INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT: A POLICY PAPER

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[1] This is a partial listing only, since a number of participant-observers joined the work sessions on a periodic basis throughout the workshop. We are grateful for their invaluable input and apologize for any names not included here.

Summary

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focus on a range of human freedoms; and these reflect the inherent inter-disciplinarity of human poverty reduction. However, productive inter-disciplinarity continues to be a challenge for many social sciences in the field of international development. The process and challenges of undertaking interdisciplinary research were explored in a Global Development Network (GDN) workshop which used two established and distinctive research areas - HIV/AIDS and direct budget support – as illustrative case studies. Seventeen researcher practitioners from 13 disciplines and 13 low income and transitional economies, and Indigenous cultures, with a range of participant-observers from aid agencies and research networks, participated. In two evenly balanced streams, these subject matter experts took part in a range of structured group assessments. They (1) identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in interdisciplinary research, (2) designed inter-disciplinary studies on HIV/AIDS and direct budget support, and (3) extrapolated implications for promoting interdisciplinary research in their own workplaces. Each of the parallel 'content' streams reported similar research process synergies and challenges, and reported recognising that interdisciplinary research is consistent with achieving the MDGs. We argue that the challenges of alignment and harmonisation of research in international development need to be addressed, and that this can best be facilitated by promoting interdisciplinary research. Furthermore, research utilisation is likely to be easier when the process of research recognises the multi-faceted and interlocking complexities that policy-makers, with practitioners, confront.

"In his [Faraday's] day, there did not yet exist the dull specialisation that stares with self-conceit through horn-rimmed glasses and destroys poetry"

- Albert Einstein in a latter to a friend, December 27 1952, parenthesis added, cited in Dukas & Hoffman, 1981, p. 99)

Introduction

How best can we bring together the insights and perspectives of different disciplines and approaches to research in international development? In multi-disciplinary research, different disciplines work alongside one another on the same issue, from different and essentially independent perspectives. Those perspectives may be combined into a set of overlapping recommendations at the end of the project, and there may be one or more perspective that remains dominant throughout. But they do not work together throughout. Inter-disciplinary research by comparison ensures that the disciplines interact with each other at *each and every stage of the research process*. The interaction lasts from conceptualisation, framing of the research question and methodology, through to data analysis and interpretation into policy development.

In this paper we explore and promote inter-disciplinarity as a research process, however our interest is not to eschew traditional disciplines. It is rather to explore how best the diverse perspectives they offer can be integrated, into a more comprehensive and valid understanding of those problems that constitute points of common interest. We wish to retain the rich depth and breadth of expertise that characterise the plethora of social sciences with legitimate interests in international development. We also want to avoid social science disciplines resting in their comfortable silos, whilst destructively competing for more dominant profiles, or asking research questions that are too abstracted from real-world development challenges. The present paper assumes that most development research at present is somewhere between mono- and multi-disciplinary. We take for granted that there is a need for new thinking on how to develop inter-disciplinarity in our research, both in terms of *what* such research might try and do, as well as just *how* it might try to do it.

The overarching framework for development activity globally, for the foreseeable future, is the Millennium Development Goals ("MDGs;" Annan, 2000). The MDGs are evidently not only multi-disciplinary, but inter-disciplinary as well. The primary goal among them is poverty reduction, under which is included a range of human freedoms (Sen, 2000). Those freedoms include access to health, education, gender equality, to a clean environment, and to fair trade. An inherent inference in presenting the goals as a set of health, education and production objectives is that poverty can be reduced by taking a range of perspectives - simultaneously. Health is inextricably entwined with education, gender equality, environment and market access; and neither can be achieved, in full, without the other.

Connectedness and inter-dependence is succinctly captured in MDG 8. This goal stresses a global partnership for development, spanning for example profit and non-profit sectors. A

broader platform for partnership is expressed in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005). Two of the declaration's five key principles are (i) Harmonisation (between the providers of aid) and (ii) alignment (with the real needs of the aid's 'recipients'). Although these ideas have not previously been applied to the research community, we argue that development research, in principle, is not above such ideals: To the extent that inter-disciplinary research gives voice to multiple disciplinary perspectives – many of them anchored in donor countries, institutions and funding agencies – it may be *harmonised*. To the extent that it includes local perspectives – for example cultural norms, social systems, and beliefs about health or wellness – research may be *aligned*. In theory, therefore, inter-disciplinary research offers an opportunity for the international development research community to become more broadly consistent with the key principles in development policy as a whole.

