



**Danish  
Development  
Research  
Network**  
*Bringing together  
knowledge and  
development*

# INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT



Dissemination and generation of knowledge  
for development  
in a network of researchers and practitioners

Compiled by Marianne Forti, DDRN, October 2008



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## List of Acronyms

Danida	Danish International Development Assistance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
DDRN	Danish Development Research Network
GEPPA	Research Network for Governance, Economic Policy and Public Administration
NETARD	Network for Agricultural Research for Development
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
ReNED	Research Network for Environment and Development

## Executive summary

The present needs assessment is based on a questionnaire survey and interviews gathered in 2007 and involving nearly 100 members of DDRN and interested key stakeholders from Denmark and developing countries. The report provides insight into expectations and habits of members as regards DDRN in general, and communication in the network in particular.

This report shows a quite new and dynamic network composed of various stakeholders who primarily expect to use the network as a source of information to keep updated on relevant events, funding opportunities, and recent knowledge and trends in development research. Most interviewees are also very interested in establishing links to other stakeholders in the network. With some variations among stakeholder groups, there is strong interest in cross-disciplinary and cross-sectorial exchanges. A less frequent but relevant expectation among members is to use DDRN as a channel to influence policy.

The most important asset of DDRN is the network's varied and broad member base, which possesses valuable knowledge and can generate new knowledge both within their already existing relations and together with other network members. Another great potential of DDRN in this respect is to promote application of existing and new knowledge in development practice.

Achieving these potentials requires active involvement of both secretariat and members of DDRN. In order for members to engage most effectively, it is suggested that the secretariat provides clear and easily accessible guidelines. This seems necessary for a series of reasons, e.g. the fact that many informants expect a limited level of active involvement in the network, that members have different degrees of knowledge of DDRN and different habits and cultures regarding communication, and that many experience a general lack of time.

To meet the needs in the network, information and communication in DDRN should be organised around three main tasks:

- **Making already existing knowledge visible.** This includes dissemination activities, e.g. electronic news services, overviews, other channels for the South, seminars and conferences, mainly with focus on cross-sectorial and cross-disciplinary knowledge.
- **Facilitating establishment of contacts to generate new knowledge.** This includes promotion of N/N and N/S contacts among members as well as to other stakeholders through meetings and workshops, web-based member database, and other fora for interaction among members, e.g. posting of ideas for joint activities.
- **Disseminating information of relevance to generation of new knowledge.** This means helping members to access information about funding sources, donor policies and strategies etc. that might have influence on their future production of research and knowledge. Activities involve use of news services, meetings and lobbying with donors and research agencies.

When relevant, in all tasks special attention should be devoted to addressing the research-practice divide in order to enhance the opportunities of contributing to application of knowledge in development practice.

Finally, the report includes a series of recommendations on how to promote effective information flow and communication in the network. The recommendations are structured around the following themes: Definition of membership, information provided by the DDRN secretariat, communication among members, lobby and policy activities, and coordination with other organisations.

## 1. Introduction

In January 2007, the Danish Development Research Network (DDRN) was established as a result of the merger of the former three networks: Research Network for Governance, Economic Policy and Public Administration (GEPPA), Network for Agricultural Research for Development (NETARD), and Research Network for Environment and

Development (ReNED). DDRN's information services and communication tools were supposed to build on the experiences of the former networks.

In light of the broader coverage and constitution of DDRN, it was decided to supplement these experiences with a needs assessment including expectations concerning the future communication in the network in order to develop an efficient and effective communication system in the new network.

### **1.1. About DDRN**

DDRN is a network linking research-based knowledge and development within the sectors of agriculture, environment, and governance. The network includes members from the research community, the private sector, NGOs and development organisations. Of the nearly 1500<sup>1</sup> members of DDRN, a large number is from Denmark, while around 30% is from developing countries. This broad and varied member base requires focussed efforts regarding communication in order to achieve the objectives of the network, i.e.:

- Dissemination and exchange of information between development programmes and the research community within agriculture, environment and governance. DDRN provides, filters and amplifies information and research-based knowledge;
- Fostering an engaged and committed network of members. By providing the necessary information channels, mechanisms and tools, DDRN facilitates community building, interaction and collaboration among its members;
- Promotion of production and exchange of research-based knowledge relevant to development assistance within agriculture, environment and governance. DDRN facilitates thematic platforms, North-South partnerships and establishment of links at national, regional and international levels.

As the former networks, DDRN operates with several activities aimed at communicating knowledge and bringing together different stakeholders to exchange and generate knowledge, including: Website, newsletters, research overviews, briefs, meetings and workshops. These communication and information channels are of relevance to all objectives of the network.

### **1.2. Objectives of the assessment**

By carrying out the needs assessment and engaging in dialogue with network members with various backgrounds, the DDRN secretariat collected relevant information to:

- Further develop existing news services (website and newsletters) in order to meet the needs of network members;
- Develop tools and channels to promote communication among network members;
- Provide basis for developing a communication strategy for DDRN that is based on an understanding of the needs of different stakeholder groups and can be used to reach and include all stakeholders.

### **1.3. Methodology and structure of the report**

The needs assessment was carried out in two phases. Briefly after the establishment of DDRN, the secretariat had developed a temporary website and mailing system to replace the three websites of the former networks. These temporary services were to be replaced by improved news services based on information gathered through the assessment.

Phase 1: In April and May 2007, a **questionnaire survey** was carried out. The results of the questionnaire survey, together with the user survey of the former NETARD and ReNED websites, provided a basis to decide how to develop the new DDRN website that was launched in July 2007.

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<sup>1</sup> As of September 16, 2008, the list of registered DDRN members counts 1463 persons and 17 organisations. At the time of its establishment in 2007, DDRN counted about 1100 members.

Phase 2: In October 2007, **qualitative interviews** were carried out with network members representing the various stakeholders involved in the network. Information gathered through these interviews was to be used to adjust and improve the new DDRN website. The interviews also focussed on other aspects of communication within DDRN and thus provide information that relates to the other objectives of the assessment.

Details on the methodology used and analysis of the responses gathered through the questionnaire survey and the interviews are described in chapter 3 and 5 respectively. Although some of the issues described in the two phases are related, they are analysed separately because of the time span between the two phases of the assessment. Between phase 1 and 2 a new website and format of newsletters were launched, which means that members who filled in the questionnaire were referring to much simpler news services than those available at the time when the second phase was carried out.

To provide a background understanding of what the members refer to, chapter 2 and 4 briefly describe the main characteristics of the former news services and the DDRN news services as launched in July 2007. Furthermore, chapter 6 provides a brief update on recent improvements and use of the website and newsletters which are to be taken into consideration before making recommendations as for how to further develop communication channels in DDRN. Sub conclusions from the questionnaire survey are presented briefly in chapter 3, while a more detailed analysis providing suggestions for future communication in DDRN is presented in chapter 7 together with recommendations resulting from the interviews and the recent developments on the website and newsletters. This approach is chosen in order to focus on conclusions of relevance at the time of editing this report, i.e. October 2008.

## 2. Former news services

### 2.1. *The former networks*

Before the establishment of DDRN, the former networks NETARD, GEPPA and ReNED each had their website and newsletters which had been functioning for several years<sup>2</sup>. A user survey of the newsletters and websites of ReNED and NETARD was carried out in 2006<sup>3</sup>. At that time, the networks had started discussing a possible merger, which is reflected in some of the recommendations included in the survey report.

