What is impact?

Impact on whom? Towards what end?
What are the routes to impact?
How do we know – and show – impact?
Impact* as

the contribution of research ‘to society and the economy, and its benefits to individuals, organizations, and/or nations’, which can be:

– Instrumental – direct influence on policy, practice
– Conceptual – in understanding, reframing debates
– Capacity building

(*adapted from ESRC)
‘Applied’ research

Impact is direct & concrete
• Government/IO commissioned research, advising

• (Randomized) impact evaluations

• Evidence-based policy-making

• Technical assistance & capacity-building

Mass free distribution of bednets

- 450 million fewer cases of malaria from 2000-2015
- 4 million fewer deaths

From: https://www.csae.ox.ac.uk/materials/conference/CSAE2018_Keynote-19Mar
Basic research

Impact is not the point, but possible
Impact could be concrete, direct, & game-changing...or not.

"I was just rubbing sticks together for fun — I didn't realize I was doing basic research."
Basic Research

Applied Research
Engaged frontier research

Impact is probable, but may be diverse, diffuse, and difficult to measure
Impact* as

• the contribution of research ‘to society and the economy, and its benefits to individuals, organizations, and/or nations’, which can be:
  – Instrumental – direct influence on policy, practice
  – Conceptual – in understanding, reframing debates
  – Capacity building

(*adapted from ESRC)
How do I make this happen

Routes to Impact

1. Dissemination of my research
2. Engaging key stakeholders
3. Involving possible end users
4. Co-production

Uptake and use of my research outside academia

IMPACT!
In the (uncomfortable) middle...

(1) We balance between research and practice, doing our best to stay ‘on top’ of both.
(2) We have to learn some new skills (in communications, advocacy, programme management...)
(3) We wrestle with how to conceptualize, measure, evaluate, and demonstrate impact.

Chart 1: Share of Working Papers (co-) authored by...

- Developing country researcher
- Female researcher from developing country
- Female researcher

2014: 51
2015: 61
2016: 53
2017: 66

Search all impact articles

RESEARCH UPTAKE
Development under climate change in Tanzania, Malawi and Ghana
UNU-WIDER presented the results of a detailed study of food security and climate change for in Tanzania to an audience of more than 50 government officials.

RESEARCH UPTAKE
Strengthening Climate Change Research in Africa
Introduction There is growing demand for climate change research in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the capacity needed to undertake this research by African scholars is sometimes lacking. As such, the research is often conducted by external...

RESEARCH UPTAKE
The Small and Medium Enterprise Survey in Vietnam
Introduction Economic reforms have transformed Vietnam’s economy, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) form a large share of an emerging competitive landscape. Understanding how these firms are created, expand, or fail is essential to...
Part 2: Engaged frontier research in practice
THE WHITE MAN’S BURDEN
Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good

WILLIAM EASTERLY

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

DEAD AID
WHY AID IS NOT WORKING AND HOW THERE IS A BETTER WAY FOR AFRICA

DAMBISA MOYO
Aid is not dead
– the latest evidence on the effectiveness of ODA

by Tony Addison, Finn Tarp, and Oliver Morrissey

When the aggregate effect of aid is estimated using a marginal productivity approach, a return on aid Investment of around 20 per cent is found.

The death of aid has often been declared, and private capital flows as well as earnings from natural resources now far exceed official development assistance (ODA) in aggregate. However, the recent and sharp downturn in resource earnings, the ability of ODA to fund public goods that private capital cannot, and the difficulty of small and fragile economies in attracting private capital, all imply that the need for aid might not be as dead as its critics
Aid to fragile states
Inequality

WIID – World Income Inequality Database

World Income Inequality Database (WIID), collects and stores information on income inequality for developed, developing, and transition countries. WIID provides the most comprehensive set of income inequality statistics available and can be downloaded for free.

The WIID 4, released in January 2017, covers all new countries and more than 1,500 new.

Inequality in the giants

Global inequality has been falling in the last quarter century. However, this trend appears to have been driven entirely by convergence in GDP per capita across nations. Inequality within countries remained roughly constant in the 1980s, and has been rising since 2000. This increase in average within-country inequality arises from a very heterogeneous picture across countries and regions.
Group-based Inequality

The politics of group-based inequalities – measurement, implications, and possibilities for change

This component of the ‘Disadvantaged Groups and Social Mobility’ project aims to shed new light on the extent to which inequalities run along ethnic, gender, and other communal lines, as well as understanding the determinants of these group-based inequalities, including the potential for change. Furthermore, the research considers impact of these inequalities on development and structural transformation. It compliments previous work by UNU-WIDER on horizontal inequality and inclusive growth, with particular attention to distilling and developing key perspectives from political science and supporting interdisciplinary collaboration.
Opinion

Professors, We Need You!

By Nicholas Kristof

Feb. 15, 2014

SOME of the smartest thinkers on problems at home and around the world are university professors, but most of them just don’t matter in today’s great debates.

The most stinging dismissal of a point is to say: “That’s academic.” In other words, to be a scholar is, often, to be irrelevant.

One reason is the anti-intellectualism in American life, the kind that led Rick Santorum to scold President Obama as “a snob” for wanting more kids to go to college, or that led congressional Republicans to

Blog

Dear Nicholas Kristof, We Are Here, Too!

21 February 2014

Rachel M. Gisselquist

Earlier this month, New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof published a scathing critique of the role of academics in public debate. ‘Professors, We Need You!’ he moaned, noting that ‘some of the smartest thinkers on problems at home and around the world are university professors, but most of them just don’t matter in today’s great debates’. He criticized in particular the practical irrelevance of the topics studied by many academics, the use of arcane quantitative models and theoretical constructs, and the ‘turgid prose’.

Kristof was particularly critical of my field—political science—noting that it ‘seems to be trying, in terms of practical impact, to commit suicide’. (Interestingly, he was less critical of economics—which, with all due respect to my colleagues, is at least as guilty of studying)