

**Growth  
Research  
Programme**

# Structural transformation and growth in Africa

Impact case study

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# Introduction

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Since 2012, the DFID-ESRC<sup>1</sup> Growth Research Programme (DEGRP) has provided funding and support to high-quality social science research on inclusive economic growth in low-income countries (LICs). The case studies in this series probe the impact of several DEGRP research projects, delving deeper than previous reports to analyse how and to what extent their findings have been taken up in policy and practice.

Many factors influence research uptake, including political circumstances, stakeholder characteristics, demand for certain types of knowledge, and how knowledge is communicated and shared (Jones et al., 2013). This study, of DEGRP research project 'Structural change and productivity growth in Africa', explores these various conditions, but pays particular attention to the deliberate and strategic actions of the project team. In doing so, it serves not only as an investigation of impact for the project's stakeholders and donors; by demonstrating how certain factors, strategies, and activities can improve research impact, it may also provide lessons for researchers and academics interested in enhancing the impact of their own work. Researchers may rarely, if ever, be able to provoke sweeping changes, but they can engage in measured strategies that will increase the chance their findings will be taken up in policy and practice.

This case study examines how a DEGRP project has contributed to helping unpack the African growth story, particularly in terms of the links between growth and structural change. The last five years have seen a growing movement around defining structural transformation and industrialisation, and what it means for the continent. This includes a shift in the narrative at a global level, by major multilateral and bilateral agencies, inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but also a growing recognition by national governments.

The case study opens by defining structural transformation and giving an overview of the project. This is followed by a methodology section summarising the case study's approach and analytical frameworks. The next section explores some of the project's impacts and how they came about. The strategies section looks across these narratives to identify and interpret some of the most important factors and engagement and communication strategies that led to impact. The case study concludes with a reflection on the project's key lessons.

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<sup>1</sup> DFID is the United Kingdom's Department for International Development and ESRC is the Economic and Social Research Council.

# Project overview

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*'The countries that manage to pull out of poverty and get richer are those that are able to diversify away from agriculture and other traditional products. As labour and other resources move from agriculture into modern economic activities, overall productivity rises and incomes expand. The speed with which this structural transformation takes place is the key factor that differentiates successful countries from unsuccessful ones.'*  
(Worrall et al., 2015)

Economic diversification has historically boosted the economies of many countries around the globe, creating jobs and ultimately leading to poverty reduction (McMillan et al., 2017). The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century saw a rise in economic growth in Africa and an accompanying interest in identifying the path of that growth. The term 'structural transformation' is closely linked to this.

McMillan et al. (2017) define structural change or transformation as 'moving labour and other resources from lower to higher productivity sectors'. This is where an economy transitions from natural resource-based activities such as the agricultural sector, towards high productivity sectors such as manufacturing and services. This includes increasing the efficiency of existing firms via 'the adoption of new technologies and management practices that can increase the efficiency of production' (McMillan et al., 2017) or reallocating resources away from the least productive to more productive firms (Worrall et al., 2015). This economic diversification is the first stage in a country achieving economic transformation. The speed with which this takes place is critical to a strong economy.

While it is evident that structural change and economic growth are inherently interlinked, there has historically been little research on the drivers of structural transformation. This is particularly the case for Africa.

The DEGRP project 'Structural change and productivity growth in Africa' sought to understand the causes – and consequences – of structural transformation across sub-Saharan Africa. The project's research examined the past, present and future of economic growth across the continent. Its main focus was to develop a harmonised long-term African sector database for 11 African countries including Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya, Mauritius, Ethiopia and Ghana. This was consolidated and became the 10-Sector database hosted by the Groningen Growth and Development Center (Timmer et al., 2015). The database compiled data and collected time series information on value added in international prices and employment for ten broad economic sectors from 1960-2010, including agriculture, manufacturing, construction and trade services.

