

Between ourselves: the new generation of information & knowledge intermediaries

From the “Intermediary workshop: summarisers, signposters and synthesisers”
May 2007

Edited by Catherine Fisher and Yaso Kunaratnam



portal • gateway • database • knowledge hub • reporting
service • one-stop-shop • clearing house • resource centre

in-ter-me-di-ar-y

(n)

1. a person who acts as a mediator or agent between parties
2. something that acts as a medium or means
3. an intermediate state or period (adj)
4. acting as an intermediary
5. situated, acting, or coming between: intermediate

The Collins English Dictionary, Second Edition (1986)

Between ourselves: the new generation of information & knowledge intermediaries

From the “Intermediary workshop: signposters, summarisers and synthesisers”

May 2007

Edited by Catherine Fisher and Yaso Kunaratnam

About this report

In May 2007, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) convened a meeting that brought together information and knowledge intermediaries working to increase access to research in development contexts by providing portals, gateways or reporting services. Participants from 10 countries joined staff from IDS Information for lively debate and exchange of ideas.

This is the report of that workshop. It does not give a detailed account of the workshop; instead it aims to capture the excitement, energy and sense of synergy that emerged and to look to the future. It is hoped it will spark debate about the role of information and knowledge intermediaries in development contexts. It is intended for those who have an interest in the role of information and communication – particularly of research – in generating better development outcomes. This includes decision makers and producers of research as well as people who are interested becoming, or supporting intermediaries.

Published by the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, Brighton, BN1 9RE, UK

Any parts of this report may be copied, reproduced, or adapted to meet local needs, without permission, provided that the parts produced are distributed free or at cost – not for profit. For any reproduction with commercial ends, permission must first be obtained from the publisher. The publisher would appreciate being sent a copy of any materials in which text has been used.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). The publishers have made every effort to ensure, but do not guarantee the accuracy of the information within this publication.

Copyright © 2007 Institute of Development Studies

Contents

We share a common belief that information and knowledge intermediaries have an important role to play in ensuring greater use of information and knowledge in development policy and practice and believe this will contribute to positive development outcomes.

Extract from the I-K-Mediary Working Group Purpose statement that emerged from the workshop

pg 2 Preface

- Why knowledge and information intermediaries?
- A new generation of intermediaries?
- Building understanding of and between intermediaries
- About the workshop - the first step of a journey
- Beyond the workshop - the I-K-Mediary Working Group

pg 4 Who are we? An emerging sense of commonality

- A common problem: decision makers don't use evidence
- Lack of common language to describe our work
- Diversity of backgrounds - a new generation?
- What we are not
- New-found peers - opportunities for collaboration and learning

pg 6 What do we do? Concepts and practice in our work

- How intermediaries aim to add value to the information supply chain
- Based on our understandings, what do we do? Similarities and differences in service design
- Fruit for thought: exploring the role of knowledge and information intermediaries through the metaphor of fruit

pg 10 Identifying common challenges and strategies for addressing them

- Identifying content and leveraging access to it
- Setting and implementing editorial criteria
- Promoting access while upholding copyright
- Balancing neutrality and advocacy
- Understanding and responding to changing external environments
- Ensuring sustainability
- Demonstrating impact

pg 13 Going forward together: the I-K-Mediary Working Group

- Why form a group?
- What will it do? Purpose of the group
- Next steps for the group - building on connections and making new ones
- Looking to the future.

pg 16 About participants

- Details of each participants' service purpose, scope and content coverage
- Workshop participants photo
- List of participants



Preface

In May 2007, the Institute of Development Studies convened a meeting entitled “Intermediary workshop: summarisers, signposters and synthesisers”. It brought together information and knowledge intermediaries working to increase access to research in development contexts by providing portals, gateways or reporting services.

Participants from 10 countries joined staff from the IDS Information Department for lively debate and exchange of ideas. This is the report of that meeting. It is written by the convenors of the meeting in consultation with participants. It does not give a detailed account of the workshop; instead it aims to capture the excitement, energy and sense of synergy that emerged. It aims to share the thinking and learning about intermediaries and our role in development that emerged from the workshop and will continue to evolve.

Why knowledge and information intermediaries?

There are many programmes aimed at helping knowledge and information flows in the development industry. Traditionally, these have included conferences, workshops, journals, libraries and extension workers. The last decade has seen the emergence of new approaches such as portals, gateways, resource centres and one-stop shops. In one way or another these are aimed at bridging information gaps, making connections, and facilitating exchange between different actors.

IDS is home to a range of such programmes, all of which play an information brokering role aimed at helping development research and knowledge reach those who can use it to reduce poverty and injustice. These services include: Eldis, an online gateway to development research; id21, a research reporting service; and, BRIDGE, a gender and development research and information service.

In different ways, these services and others like them act as mediators between producers and potential consumers of research based information. Thus, the idea of a knowledge or information intermediary may be a useful label for such people who, like the family of services based at IDS, are involved in addressing information and communication challenges within the development industry.

A new generation of intermediaries?

The rising interest in knowledge brokering initiatives has been fuelled in recent years by advances in information and communication technology, and increasing interest in research communication. New initiatives are now emerging from different sectors, with differing drivers, paradigms and logics.

These new knowledge initiatives draw on a range of traditions and approaches to develop often quite hybrid functions. This is driving the emergence of a “new generation” of intermediaries, who don’t quite fit existing definitions or professional networks, and may consequently be working in isolation while facing similar challenges.

The workshop has given us the opportunity to meet people who understand what we do. It's been enlightening to have so much room for us to look critically at what our roles should be and what we could do to make a difference. The approach taken for this particular workshop meant it was a journey we took together.

Jennifer Liguton

Building understandings of and between intermediaries

Turning the focus on intermediaries raises many questions.

What are the key features of knowledge and information intermediary roles in development contexts? Who are the organisations and groups playing this role and who is planning to? What are the similarities and differences in how the role is played? How can and do intermediaries contribute to better development outcomes? Would answering these questions help intermediaries make a greater contribution?

In a very practical sense, could bringing a group of intermediaries together generate useful learning about knowledge and information intermediary roles in development and offer practical support for their work?

About the workshop - the first step of a journey

The workshop was organised as a first step towards exploring some of these questions.

It aimed to bring together people playing an intermediary role from diverse geographic, sectoral and professional locations. We believe that this was the first meeting of its kind to focus exclusively on knowledge and information intermediaries in the development sector.

