasing share of the UK Science Budget

ODA budget increasingly managed outside of DFID –  
increasingly important role of UKRI



## Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)

- £1.5 billion (2016-2021)

*“[GCRF] marks a **change in the overall pattern of UK government funding for science and research**, making a notable part of this funding contingent of whether or not the research themes fall within the international [Official Development Aid] definition”*

**International Commission for Aid Impact**

# How is ODA-funded research for development different from 'normal' research?

- ODA compliance
  - Geographical focus: OECD list of ODA countries
  - Purpose: research should have the primary purpose of promoting economic growth and welfare in ODA countries.
- Parliamentary scrutiny
- Impact



Impact in  
international  
development



Academic  
impact





***Key question: are current approaches to reporting impact suitable for assessing development impact of ODA-funded research?***



# **Using Researchfish to report on development impact: A case-study of the Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme**



## What was ESPA?

- An interdisciplinary research programme to explore the links between the environment and human wellbeing
- 2009-2018
- Funded by DFID, NERC and ESRC

## ESPA in numbers

**922**  
**Researchers**

**50%** from developing countries



**53**  
**Countries**

where research  
has taken place



**8,516**  
**Citations**

from **419**  
papers



**125**  
**Research  
Projects**

supported by ESPA



**£43.9m**  
**Total value of  
ESPA programme**



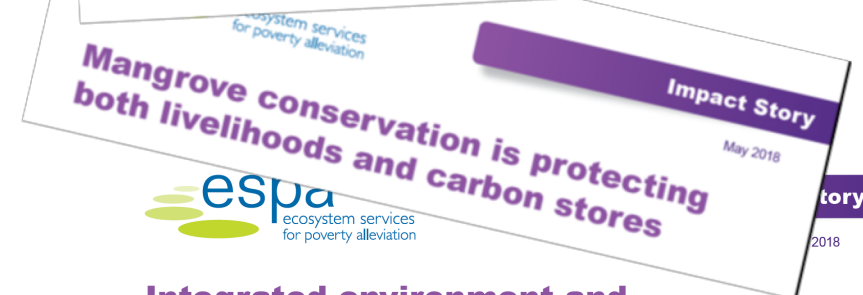




# What impact did ESPA projects have?

Influencing policy (global, national, sub-national);  
Influencing legislation and regulation;  
Influencing investments and business practices;  
Mobilising citizens action;  
Scientific base and 'proof of concept' for development funding;  
Providing direct benefits to local communities through pilot activities.

In most cases, only initial indications are visible – impact takes longer than the average research project







## ESPA's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

- DFID Logframe
- Reporting to NERC
- Reporting to Programme Executive Board
- Directorate's own learning process
- DFID's Independent Reviews (mid-term and end of programme)

