

IDS Bulletin

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THE MILLENNIUM VILLAGES: LESSONS ON EVALUATING INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Foreword

Over the last 20 years, evaluation methods have broadened in scope, approaches, and hence value for decision-making for policymakers. This *IDS Bulletin* takes a big step forward to show how integrated multisectoral development – not a new area, but one which has all too easily been glossed over – can be given a new lease of life in today’s contemporary debates. As the *IDS Bulletin* points out, poor people are unlikely to consider life as a series of disconnected sectoral issues or challenges, so there is a strong argument for more connected approaches.

In evaluating and investigating this challenge, this issue reflects on: the use of quantitative methods, a better understanding of synergy, the costs of integration, the added value of mixed methods observational research for integrated projects, and the challenge of dealing with multiple outcomes on different timescales, with different activities and inputs.

The significance of this *IDS Bulletin* is how the evidence, ideas, and approaches expressed here can illuminate one of the great mysteries of development research and practice. This is why so often the policy conclusions from research and evaluation emphasise the need for integration, coordination, addressing complexity, holistic approaches, exploitation of synergies (many peoples’ favourite), and now the SDG-generating favourite, inter-connectedness, without much evidence as to how to get there. All of these outcomes are often stated as being intrinsically ‘good things’. But are they and how do we know? In practice, do the efforts, transaction costs, and requirements of interdisciplinarity approaches to integrate outweigh the benefits? What is the best way to do this? A good first step would be to address the incentives that encourage silo-working.

This *IDS Bulletin* bravely takes on trying to find out. Case studies are presented on historical evidence, and detailing the pros and cons of diverse evaluation methodologies. Observations are drawn from case studies from the integrated rural development programmes of the 1970s, the Millennium Villages Project, and projects in Uganda and South Africa that implemented integrated family, youth, and economic strengthening.

Integrated development is messy to analyse and evaluate in order to be confident that it meets the needs and realities of poor people. This *IDS Bulletin* shows that integrated projects can be effective, but that the actual mechanisms compared to alternative approaches need more investigation.

This *IDS Bulletin* will suit those who enjoy being pulled up sharp by convincing evidence.

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