As well as linking to development policy, inter-disciplinary research also presents an opportunity to minimise the risk of "confirmation bias" (Easterly, 2006). Confirmation bias, as the name suggests, is a tendency to seek corroboration for any existing model of the world; rather than to question the model itself (Senge, 2006). When the empirical system is inter-disciplinary, any singularity of approach can lead to an over simplification, or worse still, to a greater harm than good (Rodríguez, 2007). The Global Development Network (GDN) has recognised such risks in its own policy, vis-à-vis interdisciplinary research for development. In 2007 for example, the GDN hosted a workshop, on comparative methodology for development research (GDN, 2007). During the workshop's proceedings, it was suggested that the merits and demerits of diversity in research are difficult to assess in the abstract, without a focus on concrete development issues (Fanelli, 2007). In 2008, the GDN hosted a further workshop (MacLachlan, Carr, Rawat & McWha, 2008). This workshop focused for the first time on inter-disciplinary research for development by using concrete issues, namely (a) HIV/AIDS and (b) Direct Budget Support (de Renzio, 2006).

Like the Millennium Development Goals to which they are related, issues (a) and (b) are inherently inter-disciplinary. Economists for example may focus on cost-effective mechanisms; Sociologists on empowering the poor and addressing social inequity; Anthropologists on acknowledging local customs, practices and social structures; Psychologists on attributions of responsibility, or individual relations at work (Karlsson, 2007; Ferrinho & Van Lerbergh, 2002); and development practitioners, on relations with the local community (Eyben, 2005). Without inclusion of these (and other) diverse perspectives, and the interaction of economic, sociological and anthropological/cultural variables etc, the risk of confirmation bias becomes, logically enough, elevated (Clements, 2008). For example, Structural Adjustment Programmes have been widely criticised because they failed to think through the social, welfare and health consequences of their associated neoliberal economic policies (George, 1990).

The aims in this paper are to (1) report the key methodology and findings in the workshop that explored the *process* of undertaking interdisciplinary research, and (2) to help develop policy recommendations for the development of inter-disciplinary research. These recommendations should refer not only to the case of research on HIV/AIDS or Direct Budget Support (which were taken as the content areas for the workshop reported here), but also to other research on international development. The recommendations may thus be relevant to research in general that addresses the Millennium Development Goals, and human poverty.

Outline of Method

Full details of the methodology employed during the workshop can be found in MacLachlan, Carr & McWha (2008). In essence however, the following process was followed.

People

Twenty participants were originally formally selected to take part in the workshop. Seventeen made it to the conference. Fluctuating numbers of participant-observers, from national and international aid and research networks such as the Oceania Development Network, were welcomed into the workshop when it was underway. Among the $N = 17$ selected attendees, the following disciplines were represented: Economics ($n = 5$), Political Science ($n = 1$), Development Studies ($n = 2$), Gender studies ($n = 1$), Management ($n = 1$), Law ($n = 1$), Public Health ($n = 2$), Community Health ($n = 1$), Agriculture ($n = 1$), Demography ($n = 1$), and Medical Anthropology ($n = 1$). The group included both researchers and practitioners. Workshop facilitators ($n = 3$) had disciplinary backgrounds in Psychology (Industrial, Organisational and Health), although they were all working in multidisciplinary research teams. Participant observers had expertise and qualifications across a variety of disciplines. Some of the participants, and participant-observers, had backgrounds in more than one discipline. In that case, we have reported what their biographies indicate are a main speciality. The participants originated from or were working in Nigeria ($n = 3$), Niue ($n = 1$), Argentina ($n = 1$), India ($n = 2$), Pakistan ($n = 1$), Fiji ($n = 2$), Papua New Guinea ($n = 1$), Aotearoa/New Zealand ($n = 1$), Philippines ($n = 1$), Bangladesh ($n = 1$), Zambia ($n = 1$), Indonesia ($n = 1$), and Vanuatu ($n = 1$).

Measures

The SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) is a strategic planning measure developed from Marketing Science, and applied in the past to assessing the strategic potential of development-related research (MacLachlan & Carr, 1993). The SWOT is a bootstrapping process in which subject matter experts as a group assess the internal resources for the potential development (Strengths and Weaknesses within the research community) and external market for the development (Opportunities and Threats) in the external environment. It has been widely applied to diagnose challenges and opportunities in development practice, including, for example, direct budget support (UNDP, 2005, p. 19).