The conclusions of the survey stated that:

- A wide range of NETARD and ReNED members were reading the **monthly newsletters**. These proved to be indispensable tools in communicating the activities of the networks and getting in contact with the rather diverse group of members. Statements from the members moreover supported that the user friendliness and the publication frequency of the newsletters were satisfactory and suitable.
- A large majority of the members visited the **websites** of NETARD and ReNED regularly, mostly in relation to the released newsletters and information found in these. The interviewed members of ReNED positively emphasized ReNED's open member archive, which allowed the resource base to get insight into and obtain information about other members and their activities and project involvement.
- As for the **kind of information** contained, the user survey recommended that the website and newsletter must be continued as one combined source of information presenting links to the subject areas as well as to relevant institutions and persons from the resource base. It was suggested that the website and newsletters must continue to contain a general and technical development aid angle as well as news directly targeted towards the different fields of interest.
- Members of ReNED and NETARD found their way to **information about Danida** through other channels; probably directly through Danida's own homepage or through other entry gates.

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<sup>2</sup> NETARD was founded in 1998, while ReNED and GEPPA were established in 2003 and 2004 respectively.

<sup>3</sup> The report "User Survey of ReNED's & NETARD's Newsletters and Homepages" by Andreas Egelund Christensen, NETARD, and Mille Møllegaard, ReNED, July 2006, is available at [http://www.geogr.ku.dk/projects/rened/ReNED\\_NETARD\\_User\\_Survey\\_2006.pdf](http://www.geogr.ku.dk/projects/rened/ReNED_NETARD_User_Survey_2006.pdf). GEPPA also initiated a user survey of its news services, but the network was closed before the report was compiled.

- On basis of statements given by the members of the two networks, the survey concluded that introduction of **user fee** would result in a considerable decline in number of members and would hence not be advisable.

## 2.2. Temporary DDRN website

In April 2007, the DDRN secretariat set up a temporary website to keep the members updated on the development of the network and to disseminate news, focussing particularly on upcoming events. The website was very simple and intended as a temporary site to post the most important news while working to develop a new and more dynamic website that would have the same kind of features as the former websites and possibly include new ones.

This first website was composed of three thematic areas referring to the fields of the former networks (environment, agriculture, and governance), a category for general news, and one for activities organised by DDRN. It was set up as a simple FrontPage solution composed of five pages which were divided in several categories and could only be updated by the Communications Officer. Newsletters were sent as normal emails to the list of members which resulted from the merger of the lists of the former networks.

## 3. Questionnaire survey

### 3.1. Methodology

A questionnaire was developed in April 2007 to gather information on: Expectations as a member of DDRN; Impressions of the temporary website and newsletters; Interest in themes and type of information; Interest in communication with other members; Interest in contributing to communication within the network; Other sources of information. The questionnaire also included basic information about the respondents and is enclosed as Annex 1.

Respondents were selected randomly by picking every fifth member on the DDRN member list. At first, the questionnaire was sent by email to 222 members who had 10 days to respond. A reminder was issued after the deadline and sent to the 195 members who had not yet responded. Another two weeks later, a second selection of further 20% of the network members took place as only very few members had responded to the reminder. Due to time pressure the secretariat did not issue other reminders and the responses analysed in this report refer to a total of 62 questionnaires which had been collected within a month after sending the first call.

Being the actual rate of respondents quite small, the results of this survey can not be considered representative for all members. The results provide though relevant information that indicates some trends and tendencies and can be used as source of inspiration in the further development of communication channels in DDRN.

### 3.2. Respondents

Table 1 indicates the total number of respondents<sup>4</sup>:

<b>Table 1: Number of respondents</b>	
Total number of members	1112
Survey group: number of persons	444
Survey group: % of all members	39,9%
Respondents: number of persons	62
Respondents: % of survey group	13,9%
Respondents: % of all members	5,6%
Female respondents: number of persons	19
Female respondents: % of respondents	30,6%
Male respondents: number of persons	42
Male respondents: % of respondents	67,7%

Table 2 indicates the stakeholder categories of the respondents. As many members are engaged in several contexts, some respondents indicated that they belong to more than one category. When registering the data, the institutional

<sup>4</sup> The number refers to the registered members in April 2007, when the respondents were selected. One of the respondents did not fill in the information on gender. Therefore the total of female and male respondents amounts to 61 and not 62 persons.

affiliation that the respondents had indicated in the questionnaire was used to define which category was to be used as primary<sup>5</sup>.

<b>Table 2: Stakeholder categories of respondents</b>							
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Total 1. category</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>% of total respondents</b>	<b>Total 2. category</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>
Researcher - Denmark	26	5	21	41,9	1	1	
Researcher - Dev. country	3	1	2	4,8	2		2
Researcher - Other EU country	1		1	1,6			
Researcher - Other	1		1	1,6			
PhD. student - Denmark	3	1	2	4,8			
PhD. student - Dev. country	1		1	1,6			
Consultant - Denmark	6	1	5	9,7	6	3	3
Consultant - Dev. country	3	2	1	4,8	4	1	3
Consultant - Other EU country					1		1
Danida - Dev. country	4	2	2	6,5			
NGO - Denmark	2	2		3,2	3		3
NGO - Dev. country	2		1	3,2	1	1	
Master's student - Denmark	4	3	1	6,5			
Master's student - Dev. country	4	2	2	6,5			
Administrative officer - Denmark	1		1	1,6			
Other	1		1	1,6	1		1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>99,9</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>

The table shows that the respondents were primarily researchers from Denmark, mainly male researchers, followed by consultants, students, Danida staff, NGOs and others. As the members are not all registered with their institutional affiliation, it is not possible to define whether this corresponds to the precise division among stakeholders in the member base.

The member database shows that approximately 2/3 of the members are affiliated to a university or research institute, so the large representation of researchers is considered to depend on the fact that there are more members from this stakeholder group in the network. Also, it must be considered that it may be the researchers who feel most engagement in the network and therefore are most prone to answer. It is striking that among the respondents from developing countries, the most represented are Master's students.

As table 2 shows, most of the respondents involved in more stakeholder groups are consultants as secondary category. This applies particularly to researchers and consultants in Denmark who also work as consultants in developing countries. The fact that there is overlap among the categories is of relevance to communication in DDRN as the categories must not be viewed as exclusive of each other. Many members might in fact be interested in information of relevance to other stakeholder groups than their primary group.

### **3.3. Analysis of response from members**

#### **3.3.1. Expectations as a member of DDRN**

Table 3 shows the expectation of the respondents from their membership in DDRN. The respondents were asked to answer in prioritised order, using 1 as their first priority. When registering the data, responses from the members were given scores in order to identify the rate of interest in the various options<sup>6</sup>. It is important to note that a number of respondents did not fill in the survey correctly, which poses ulterior restrictions on the validity of the responses indicated in table 3<sup>7</sup>. To indicate the priorities expressed by the respondents more clearly, the amount of first priorities is indicated in the right column of table 3<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Three respondents indicated more than two stakeholder groups. In this cases, the choice of primary and secondary category were based on their institutional affiliation and supplementary information about them available on internet.

<sup>6</sup> Five scores were given to all first priorities, descending to one score for a fifth priority.

<sup>7</sup> Some respondents answered by marking with X and others selecting more options with the same degree of importance. The responses that were not filled in correctly are included in the data anyway as they provide useful information about the preferences of the respondents and included with the following adjustments: 1) Options marked with an X are given three scores which responds to medium interest. This applies to 19 questionnaires and might be due to a misleading formulation in the original

Table 3: Expectations of members from DDRN				
Option	Total sum scores	% of pref.	1. priority	% of 1. prior.
Contact <sup>9</sup>	10	1,6		
Contact North	13	2,1	1	2,4
Contact South	6	0,9		
Contact North <i>and</i> South	166	26,9	12	28,6
<b>TOTAL Contact</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>31,5</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>31</b>
Get information	240	38,8	22,5	53,6
Influence policy	137	22,2	5	11,9
Other	46	7,4	1,5	3,6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>618</b>	<b>99,9</b>	<b>42<sup>10</sup></b>	<b>100,1</b>

The table shows a clear priority for getting information from DDRN, then to get in contact with other researchers and practitioners, primarily from both North *and* South, followed by interest in influencing policy. First priorities are included to give a more nuanced insight into the importance given to the expectations and show even more clearly that receiving information from DDRN is the main expectation for more than half of the respondents. One third indicated getting in contact with other researchers and practitioners as their main expectation.