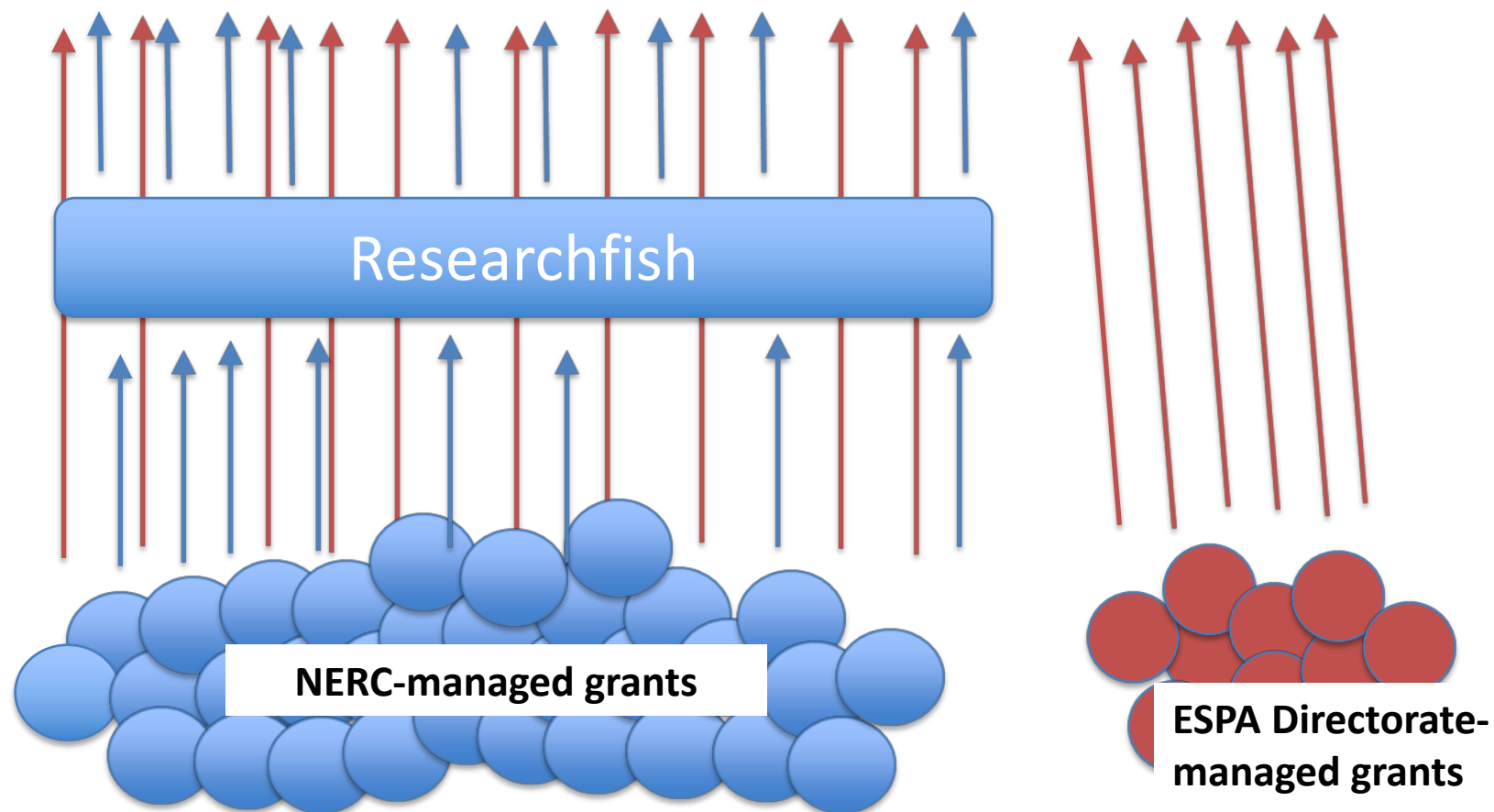
**Researchfish was a key source of data and information for ESPA's MEL**

## Information flow

Programme-level

**ESPA Directorate - Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning**

Project-level





## Key benefits of Researchfish

- A reporting requirement for PIs (not an add-on) – thus reducing the burden for researchers
- 5 years after end of project (enables the assessment of longitudinal impact)



## Key issues and challenges (1)

Only partial overlap between the information required by Researchfish and information needed for the ESPA's logframe

Different terminology (or same terms used in different ways – particularly **impact**).



## *A few examples from ESPA's logframe...*

1.2	ESPA research projects produce high quality research outputs addressing issues of ecosystem services and their link to poverty alleviation in a range of formats.	1.2.1	Total <sup>4</sup> number of journal articles attributed to ESPA projects.	0	20	100	200	RCUKJournalArticle
		1.2.2	Number of other research outcomes (books, book chapters, briefing papers, conference papers, grey literature).	0	20	300	600	RCUKOtherPublicationReport, RCUKOtherReport, RCUKTechnicalReport, RCUKConferencePaper, RCUKWorkingPublication, RCUKBook, RCUKBookChapter
		1.2.3	Percentage of total journal articles published as open access.	0	25% since start of programme	50% since previous milestone	100% since previous milestone	RCUKJournalArticle Marked Open Access





## *A few examples from ESPA's logframe...*

1.4	ESPA research teams produce practical products that support decision-makers to deliver evidence-based policy and investment decisions.	1.4.1	Number of models / tools / datasets / frameworks produced to support decision-makers to deliver evidence-based policy and investment decisions.	0	ESPA Directorate develops guidance	5 new frameworks, methods, tools and models from ESPA projects.	65 new frameworks, methods, tools and models from ESPA projects Disaggregated as so: 30 models 25 tools and datasets 10 methods/ frameworks	Manually coded and extracted from ESPA Management Information Systems based on data obtained from ResearchFish.
-----	--	-------	---	---	------------------------------------	---	---	---

## *A few examples from ESPA's logframe...*

1.3	ESPA research produces publications which are highly cited and influential in terms of promoting conceptual advancement in academic circles.	1.3.1	External citations of ISI journal <sup>5</sup> articles from ESPA projects in research publications.	0	2	600	5000	Imported from Web of Knowledge.
		1.3.2	Global average citation rates of journal articles from ESPA projects published from 2009 to 2015.	0			Matching global average citation rates for environmental science between 2009 – 2015 reported by ISI/ Web of Knowledge in 2015	Global average citation rates for environmental science between 2009 – 2015 reported by ISI/ Web of Knowledge in 2015.