The workshop was convened with three main aims:

- 1) to find out if information intermediaries working in different programmes have anything in common,
- 2) to discover what we can learn from each other, and
- 3) to identify if there is any interest in future collaborative learning and exchange

The workshop was highly participatory, with a participant-directed and evolving agenda based on learning about, with, and from each other. Together we explored our understandings of how we contribute to achieving development objectives and began to map our various approaches and roles. As well as pushing our conceptual thinking, participants were able to reflect on their own work and compare it with others – sharing practical challenges and ideas for overcoming them.

Beyond the workshop - the I-K-Mediary Working Group

Over the course of an intensive week, participants (including ourselves) found that we have lots in common, plenty to learn from each other and have agreed to continue the journey started at this workshop. There are further questions that the group wishes to explore in the next stage and these are featured in each section of this report. Together, participants have formed the “I-K-Mediary Working Group” as a vehicle for continuing our journey, this is described in more detail in the final section of the report.

As convenors, we believe that this is the first step towards greater conceptual understanding of the role of information and knowledge intermediaries in development and look forward to seeing greater learning and practical collaboration between them. Watch this space.

*Catherine Fisher and Yaso Kunaratnam
Strategic Learning Initiative, Information Department, Institute of Development Studies*



Who are we? An emerging sense of identity

What do we do and why do we do it?

What are the similarities and differences between us?

It's perhaps surprising that our concerns are so similar and we haven't met before.

Peter Ballantyne

The workshop brought together people from organisations around the world who are involved in trying to increase the use of information and knowledge in development policy and practice by playing a “brokering” or “intermediary” role between suppliers and consumers of that information and knowledge. This was identified initially as those who are running programmes or services which aim to increase access to or use of research in development contexts by providing portals, gateways or reporting services.

IDS, the organisers, invited organisations which were using primarily online methods to communicate research from a variety of sources to a broad audience. The group came from research institutes, networks, government and international organisations from Bangladesh, Egypt, France, India, Kenya, the Netherlands, Philippines, South Africa, Tanzania, and UK. (A breakdown of participants with descriptions of their services can be found on pages 16-17.)

The relevance and accuracy of the description used to bring us together was not examined directly, but identifying the criteria that we had in common was a theme throughout the workshop.

A common problem: decision makers do not use evidence

I was struck by how similar our purposes were and how different our approaches.

Jennifer Liguton

Universally, our services were attempting to address the reality that decision makers do not use the evidence available when making decisions. Decision makers identified by the group include:

- Policy makers making policy decisions
- Practitioners making decisions about programmes
- Researchers designing and implementing research projects
- Individuals making decisions about household livelihood strategies

Underpinning our work is a universal idea that failure to use evidence is a real problem that is having a negative impact on development outcomes. This assumption is part of a huge debate which is beyond the scope of this report, yet it is interesting that we as a group shared this belief.

In order to address this problem, we all aim to improve access to evidence and encourage use of evidence to change the ways in which our target audiences inform themselves about the decisions they are making. There are significant differences in the role that different services play and the approaches that they use, even though many of the tools are similar. This is explored further in the following section.

Lack of common language to describe our work

Despite this common purpose, the group did not have a common language to describe our work. Whilst the concept of an information or knowledge intermediary is widely used in various development contexts (in particular in library and agricultural extension work), the term was not widely used by members of the group to describe themselves or their work. Some of the participants had never heard of the term before whilst others used the term “info-mediary” - a combination of the words “Information” and “intermediary” – a term initiated in the financial services sector. This lack of common language made it difficult to talk about our work. During the workshop we variously used mapping and drawing, analogies and often defined ourselves in terms of ‘what we are not’ to explore the similarities and differences within the group.



We found the group was characterised by professional diversity

Diversity of backgrounds – a new generation?

When we explored the personal backgrounds of the people at the workshop we found individuals within the group had come through many different routes. Some of us were trained librarians, some still working in library settings; some came from a “techie” background within the private sector; others were academics from a research background; others from publishing, whilst others had a communication background, whether in research communication, health communication or journalism.

So while knowledge and information intermediary roles are not new in development, the new generation of intermediaries as represented at this workshop, is characterised by professional diversity. This reflects – or even generates – the hybrid nature of the services that straddle more established sectors or disciplines. These intermediaries don’t necessarily fit existing definitions or professional networks, or even think of themselves as intermediaries.

New found peers – opportunities for collaboration and learning

It was striking how few of us knew each other before the workshop or – perhaps worse – had even heard of each others’ services. The similarity of purpose and function we discovered, might have led to a feeling of competition among the group. However the different contexts in which participants operate and the close relationship that they have with their stakeholders, meant that each service was operating in a different niche. By contrast there was a strong sense of excitement at finding people who are thinking about the same issues and dealing with the same challenges (see page 10-14). For many of us it was the first time we had met such direct peers. This led us to conclude that the group provides opportunities for identifying areas of collaboration between services as well as peer support and learning between the people behind the services.

What we are not

If something is not widely understood or defined it is sometimes easier to explain it in terms of what it isn’t. This outlines how our roles are different to...

- **Suppliers’ own research communication** – we aim to present research findings from a range of institutes which means we cannot play an advocacy role for particular research findings, we need to take a more objective or neutral stance
- **Google/Google scholar** – we play an editorial role in selecting information; some of us add value to material selected through organising it and/or creating summaries or abstracts, many of us link exclusively to full text documents which is not always the case in google scholar
- **Online journals** – generally we do not publish materials, rather we deal in material that has already been published (formally or informally) by others, the range of material we deal in is often broader than just peer reviewed research
- **Broadcast media** – we have a development objective and focus and most services (although not all) have a more specific audience than general public
- **Libraries** – generally we use different technologies and aren’t reliant on a physical collection, we have more specific audiences than public libraries and broader audiences than dedicated libraries, many of us go beyond cataloguing information to lever access to it, package and communicate it
- **Communities of practice/networks** – whilst convenors of networks often play an information broker role, this differs from our work in that it is often for a small and defined group of network members and is usually (but not always) an informal role

Beyond the workshop – questions for the future

Is this a new and distinctive group? If so how can the capacities of the individuals within it be supported?

Can we develop a common language for talking about what we do? What would that achieve?

Is there such a thing as an information intermediary sector?

The role of intermediaries goes beyond the provision of information/knowledge. There is a need of adding value to the knowledge to be more than just a repository.