The NGT (Nominal Group Technique) is a bootstrapping process used, like the SWOT, to maximise diversity of group input to collective and consensus decision-making. It has also been widely used, including, for instance, exploring attitudes toward HIV/AIDS prevention (MacLachlan, 1996). The NGT entails each member of the group individually recording their ideas on a topic prior to group discussion, during which phase the individual clarifies their best ideas and the group evaluates their relative merits. A key strength of the NGT is its capability to draw maximally on an initially diverse pool of ideas without closing down alternative avenues and ideas prematurely (Carr, 2003).

Both the SWOT and the NGT have been found to result in superior decision-making compared to relatively unstructured "brainstorming" (Sutton, & Hargadon, 1996).

Process

A Call for Participants was launched by GDN (http://www.gdnet.org/middle.php?oid=1215). Proposals were selected on merit, with cognisance of geographic distribution. The participants selected were asked to prepare a short presentation for the workshop, with a draft chapter for a subsequent workbook (for details, see MacLachlan et al; 2008). The workshop consisted of four highly interactive modules regarding interdisciplinary research: (1) Introduction, (2) What is gained and lost? (3) Does it address real world complexity? And finally (4): How can it work in your own workplace?

1. During the introductory module, following formal introductions to the topic and each other, the two streams (HIV and DBS) gave individual presentations of the slides they had prepared following selection into the workshop. These presentations served to self-facilitate awareness of, and possibly respect for, diverse discipline perspectives; and to provide input to the subsequent modules.

2. During module two, the SWOT was administered. It was completed in evenly balanced (numerically and in terms of discipline/professional areas) in four groups (two for HIV/AIDS, and two for direct budget support).

3. The goal in the third module (i.e., Does it address real world complexity?) was to allow the groups to actually design potential inter-disciplinary studies of the key topics, HIV/AIDS and Direct Budget Support. Occasions for such consultation are comparatively rare in many research settings. Hence the propinquity of the workshop was used directly, to sample how collective decisions can actually play out, and what they can actually achieve.

4. The NGT was completed during the last module session, in two groups (one for each focus, i.e., HIV/AIDS and direct budget support).

5. Finally, we conducted an anonymous evaluation of the workshop during debrief. The outcomes of the evaluation, which was made via email directly to the Global Development Network, can be found in MacLachlan, Carr and McWha (2008).

Results

Outcomes from the four SWOT analyses are presented in Table 1. From Table 1, an initial observation is the apparent comparative absence of content-specific points. The entries refer more to matters concerning research *process*, rather than research content, i.e., issues *specific* to HIV/AIDS or Direct Budget Support (DBS). In fact, there was is no mention of either HIV/AIDS or direct budget support from any of the groups. As a whole therefore, Table 1 is characterised by more process- than content-related issues.

Table 1

Summary of strategic possibilities identified from an inter-disciplinary research approach

Internal	Helpful STRENGTHS		Harmful WEAKNESSES	
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2
HIV/ AIDS	Potential holistic view Enhanced funding outlook Checks & balances Ethics inclusiveness Broader understanding	+ve interdependence Pooled resources Community Widened learning Wider evidence base Theory stretched	Diminished rigor Needs team work Higher risk of failure Weak leadership	Clash of methodologies Contest for dominance Commun'n breakdown Struggle for leadership Takes extra time
……. DBS	Multiple perspectives More rigor Team approach/more rigor More likely funded More practical Consultative Broader view Fresh research insights	Complementariness Terminology flexib'ty Multiple predictors Do less harm New input own research	Shallowness Coordination/confusion Low status in Universities Overlook culture Weak team leader Time consuming Expensive	Breadth not depth Disputed findings Clash of methods Budget blow-out
External	OPPORTUNITIES		THREATS	
HIV/ AIDS	Pooled resources Access to funding New theory	Match to complex issues More inclusive/voice Creates new fields Evaluation development	Conflicts of interest Loss of autonomy Being subsumed Disciplinary stereotypes	Mismatched priorities Threat to mono-discip's Too few Inter- journals Look costly to funders Evaluation complexity
……. DBS	Likely to attract funding Consensus difficult Do not fit a sector	More funding sources Credibility Ability to convince New theories	Turf protection Promotion jeopardised Politics Dominant paradigms	Corruption Confuse policy makers Regime intolerance Career slowdown Politicians like simplicity

Source: Extrapolated and synthesised from raw data in MacLachlan et al (2008)

Consistent with the theme of process before content, there is a great deal of overlap in the issues identified by each stream, and indeed each of the twin groups within the two main streams.