The project team was led by Professor Margaret McMillan, based at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), in collaboration with internationally renowned experts Professor Dani Rodrik, from Harvard University; Professor Marcel Timmer, from University of Groningen; Dr Yaw Ansu, from the African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET); and Professor Jonathan Temple, from University of Bristol.

The project came about due to a number of factors. First, an Inter-American Development Bank report on Latin America showed very interesting patterns of structural transformation across the continent. This sparked an interest for McMillan and Rodrik in what structural transformation looked like in other parts of the globe, and above all in Africa. The pair were subsequently asked to write a paper for the

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International Labour Organisation/World Trade Organisation on sustainable globalisation, which emerged as a working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) in 2011. With the help of IFPRI's African offices, the paper gathered data on a group of African countries from 1995-2005. It also drew on the existing 10-Sector database hosted by the University of Groningen Growth and Development Center, but at this point, the database did not contain African data, only data for Latin America and Asia. In fact, there was clearly a substantial lack of data and research on the determinants of structural transformation across the continent. McMillan and Rodrik therefore decided to go ahead and plug the data gap. They applied for and won DEGRP funding for a new research project, which subsequently ran from 2012 to 2014.

The data included employment information for both rural and urban populations, and youth and older populations, as well as information on gender. Analysis of this data helped the team identify countries in which structural change had been growth-enhancing, as well as countries in which transformation has reduced economic growth. The project also produced an accompanying framework through its working papers to support the data and put recent African growth in historical and international perspective (Timmer et al., 2014).

The project's research quantified the role of structural change and other drivers of growth, and analysed the sources and sustainability of Africa's recent growth to chart possible sources of future growth. The key message to emerge is that post-2000, structural change in Africa has been growth-enhancing. McMillan describes it as 'Africa's quiet revolution'. What is particularly important about this finding is that it contradicts the findings discussed in McMillan and Rodrik's original 2011 paper, where they stated that this was not the case. The data therefore led to a re-evaluation of this finding, because it could drill down further into the growth story.

The research found that commodity prices, increased education and improvements in governance have all played a critical role in facilitating structural change. It also found that there has been a substantial decline in the share of the labour force engaged in agriculture. 'Moving out of agriculture has been associated with increased living standards for millions of people' (McMillan, 2014). At the same time, there has been an increase in value added per worker in agriculture in several African countries. The data also highlighted the disadvantages that women and youth face, particularly in terms of employment, which has significant policy implications. Finally, it emphasised the potential for large economic gains in sub-Saharan Africa by reallocating activities from low- to high-productivity sectors and particularly via the manufacturing and services sectors.

The research and the data only begins to tell this growth story for some African countries, but propose some preliminary solutions to policy and economic challenges and set the scene for further analysis and more in-depth research.

# Approach and methodology

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DEGRP research projects aim to influence policy and practice in various ways. They may produce new knowledge, shift debates, influence policies, transform behaviours on the ground, or bring about new networks. To increase the likelihood of these various kinds of impact, the DEGRP Evidence and Policy Group offers [guidelines](#) for researchers to help them plan or analyse their engagement and communication strategies. The guidelines include frameworks for categorising different types of impact and communication strategies. Described below, these frameworks provide the starting point for this case study.

## IMPACT TYPES

DEGRP defines four different types of impact that DEGRP-funded projects could achieve. While some forms of impact may fit more easily into these categories than others, this framework provides researchers with a vocabulary to recognise and describe some of the many ways in which their research may influence the societies and governments with which they are working.

**Conceptual impacts** are changes made to knowledge, understandings, and attitudes. This type of influence can be noticed in changing perceptions or by the internalisation of new ideas among societies and stakeholders.

More concrete influence would fall under the category of **instrumental impacts**, which comprise changes in either policy or practice. This type of impact is generally embodied in something tangible such as a policy document.

**Capacity building impacts** refers to changes in the ability of researchers, partners, or end-users to carry out similar work in the future. Research that influences capabilities and competencies can be said to have capacity building impact.