## *A few examples from ESPA's logframe...*

O.2	Decision-makers demonstrate recognition of ES for PA as a major development intervention and show increased demand for evidence on ecosystem services to support implementation.	O.2.1	New ESPA-related projects or activities funded by agencies outside the ESPA programme i.e. extending or continuing ESPA research.	0	£2 m	£31 m	£41 m	RCUKFurtherFunding
		O.2.2	Development activities or investments informed by or utilising ESPA research.	0	£2 m	£30 m	£40 m	RCUKFurtherFunding



## Key issues and challenges (2)

Multiple reporting of same results among different projects  
(need for data cleaning and Quality Assurance)

Variance in the level of detail and evidence provided in  
Researchfish submission

Lack of Southern voices and perspectives



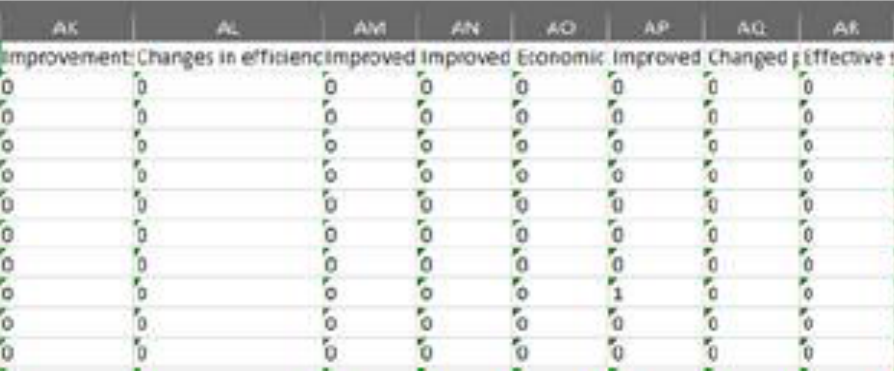



## Key issues and challenges (3)

Disconnect between the timeframe of ESPA logframe reporting and RF reporting

Data migration and interoperability issues between RF and ESPA's MIS (e.g. inconsistencies in data formatting from one year to the other)



<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
22 columns of data Does not include Funding Value or Award Submission date, Country	51 columns of data Includes Funding Value, Award Submission date, Country
One True/False column for each possible Policy Impact choice	Comma-separated lists of Policy Impact choices
 <p>The screenshot shows a table with 8 columns labeled AK through AR. Each row contains a single value, either 0 or 1, representing a binary response for a specific policy impact type.</p>	 <p>The screenshot shows a table with a header row 'Policy Impact Types' followed by several rows of comma-separated text descriptions of impacts, such as 'Changed public attitudes on social issues', 'Improved educational and skill level of workforce', etc.</p>
All dates as yyyy-MM-dd	Mixture of yyyy-MM-dd and dd/MM/yyyy dates

## Examples of differences in data formatting in different years (2)

All dates as **yyyy-MM-dd**

F	G
Start Date	End Date
2010-09-01	2013-02-15
2013-09-01	2017-08-31
2012-05-01	2016-04-30
2010-09-01	2013-02-15
2012-05-01	2016-04-30
2012-03-01	2016-08-30

Mixture of **yyyy-MM-dd** and **dd/MM/yyyy** dates

N	O	P
Award Start Date	Award End Date	Award Submission Date
2010-09-01	2013-09-30	15/03/2018
2013-11-01	2016-06-30	15/03/2018
2012-03-31	2016-12-30	13/03/2018
2010-09-01	2013-09-30	15/03/2018
2013-11-01	2016-06-30	15/03/2018
2012-05-21	2013-07-22	14/03/2018
2012-04-30	2016-12-31	21/02/2018
2013-07-01	2017-11-30	15/03/2018
2013-07-01	2017-11-30	15/03/2018
2010-09-01	2013-09-30	15/03/2018
2013-11-01	2016-06-30	15/03/2018
2010-09-01	2013-09-30	15/03/2018
2013-11-01	2016-06-30	15/03/2018



# Considerations for future ODA-funded programmes (1)

- Formalise agreement between UKRI/RF and programme management, establishing clear lines of responsibility in relation to data
- Reconcile reporting timeframes



## Considerations for future ODA-funded programmes (2)

- Scope out 'data journey' and allocate sufficient resources (data analyst/interpreter)
- Anticipate the technical challenges relate to the migration of Researchfish data into (bespoke) database
- Provide tailored guidance to researchers on how to report to Researchfish





## Considerations for future ODA-funded programmes (3)

- Develop quality assurance protocols early on
- Complement Researchfish with the programme's own reporting system
- Capitalise on the 5-year post-project reporting window





The University of Edinburgh

# THANK YOU!

## ....Questions?

For more on ESPA's learning about how to do research with development impact:

[www.espa.ac.uk/impact](http://www.espa.ac.uk/impact)