Among strengths for example, Table 1 shows that an holistic outlook and positive interdependence (HIV 1 Groups 1 and 2, respectively) are matched by complementariness and multiple perspectives (DBS, Groups 2 and 1, respectively). Straddling internal strengths and external opportunities, all four groups either see, or have experienced directly, some enhanced funding outlook, due to pooling of resources material and intellectual; and a multiplied likelihood of adapting to, or matching, a funding source. These potential benefits are counterbalanced by risks of "diminished rigor" (Weakness, HIV, Group 1), "clash of methodologies" (HIV, Group 2), or "shallowness" and "breadth not depth" (DBS, Groups 1 and 2). Externally from Table 1, "Conflicts of interest" and "mismatched priorities" (for HIV groups) are mirrored by "turf protection" and "corruption" in the stream on DBS.

Table 1 also shows a link between ethics and inclusiveness. In the HIV stream, and strengths, "checks and balances Ethics" and "community inclusiveness" are matched, among the DBS participants, with points about being "consultative" and "doing less harm." As these examples indicate, inter-disciplinary research is seen as being "more inclusive (of community) voice" (Opportunities, HIV; Group 2). Interestingly, these strengths and opportunities, from greater inclusion, are not counterbalanced to any noticeable degree by parallel weaknesses and threats.

Hence the net impression or suggestion in Table 1 is that inter-disciplinary research enhances the prospect of both harmonisation and alignment.

For the academic community, Table 1 suggests that inter-disciplinary research will 'stretch the muscle' of contemporary theory. All four groups mention ideas of broader understanding, theory development, creation of new fields and wholly new theories being born. There may also be new inputs to one's own research (Strengths, DBS; Group 2). On the practical side, these potential advances in science and social science may be partially offset by sharper needs for good team leadership, greater coordination, and some political skill (Table 1). In Table 1, there are also considerations of enhanced cost, for example, due to down time from team dynamics.

We also see in Table 1 predictions of potential "promotion jeopardy" and "career slowdown" (External Threat, DBS, Groups 1 and 2), for example perhaps from "too few interdisciplinary journals" (External Threat, HIV Group 2). In an interrelated vein, Table 1 also warns that inter-disciplinary research may both take "extra time" and cost more monetarily ("Budget blow-out), plus be comparatively difficult to communicate to politicians. These are all, of course, quite tangible challenges.

Overall therefore, there are two general suggestions contained in the data from Table 1. If inter-disciplinary research is to be effective, then (i) structural as well as (ii) human factors have to be managed effectively.

Table 2
Potential Research Studies designed in an Inter-disciplinary forum

Stream	Question	Methodology	Analysis	Outcome/outputs
HIV/AIDS	How accessible is ARV t'ment to selected HIV+ grps in selected nations?	Quantitative and Qualitative Epidemiological survey	Descriptive and statistical analysis	Identify barriers to accessibility. Identify solutions
HIV/AIDS	Factors affecting the accessibility to HIV/AIDS treatment among rural communities in the Philippines	Qualitative framework-in-depth interview (with key stakeholders). Analysis of Policy-legislative framework. Primary survey using structured questionnaire	Documentary or textual analysis Figures, charts, and tables Factor analysis	Discover the barriers of accessibility Programmatic and policy inputs
Budget support	What are the accountability challenges of direct budget support? A comparative study (Niue, Vanuatu, Samoa, PNG, Nigeria, and Fiji) SWOT analysis of donor requirements (input and output) Critical review of statistical systems, reporting systems, accounting systems, governance and institutional capacity	Interviews with government, e.g., finance, education, health; with community aid workers, teachers, donors, NGOs. Legislative review Technological systems assessment Accounting system capacity review	Compare requirements of the donors to the institutional capacity of the countries Identify the gaps in the above and suggest ways to address them Making donors review their internal procedures Look at improving institutional capabilities	Required disciplines: PFM specialists Accounting IT systems Strategic Planning Legal Social scientists/sector experts in health, education and governance Communication specialist Statistical expert
Budget support	Direct Budget Support versus Project Aid with respect to Land Reforms: How does DBS scale up land reform in Pakistan, Nigeria and Brazil vis-à-vis project aid?	Intervention-oriented approach using DBS in Region A, project aid in Region B, and no intervention in Region C, in each of the three countries Interdisciplinary feasibility study Randomisation to choose sites. Selection of indicators (health, gender, income/wealth, and consumption, education, etc) Intervention in regions A & B Intervention A – redistribute cultivable state land via DBS compensation Region B – Loans to buy land, agricultural & technological inputs via project aid	Regression analyses Psychometric analysis Qualitative analysis (well-being analysis etc) Cross-comparison of regional data (A, B & C) across selected countries	Availability of results concerning comparative effectiveness of using DBS and project aid with respect to land reforms. Cross-country data on what works best where. Highlighting results in policy agenda