Finally, **connectivity impacts** refers to a project's ability to strengthen or create networks of people and organisations that can both understand and utilise the research. These networks and connections may be formal or informal.

Projects may help bring about one or more of these impacts in any combination, either through direct, observable influence or by making a plausible contribution to them. Moreover, since shifts in policy and practice often take place over long stretches of time, the impact of a single piece of research may be felt long after its findings have been communicated.

This case study, produced three years after the completion of the DEGRP project, aims to capture some of the project's more immediate impacts. In fact, the project team and the contacts they forged are continuing to work on other projects in the same field – efforts that can be seen as diffuse and ongoing effects of the original project. A broader investigation that seeks to identify and assess these long-term impacts remains a topic for future study.

### COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

What can researchers do to increase the impact of their research? DEGRP's Evidence and Policy Group (EPG) suggests that in order for research to have an impact, simply publishing findings is not enough: researchers must employ a range of deliberate communication and engagement strategies to help ensure their findings are transformed into effective policies and practices. There are many approaches and techniques researchers can use, from disseminating research results to the right audiences, to co-producing policy recommendations with influential partners.

The EPG recommends the KStar (K\*) framework as a tool to help researchers visualise and classify some of the ways in which their research can be disseminated, shared, exchanged, or mobilised (Shaxson and Bielak et al., 2012). As with the impact types already mentioned, it provides a common vocabulary for discussing and examining activities that are described in many different ways across sectors (ibid).

The framework defines four interconnected knowledge-sharing strategies or 'K\* activities' that researchers can employ:

**Information intermediation** includes those activities that help enable access to information. Examples include creating, collecting, and communicating ideas and information and putting them into the public domain.

**Knowledge translation** entails rewording or reworking information so that a range of different audiences can make sense of it.

**Knowledge brokering**, the quintessential 'relational' activity, includes strategies like networking, match-making and collaborating that help connect individuals or organisations and encourage relationship-building.

**Innovation brokering** comprises activities that aim to improve knowledge-sharing at a systems level, such as putting structures in place to empower other knowledge practitioners in the future.

Ideally, these activities should be planned as early as possible in the project's lifespan, for maximum impact.

The framework does not stipulate how researchers should implement these activities: projects need to work out for themselves which knowledge strategies they should implement and how realistically they can achieve them as part of their engagement and communications strategy. They may also need to consider if there are others who could help with these functions within or beyond their networks. Nor does it capture all potential strategies that project teams can employ. Nonetheless, it provides a standard language to explore and describe some common approaches beyond publication of findings.

### CASE SELECTION

As with the other DEGRP-funded projects in this series, this case study on structural change in Africa constitutes what Seawright and Gerring (2008) call an 'influential case': one that provides abundant opportunities for learning. First, the case emerged as a successful example of contribution to research impact, with the project team reporting various examples of change. Thus, analysing this project enables us to draw lessons for subsequent DEGRP projects. In addition to the project's reported success, several members of the team pointed to common approaches, strategies, and factors that fuelled this success. This case therefore provides rich ground for exploring the role played by engagement strategies, as well as other important factors, on research impact.



### DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS

A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used to collect and analyse data for this case study. The first step was desk research to read and analyse relevant project documents and papers, including: research team reports; the original impact plan; a mid-project progress report; key publications such as *What is driving the 'African Growth Miracle'?* (McMillan and Harttgen, 2014a) and *Globalisation, Structural Change and Productivity Growth, with an update on Africa* (McMillan et al., 2014); a citation analysis; and extracts from the DEGRP Impact Log, an internal folder that recorded some examples of engagement and impact from email.

Next, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the project's four key research stakeholders: project lead Professor Margaret McMillan, Professor of Economics at Tufts University and Senior Research Fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI); Professor Dani Rodrik, Ford Foundation Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government and President-Elect of the International Economic Association; Dr Yaw Ansu, Chief Economist at the African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET) in Ghana; and Professor Marcel Timmer, Professor of Economic Growth and Development at the University of Groningen.

