

National Systems of Innovation (NSI)

The impact that research can have on any given target group is determined by many other factors besides investment in the research itself. Many of these factors are outside the control of researchers. They include:

- the level of education of the target group
- the technology available to the target group
- the political voice of the target group
- the socio-economic options available to the target group
- the broader policy context that the target group has to live within

Factors such as these are determined by National Systems of Innovation (NSI). NSI refers to all those institutions and institutional relationships that make it possible to produce and use innovation: educational policy; higher education investment; research institutes; research infrastructure; technological infrastructure; technological capacity; government policy; promotion of strategic industries; etc.

This has a decisive impact on communication of research. In sum, it means that the communication of research will only have an impact if the surrounding NSI is *enabling*. If, on the other hand, the surrounding NSI are *disabling*, the communication of research is *not* likely to have any significant impact, however well the communication itself is carried out.

Outline of questions

NSI analysis points out that communication of research is only one element within a wider system. In order to map out this system, and to determine the potential impact of communication activities, the following questions can be asked:

- What *uptake mechanisms* are available to the target group?
- What *capacity* does the target group have to make use of the research once it has been communicated?
- Which *enabling institutions* already exist? (And can we use them?)
- What *other factors* need to be in place here for communication to have an impact?

In sum: *Impact = Communication + What?*

Further resources

- Barnett, Andrew (2005) 'Reducing poverty needs an 'innovation system' approach', see: <http://www.scidev.net/dossiers/index.cfm?fuseaction=dossierReadItem&type=3&itemid=374&language=1&dossier=13>
- Surr, Martin et al. (2002) 'Research for Poverty Reduction' *DFID Research Policy Paper*, London: UK Department for International Development.