

Power of partnership and pathways out of poverty

Since the ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research was established in 2005, the world in which we work has changed significantly. Most countries have seen major gains in living standards and human development, with significant improvements in health and education outcomes. Yet these gains are often vulnerable to reversal; structural inequalities and harmful social norms persist. In the last decade, we have witnessed a crisis in the global economy and, after a period of sustained decline, a resurgence in the number and intensity of conflicts. Recent years have seen an upswing in violent deaths and forced displacement, the spread of populist politics, and closing space for civil society. While poverty continues to fall at a global scale, the rate of this decline is slowing as extreme poverty becomes increasingly concentrated in a smaller set of countries which face multiple and deep-rooted challenges, including social and political fragility, and armed conflict. Climate change and environmental degradation pose fundamental challenges to the sustainability of many development gains.

Traditional North-South development paradigms are giving way to a more interconnected, globalised, rapidly changing world that needs new kinds of action and relationships. Youth and social movements have seized political spaces and opportunities with varying degrees of success in an attempt to redefine notions of social and personal justice and freedom. In many countries, repressive governments have sought to suppress such opposition. Positive change

requires new kinds of research and knowledge focused on how we can work together.

Over time, the Joint Fund also evolved; the initial focus on the MDGs diminished, and emphasis was placed on pathways out of poverty, institutional conditions that alleviate poverty and violence and insecurity. Meanwhile, taking a strategic approach to impact increased with the requirement of clear pathways to impact statements. There has always been an expectation that the diverse, world-class scientific research the scheme funds would have the potential for impact on policy and practice for poverty reduction.

In this challenging context, the Joint Fund has been well-suited to respond to a growing requirement for new knowledge about the complex lives, experiences, and strategies of the poorest and most marginalised in society.

Pathways out of poverty and oppression are multiple and take many shapes. There is increasing recognition that poverty is multidimensional in nature, and that our analysis of wellbeing needs to consider not only material dimensions (low income and consumption, a lack of assets or services) but also social phenomena (shame, stigma, exclusion and violence) – and the mutually-reinforcing relationships between material and social outcomes. Supporting journeys to more positive wellbeing and lives that are more livable requires acknowledging gendered and international power dynamics and social norms, as well as exclusionary behaviours and systems in communities and institutions. The negative effects of

intersecting inequalities of race, ethnicity, caste, religion, sexuality, and physical and mental ability run deep in all of our societies.

ESRC-DFID's Joint Fund has supported 172¹ geographically diverse research projects in which academics work in partnership with civil society, non-governmental, and governmental organisations. Projects cover multidimensional aspects of poverty and include issues such as inequality in education, health system reform, secure livelihoods, economic strategies and social protection, gender in everyday lives, and childhood and youth. Research has built understanding of how poor and marginalised people navigate and negotiate their futures, and has influenced policy contexts and broader transformational changes in societies. Since 2016, the Impact Initiative for International Development Research, working closely with ESRC-DFID, has been focused on strengthening linkages between groups of grantees and intermediaries, promoting critical bodies of knowledge and learning, addressing shared capacity issues, and evidencing impact. As the Fund completes its final phase, we are in a unique position to share learning from across this portfolio of evidence. This comprehensive guide provides practitioners and policy actors with an indispensable catalogue of cutting-edge research that has real implications for policy and programmes. The guide is being launched at a major international event, 'Power of Partnership', in Delhi, in December 2018.

This conference of academics, practitioners, knowledge brokers, policy actors, and donors from the international community will extend learning and ongoing innovation across regions and projects. Much of the research presented has been co-constructed and co-delivered through innovative local and global partnerships committed to inclusivity and engagement with policy and practice.

¹ According to data available at the time of printing.

Learning across the Joint Fund includes interrogating what makes partnership successful in achieving impact in policy and practice and in making poor people's lives better. Questioning the interactions between research, politics, and practice includes addressing the politics of evidence; building capacity and interfaces between academics, knowledge brokers, and decision-makers; and making new spaces for the voices of often excluded and marginalised populations to be heard. The research across the portfolio of ESRC-DFID's Joint Fund can contribute to leaving no one behind in meeting the SDGs in diverse cultural and political global contexts.

As Amartya Sen reminds us, 'justice is not indifferent to the lives that people can actually live' (*The Idea of Justice*, 2009: 18). We need to combine an understanding of human lives, experiences, and realisations alongside institutions and rules.

It is with respect that we can learn from all of the projects profiled here and discover new ways to challenge our assumptions, illuminate the complexity of poverty and social norms, and inform institutional dynamics as well as local, national, and international policy and practice. All of the projects listed in this booklet were enabled by the ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research. It is intended to be a practical guide that will enable grant holders to be aware of and connect with each other's work. There is still a long journey towards the realisation of rights and equality, social and personal justice for poor and marginalised people. But better to build trust and to travel and learn together – that is the power of partnership.

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