Beyond the structural and individual processes in Table 1 lies the practical concern of research designs in Table 2. Effectively, Table 1 begs the question, *Can* an interdisciplinary research project be designed; i.e., can it *work*? Admittedly, these streams were self-selected and to that extent perhaps less prone to some of the potential clashes of viewpoint and ideology presaged in Table 1. Nonetheless, it might be instructive as we did to use the SWOT exercise to springboard to actual research design. The results of this step in the workshop process – designed to mirror actual research decision-making – are presented in Table 2. Table 2 does not reflect the fact that these designs are outlines only; they were fleshed out in far more detail during the workshop itself (for details, MacLachlan et al, 2008). Nonetheless a first point to note, from Table 2 in its own right, is that the teams, each of them, did in fact manage to design a study in the allotted (relatively minimal) time. This is encouraging in that it suggests that, at least in simulation, the potential barriers identified in Table 1 are not insurmountable.

From Table 2, in addition to the self-evident inter-disciplinarity of the research Question, there is a blend of both quantitative and qualitative methodology. The use of these "q-squared" methodologies is not particular to any one stream, nor to any one group within each stream (i.e., under "Question" in the Table). It is a process- not content-based course of action. The process of research design included a mix of archival analysis, experimental control, survey and interview methodologies, plus textual analysis. The studies range in ethos from exploratory and inductive, to interventionist and deductive. Data analyses range from content analysis through to factor analysis, and cover health management, accounting and policy development. As we move down in Table 2, the studies proposed vary in apparent complexity. In the final study being proposed, for example, the field experimental independent variable (no intervention, project aid, direct budget support) is controlled and cross-nested within country sites (Regions A, B and C). This crossing of factors could enable, for instance, cross-regional as well as within-country comparisons on the range of dependent variables (inter-disciplinary indicators). Such comparisons, across the multiple indicators in Table 2, are inherently more in keeping with the spirit and ethos of the MDGs.

Having considered the practicalities of designing an inter-disciplinary study, the workshop turned to the practicalities of how individual researchers might negotiate the wider potential barriers to initiating inter-disciplinary research, in their own workplaces. The outcome of the ensuing (twin) Nominal Group Technique processes (one for each stream) is presented in Table 3. From Table 3, the higher ranked solutions tend to be structural, or quasi-structural. They range from providing research grants that are focused on, and reward, inter-disciplinary proposals and cluster formation; to promoting seminar series and greater recognition of the value of inter-disciplinary research. By contrast with these structural recommendations, there is comparatively little that focuses on individual initiatives (an exception is to "fund two or more leading thinkers" to write a position paper on the topic). Instead, our participants and participant0observers recommend a fostering of networks using incentives such as grant and journal openings, coupled perhaps with training opportunities and outcomes – like those enabled by our own sponsors and by the GDN.

For a change to occur, Table 3 indicates that specific structural changes will be needed to harmonise and align with more micro-level initiatives, like evidence-based workshops and outputs.