A division of the data by gender shows that female respondents tend to prioritise access to information higher than the average for all respondents, giving less priority to establishing contacts and slightly more than average on influencing policy. This is especially evident when looking at first priorities indicated by female respondents: Information: 54,5%; Contacts; 27,3%; Policy; 18,2%.

One fourth of the respondents indicated other expectations besides those listed in the categories above. Other expectations include: Channels to identify and contact resource persons, a general update on debates in the research milieu, links to international organisations, jobs, funding opportunities, and capacity building.

### 3.3.2. Temporary DDRN website and newsletter

The respondents were asked whether they had visited the temporary website of DDRN and read the newsletters, and if so, what they thought of these news services. The answers are showed in table 4. It must be noted that the percentage of respondents visiting the website and reading the newsletters cannot be considered representative for all network members as it is likely that the respondents using these services are more propense to participate in the survey. By the time the respondents filled in the questionnaires, one monthly newsletter and five news mails<sup>11</sup> had been sent to all network members and the temporary website had been online for about two months.

Table 4: Use of temporary website and newsletters		
Question	Number of respond.	% of tot. respond.
Visited website and/or read newsletter	50	80,6
Read the DDRN newsletters	44	71
Have not read the newsletters	15	24,2
Visited the temporary website of DDRN	38	61,3
Have not visited the website	24	38,7

Table 4 shows that 80% of the respondents had visited the website and/or read the newsletters, with more members reading the newsletters than visiting the website. Supplementary data indicate that only a few respondents had alone visited the website and that respondents who read the newsletters mostly had done so more than once. This

questionnaire, i.e. the one sent to thee first selection of respondents; 2) In cases where the same priority is used more than once they are given one or two scores less, according to the number of same priorities given (this applies to 5 questionnaires).

<sup>8</sup> In case of two first priorities given by the same respondent, their preference counts only for half priority.

<sup>9</sup> If selected, this category was supposed to be specified by indicating which of the three opportunities regarding contacts the respondents were interested in. A few participants have though not specified their selection.

<sup>10</sup> As many respondents used X in stead of indicating their choices in accordance to their order of preference, the total number of expressed first preferences is minor than the total of respondents.

<sup>11</sup> DDRN operates with **monthly newsletters** and **occasional news mails** that are sent to the members in case of important announcements that deserve special attention or would loose their relevance if sent with the forthcoming monthly newsletter.

confirms the conclusions of the ReNED and NETARD survey stating that newsletters (including news mails) are the most used information channel.

A more detailed look at the use of these two news services based on the various stakeholder categories of the respondents, shows though that researchers constitute the only group who read the newsletter more than they visited the website. Others stakeholder categories did both equally, while consultants in DK (6 respondents) were the only category who clearly visited the website more that reading the newsletters. This indicates a variation as regards the channels of information preferred by stakeholder groups of DDRN.

The respondents were also asked to comment whether there was something in the news services they particularly appreciated or missed. 19 respondents answered that there was something they liked. Their answers can be grouped in the following categories: Announcements of events (8), clarity and good navigability (7), and a few comments indicating a good content and that it could aid research in developing countries. Eight respondents indicated that there was something they did not like. Their comments referred to: Bad layout (5), lack of links to contacts and researchers (4), one comment that the website was confusing, and that the services had too few announcements of events.

### 3.3.3. Information to be provided by DDRN

To identify which kind of information members were interested in receiving from DDRN, 11 categories were proposed to informants, who were asked to select among these in order of priority. When analysing the data, the same procedure was used as for the data on expectations from DDRN.<sup>12</sup>

<b>Table 5: Information preferences</b>			
<b>Information category</b>	<b>Total sum scores</b>	<b>% of pref.</b>	<b>% pref DK researchers</b>
National and international conferences, seminars and workshops	486	14,1	12,8
New research papers on issues of current interest within the fields of DDRN	444	12,9	12,1
New policy documents within the fields of DDRN	416	12,1	11,4
Links to funding possibilities for research projects	410	11,9	13,7
Information on network activities carried out by DDRN members	383	11,5	12,7
Links to Danish, international and Southern research institutions	345	10	9,5
Information on other members (research/work areas, country, etc.)	320	9,3	9,5
Job openings and grants at research institutions	310	9	8,8
Calls for contributions to comments on research priorities and policy issues	288	8,4	8,8
Other	33	0,9	0,7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3435</b>	<b>100,1</b>	<b>100</b>

As Table 5 shows clearly, in general respondents are mostly interested in receiving information about seminars and conferences, followed by information about research papers, policy documents, links to funding sources, information about network activities carried out by members, and links to research institutions. The categories of least interest to the respondents are call for contributions to comment on strategies (policy and research), information on other members, and job openings.

The seemingly little interest in information on other members seems surprising, taken into consideration the large interest for the member database that seemed to result from the ReNED survey. Again, if looking at the data dividing the respondents by stakeholder groups, there are some variations. The responses from researchers in DK are included in table 5 to indicate the preferences of the group most represented among the respondents (26 out of 62). It is interesting to note that the information of main interest to this group regards funding opportunities, followed by information on events and network activities. Researchers in the South also indicate information on funding sources for research programmes as their main preference, while this information is the second priority for Master's students

<sup>12</sup> In analysing the data, first priorities were given 11 scores descending to 1 for the last in order of priority. Four members compiled the table using X in stead of number of priority and these responses were gives 6 scores indicating medium interest. Five respondents also indicated more than one first priority. In these cases, when summing the scores, these have been given a number less according to the number of first priorities indicated (e.g. 9 scores if 3 first priorities). As for the data in table 3, questionnaires that were not filled in correctly were used anyway as they still provide information on what respondents are interested in.

in the South after information on grants and job opportunities. The groups who prioritise information on events as first priority, as corresponds to the average presented in the table, are PhD students, Master's students in DK, and consultants in DK.

As the new website of DDRN was supposed to create a common platform that was not limited to replicating the former three websites by being divided in the themes of these websites, there was need to identify issues of general interest to members with various thematic interests. To go beyond the former agriculture / environment /governance divide, a list of themes was included in the questionnaire. Table 6 below indicates the number of respondents who marked the suggested themes as being of their interest. The themes are highest interest to respondents are listed below in order of preference<sup>13</sup>.

<b>Table 6: Themes of most interest to members</b>		
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Number of interested</b>	<b>%<sup>14</sup></b>
Rural development	38	62,3
Development aid policies	36	59
Natural resource management	35	57,4
Climate change	33	54,1
Social development, gender and poverty	33	54,1
Livelihood	33	54,1

Members also proposed other themes of their interest. About 40 themes were suggested. While a few were about general development issues, most of these were very specific themes related to either agricultural, environmental and governance issues, e.g. animal ecology, soil fertility, plant nutrition, property rights, communication for development in business and agriculture, security sector reforms, air quality management, health policy and management, and capacity building for development consultants.

The list on Table 6 indicates representation of all interest groups from the three former networks. All cross-cutting and general themes, e.g. development aid policies and climate change, seem to be of interest to the members. Natural resource management, which is a more specific theme, seems also to be of high interest, which can be due to the fact that this theme involves issues of relevance to both agriculture, environment and governance. The themes listed above are not comprehensive but provided inspiration for how to organise the themes to be posted on the website.

