



Danish  
Development  
Research  
Network  
*Bringing together  
knowledge and  
development*

# PRIORITIES FOR DDRN COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

## Revised: August 2010

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After nearly 1½ year of implementation of the DDRN communications strategy, and with still a little less than a year left of the current grant, time has come to review the progress made so far. DDRN launched its communications strategy to be implemented by the secretariat in March 2009. The strategy formulated the following vision:

*"DDRN is a key entry point to the Danish resource base and a main channel for communication between researchers and practitioners in Denmark and across North/South"*

To reach this vision, communications activities of the network have focused on four objectives:

- 1) To ensure **well functioning communication among members**;
- 2) To ensure that all interested development researchers and practitioners know **how to use DDRN**;
- 3) To be a source of **good quality and timely research-based information** of relevance to researchers and practitioners;
- 4) To have well functioning communication with **key national and international stakeholders** promoting research/practice and N/S research cooperation.

The aim of this note is to provide guidance and focus to communications activities of DDRN during the remaining time of the current grant in order to facilitate the achievement of the vision.

### **Background:**

Many of the current services and activities of the network are highly appreciated by members in the South and in Denmark. A continuously growing number of members are joining the network, particularly from the South. DDRN currently comprises over 2000 members, which is an increase of more than 140% since the network was established in 2007. Furthermore, DDRN has gained increasing recognition among international organisations, also for its communications work. DDRN has now strong links to a series of prominent knowledge intermediaries in Europe, especially in the UK where the leading organisations in this field are based, and in the South.

DDRN is giving priority to a series of key functions that aim at promoting research uptake. Most activities are carried out in cooperation with partners in Denmark, other European countries or countries in the South. Some are joint activities; others are led by DDRN, drawing upon resources from other organisations and networks. Common to all is the strategic approach of including partners from a rich network inside and outside Denmark. Examples of these activities include workshops in Denmark and in the South to assist members and other stakeholders in working strategically with research communication, and promotion of multi-stakeholder platforms where researchers and practitioners can engage in discussions and develop new knowledge.

### **Achievements of communication objectives:**

While carrying out communication activities to reach the four objectives formulated in the strategy, most time has so far been dedicated to objective 3 (providing good quality and timely research-based information). Website and newsletters are well received by members, but procedures for dissemination of information not openly available on the Internet need to be developed. Good results have also been achieved on objective 4 (relations to international stakeholders), while fewer relations were established to institutions in Denmark. This was partly due to changes currently occurring in the organisation of Danish universities concerning development research. Focusing on these objectives was necessary to promote DDRN as a respected source of knowledge and thus a forum in which researchers and practitioners are motivated to engage.

Achieving well functioning communication among members (objective 1) has so far primarily focused more on personal communication than web-based communication. Working groups and task forces have been successful in carrying out activities that involve several stakeholder categories of the network, primarily in Denmark, but more needs to be done to promote on-line interaction. This would allow for a higher degree of involvement of South members. Another successful activity contributing to this objective is a series of workshops on research communication to build the capacity of members and cooperating partners to communicate research to stakeholders and in N/S research cooperation. The secretariat has organised several workshops and supported network members in organising one workshop on this subject. Having positioned itself as a competent organisation within this field, DDRN was also used by the Ministry of Science and Technology of Vietnam to organise a study tour to Denmark to learn about science communication.

Recent surveys reveal that some of the products and services provided by DDRN are not commonly known among members, indicating that more has to be done to ensure that all interested stakeholders know how to use DDRN (objective 2)<sup>1</sup>. This would imply stronger branding of DDRN products and services and raising awareness about the importance and modalities of various functions of the network.

### **Activities to prioritise:**

DDRN needs now to gather experiences and document results to 1) demonstrate the achievements and relevance of DDRN, and 2) gather lessons on well functioning approaches and tools. DDRN's unique contributions to promoting knowledge-based development practice have to be made explicit, which involves focusing on core themes and approaches not prioritised by others to avoid overlap.

A stronger positioning of DDRN also requires detailed understanding and knowledge of the member base, as do more targeted communication outputs. Future activities thus have to be based on monitoring through statistics and surveys to a higher degree than has been done before. A core value of DDRN consists in the fact that besides including representatives from academia in Denmark, it also includes a large number of Danish practitioners as well as researchers and practitioners in developing countries and in other countries in the North. These member sections should be prioritised in monitoring activities.

To reach the communication objectives and take advantage of the added value provided through the composition and approaches of the network, DDRN will focus its future communication activities on the following activities:

#### **1) To ensure well functioning communication among members:**

- Establish member-to-member platform

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<sup>1</sup> During March-August 2010 the secretariat has carried out two surveys among consultants and researchers based in Denmark. For example, both surveys show that only to half of the members who responded are aware of the DDRN research overviews.

- Promote updating and use of member profiles (focusing particularly on improving the visibility of DK member-base)
- Make members aware of good tools and approaches for sharing knowledge, both online and through seminars

2) To ensure that all interested development researchers and practitioners know **how to use DDRN**:

- Develop editorial policy and guidelines on use of website and newsletter
- Update information about secretariat staff on the website focusing on activities rather than background
- Launch new section on the website and newsletters with headlines about upcoming activities involving the secretariat and working groups/task forces in which DDRN members are engaged
- Launch "DDRN in Focus – **how you can ...**" series of guidelines to enhance use of services provided by DDRN (e.g. finding experts, accessing thousands of links, etc).
- Launch "DDRN in Focus – **how we ...**" series of briefs to disseminate lessons learnt and promote competences of DDRN (e.g. facilitate cross-disciplinarity, organise research communication trainings, etc.)

3) To be a source of **good quality and timely research-based information** of relevance to researchers and practitioners:

- Identify kinds of information unique to DDRN, and focus on various ways of disseminating this
- Produce briefs and reviews to reflect competences of the Danish resource base and of selected countries in the South if relevant openings for these to be used occur
- Improve monitoring of use of website and newsletters

4) To have well functioning communication with **key national and international stakeholders** promoting research/practice and N/S research cooperation:

- Visits to Danish universities, focusing on coordination with international offices and communications offices to promote DK contributions to DDRN website (information on publications to supplement current contributions on events)
- Explore possibilities for cooperation with other intermediaries that promote/demonstrate added value of DDRN in international perspective

While activities listed above will have to be prioritised, a series of other ongoing activities will also be carried out, e.g. updating of website and newsletters. To allow for time to implement the new priorities, some of the outstanding improvements on the DDRN website<sup>2</sup> and one of the planned workshops on research communication will have to be postponed.

All in all, much has been done to brand DDRN as a source of good quality information and a forum for research-practice and North-South interaction. To achieve the vision formulated in the communications strategy, more attention will be focused on making the Danish base visible and promoting active interaction among members. The constant main goal to be kept as core guiding principle, also in case of further adjustments to reflect changes in the Danish development research arena, is promotion of research uptake through N/S research/practice information sharing and interaction – the core added value provided so far by DDRN.

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. introduction of tags on content and of RSS feeds