Participant reflection

What do we do? Concepts and practice in our work

**How do we understand the way in which information and knowledge come to be used?
What does this mean for the activities we undertake?**

To describe and explore our roles at a conceptual level, we had to take a step back from our day to day activities to think about the bigger picture. In order to explore our roles and functions, we drew out an information supply chain that had research suppliers at one end and potential consumers at the other. Recognising that this is an overly linear representation of processes of information and communication flows, we used this as a discussion tool to explore the processes and actors and channels of communication involved in this supply chain and attempted to locate ourselves within it.

We identified that all workshop participants are trying to ensure that information and knowledge is accessible and is used to improve development policy and practice. We are all trying to intervene in either the context or the manner in which development actors make decisions. In our work we act as agents between suppliers of information and potential consumers of that information. Using the idea of an information supply chain helped us to describe how, where and why we aimed to intervene.

In a perfect world decision makers at all levels would be perfectly informed about the range of information available to them, would know what to access and how to do it and would actively seek it out when making decisions. Whilst in many cases direct and effective connection between research suppliers and decision makers does happen, this

Interventions at this end are informed by information science and shaped by movements such as open access and e-governance

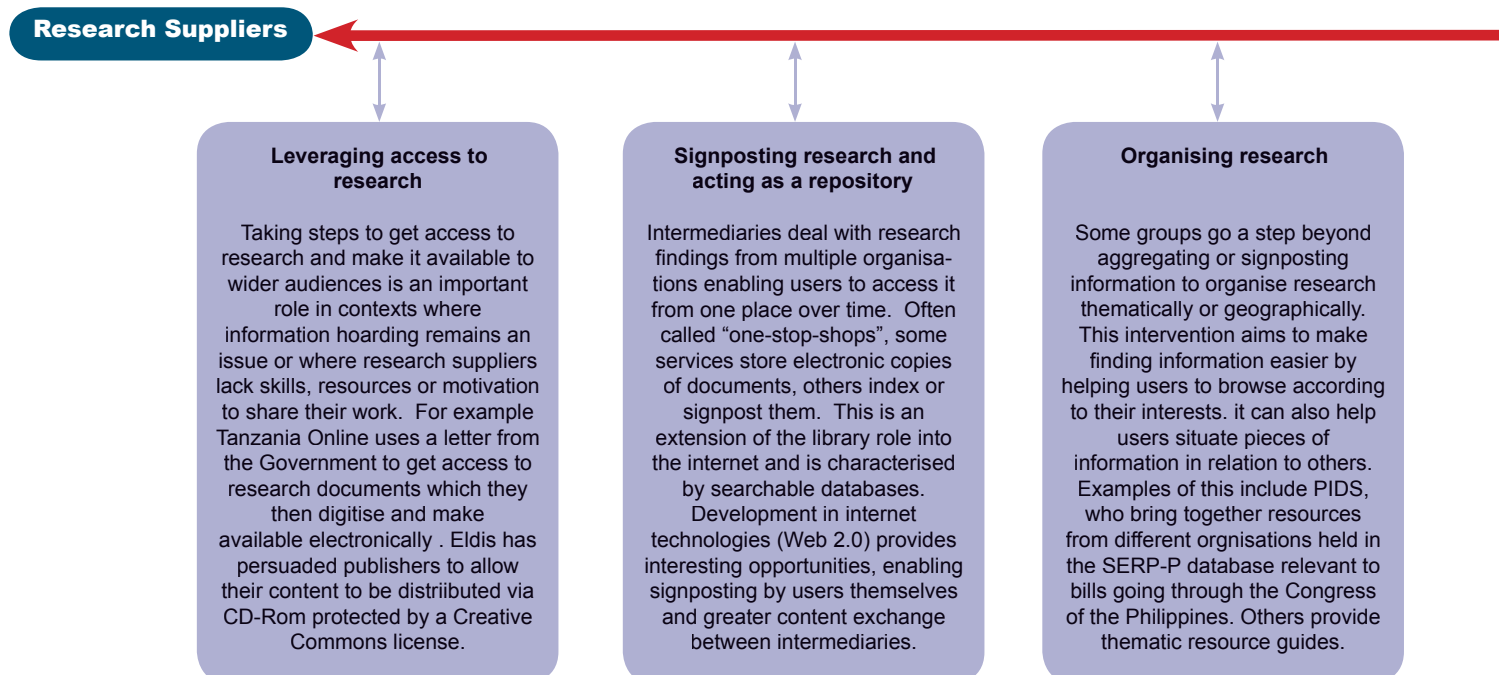


Fig 1: This diagram presents the value added by intermediaries at different stages in the information supply chain – it is a linear

In a perfect world decision makers at all levels would be perfectly informed about the range of information available to them, would know what to access and how to do it and would actively seek it out when making decisions.

is by no means universal nor is it necessarily effective – not least because it prioritises certain perspectives over others.

We exist because we perceive there are imperfections in the connections between suppliers and producers of information and knowledge and consumers of that information and knowledge. These imperfections play out differently for different actors in different contexts, and in many cases the actors involved may not themselves perceive there to be imperfections.