### 3.3.4. Information about and communication among members

In order to assess how communication among members was to be structured, respondents were requested to indicate their degree of interest in webfora, list of proposals for joint activities and information on members. The results are indicated in table 7 below:

<b>Table 7: Interest in information and communication channels</b>						
<b>Channel</b>	<b>Very int. Numb. - %<sup>15</sup></b>	<b>Interest. Numb. - %</b>	<b>Fairly int. Numb. - %</b>	<b>Not int. Numb. - %</b>	<b>Not resp.</b>	<b>Total</b>
List of members' proposals for joint activities	19 – 31,7%	25 – 41,7%	9 – 15%	4 – 6,6%	3 – 5%	100%
Information on other members	6 – 10%	33 – 55%	15 – 25%	3 – 5%	3 – 5%	100%
Webfora – discussion groups	6 – 10%	20 – 33,3%	26 – 43,3%	6 – 10%	2 – 3,3%	99,9%
Other	4 – 6,7%					

The category of most interest is clearly a list of proposals for joint activities, with more than 30% very interested and 40% interested respondents. Furthermore, table 7 confirms the results from table 5 that information about other

<sup>13</sup> Other themes included in the questionnaire were selected with the following order of priority: Biodiversity, Food security, Research communication, Fight against corruption, Financial and private sector development, Organic production, Public sector governance, Promotion of human rights, Forestry, Corporate social responsibility, Urban development, Trade and liberalisation, Livestock, Local service delivery, Migration.

<sup>14</sup> Out of 61 respondents who filled in this question.

<sup>15</sup> The % refers to the total number of respondents to this question (60 out of 62). A few respondents have not filled all the categories included in the question. The number of respondents who did not answer is included in the table.

members is not one of the *first* priorities, as less than 10% indicate that they are very interested in this information. It is worth noting that 53% is though interested and only 5% indicate that they are directly not interested in this information. The interest for information on other members is clearly much higher than the interest in webfora, in which less than 10% are very interested, 32% interested, and more than 50% fairly or not interested.

Table 7 thus indicates that the respondents are highly interested in interacting with other members, and rather so through joint activities than discussions groups on webfora. It is worth noting that the group of stakeholders who indicated the strongest interest in webfora are Master's students from developing countries.

Respondents were also asked which kind of information about fellow network members they were interested in.

<b>Table 8: Preferred information on other members</b>		
<b>Information</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>	<b>% of respondents<sup>16</sup></b>
Themes of research / field of work (indicating keywords)	45	84,9
Institution	43	81,1
Contact details	41	77,3
Name	40	75,5
Country experience	35	66
Link to member's website	33	62,3
Publications	32	60,4
Brief presentation	26	49,1
Stakeholder group	26	49,1

As table 8 shows, respondents are most interested in area of work/research and institutional affiliation and not so interested in descriptions about the members. Besides the categories included in the table, some respondents added that they were interested in other categories that indicated interest in interaction, e.g. 'willingness to develop collaborative research' and 'have / need information'.

The respondents were also asked about their interest in providing information to the network. Four categories of information were included in the question and could be marked with degree of interest, from 'very interested' to 'not interested'. The results are reported in table 9 below:

<b>Table 9: Interest in providing information</b>						
<b>Kind of information</b>	<b>Very int. Numb. - %<sup>17</sup></b>	<b>Interest. Numb. - %</b>	<b>Fairly int. Numb. - %</b>	<b>Not int. Numb. - %</b>	<b>Not resp.</b>	<b>Total</b>
Ideas for joint activities /research projects	14 – 22,9%	28 – 45,9%	8 – 13,1%	4 – 6,5%	7 – 11,5%	<b>99,9%</b>
Events within your field of research/work	13 – 21,3%	27 – 44,3%	7 – 11,5%	4 – 6,5%	10 – 16,4%	<b>100%</b>
About your self	10 – 16,4%	26 – 42,6%	14 – 22,9%	6 – 9,8%	5 – 8,2%	<b>99,9%</b>
Your research results	10 – 16,4%	23 – 37,7%	11 – 18%	6 – 9,8%	11 – 18%	<b>99,9%</b>
Other	2					

Table 9 indicates a generally high level of interest in providing information to the network. More specifically, the results indicated above show that informants are mostly interested in providing ideas for joint activities and research projects, being 69% of the members interested or very interested. There also seems to be high interest for providing information about events within the respondents' field of works and /or research, with 65% of the members being interested or very interested.

The category that seems to be of least interest to the respondents, although still with 54% being interested or very interested, is providing results of own research. It must though be noted that this category of information might be considered of more relevance to some stakeholders in the network, i.e. researchers, PhD and Master's students. Data from the questionnaire show for instance that out of the 25 researchers in Denmark who filled in this question, 12 %

<sup>16</sup> Nine (9) respondents did not answer this question, thus the % refers to a total of 53 respondents.

<sup>17</sup> 61 respondents compiled this section. Some did not fill in all categories and the number of the respondents who left some parts out is included in table 9. The quite high number of respondents who did not indicate their degree of interest in the different categories can be seen as a sign of lack of interest in the specific category.

were very interested, 52% interested, 24% fairly interested, and 4% not interested in providing information about own research results, while 8% did not respond. The data thus show that researchers are more interested in providing this information than other groups of respondents. This high interest also applies to students in the South. It is though important to note that consultants and NGOs also indicated interest in sharing results from own research, indicating a broad understanding of the concept of research.

### 3.3.5. Suggestions by members

Respondents were asked to contribute their suggestions for promoting the user friendliness of the news services. Ten of the respondents who also commented on whether there was something they particularly appreciated or disliked in the news services (Table 4) provided their suggestions. These mainly regard the same issues as explained in section 3.3.2. A few new ideas are though also mentioned, e.g. making the profile easy to update online, which refers to the procedure in the former ReNED where members were to send information to the secretariat staff who then updated; and sending the newsletters by post mail. The latter suggestion comes from a member in the South who might have encountered difficulty in using the web-based news services and points to the important challenges of accessibility and availability posed by these channels.

### 3.3.6. Other sources of information

In order not to overload members with information, the final section of the questionnaire was dedicated to gathering data on other sources of information used by respondents. News sources mentioned in the questionnaire provide some of the main sources used by DDRN's secretariat.

Table 10: Other sources used by members				
News source	Website	Newsletter	N and/or W	% of respondents <sup>18</sup>
Danida DevForum	18	8	23	57,5%
Ulandsnyt.dk	12	16	21	52,5%
Sci-dev.net	10	7	13	32,5%
Other Danish research networks	10	3	11	27,5%
Eldis	8	3	9	22,5%
Id 21	3	2	4	10%
Other sources			16	40%

Among the 'other' news services mentioned by the respondents, most were used only by one respondent, while a few were used by two to four respondents. These included news services provided by World Bank, ODI, UN Agencies and the Danish Project Council. Table 10 shows that a high percentage of the respondents make use of the Danish news services provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and by U-landsnyt. The number of respondents making use of international news services (those listed and/or other listed by respondents) amount to 24 respondents, corresponding to 60% of the respondents to this question.

Most respondents are thus interested in information from different national and international sources and there seems to be very little overlap of sources consulted by respondents, except from the Danish sources included in the table.

## 3.4. Sub conclusions from the survey

The data analysed in the questionnaire survey indicate a series of characteristics regarding the respondents' use of and expectations from DDRN, especially regarding communication channels in the network. These are briefly summarised in this section, while a more detailed analysis providing more suggestions for future communication in DDRN is presented in chapter 7.

### Expectations from membership

- While a number of members expect to use DDRN to influence policy, the main part is primarily interested in getting access to **information and contacts** to other members and researchers and practitioners in general, i.e. not exclusively members of DDRN.

<sup>18</sup> As 22 respondents did not fill in, the % refers to a total of 40 persons.

- DDRN should therefore prioritise **information/communication and linking activities**, while leaving some scope for activities to influence policy.

#### Set up of news services

- Different stakeholder categories have **different ways of using DDRN's news services**, e.g. newsletters are most used by researchers, while other groups use both channels equally and a few mainly use the website. This confirms the importance of **updating the website regularly**.
- When developing the new website, the **layout** should be improved.
- The new website would have to include both **general and specific thematic news**. When deciding which categories to include in the general news category, the following categories that were indicated by the respondents could be considered: Rural development, Development aid policies, Natural resource management, Climate change, Social development, gender and poverty, and Livelihood.