Table 3

Rank-ordered Recommendations for Promoting Inter-disciplinary Research for Development

HIV/AIDS	Direct Budget Support
1. Provision of research grants that have a focus on and requirement for interdisciplinary research 2. Establish a research cluster or a group 3. Provide incentives like subsidies, recognition 4. Engage communication - specialist to focus on language and visual tools 5. Perform a small pilot project 6. Conduct advocacy meetings (on behalf of inter-disciplinary research) 7. E-based interdisciplinary communication systems 8. Develop a curriculum 9. Fund two or more leading thinkers from different disciplines to write a paper on why interdisciplinary approach is best way to address a pressing development problem 10. Engage behavioral scientist as consistent member of HIV research teams 11. Suggest working ID to speed up delivery 12. Set up a multidisciplinary research centre	1. Promote thematic ID groups (themes or org. structure), e.g., environment (ID Research Networks) 2. ID Seminar sessions 3. Funding ID research 4. Replication of ID Research workshop using the GDN model (Training new researchers) 5. Peer reviews by ID panel 6. Make ID Approach a requirement in all Calls for Proposals 7. Stakeholder analysis and involvement in research : participatory/inter-disciplinary 8. Publish ID Journals and research works 9. Ensure balance between natural and social sciences: ID Research, study, etc

Discussion

The main learning points to arise from this workshop are that inter-disciplinary research is a process before it is an outcome; that challenges to it are perhaps more to do with process issues than specifically related to the content of different approaches; that in our research design simulation participants were able to combine methodologies where they had often previously used single methodology approaches; and that the promotion and support of interdisciplinary research is likely to require structural changes in our research institutions, as well as changes in the value placed on interdisciplinary research more generally. While participants clearly felt there was value in the interdisciplinary approach, they also recognised that it is not easy to move outside the warmth of one's familiar discipline and try and actively think through a research question from a perspective with which one is considerably less familiar. That can challenge the intellect as well as making people personally vulnerable in the sense of "not knowing." An effective interdisciplinary process, therefore, is likely to require some 'softer' human skills - like teamwork, leadership, tolerance of difference and ambiguity, and selflessness (Fanelli, 2007).

We would not want to downplay those challenges. But we do want to stress that the process-based risks that they entail must be overcome, or addressed, through process-based policy. Increasingly, policy makers and research-policy nexus networks like GDN, are calling for a greater focus on research utilisation (Summer, Perkins and Linstrom, 2008). The inclusion of end-users of social science research in the framing of the research question is likely, we believe, to introduce a greater degree of complexity to research than can be comfortably managed within any one discipline alone. For instance, we would hope that questions about direct budget support would seek answers to social and welfare implications of such allocations; not just focus on financial flows. Likewise, we would hope that questions about ARV rollout would not simply be concerned with drug supply and medication adherence; but also with health system financing and strengthening, stigma reduction, and equity restoration (see MacLachlan et al, 2008).

Molteberg and Bergstrom have argued that "Development Studies addresses current, actual problems, focusing on solving them – it tends to be applied and action or policy-orientated" (2000, p.7). While the complexity of real world problems has to be simplified to allow for systematic scientific research, such research also needs to acknowledge the complex of interacting factors that constitute the multi-factorial system that the dependent variable inhabits outside the research itself. We - researchers - have tended to leave the working out of how all that fits together - in the real world - to people who often have no research background. This is no longer a defensible position, if it ever was. If we care enough to do the research, then we should also care enough about how the research findings are implemented. By logic as well as definition, translatable research requires a relatively broad conceptualisation of the research question, if the results are to be translated into policy and practice actions. Such conceptualisations are best grounded in an interdisciplinary approach - including an involvement by practitioners in the research from the outset (*People*, above).

One oft-cited tenet in social science is that "there is nothing as practical as a good theory." What kind of theory is likely to emerge from inter-disciplinary research? Our participants in both streams identified 'theory development' as an outcome of inter-disciplinary processes. An example of what such theories may eventually contain is General Systems Theory, which has

been used to theorise about direct budget support (DFID, 2004, p. 9). Such theories may or may not sit squarely with traditional knowledge systems, perhaps highlighting some of the inevitable challenges - and possibly limitations - to research alignment.

In conclusion, inter-disciplinary research, whilst by no means an easy option, may hold more promise in the long run for making a meaningful contribution to international development, and so to achieving the MDGs. Policy-wise, interdisciplinary research chimes with several meta-aspirations within international aid, notably for more harmonisation between high-income country researchers; and for better alignment with the interests and initiatives of researchers in low-income countries. Echoing Ghandi's call for us to be the change we seek, one of the participants in our workshop poignantly remarked: "Having other disciplines [involved] … means that the community perceives the research process as likely to be more inclusive." Such inclusion, we believe, is an essential ingredient for promoting real research utility.

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