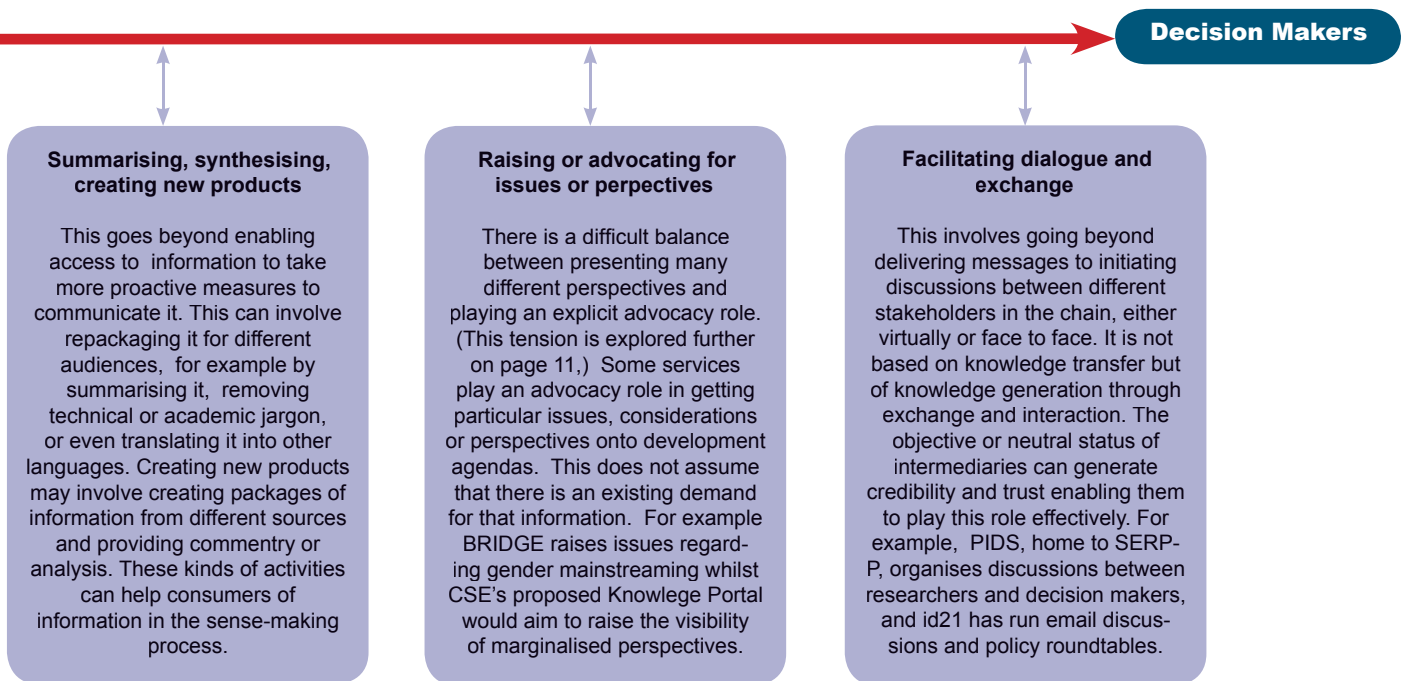
Challenges to “perfect information” flows identified by participants included:

- information overload
- lack of easily available information on particular topics or from certain sources
- information hoarding
- poor communication by suppliers
- lack of diverse perspectives/dominance of particular voices
- lack of culture of information use
- barriers to access due to time/skills/technical/financial considerations

Thus in a context of information asymmetry, information intermediaries can add value to the information supply chain by playing a variety of roles – some closer to the research suppliers, others closer to the end consumer. Whatever role intermediaries play it is clear that they need to be engaging with multiple actors in the supply chain, from communications staff in research institutes to technical staff in parliaments, lobbyists, pressure groups and the media. The understanding of the information supply chain that underpins the service will inform which of those groups the service targets and the nature of the activities it undertakes.

Key stages in the information supply chain

Interventions at this end are informed by communications and advocacy principles



or representation although in reality there are lots of interactions and loops between different actors in the chain



During the workshop we used mapping and discussion to explore similarities and differences in our work

Based on our understandings, what do we do to intervene in these processes?

From our discussions about what we do and why, it is clear that although the overall purpose of our work is very similar, a number of factors lead to substantial differences in the design of services and the nature of our work, interpretation of the nature and location of need, political issues and the particular mission of the organisation.

There were considerable variations in service characteristics in the following areas:

Ultimate target audiences: for some services we are trying to help people making macro decisions in policy circles, for others it is people in communities. However, all of us have a range of users who aren't necessarily ultimate beneficiaries and, in some cases, ultimate beneficiaries are reached through other actors.

Scope and focus: services differ in their focus – some concentrate on content from a particular country or region, others are international. Some concentrate on a particular topic (e.g. HIV and education, environmental issues, gender) whilst others are broader based.

Editorial criteria: some services only deal with high quality peer-reviewed research, others feature a range of different kinds of information, for some quality is most important, for others diversity or breadth of content is more important.

Communication channels: all services use online tools to a certain extent but for some this is a lesser part of what they do and prioritise print or other electronic channels such as email or CD Roms or convening face to face meetings.

Type of intervention: as illustrated in the diagram on the previous page, some services play a signposting role, pointing to where research can be found. These roles focus on improving access, others go further to organise or disseminate that information, whilst others repackage or even generate new information, so getting involved in helping users make sense of information.



We spent time individually reflecting on what we had learnt and what this meant for our work

Some intermediaries are like supermarkets, they have a lot of choice on offer...

Fruit for thought: exploring the role of knowledge and information intermediaries through the metaphor of fruit

During the workshop we found an interesting metaphor for exploring our work by thinking about the supply chain for fruit. Clearly fruit is not a perfect comparator for research findings – not least because a piece of fruit can only be consumed once – however there were enough points of comparison to stimulate some interesting conversations.

Why fruit?

Like fruit, there is an assumption that consumption of research is a positive thing that will have good outcomes for development, just as fruit has positive health outcomes for the person who consumes it.

In some cases consumers will go directly to producers to access fruit – they will go to producers they know (the tree in their garden, the farm down the road). The consumer wants fruit and knows where to get it. However it may mean that their choice is likely to be somewhat limited.

In reality there are often multiple actors and processes between producers of fruit and consumers. the fruit supply chain is generally made up of:

- actors (producer, picker, packer, driver, middle men, shop worker)
- transport methods (trucks, boats)
- distribution channels (wholesaler, supermarkets)

Where a potential consumer, in our case a decision maker, does not have a latent demand for fruit or does not visit the farm on which it is grown to get that fruit then it is likely that a range of actors will be involved if he or she is to consume fruit.

So what has it got to do with knowledge and information intermediaries?

Some intermediaries are like supermarkets, they have a lot of choice on offer (in online databases) but rely on people visiting them to identify and purchase which fruit they want.

Some intermediaries are more like fruit processors; they source the fruit then process it into fruit salads, juices or even pies. These intermediaries are likely to create different products for different appetites.

Some intermediaries go even further in an attempt to persuade people to eat fruit; they package it and hand deliver it at the right time, providing juice when a consumer is thirsty, or even a wine reception. At the extreme end of the metaphor some intermediaries some may even launch a public campaign extolling the value of eating fruit.

Clearly there are multiple routes to informing policy and practice, just as there are multiple ways in which people can consume fruit. Decisions need to be made about where to prioritise our efforts and where our particular added value will have the highest impact.

Beyond the workshop – questions for the future

How could a deeper theoretical understanding of the underpinnings of our work help us?

Can mapping our services help us to develop a more sophisticated understanding of how they relate to each other and provide a greater basis for collaboration?

It was useful listening to and talking with other colleagues about their roles and work, being with people who do the same type of work and who understand the problems and challenges.

Participant evaluation

Identifying common challenges & strategies for addressing them

What challenges do we face that are particular to our group? How have we tried to overcome them?