#### Information flow between secretariat and members and among members

- Groups of stakeholders have **different priorities** as regards the **categories of information** to be provided by DDRN.
- As the groups prioritising information on events are stakeholders from Denmark, the website should aim to focus the information on **events in DK** and might consider prioritising these events. One possibility could be by dividing the events sites in DK and international events.
- There is a strong interest in information on funding from both Danish and Southern respondents, which calls for inclusion of links to both **national and international funding sources**.
- There is strong interest among respondents in having access to and contributing to **lists of ideas for joint activities**, while webfora are of less interest to respondents. This indicates that **interaction** among members aimed at concrete activities is preferred. A forum for this kind of exchanges should be included in the website.
- Most of the Danish respondents make regular use of Danish sources of information such as Danida DevForum and Ulandsnyt. DDRN should only provide the most general and relevant of the news distributed through these channels, e.g. news of relevance to members in other countries who may not subscribe to these services. The international sources used by the secretariat are though only used by few of the respondents, thus there is scope for continuing using these and **expanding the number of international sources**.

## 4. New DDRN website and newsletters

Based on a quick analysis of the responses provided through the survey and the experiences from the former networks, a new website and new format for newsletters were developed by the DDRN secretariat and launched in July 2007 on [www.ddrn.dk](http://www.ddrn.dk).

The website was divided in several categories, i.e. DDRN News, General news, and seven thematic categories<sup>19</sup>. All categories are subdivided in: Events; Research papers and policy documents; Links for funding sources; and Other news. A special section was established for Students news, targeted at both Master's and PhD students. Furthermore, a section was included with links to (mainly) research institution and international development organisations. This section is divided in links to: Denmark; Europe; Africa; Asia; Central and South America; and International and cross-regional links.

An important new feature launched on the DDRN website was a section for working groups composed of network members. To accommodate the interest in establishing communication channels aimed at concrete activities,

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<sup>19</sup> These are: Livelihoods and social development; Agricultural production; Natural resource management and biodiversity; Urban and industrial management; Public administration and public policy; Democracy, human rights and state-building; Trade, private sector and economic development.

working groups were provided for a on the website to discuss and share information.

With the launch of the website, all members were urged to register their profile on the online member database available at [http://www.ddrn.dk/index.php?side\\_id=38](http://www.ddrn.dk/index.php?side_id=38). The registration of profiles proceeded slowly, partly due to technical problems after the launch of the website, but primarily due to slow response from members. The database was linked to the new newsletters service. While general news is sent to all members, thematic monthly newsletters and occasional news mails were supposed to be sent to the members according to the themes and/or areas the selected. As the registration of profiles in the database proceeded slowly, at the time when the interviews were carried out, newsletters containing all themes were still sent to all members<sup>20</sup>.

## 5. Interviews

This chapter describes the second phase of the needs assessment that was carried out in late September and October 2007 through interviews with a number of network members and a few key stakeholders interested in joining the network.

### 5.1. Methodology

The aim of carrying out the interviews was to supplement the information gathered through the questionnaire survey and get more accurate insight into members' experiences and expectations. The interviews were carried out as qualitative semi-structured interviews divided in four main themes: 1) Membership of DDRN, 2) Impression and knowledge of DDRN, 3) Experiences and expectations regarding communications in DDRN, and 4) Future and roles in DDRN. The interview guide is enclosed as Annex 2<sup>21</sup>.

Interviews were carried out with representatives from all stakeholder groups in DDRN and with special focus on students, both from Denmark and the South, and stakeholders from the South in general. This priority was due to an intention of strengthening the focus on how to better include these groups in the network. The member database on the website was used to select the informants, who were identified by searching according to stakeholder categories (researcher, students, NGO, private sector)<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, a few other informants were selected as they represented categories of key importance to DDRN, i.e. a representative from a main Danish NGO umbrella organisation that showed interest in joining the network, representatives from one of the few institutional members of the network, and some participants from a workshop carried out by DDRN in Uganda.

The interviews were mainly carried out as individual interviews, while a few were carried out with two or three informants and one as focus group interview with informants from various stakeholder categories. The intention of having the focus group interview was to facilitate discussion across stakeholder groups and promote the interview as a learning experience for the interviewee about other groups in the network and as a way to generate new ideas.

In the next sections of this chapter, responses from the informants are presented and analysed. While taking departure in the same main questions, the interviews developed with emphasis on different themes. Responses from informants are grouped around the themes touched in the interviews, indicating general trends, examples, and variations.

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<sup>20</sup> The first thematic newsletters were sent to members on October 19, 2008, and the members who have not yet selected news categories in their profile still receive a monthly thematic newsletter containing all 7 themes and student news. As of September 16, 2008, this applies to 1274 out of 1480 members. It must be noted that some members actively have chosen not to select any thematic newsletters as they are interested in viewing all the news posted.

<sup>21</sup> The interview guide used for individual and group interviews was almost identical. The guide enclosed in Annex 2 is the one used for individual interviews as most interviews were carried out with one informant. As most of the interviews were carried out in Danish, the guide was developed in Danish as well.

<sup>22</sup> As the members are to update their stakeholder category themselves, the fact that they have a profile on the website indicates a certain degree of engagement in DDRN, which implies a degree of bias in comparison to members who have not been so active. These members can be expected to have some more knowledge of the network than members who have not updated their profile and this was considered to be positive for carrying out the interviews, as the secretariat intended to speak primarily with members with good knowledge of the network. The informants were selected from the database by picking every third on the list and proceeding to the next name in case they did not want to be interviewed. The number of researchers who had updated their profile on the website was higher than the other stakeholders and only every sixth was contacted.

## 5.2. Informants

Table 11 below shows the number of members interviewed divided in stakeholder category. The data refer to a total of 20 interviews carried out in Denmark and five in Uganda.

Table 11: Stakeholder categories of informants				
Stakeholder	Total cat.	F	M	% of total informants
Researcher - Denmark	6	2	4	17,1
PhD. student - Denmark	3		3	8,6
Consultant - Denmark	2		2	5,7
NGO – Denmark	4	2	2	11,4
Master's student - Denmark	8	5	3	22,8
Administrative officer - Denmark	2	1	1	5,7
Total Denmark	25	10	15	71,4
Researcher – Dev. country	1		1	2,9
PhD. Student – Dev. country	2		2	5,7
Master's student – Dev. country	4	1	3	11,4
Other <sup>23</sup>	3		3	8,6
Total Dev. country	10	1	9	28,6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>

The informants had different degrees of knowledge about DDRN. 22 informants had been members of one or more of the former networks (primarily of ReNED and an equal number of GEPPA and NETARD) and thus members of DDRN since its beginning. Four were not registered members, while the other informants had registered after the establishment of the network and had thus only been members for a few months.

The degree of engagement in DDRN also varies. While a few had been active in working groups and a single informant was member of the board of DDRN, most had not yet been in direct contact with the secretariat. Most of the informants knew DDRN through the network's news services.

## 5.3. Analysis of informants' responses

### 5.3.1. Membership of DDRN

To get a more precise indication of motivations for joining DDRN than the information provided through the questionnaire survey, the interviews contained a section on reasons for becoming a member of the network. This included a question on the special relevance of being a member of the network related to the specific stakeholder category of the informant. The responses from the informants are here grouped with an indication of which preferences are most common and presented in order of frequency among the interests expressed by the interviewees. This section is summarised with a description of informants' interests grouped by stakeholder category.

#### 1) Staying updated

The motivation which is expressed by most members as a reason for joining DDRN is to use the network as a way of keeping updated on 'what is going on'. Several informants mention their interest in being updated on which conferences and events are taking place, and on what is generally happening within the development research milieu. For example, one informant mentioned that she currently did not have much contact with other development researchers and being a member of DDRN was a way of keeping in touch.