The interviews ranged from 20 minutes to one hour in length and consisted of open-ended questions about the observable impacts of the research and how they were achieved. The insights and findings from the interviews were analysed and cross-referenced with the desk research. Dirk Willem te Velde, DEGRP's Research and Theme Lead (Innovation, China-Africa and Finance) was also interviewed.

While additional interviews with other project team members or key stakeholders would have enhanced the scope of this research, time and budget restraints meant keeping the total number of these interviews to a minimum and prioritising individuals who were intimately involved in the project. This case study therefore represents an **internal perspective on impact**; its findings have not been validated by individuals external to the project. Further research may entail broadening and expanding this analysis to take into account alternative voices and viewpoints, including from those individuals and organisations on the receiving end of the project's communication strategies. Furthermore, as this case study was conducted three years after the project ended, it must be understood as a preliminary look at the beginning of the impact story.



# Contributions to change

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According to the original project plan ‘the impact of this project is likely to be indirect... we are not making precise policy recommendations but we are demonstrating the importance of expanding modern, labour-intensive sectors in African economies that wish to achieve rapid broad-based growth’. This section examines how a big conceptual shift interacts with policy. Since project completion in 2014, there appear to have been a number of changes linked to the research. This section categorises those changes into the different types of impact set out earlier, but it should be noted that they are all closely interlinked.

## CONCEPTUAL IMPACT

### Plugging the data gap

*‘We talk about transformation, but at the end of the day, you need to be able to measure it and to track it. So the work in assembling that data... is fundamental.’ - Yaw Ansu*

This project was the first to produce data on sectoral productivity performance in sub-Saharan Africa. According to Ansu, a key impact of the project has been to contribute new data and a framework for other researchers and decision-makers to advance the understanding of economic transformation and related policy issues.

At a basic level, analytics show that the 10-Sector database hosted by the University of Groningen has been accessed regularly. They also show a marked increase in page views on the website following the launch of the African section in 2014 (7,665 views in 2011 to 12,444 views by 2015). Furthermore, McMillan and Rodrik’s original 2011 project paper *Globalisation, Structural Change and Productivity Growth* has had almost 500 citations since publication. This is an impressive number of citations and in a recent DEGRP citation analysis proved to be the most cited paper among a selection of Call 1 projects.<sup>2</sup> Of course, these statistics alone do not tell us who used the data and most importantly how, but they do show access and interest.

### Influencing the narrative

*‘Everybody started talking about structural change.’ - Margaret McMillan*

Prior to the project, the narrative on economic growth in Africa was certainly becoming clearer, but it was during the project’s lifetime and in recent years that the use of the terms economic transformation and structural transformation became more widely used.

Rodrik claims that the project was part of a new conversation that was emerging in academic and policy circles. And according to McMillan, people weren’t talking about structural transformation in quite the same way as before the project. That is not to say that the project alone achieved this, but it appears that the research had a key role to play in unpacking the African growth story and building a more detailed picture of how structural change has influenced this. The project research and data have attracted the

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<sup>2</sup> The analysis looked at 25 publications across the three key themes of DEGRP Research Call 1.

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attention of a range of stakeholders including policy-makers, donors, multilateral organisations, the private sector and academia.

There has been growing interest from a range of stakeholders in examining the dimensions of structural transformation, and finding ways to achieve economic transformation as a key component of development and poverty reduction. Since the project's inception several prominent international and African institutions and donors have started talking more about structural transformation and how it can influence economies. This is demonstrated by the publication of a series of flagship reports by these organisations, particularly in 2013 and 2014 (during the project's lifespan), all of which outline clear visions for how to bring about economic transformation. These papers have been critical in building debate and momentum on key national, regional and even global platforms, and have particularly emphasised the need for economies to diversify to achieve this transformation.