Central to the workshop was identifying, and sharing strategies to address, common challenges that we face in our work. Some challenges are shared with other kinds of development programmes but play out differently for knowledge based development programmes, for example how to measure impact and ensure sustainable funding. Others are particular to the information and knowledge intermediary role. These challenges are shared by all individuals and organisations involved in playing a knowledge intermediary role.

The workshop was organised along principles of peer exchange and sharing and was flexible enough for us to identify and pursue our interests as they emerged – in this way we could identify what we could learn from each other and how to do it. There were many rich and informative discussions, the breadth and depth of which is not possible to capture here. Below are highlights. Whilst we did not find answers to a lot of the challenges raised, we were able to get ideas about how others have responded to inspire us in the future.

Challenge 1: Identifying content and leveraging access to it

Identifying content to feature in our services is a major challenge faced by all of members in the group – a challenge particular to intermediaries and unexpected for many of us. Unlike traditional research communicators, such as higher education and research institutions, we are not located at the source of the content and are trying to present a variety of research beyond institutional or individual levels. Unlike journals, featuring content in our services is not recognised as an institutionalised route to professional advancement for individual researchers, and unlike libraries we are not recognised as well established functions for public access to information. This means that the process of identifying and leveraging access to material is a constant feature of intermediary work – databases don't fill themselves!

One aspect of this challenge discussed at some length is the reluctance of some information

suppliers (generally research institutes, university or government departments) to allow access to their content. In some contexts research findings are physically locked up – people are reluctant to share because they fear plagiarism and competition or want potential consumers to go directly to them.

Content sourcing approaches include:

- TzOnline has a dedicated researcher to go out and physically collect documents from suppliers - "Sometimes we have to drive over 500km to get content".
- Bangladesh Online Research Network charges users to access papers using a pre-pay card, revenue generated is shared with the supplying organisation to motivate them to contribute
- SERP-P relies on participating organisations becoming members of the initiative which requires them to submit their content directly to the site



We shared common challenges and explored how to tackle them

Challenge 2: Setting and implementing editorial criteria

The role of intermediaries in making decisions about content is a powerful one. We are all making significant decisions about what to include and exclude, trying to ensure quality, relevance, diversity and topicality. A major concern for some was how to ensure “good” content, others were less concerned about quality but sought topicality or diversity. Finding the right balance is essential for the credibility of the service.

Services approach making decisions on content differently, depending on the nature of the content and the purpose of their service. Given the amount of content that we deal with (hundreds to tens of thousands of items p.a.) the need for credibility must be balanced with the resource implications of checking each item. Almost all have editorial criteria to guide their selection, but some have editorial boards that help vet content (BDRResearch, PAIKS, id21), whilst others rely on institutional members to submit content and do not interfere with what is submitted.

Challenge 3: Promoting access whilst upholding copyright

In our role as intermediaries, we are constantly collecting and reworking information over which others hold copyright. Signposting or linking to documents already available online is quite straightforward, however keeping copies of information in a repository or distributing them via CD-Rom is a more complex area. Terminology and laws in this area abound, international variation and overlapping legal regimes can complicate the situation and inhibit greater use of information. As an example of a response to this challenge, Eldis has been working with publishers and suppliers to negotiate permission to allow their material to be used in certain ways (particularly distributed via CDROM) using a Creative Commons licence.

Challenge 4: Balancing neutrality and advocacy

Being seen as a trusted and neutral source of information is a key ‘added value’ for the group. Presenting multiple perspectives is central to the role of intermediaries, avoiding an explicit advocacy role such as arguing for the use of a particular set of research findings. However some members of the group questioned how effectively intermediaries can realise their objectives in creating greater use of evidence without employing advocacy or lobbying tactics.

This is not an easy challenge to overcome, and there were different ideas and approaches amongst participants at the workshop. Some felt that our role is to connect to those who are doing advocacy, others felt that they are creating spaces for target audiences to engage with research (either online or face to face). Many of us felt that we are advocates for using a particular type of information (notably evidence based research) whilst some of us championed thematic issues in development such as gender.



We found talking while walking a good way of sharing ideas and learning about each others' work

Challenge 5: Understanding and responding to changing external environments

The group welcomed the chance to think about the external environment with others. As players in the information chain our ability to function effectively is subject to changes in the contexts in which we operate. During the workshop we pooled ideas from our different perspectives about changes in the external environment which were helping or making it more difficult for us to realise our objectives. Some of the trends identified include: the ways in which decisions are made and who is influential in different processes; research trends, both in production and appetites; technological developments including greater access to the internet and its evolution; changes in access to information such as open archive and e-governance movements.

Challenge 6: Ensuring sustainability

This is a challenge for any ongoing development intervention. The group interpreted sustainability not just in terms of financial sustainability but also in terms of:

- *Governance management and structure:* recruiting and maintaining staff was a particular challenge for Southern organisations
- *Flexibility and innovation:* we discussed balancing the need to innovate with innovation for its own sake, governance and structure can be a barrier or an enabler for innovation, whilst important technological innovation is not the key factor
- *Competition and niche:* again the group stressed the importance of understanding position and niche in relation to others in a changing field

Challenge 7: Demonstrating impact

Like all knowledge based interventions, there are particular challenges in demonstrating what impact our work has had, being so bound up with complex processes of information, knowledge, learning and action. The group was disappointed to find that there are no “magic bullets” for demonstrating impact. However amongst the group there were different approaches to capturing evidence about aspects of our work which were useful to share. For example, SERP-P have a framework for evaluating behaviour change and capacity of suppliers, many use stakeholder meetings to acquire feedback whilst D-Net and IDS have used interviews with non-users to cross reference with evidence generated from users of services. A key challenge identified was how to assess the ultimate outcomes of our work when there are so many different actors involved in the information supply chain.

Beyond the workshop – questions for the future

Is it possible to identify good practice in our “sector”? If so how can we generate or capture it?

Would joining forces help to create a more enabling environment for our work and help overcome some of these challenges?

How can we continue to share ideas and support each other – is the benefit worth the effort?

How can we share our experience with newcomers to this field of practice?

Going forward together: the I-K-Mediary Working Group

Sometimes we are struggling to find our identity and sometimes we align ourselves with things that are a bit like what we do like research communication and knowledge management that are bigger than us. There was great validation and sense of identity from being a group, focused on the core of what we do. As an output of the week and as a concept this is really valuable.