Informants mention both attending events and reading the newsletter as a way of keeping updated. An interesting perspective on this is explained by a student informant who earlier only kept updated by reading the newsletters, while she currently also was interested in attending events, and envisioned that in future besides getting information she would also contribute her comments and ideas. This suggests a time perspective indicating that the degree of involvement may increase in the course of students' education. Another student who is mainly interested in keeping updated explicitly mentions the inspiration seminars arranged by DDRN as an event of special relevance. This event is

<sup>23</sup> The three informants had management functions at local research centres.

mainly targeted at students approaching their Master's theses, thus promoting active participation of students in the late phase of their studies.

Being a member of the network is also mentioned as a way of keeping updated in developing countries. Some of the informants explicitly refer to update within their specific field of work when explaining their main motivation for joining the network. Specific field mentioned include i.e. food security, conservation, social sciences relevant to IT, and organic agriculture. It is worth noting that the four informants are NGO representative, Master's and PhD students. There seems thus to be a stronger expectations about a general update than specific update within own field of work and/or research, especially so among researchers.

## 2) Contact/Cooperation/exchange

Another main motivation expressed by many informants is to use the network to find other members with whom to share information. One informant for example explains that his motivation for joining the network is to be part of a joint forum for exchange of information and contacts. Another informant expresses his interest in establishing a larger cross-disciplinary network in Denmark, broader than his own research institution. DDRN is also mentioned as a way of getting an overview and getting to know the Danish resource base.

While some informants indicate that they use the network to get to know the Danish resource base without being specific on a special group of people they are interested in reaching, others express that they are members to get in contact with one specific stakeholder group. The relations mentioned as motivation for joining the network include:

- *Researcher-researcher*: to find people working within the same area;
- *North/South*: primarily to establish connections within the research community;
- *NGOs-researchers*: to improve the quality of practice in relation to development projects;
- *Students-practitioners*: both ways, also expressed by consultant as a way to get in contact with interesting students;
- *DDRN-Danida*: DDRN as a loudspeaker towards Danida.

It is important to notice that several members seem to expect that DDRN provides access to the entire Danish resource base. This seems to indicate a misconception as DDRN is one out of three research networks and does not cover health and water issues.

## 3) Link to job and funding

Finally, another main motivation for joining the network mentioned by a few informants is the interest in finding links to jobs, expressed by several Masters' students, and to funding sources, mentioned by a students and a researcher.

### Expectations of stakeholder categories

Informants were also asked to contribute their views on the special relevance of DDRN membership to their stakeholder category in DDRN. The responses indicate that:

- **Researchers**: Seem mostly interested in getting in contact with others in the resource base to share ideas and information. They are also interested in keeping updated and strengthening N/S links, as a way of including the need for research from South perspective. Only one informant mentions access to funding of research projects as the most reason of most relevance to researchers.
- **PhD. Students**: The PhD students interviewed seem more interested in establishing and maintaining contacts, both within the research community, as well as to Danida and NGOs.
- **Consultants**: Only two consultants were interviewed and they were respectively interested in using the network to contact Danida and as a forum for exchange of information and contacts, and meeting students.
- **NGOs**: Informants are as interested in information as in contacts, especially with researchers. This is seen as a way of improving practice, and it is acknowledged that establishing contact among researchers and NGOs is not easy as it requires time and willingness from both sides. Furthermore, an informant suggests that NGOs must have a certain degree of experience and capacity in order to fruitfully engage in cooperation with researchers.

- **Master's students:** This group seems to be slightly more interested in getting information to keep updated, but establishing contacts to researchers and practitioners is also very important. Several students express that they are interested in linking to the 'adult' section of the network and practitioners, e.g. to get a better impression of what their study can be used for. The opportunity of engaging in cross-disciplinary exchanges is also mentioned among the reasons of special importance to Master's students. So is also receiving inspiration and sharing experiences about Master's theses.
- **Institutional members:** As this way of membership is still quite limited<sup>24</sup>, only one institutional member was interviewed. The representatives interviewed from the member institution provided very interesting point of views regarding this category of membership. The informants stressed that although clarification is still needed about the role of institutional members in DDRN, they expect institutional membership to be a good way of promoting both the institution's and the researchers' interests and a way of ensuring high quality (e.g. when the institution assessed candidates to a call circulated by DDRN for an international organisation). They also stressed as strength of this category of membership the fact that researchers at member institutions can count on the support of their institution when engaging in network activities.
- **South members:** The respondents from the South seem primarily interested in receiving information and keeping updated in order to know 'who is doing what and what is going on'. Some are also interested in trying to establish cooperation between Danish and South researchers, expressing interest in the expertise of Danish researchers.

As concluded in the questionnaire survey, the interviews also indicate that receiving information to keep updated is the main reason for joining DDRN. The gap of interest between establishing contact and receiving information is though much closer as expressed in the interviews than in the survey. The interviews indicate that a few groups of stakeholders seem more interested in establishing contacts than receiving information, and generally there seems to be scope for establishing contacts to exchange information and improve practice. While most informants seem interested in establishing contacts with members from other stakeholder categories, it seems that by joining DDRN researchers mainly expect to establish contacts to other researchers, including N/S exchange. This suggests that in general this group is more interested in establishing cross-disciplinary than cross-sectorial relations.

It is interesting to notice that information about funding sources is here, as in the survey, only mentioned by few as the main reason for joining the network. A closer look at the kind of information of interest to the respondents of the survey showed though that information on funding was highly prioritised. Being access to information the main expectation, information on links to funding can also be considered of high relevance among the expectations from being a member of DDRN. The fact that so few explicitly mention this category as main reason for joining the network may indicate that mentioning funding as main interest is not considered 'politically correct'.

### 5.3.2. Impressions and knowledge of DDRN

The informants were asked about their impression of DDRN. To know the source of their knowledge of DDRN they were also asked about which channels they used. As indicated previously, most of the informants stated that they mainly knew the network through their use of newsletters and website. When explaining that they only knew the network through the use of newsletters and/or website, a few informants commented that they did not *use* the network as such. For instance, one informant explained that she did not really use the network because she rarely came to Copenhagen. This raises two important issues: If members feel that *really* using the network implies attending events organised by DDRN, which mainly take place in Copenhagen, a geographical issue may exclude many from achieving *real* engagement. Also, it raises a question as of what it means *really* to use the network, i.e. only receiving and reading news or necessarily also attending events.

Interesting indications of how the network is perceived were given through descriptions of the network if compared to the informants' neighbours (asked in group interviews). The following pictures were given:

- A very extrovert neighbour; but people do not necessarily have time for engaging with him. He though is understanding and accepts that others cannot be there;
- A neighbour who has a tool shed from which I would want to borrow quite often;

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<sup>24</sup> 7 at the time of interview and 17 at the time of editing this report.

- It is still a little difficult to see how this new neighbour is, so I will wait and see.

The descriptions above touch upon several of the impressions of the network highlighted by other informants, which are grouped below starting with the characteristics mentioned by most informants:

1. A very dynamic and broad multi stakeholder network that includes many institutions and organisations;
2. An academic organisation primarily targeted at researchers, characterised by very high professionalism and cross-disciplinarity. A little 'dry', not focused on NGOs nor on young researchers;
3. Still in phase of transition, thus unclear whether it is to become a service provider or facilitator of change;
4. A Danish network, South participants are not visible.

It is interesting that some of the views indicated by the informants point to opposite pictures, e.g. the being very broad and open on one hand, and very academic and targeted at established researchers on the other. It is particularly students who define the network as indicating a very high professional level. Several explicitly comment that DDRN is of relevance to Master's students and that there is not much focus on students in the network in general. This is explained very well by the picture of neighbour one of the students provided in a group interviews: "A busy neighbour. It's a pity that they are too busy to keep in touch!"