Two key reports by the African Development Bank (AfDB) both cite several of the DEGRP's main project publications and incorporate data from the 10-Sector database. The first report sets out AfDB's strategy for 2013-2022 and the need for greater inclusive and green growth (AfDB, 2013a). The second report, the *African Economic Outlook 2013*, emphasises the importance of diversification through a strong natural resources sector, to create higher productivity and ultimately more jobs (AfDB, 2013b). The United National Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) also produced a major roadmap *Economic Transformation for Africa's Development* in 2013, which stresses the role of manufacturing and urbanisation to create change. According to the interviews, it is likely that all these papers were partly influenced by the original project paper by McMillan and Rodrik and the subsequent DEGRP project work.

ACET's 2014 *African Transformation Report: Growth with Depth* report (and accompanying transformation index) is another example of a flagship publication launched during the DEGRP project's lifetime and is closely linked to the research. According to Ansu, the DEGRP research 'dovetailed with the report'. The transformation report advocates for 'growth with depth' and looks at transformation at a more local and sector-specific level. This is defined as a country's need to 'diversify their production, make their exports competitive, increase the productivity of farms, firms and government offices, and upgrade the technology they use throughout the economy – all to improve human well-being.' (ACET, 2014)

Although the DEGRP project was completed in 2014, the team are still regularly contacted by multilateral agencies, donors, African organisations and even the media who want use the research to support their publications. High profile reports on structural transformation which incorporate the project research include *The Africa Competitiveness Report 2015*, a publication jointly produced by the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, the World Bank, AfDB and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for the World Economic Forum in Cape Town, and UNIDO's *Industrial Development Report 2016*. The original project research and subsequent work of the team was also profiled in *The Economist* in August 2017, in an article on structural change titled 'Why Africa's development model puzzles economists'. These examples demonstrate the enduring impact of the project and its continued relevance long after the project end.

The project team have also been asked to give talks on the research to institutions and donors such as UNIDO, UNCTAD, ILO, the World Bank and the IMF. The research has also been showcased at events hosted by the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) in Finland (2013), the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (2013 and 2014) and the 33rd General Conference of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth (IARIW) in the Netherlands (2014).

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The narrative on economic transformation has become much louder and clearer. Further analysis would be needed to assess the extent of the project's contribution to this conceptual shift, but at the very least, the project has provided the data and analysis to support some critical reports and new thought leadership to ensure that they are informed by evidence.

### Encouraging new research

*'It provided a platform for people in Africa to take this data as a starting point for their particular study and the questions they were interested in.'* - Marcel Timmer

According to Timmer, the project data has provided a 'launch pad' for others to do further research and to answer other research questions on the various dimensions of structural transformation, for example, how to enhance productivity, particularly in manufacturing and in the private sector.

A number of new projects have come about as a direct result of the project. The subsequent research has been about building a more local-level picture and drilling down into specific sectors and areas of productivity. UNECA have developed a set of case studies on structural transformation in 21 African countries using and expanding on the project data. McMillan was asked to input on the development and the terms of reference for this.

The International Growth Centre (IGC) did a scoping study in Tanzania to figure out what they could do at a firm-level to complement the types of work the project highlights. This resulted in a paper that used the DEGRP data, but also combined it with data from small firms. It showed that labour productivity growth in Tanzania was faster than ever before and that much of the growth in employment has been in small firms.

According to Dirk Willem te Velde, the DFID-funded Supporting Economic Transformation (SET) project, led by ODI, partly came about as a direct result of the DEGRP project. SET has carried out further research on promoting economic transformation in developing countries, as well as providing practical policy support to country governments and partners. This project has included further country-level work, for example manufacturing in Tanzania. A SET project paper (McMillan et al., 2017) subsequently reached a large audience of policy-makers.

Finally, the World Bank commissioned a book *Structural Change, Fundamentals and Growth: A Framework and Country Studies* (2017) to expand research to additional countries not originally in the project, in South East Asia, the Middle East and North Africa and to dig deeper into the reasons behind economic transformation. Since launching in May 2017, the book has already been downloaded over 1,000 times via the World Bank and IFPRI websites. According to McMillan, it is a critical piece of follow-on work from the original DEGRP project.