Participant reflection

This report has attempted to capture the sense of excitement, synergy and discovery that we felt during the workshop. Although the workshop was a week long, at the end the participants felt that their journey together had only just begun – we raised many more questions than answers. Our questions for the future centre on furthering understanding of our collective functions and value, and how we can use this to develop our capacities and those of others. We have many ideas on how this can be achieved, including documenting good practice, collaborating to overcome challenges and generating new ways of achieving our goals.

To take all of this forward and continue our learning and collaboration, we formed a working group, initially named the “I-K-Mediary Working Group”. This will aim to take forward the momentum of the workshop and the sense of shared identity that emerged from it, and will be the platform for beginning to explore the questions raised during this report.

The group is an experiment – in some ways it is a platform to build on. It should enable future activities and could be a point around which other intermediaries – and new intermediaries - can come together.

Why form a group?

For all of the participants, this was the first time that their work as intermediaries had been the central focus of an event. Whilst some participants had been to events attended by other intermediaries, the focus of the event had been the sector (whether health, agriculture etc) or discipline/profession (librarian, ICT, research).

The fact that none of the participants had met before, in spite of their common purpose and function, suggests that there is not currently a platform for learning and collaboration that spans the different sectors and contexts in which intermediaries are playing this role.

The I-K-Mediary Working Group will not seek to replace existing related networks that different participants are already in but will be a space for reflecting on and sharing the different insights they provide.



The I-K-Mediary Working Group going forward together!

There should be more scope for co-operation than competition.

Lynne Sergeant

What will it do? Purpose of the group

Formed out of the recognition that there was much to gain from collaborating as peers, we hope that the group will enable the following five streams of work:

- **Increasing understanding about intermediaries** – The group will continue to define the knowledge and information intermediary sector, the theoretical underpinnings of intermediary work and map our own services within it. The idea is for the group to take more time to think and reflect and to look critically at our role and how we can collectively make a difference.
- **Sharing and learning** – The group will continue to share and learn about practical and strategic aspects of our work by debating, posing questions, and sharing resources on key functions such as M&E. The collective experience of the group could also be used to support newcomers to this kind of knowledge and information intermediary work.
- **Lobbying and championing** – The idea was raised of joining forces to lobby on common concerns to influence key stakeholders such as suppliers of research and donors for knowledge work. This may see the group playing a leadership, campaigning or championing role in opening up access to knowledge.
- **Developing good practice** – The group will identify and promote good practice among intermediaries by collaboratively creating manuals and how to guides – ideas for subjects include copyright and intellectual property rights.
- **Functional collaboration** – Having recognised that we are collaborators not competitors, the group will enable tactical collaboration between its members. This might be collaboration on exchanging content, signposting and promoting each others services, and undertaking joint projects.

Next steps for the group – building on connections and making new ones

The I-K-Mediary Working Group is currently made up of participants in the workshop and is supported by an online community space. IDS was asked to take on a facilitation role in the first instance, which will be subject to review by the group.

The group has identified some joint projects – such as creating a framework for mapping our work and having an online discussion on copyright to generate some best practice ideas. Some members of the group plan to collaborate on some theoretical work around intermediaries.

The group plans to meet again in early 2008 to assess how valuable membership has been so far to its members, and to work together to develop some good practice guidelines around a functional area such as monitoring and evaluation of intermediary work.

We will welcome participation in this meeting from other like-minded organisations. We hope that this will serve to build on and forge new connections between knowledge and information intermediaries.



Together we generated a name and a work plan for the I-K-Mediary Working group

Looking to the future

Are you a knowledge or information intermediary? Do you know any? Are you thinking of becoming one? Do you have a practical or theoretical interest in intermediaries? If the answer to any of these is yes we would like to hear from you.

Want to join the group?

Did you at any point in reading this report think “yes, that’s me...” or “I’ve been thinking about that too..”? If you share the issues raised in this report and you are a knowledge or information intermediary (or think you might be), you may wish to become part of the group. The next face to face meeting of the I-K-Mediary Working Group will be early in 2008 and we would welcome participation from like-minded organisations. Over the coming months the group will be working out the details for this meeting and raising funds for it.

Want to contribute to the debate?

We hope that this report will serve to spark debate around the role of information and knowledge intermediaries in development contexts. This report is a starting point: members of the group will be developing the ideas within it individually and together.

If you would like to respond to, build on or challenge any of the ideas or concepts in this report please get in contact.

If you are organising a conference or event and would like one of the members of the group to share some of the ideas in this report, present a paper or take part in a panel, please let us know.

And finally...

To find out more about the knowledge and information intermediaries who took part in the workshop and the wide range of services and activities they undertake, please see further details listed at the back of this report.

Contact us

You can contact the I-K-Mediary Working Group through Catherine Fisher at the Institute of Development Studies at c.fisher@ids.ac.uk or on +44 (0)1273 877881

About participants

Service	National Education Quality Improvement Initiative (NEQI) - still under development	SocioEconomic Research Portal for the Philippines (SERP-P)	GDNet	Bangladesh Online Research Network	Euforic website	CSE Knowledge Portal – still under development
URL	Not yet launched	http://serp-p.pids.gov.ph/publications/	www.gdnet.org	http://www.bdresearch.org	http://www.euforic.org/	Not yet launched CSE website http://www.cseindia.org/
Host organisation/ location	Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa	Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS)	Global Development Network, Egypt office	D.Net - Development Research Network, Bangladesh	Euforic – Europe's Forum on International Co-operation, Netherlands	Centre for Science and Environment, India
Purpose	To improve the quality of education through evidence-informed policy dialogue	To promote research utilisation & advocate research results to policy-makers/researchers	To promote development research and local knowledge for local policymakers through networking and gathering	To make resources available on Bangladesh & South Asia to target groups for quality interventions and better decision making	To inform development policy & practice; and mobilise & enhance access to development information for the right people	To disseminate environmental news, analysis & research to a wide variety of stakeholders
Scope	National	National	International/Regional	National	Regional	Regional
Content coverage & other features	NEQI is a new education research reporting service, which will feature research on education and quality in South Africa (and internationally)	SERP-P is an online electronic database aimed at legislators and features research in major socio-economic and policymaking fields and statistics information related to Bills passing through the Philippine Congress. It has over 4,000 studies on its database	GDNet features social and economic research from the South. It has over 11,000 documents, mainly in English, and offers e-mail newsletters, journals, funding alerts, toolkits, profiles of researchers, events and jobs; and also undertakes capacity building initiatives	Bangladesh Online Research Network features over 1,200 papers from Bangladesh & SAARC on 84 thematic areas related to development in English & Bengali. It also offers an online discussion forum, e-mail alerts and offline options e.g. CD-Roms	Euforic provides information, knowledge and communication on international cooperation and development e.g. trade, governance, and aid in a number of European languages. It has indexed 7-8,000 documents and offers news services, RSS index feeds, video content and blogs	CSE portal has not yet been launched but they have over 100,000 offline abstracts and documents to put online relating to the environment and sustainable development in South Asia
Represented at workshop by	Anil Kanjee, Director, National Education Quality Improvement Initiative	Jennifer P.T. Liguton, Director for Research Information	Nadia Fawzy, Regional Co-ordinator (no longer with GDNet)	Ananya Raiman, Executive Director	Peter Ballantyne, Director	Shams Kazi, Website Co-ordinator