NGOs representatives also perceive the network as very academic, while most researchers perceive the network as very broad, including many stakeholders. One researcher also indicated that the network signals to be most useful for cross-disciplinary issues than specific thematic information and another that is indicates more development than research compared to former networks. There seems thus to be a discrepancy: What seems open and broad to researchers apparently seems very research oriented to other groups. This might become problem if these groups do not feel addressed and included in the network.

Some of the impressions of the network are explained more in detail by the informants when asked about the challenges and potentials they see in DDRN. These are presented below according to core issues:

- **Broad member base:** This is seen as a potential as the website and database can provide a quick overview and useful channel to find relevant people. It is also a way to reach many persons within the resource base. While some indicate inclusion of NGOs as a potential, others find that this group is not targeted, as NGOs need focus on implementation and political agenda to become interested. Several members mention the broad base as a challenge as it may be difficult to maintain focus and keep all interested. The network may also risk becoming too broad so that members feel that there is nothing specific they can use; therefore, some members suggest defining the focus of the network more clearly.
- **South participation:** A number of informants see the possibility of enhancing N/S exchanges as an important potential of DDRN and some stress the importance of including South perspective when addressing global issues. DDRN is for example seen as a good way of establishing more cooperation with the South by the interviewed institutional member who also see DDRN as a good entry point from South to DK. Just as many informants see it though as a challenge, as it still seems unclear how South members are included and how they are to use the network. Some informants also see it as a challenge that English is the only language used by DDRN, while including information in French and Spanish may enhance the benefit of the network for Southern members.
- **Linking research and practice:** The informants mentioning this potential suggest it should be the main focus of DDRN. For example an informant states that there is: "Huge potentials in establishing link between researchers and NGOs; there is a need for this in the field, NGOs are asking for documentation and monitoring which can be achieved via research; researchers could also use data collected by NGOs; researchers could help investigate whether the work of NGOs makes a difference and could create room for a free and open exchange of the problems and challenges faced by NGOs, e.g. what could be used in the field to document the effect of agricultural programmes". An important challenge mentioned is that practice and research are far from each other, so communication can be difficult. Some suggest that research results be disseminated in a more practice-oriented way, thus aiming at application of research results.
- **Communication:** This is mainly mentioned as a challenge in the network. Most challenges mentioned regard internal communication in the network, like finding easy procedures for contacts and communication, clarifying the difference between communication to individuals and organisations, and reaching all members. Defining the profile of the network for external stakeholders is also mentioned as a challenge.
- **Cross-disciplinarity:** This is mainly mentioned as a potential of the network and several informants indicate

that there is a need for cross-disciplinary initiatives that promote professional synergies and holistic solutions.

- **Advocacy:** A few informants, mainly consultants and NGOs, see advocacy as a potential of DDRN because the network gathers several groups.
- **One network:** A potential that is mentioned by a few informants is the fact of having 'one central network'. This refers to members who apparently do not know of the other research networks, as well as to a few others who see it as a future development they would welcome.

The responses above indicate that the characteristics of the network which informants consider most important, be this as a challenge or potential, is the fact that DDRN is composed by a broad base of stakeholders in Denmark and in the South, including both researchers and practitioners. Developing a focus of the network so that it becomes clear what various stakeholders can use it for is of core importance for maintaining the interest of the members. To achieve this, communications in the network plays a major role.

### 5.3.3. Good communication

In order to gain a good understanding of the informants' experiences regarding communication within groups and/or networks, they were asked to refer to good examples from other contexts than DDRN.

The responses show that the informants have experience with quite different sources, as previously indicated in the survey. They refer to various groups' and networks' websites and newsletters, including the former Danish research networks, as well as to chat rooms, blogs, member databases, meetings and conferences. This shows that communication is seen as much more than web-based exchange of information.

A few examples of good communication that include elements appreciated by several informants are showed in box 1 below:

#### Box 1: Examples of good experiences with communication<sup>25</sup>

*Example 1:* "Clean Air Initiative has a very useful and concrete **website** and yearly conferences with thematic focus that provide opportunity for **establishing local networks**. They dispose of a lot of **funds**, especially for initiatives on a continuous basis, and the **secretariat** puts a lot of effort into keeping everyone informed and running the initiatives."

*Example 2:* "**Small networks** are easy to get an overview of and people know each other, it's easy to contact each other and arrange for meetings...The Borneo network functions quite well: Every other year they have a large conference where people can meet and get to know each other. The conference is held in Indonesia or Malaysia, 300-400 people attend and the focus is cross-disciplinary. They produce a Bulletin twice a year where they announce what researchers get published and proceedings from meetings. They have a database with Master's and PhD dissertations and the website functions as 'point of anchorage'. The board serves the interests of the network and **voluntary work** drives the network. Administration of the network is carried out by the members on a shift basis. A lot of energy is put into **communication** within the network."

*Example 3:* "AWAS, a political network, provides emails with background information **oriented toward action**, which engages members. Members **feel included** because they [secretariat] communicate often and precisely and provide follow-up on actions taken. They provide brief newsletter that I therefore read. People are part of it even if only participating peripherally."

Characteristics that define good communication most valued by informants are presented below in order of priority:

1. **Shifting engagement towards action:** Some informants refer to examples of groups and exchanges aimed at specific activities, e.g. meetings in Vietnam and Mozambique to gather researchers and collect ideas for research projects carried out by the former NETARD. Just talking seems not be enough for appreciating communication. This is especially clear when informants are asked specifically about key to good communications, as most indicate that 1) good communication is when interaction is aimed at a concrete result, and 2) the degree of interaction should change, i.e. engaging when need arises.
2. **Focussed flow of information:** Informants are interested in professional, targeted and brief newsletters and clear rules for flow of information, with instructions on the information they receive regarding whether and how they are expected to react. Ulandnyt is mentioned by a few informants as a very good example, which

<sup>25</sup> The interviews which the box refers to were carried out in Danish. Thus the citations in "" are not to literally referring to the wording of the informants.

they refer to as a good mixture of thematic and practical information, always updated, very relevant, and not too detailed. While a few members appreciate the possibility of all members to write to all, this does not seem to be the general experiences. One informant also indicates the possibility of selecting frequency of receiving information as key to good communication.

3. **Face to face meetings and size of group/network:** The possibility of meeting other network and group members face to face is also very appreciated and this is in some cases related to the size of the group/network, as it might be easier to know each other in small groups. Especially students refer to informal face to face meetings as good experiences of communication, e.g. the informal talks during the evening at the two-day Sahel workshop held in November 2006. Several informants acknowledge that if people know each other personally further interaction is easier, which also is valued as good communication.
4. **Accessibility:** Some informants refer to web-based communication tools as a good way of promoting N/S communication. Master's and PhD students from Denmark and developing countries had positive experiences with e.g. blogs, discussion fora, emails and skype. On the other hand, some also indicate that it is difficult to reach others in developing countries by email and therefore suggest e.g. posters as a better tool to spread information. This shows that the access to internet varies and while it in some places offers effective communication tools, it excludes many in other areas, which is both due to slow connections and lack of access to computers.
5. **Active secretariat:** Some informants stress that keeping all well informed in groups and networks is a role of secretariats. A few examples are provided, where a central secretariat ensures information sharing to the whole member base, including a case where communications functioned extremely well and involved both secretariat and members, just until funding of the secretariat run out and all activity thus stopped. It is worth noting that the importance of an active secretariat was mentioned by informants when telling examples of good communication, but not specifically addresses as a key to good communication.

Summing up, it is clear that informants have a general preference for precise and focussed information, with possibilities for personal interaction preferably aimed at specific results of current relevance. The responses do not indicate variations among stakeholder groups, except from students. This is the group most interested in opportunities for face to face meetings and with most experience with various web-based tools in developing countries.