## INSTRUMENTAL IMPACT

*'African governments are increasingly seeing the importance of (structural change) and are emphasising it more in their policies.'* - Margaret McMillan

This case study has already highlighted the fact that this project did not set out to generate policy recommendations, and that its pathway to impact was not direct. At the same time, according to McMillan, when thinking of impact, influencing national governments and policy in Africa would always be something that they would want to see happen. The project did generate policy-relevant insights, for example, it demonstrated the importance of the manufacturing sector as a leader in ensuring structural

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transformation. There is also a better understanding of the sources of productivity growth within sectors overall.

A number of African countries, namely Rwanda, Ethiopia and Tanzania, have emphasised structural transformation in their national plans and policy documents. Previously, the Ethiopian government was talking more about accelerated growth in agriculture, but has since shifted emphasis and now stresses the importance of structural change in its latest five-year development plan.

It would be too much to say that this was solely or even predominantly because of the DEGRP project. However, McMillan does believe that presentations on the project research at forums such as the Ethiopian Economics Association and further work with IFPRI could have contributed to government thinking. For example, IFPRI published a policy brief in 2012 which was influenced by the DEGRP project and co-authored by Timmer, McMillan and Rodrik (Timmer et al., 2012). UNECA have also published some research on structural change which has been influenced by the project research and may have been influential in policy circles in the country (UNECA, 2013).

Another important shift at a global level was the inclusion of sub-goal 8.1 in the SDGs, which aims to 'achieve transformation of economies towards higher levels of productivity through diversification with a focus on high value-added sectors' (OWG, 2014). It is clearly not possible to say that the project contributed to this major global change, but the project was operating in this context.

The only link to the SDGs that could be found is that the African Union wrote the following quote in a statement on the post-2015 agenda: 'We, the heads of state and government of the African Union ... reiterate the importance of prioritizing structural transformation for inclusive and people centred development in Africa' (African Union, 2014). According to McMillan the project research did help to influence the statement to some degree, even if only indirectly. The origins of this quote are further assessed in the next section.

## CONNECTIVITY IMPACT AND PARTNERSHIPS

As part of its impact objectives, the DEGRP project prioritised working in partnerships and sought to strengthen networks of people and organisations to both understand and utilise the research. The relationship with ACET was critical to this, particularly for reaching African networks, businesses and policy-makers. McMillan believes that existing networks were further strengthened by the project, particularly informal networks of researchers and statistical organisations interested in measuring productivity in Africa. The project has also led to enhanced relationships with the private sector. For example, McMillan has contacted firms in both Tanzania and Ethiopia and this has also led to subsequent work to research ways to increase productivity growth. One such project is led by a team in Tanzania who run a company to allow lending to small- and medium-sized businesses in the country.

### 'The Quest for Economic Transformation' Conference

The 2013 conference, 'The Quest for Economic Transformation' organised by IFPRI and ACET and funded by DEGRP, is a prime example of an event that encompassed this drive to build partnerships and networks to communicate the research and to engage with new audiences. The conference in Nairobi, Kenya, brought together a range of African and international actors to share perspectives on economic transformation. The 250 participants included influential academics, policy-makers and donors, as well as private businessmen and women, representatives from banking and industry, and representatives from farming groups and workers' unions. Organisations represented included the Central Bank of Kenya, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Pan African Agribusiness and Agroindustry

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Consortium (Pan AAC), the Brookings Institute, Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), and the World Bank.

Key members of the project team presented the dataset as well as new project research. Attendance led to several follow-up conversations and further research and inputs. For example, Ousmane Badiane, the Director for Africa in IFPRI attended the conference and was impressed by the quality of the work and presentations. He subsequently had further discussions with the project team and used his strong ties with the African Union to contribute to their thinking on structural transformation, as discussed above.