Poverty Alleviation Information and Knowledge System (PAIKS)	Source	UNESCO HIV/AIDS Clearing House	Tanzania Online	Eldis	id21	BRIDGE
http://www.aicad-paiks.org/	http://www.ask-source.info/	http://hivaidsclearinghouse.unesco.org/	http://www.tzon-line.or.tz/	www.eldis.org	www.id21.org	http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/
African Institute for Capacity Development (AICAD) Kenya	Healthlink Worldwide, Handicap International and the Centre for International Health, U.K	International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), France	Economic Social Research Foundation (ESRF), Tanzania	Institute of Development Studies, U.K	Institute of Development Studies, U.K	Institute of Development Studies, U.K
To empower communities to reduce poverty, change people's livelihoods and contribute to economic development through disseminating poverty-related information	To provide an international info support centre around management, practice and communication of health and disability in developing countries	To collect, synthesise & disseminate information/knowledge on HIV/AIDS & education to donors and key partners; and find/disseminate good practices to manage the impact of HIV/AIDS on education systems	To provide better access to information on development in Tanzania to reduce poverty	To filter, structure, present, share & support relevant/evidence-based information on development for policymakers	To communicate development research to policymakers (Government) and decision makers (NGO, UN, bilateral) to help alleviate poverty	To provide diverse & relevant gender resources for policymakers & practitioners
Regional	International	International	National	International	International	International
PAIKS features information on poverty related issues e.g. economics, indigenous knowledge and technologies and community information. The database is relatively new and contains 750 entries. It offers research findings, information about professional/experts & institutions and provides information on training themes	Source is a database containing global information on health, disability and child rights, and information & knowledge management. It contains over 27,000 documents and offers e-mail updates, news-feeds and material on CD-ROMs, toolkits, recommended source lists, newsletters and journals	The HIV/AIDS clearing house contains information on HIV/AIDS on education, planning and policy from around the world (mainly Africa). It has over 2,000 full text documents. It offers an electronic newsletter and related products, CD-ROMs and hard copies of documents	TzOnline hosts development information on Tanzania related to e.g. poverty issues, growth and mining. It contains over 6,000 documents in its database. It provides email bulletins.	Eldis covers development information on a range of themes e.g. conflict, aid and climate change. It contains over 35,000 records. It offers e-mail newsletters, news-feeds, CD-Roms, resource guides, country pages, community pages (mainly in English) and highlights news, events and jobs	id21 covers development information across all disciplines, but focuses on UK funded research or work involving UK researchers. It has over 3,700 summaries on its database and offers 10 insights paper newsletters a year, e-mail alerts and some French & Spanish translations	BRIDGE covers global gender related material in relation to e.g. governance and conflict. It offers thematic cutting edge packs, in brief newsletters, tools, reports and good practice cases. It also hosts Siyanda - a searchable database of gender information and a space where gender practitioners can share ideas, experiences and resources
Bernard Bazirake Bamuhiiga, Information, Network and Documentation Director	Deepthi Wickremasinghe, Co-ordinator, Source	Lynne Sergeant, Clearinghouse Manager	Abdallah Kashindye Hassan, Senior Information Officer/Coordinator	Geoff Barnard, Head of Information Department Plus various other members of staff from across the different IDS projects		

Workshop participants



Top left to right: Abdallah Hassan (TzOnline), Jennifer P.T. Liguton (PIDS), Peter Ballantyne (Euforic), Freida M'Cormack (IDS), Bernard Bazirake Bamuhiiga (AICAD), Cheryl Brown (IDS), Lynne Sergeant (IIEP), Georgina Aboud (IDS), Shams Kazi (CSE India), Geoff Barnard (IDS), Nadia Fawzy (GDNet).

Bottom left to right: Catherine Fisher (IDS), Deepthi Wickremasinghe (Healthlink Worldwide), Yaso Kunaratnam (IDS), Anil Kanjee (HSRC), Ananya Raiman (DNet)

List of participants

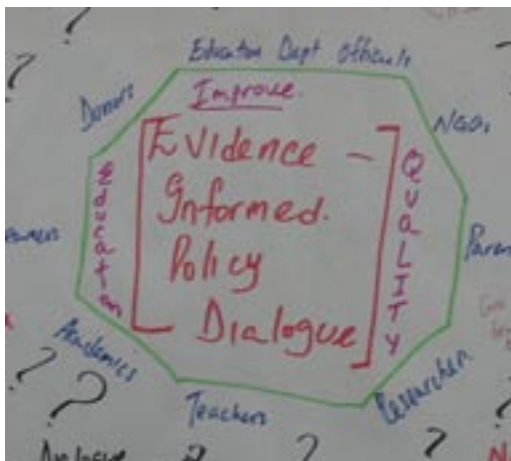
Name	Organisation	Country
Peter Ballantyne	Europe's Forum on International Co-operation (Euforic)	Netherlands
Bernard Bazirake Bamuhiiga	African Institute for Capacity Development (AICAD)	Kenya
Geoff Barnard	Institute of Development Studies (IDS)	UK
Nadia Fawzy	GNet	Egypt
Abdallah Hassan	Economic Social Research Foundation (ESRF)	Tanzania
Anil Kanjee	Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)	South Africa
Shams Kazi	Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)	India
Jennifer Liguton	Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS)	Philippines
Ananya Raiman	Development Research Network (DNet)	Bangladesh
Lynne Sergeant	International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)	France
Deepthi Wickremasinghe	HealthLink Worldwide	UK

Facilitators and Rapporteurs (IDS)