### CAPACITY BUILDING IMPACT

*'A key part of the project has been about making people aware of the issues, explaining the methodology and the importance of the underlying data.'* - Margaret McMillan

While capacity building was not a major part of the project's impact objectives, it developed as a strategy in response to demand from other researchers. Both Timmer and McMillan stress that the research provided a clear and concise framework for others to use to clarify what structural transformation looks like in the relevant African countries. But as well as providing the data and the framework, the project team have also taught a range of researchers about the methodology for quantifying structural change, including many researchers from developing countries. The follow-on book *Structural Change, Fundamentals and Growth: A Framework and Country Studies* (2017) specifically incorporates that teaching, and as previously mentioned has had a lot of interest. The team continue to get queries about the data and methodology in McMillan and Rodrik (2011) on a regular basis.

According to McMillan, the project has also contributed to influencing African policy-makers to think more about the importance of collecting this type of data. For example, UNECA have since collaborated more with statistical agencies to develop further national accounts and employment data and are doing more capacity development, 'jump started by this project' (McMillan) to emphasise why having this type of data is critical. Unfortunately, not enough time has elapsed since the end of the project to be able to do an in-depth examination of how it has influenced National Statistical Agencies in Africa.



# Strategies for impact

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## A HOLISTIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

*'As technical as the work might get, nothing beats having an eight-page introduction, which explains, in a very straight forward way, the policy relevance of what you are doing, exactly what you are doing and the results.'* - Dani Rodrik

The project produced a range of widely-read and cited publications, from papers in the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER)'s working paper series, to articles in the *Financial Times*. The team also published journal articles in *World Development*, *World Bank Economic Review* and the *Journal of African Economics*.

But as McMillan commented, simply putting publications out there would not be enough to influence a range of stakeholders, especially non-academic stakeholders. Conscious of the need to move beyond information intermediation to knowledge translation and knowledge brokering, the team had a strategy mapped out at the inception of the research, with 11% of the budget allocated to engagement and communications. They were also opportunistic. This resulted in a diverse range of activities and outputs including seminars, presentations, workshops, a project conference, publications, op-eds and blogs, and the use of digital channels such as social media, and key organisational websites (e.g. websites belonging to IFPRI, DEGRP, ACET, ODI and the University of Groningen) to share their findings.

The project team had various opinions on what were the most important and influential engagement and communications strategies to get their research to a range of stakeholders, both in general and for this specific project. McMillan feels that in person, 'on the ground' communications and engagement is particularly important for reaching a range of audiences, but also for touching people's lives, and resonating with policy-makers. In many African countries, internet is still intermittent and therefore in-person engagement is critical, particularly for policy circles. The project conference hosted by IFPRI, DEGRP and ACET in Nairobi is a strong example of this. According to McMillan, 'the private sector and government were equally important (as audiences) and that was reflected in the way we ran our conferences'.

Rodrik believes that to influence decision-makers you need to focus energies on channels such as the media and social media: 'Policy-makers operate in the same ecosystem as the rest of us and are influenced by the media and social media'. Articles, op-eds and blogs are read by policy-makers and get onto their desks much more easily than other publications. The project wrote op-eds for publications such as the *Financial Times*' 'This is Africa' blog and *Project Syndicate*. One of the 'This is Africa' articles was subsequently republished in local newspapers across several African countries, including Ethiopia and Rwanda. It is also cited in high profile publications such as UNECA and OECD's (2015) *Mutual Review of Development Effectiveness in Africa: Promise & Performance 2015*.

This project shows how a mix of formal and informal engagement and communication activities and outputs is critical to any impact strategy. The example of Badiane interacting with the African Union highlights this. If you look at the communication and engagements activities they included informal and formal discussions, but also the project team producing some policy briefs which summarised key messages and findings from the project research.