Cheryl Brown	Strategic Learning Initiative (SLI)	UK
Anna Downie	Strategic Learning Initiative (SLI)	UK
Catherine Fisher	Strategic Learning Initiative (SLI)	UK
Catherine Gould	Strategic Learning Initiative (SLI)	UK
Gabrielle Hurst	Strategic Learning Initiative (SLI)	UK
Yaso Kunaratnam	Strategic Learning Initiative (SLI)	UK
Isabel Vogel	Strategic Learning Initiative (SLI)	UK

Other IDS participants

Julie Brittain	British Library for Development Studies (BLDS)	UK
Stephanie Watson	British Library for Development Studies (BLDS)	UK
Adrian Bannister	BRIDGE	UK
Elaine Mercer	BRIDGE	UK
Hazel Reeves	BRIDGE	UK
Liz Allcock	Eldis	UK
Peter Ferguson	Eldis	UK
Alan Stanley	Eldis	UK
Kate Brincklow	Health & Development Information Team (HDI)	UK
Rebecca Wolfe	Health & Development Information Team (HDI)	UK
Duncan Edwards	Information Systems Unit (ISU)	UK
Louise Daniel	id21	UK
Shanti Mahendra	id21	UK
Freida M'Cormack	id21	UK
Alistair Scott	id21	UK
Tim Woods	id21	UK



About the convenors of the workshop

About IDS

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) is a leading global organisation for research, teaching and communications on international development. Its purpose is to understand and explain the world and try to change it - to influence as well as inform.

About the IDS Information Department

The IDS Information Department supports a large and diverse international community through its family of Knowledge Services. While each service has a distinct approach, audience and focus, they share one goal: to help development research and information reach those who can use it to reduce poverty and injustice. These services include: Eldis, an online gateway to development research; ID21, a research reporting service; the British Library for Development Studies; and BRIDGE, a gender and development research and information service. For links to all of our services see www.ids.ac.uk/info.

This workshop was convened by the Strategic Learning Initiative team within the Information Department as part of the capacity development strand of the DFID funded "Mobilising Knowledge for Development" programme.

Acknowledgements

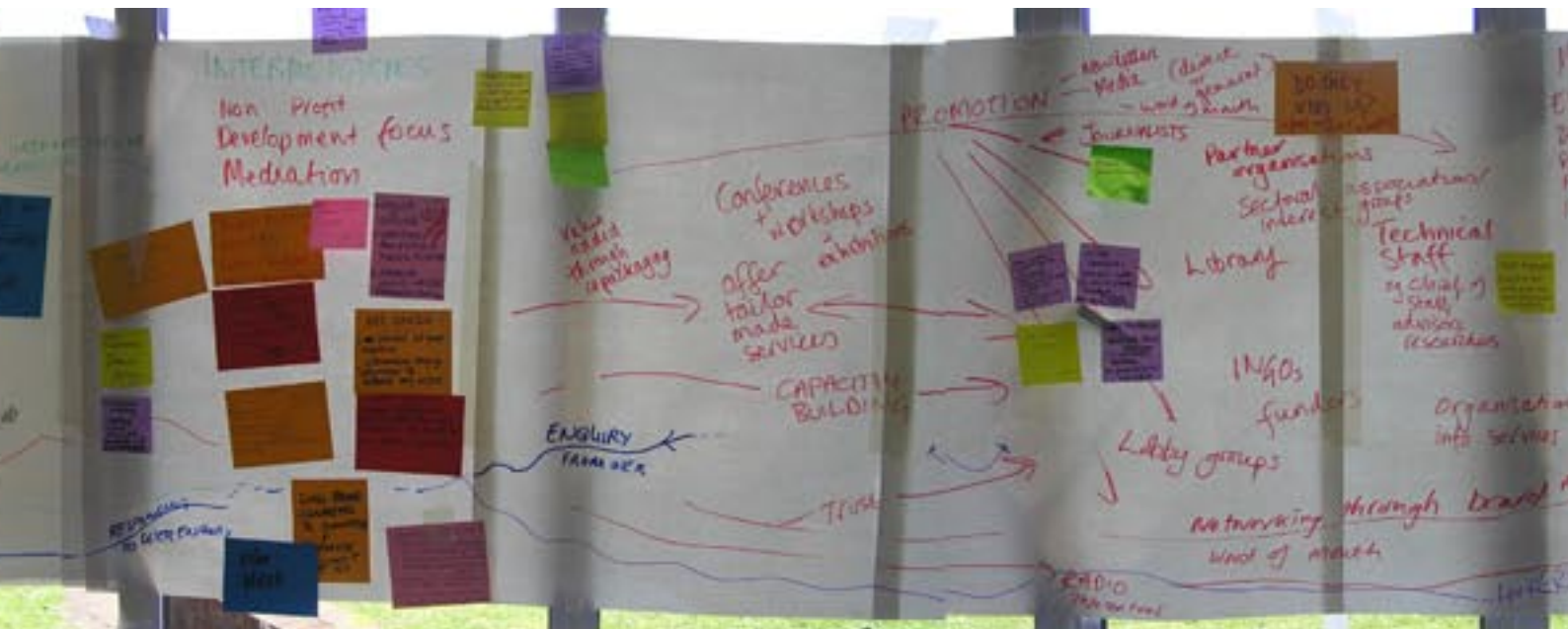
We acknowledge the support of DFID Central Research Department in enabling the workshop and this report to happen. The editors would like to thank participants in the workshop for their enthusiasm, openness and assistance in producing the report and IDS colleagues for inspiration, feedback and practical help, particularly Gary Edwards and Jo Glyde from the Communications Unit.

This report can be downloaded as a pdf from:
www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/outputs/between_ourselves.pdf



In May 2007, the Institute of Development Studies convened a meeting entitled “Intermediary workshop: summarisers, signposters and synthesisers”. It brought together information and knowledge intermediaries working to increase access to research in development contexts by providing portals, gateways and reporting services. Participants from 10 countries joined staff from the IDS Information Department for lively debate and exchange of ideas.

This report is intended for those who have an interest in the role of information and communication – particularly of research – in generating better development outcomes. It shares the thinking and learning about intermediaries and our role in development that emerged from the workshop and continues to evolve. Finally it looks to the future and outlines ideas for future work to strengthen the work of intermediaries.



Institute of Development Studies
at the University of Sussex
Brighton
East Sussex
BN1 9RE UK

Tel: + 44 (0) 1273 606261
Fax: + 44 (0) 1273 62120
E-mail: sli@ids.ac.uk
www.ids.ac.uk/info