### THE VALUE OF A HYBRID RESEARCH AND POLICY TEAM

The makeup and role of the project team meant that not only was there a strong academic background, but also the collaboration of a local in-country think tank, ACET, to connect more easily to policy circles and the private sector, and to broaden opportunities for policy engagement. This matchmaking and linking function was particularly important for connectivity and partnership-type impacts, but also for achieving conceptual impacts and bringing conversations to wider policy audiences.

Timmer also describes Rodrik as an example of a researcher who can bridge the divide between policy and academic circles. Individuals with this ability to reach policy circles are sometimes referred to as 'policy entrepreneurs' (see Young and Mendizabal, 2009). Rodrik highlights the fact that much of his work involves going to see policy-makers and finding out their policy questions. Interestingly, this project did not start like this, but it was clear that the research had implications for policy.

Obviously, it is not always possible to have this mix in a research team, but ensuring that researchers collaborate with others who can do this work is critical to policy engagement. Researchers may not always be the best messengers for their research and may need to look to other organisations or knowledge brokers to fulfil this function (Shaxson, 2006).

### CREDIBILITY AND PROFILE

Finally, projects should not underestimate the importance of profile, but above all credibility. These are not necessarily communications and engagement strategies, but they are crucial for influencing audiences and achieving impact. Without credibility, academics will not get much traction. It helps not only to disseminate research findings, but also to encourage more engagement and uptake from audiences. According to McMillan, credibility (in whatever form this takes), makes sharing messages through a range of channels much easier to achieve, with audiences more receptive and willing to engage with the knowledge. Therefore, having credibility within a research team is important for achieving any type of impact.

All the key organisations involved in this project, from ACET to the University of Groningen, had strong reputations and therefore credibility. In addition, the project team all had very well-established profiles and credibility as academics. Rodrik, in particular, is an internationally renowned economist. His profile, credibility, networks (including digital and social media networks) were all essential in helping to share the project research and connect to influential platforms. For example, Rodrik's Twitter account has 82.4K followers and a tweet can easily lead to media quotes that increase the coverage of research findings. Further analysis of social media engagement would be needed to consolidate this, however it is likely that many doors opened to the team as a result of Rodrik's inclusion in the project.



# Conclusion

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The last five years has seen the development of a major movement on structural transformation and industrialisation on the African continent, something that did not exist in quite the same way before that period. During that time, key African and global institutions, donors, and decision-makers have all set out a much clearer vision of the value and role of economic transformation in reducing poverty and improving lives.

There is no doubt that the DEGRP project on structural change was a key part of this narrative, even if it was only a small piece of the puzzle. This was a project that was in the right place at the right time to provide metrics and evidence of how structural transformation looks in 11 African countries. The project therefore plugged an important data gap and has allowed other researchers and decision-makers to use the data to help unpick and advance the Africa growth story.

Undoubtedly the strongest impact that can be determined from the case study is its conceptual contribution. The project may well have contributed to instrumental impacts, but it is too early to understand exactly what governments are doing differently. Of course, what governments ultimately do will be influenced by a range of factors, but there has been a clear conceptual shift at a global, regional and national level. This has been accompanied by a great deal of interest in the type of data that has been collected by the project and its framework for analysis.

While it is mentioned in the original planning document, the project did not actively seek to build the capacity of local researchers or partners to do further research, nor did it intend to work with local statistical agencies or government bodies. This type of impact has happened since the project ended, the team continuing to get regular queries regarding the research as well as additional work. Instead, it appears that the project team focused more closely on prioritising partnerships and consolidating and building new networks, particularly thanks to ACET's role in the project.

The engagement and communications were both planned and opportunistic – two key components to any strategy. This, combined with a high-profile team with strong credibility and reputations, helped to propel the data beyond the usual academic circles.

As with the other case studies in this series, it is clear that achieving impact is not a straightforward, linear process, and certainly one small project is unlikely to create major change by itself. However, this DEGRP project has had some very impressive impact. It has provided new and robust data, and a strong analytical framework to help people think differently about an important economic and development issue. And interest and analysis of structural change does not look like it is going anywhere any time soon.

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