### 5.3.4. Communications in DDRN

As mentioned previously, informants made use of both the newsletters and website of DDRN and a few also actively engaged in other activities organised by the network. Asked about whether the informants were especially interested in any specific communication channels in DDRN, only one fourth of the informants specified a channel of particular interest to them. The channels most stressed were the member database and the newsletter.

#### Comments on communication channels in DDRN

During the interviews, some informants provided comments on the website and newsletters of DDRN, even though they were not specifically asked to comment on these news services. Several informants commented that they found the **website** user friendly, well organised and with good division of areas. A few appreciated the fact that it included a member database, which e.g. made it easier for people in the South to find people with expertise. Very few commented that it lacked clearer instructions on how to use it, that it had much text and was a little 'abstract', that it was primarily focussed on Africa, and that NGOs were not visible.

A few informants also commented the DDRN **newsletters**, which most found of good quality. One informant suggested that besides documentation of events, selected DDRN activities be covered in journalistic style to catch people's interest and thereby make them more interested in the network.

Furthermore, a few informants also commented that they had experienced openness from the DDRN **secretariat**, which seemed interested in listening to members. One informant referred for instance that: "It is satisfactory that proposals from members get followed up; this shows that communication goes two ways".

#### Challenges and potentials

As many informants already indicated while discussing their impression of the network, the fact of being a multi

stakeholder network poses special challenges, one of which regards communication. When more specifically discussing challenges and potentials for communication within DDRN, the following areas were emphasised by informants, which are to be considered together with informants' indications about communications in general:

- **A useful tool for students:** A few students commented that the main potential for communication in DDRN was that it could serve as a channel for linking students to practitioners and researchers, especially if NGOs, universities, and other stakeholders contribute information.
- **A first step towards cooperation:** A few members emphasised the potential of the member database and of establishing links among people, which would make it easier to 'take the next step'.
- **Geographical and cultural barrier:** Some informants stressed the fact that reaching members who cannot attend events in Copenhagen nor are the target groups of Danish based calls and invitations may be difficult. This also applies to reaching people who do not read English. One informant also noted that it often is difficult to communicate research across cultural borders, e.g. South research may not be acknowledged because written differently than in North.
- **Time constraint:** A few mentioned the fact that lack of time at disposal of members may be a main challenge to good communication in DDRN. When discussing other parts of the interviews, a few informants also mentioned the danger of 'network overload' and 'contacts overload'.

The informants provided a series of suggestions for improvements on the DDRN newsletters and website. They were also explicitly asked what they thought the secretariat and the members could do respectively to promote good communication in DDRN. The participants of the focus group interview and group interview with students were asked to write down their suggestions, and many proposals have resulted from this process. A detailed list of task for members and secretariat staff is enclosed as Annex 3, while the section below presents the suggestions given by informants grouped around the channels that seem to be of most importance to them. Informants' suggestions regarding who should be responsible for the tasks mentioned are included below:

- **Member database:** Detailed profiles on the DDRN website should make it possible to identify persons with common interests and/or experience and knowledge about specific regions, countries, institutional cooperation projects etc., including brief presentation of research results. The database should also enable search on institutions and partners. It should be possible for members to indicate what kind of contacts they are interested in receiving, e.g. job opportunities, knowledge dissemination, etc. Updating own profile is a main task for *members*, but it is a main responsibility of the *secretariat* to make sure that this feature functions properly. The secretariat should also keep the members updated on status of membership and information on who joins the network in Denmark and in the South.
- **Information on website and newsletters:** There should be a clear guidance on the character of information posted and instructions on how to spread information in the network. Research and NGO projects should be presented in a way that provides overview, presenting conclusions at the end and ideas at the beginning, as a very brief intro to get an idea of what others are doing. More information about funding sources, PhD dissertations, courses and information of what has happened at DDRN events (slides and video) should be included. Sending information for the website and newsletters was identified as a main task that *members* could contribute to. Besides posting the information, the *secretariat* would be responsible for informing members that new information can be found on the website and reminding members that they can contribute. The secretariat should also keep the members abreast of global trends, including tender and project calls, make already existing research visible, and publicise examples of how the member base was used.
- **Interactivity:** Informants suggested the establishment of open forum and mailinglist systems where members can discuss and post information. These should be interactive and process based so that people can contribute when need arises. The website should include an announcement board where all can write and which should be kept updated. The *secretariat* would be responsible for establishing these fora and developing a codex of interaction. It should also assist the establishment of working groups. These would be a good environment for *members* to meet having the force of a minor group. Regarding the issue of

establishing cooperation among members, one informant raised the possibly controversial issue of defining who is 'serious', i.e. who is really interested and *interesting* to collaborate with.

- **Coordination with other information sources and institutions:** The network should clarify its vision and place itself besides Danida and Ulandsnyt in order not to disseminate the same information. This would be a task for the *secretariat*, while the members could make sure that DDRN makes use of platforms that *members* can use and contribute to, e.g. Wikipedia. It is also suggested that the secretariat introduces DDRN to other networks and institutions, and strengthens cooperation with international offices at Danish universities. With respect to communications to institutional members, the secretariat should clarify how DDRN intends to make use of institutional contacts. It is also suggested that DDRN be clear about what activity profile it wants to show and decide if/how to attract more members: "Does DDRN has to offer itself or let organisations come to it?"
- **Organisation of activities:** Opinions vary as to how the secretariat is to engage in planning of seminars and conferences. Some informants suggest that the *secretariat* should be the main initiator, others that *members* should contribute, and one that DDRN may consider not organising 'own' conferences, but in stead making already planned conferences broader by engaging its resource base. Seminars to gather NGOs (and in future consultants) in need of knowledge within a specific area to establish dialogue and promote informal exchange of ideas and feedback are also suggested as an activity based on the added advantage of the network, i.e. inclusion of and communication across several stakeholders. A coffee-corner or library, after work meetings and other opportunities for meeting personally and not necessarily at universities are also suggested. The secretariat was also suggested to arrange 'mutual expectation meetings' for researchers, Danida, consultants and industry representatives.

Among the suggestions mentioned above, many informants indicated that members should update profiles and contribute information to the website and newsletter. Other suggestions are formulated by one or few informants. Thus many of the concrete activities suggested above may be seen more as a 'wishing list'. Many though support issues raised earlier and provide useful inspiration for future development of communication channels in DDRN. It seems clear that the secretariat is expected to be the main responsible for information flow in the network, with the particular task of identifying and defining ways to engage members in communication to share information and interact, including facilitating the process of establishing cooperation among members. For members to engage actively, they seem to need clear guidance and examples that show the results of contributing.

#### 5.3.4. Future in DDRN

The interviews were concluded by summarising on what the informants envisioned that they would have achieved and contributed to the network a couple of years after the interviews. Summing up, the informants expect that they personally would have:

- Gained more knowledge and updated information;
- Established new contacts;
- Attended relevant events;
- Found jobs (students);
- Established N/S research cooperation.

A few also commented on expected achievements made by the network within a few years, which included:

- More members in the South;
- Stronger focus on research in Danida, both in Denmark and in sector programmes, e.g. by introducing research and education sector programmes;
- More funds to facilitate research in the South, e.g. as it works with B2B projects;
- DDRN posters hanging at universities.

The informants were also asked about what they would imagine to have contributed to the network. The number of informants expecting to contribute was smaller than the number of informants who expected receiving/achieving from the network. The contribution regarded:

- Sharing of results from Master's thesis;
- Sharing information from own project;
- Dissemination of information from DDRN and invited other to participate in DDRN activities.

This is interesting as it shows a much less active picture than the one suggested by the long lists of ideas of what members could contribute to.

A few informants also contributed their idea of what kind of network DDRN would develop into within a couple of years after the interviews, suggesting that: In future DDRN becomes better to place itself between other portals and sources of information. It links up to already existing internet tools and is included in searching engines so that member profiles are shown and the value of contributing and updating profile is clear. DDRN shows trends in international development aid and what role there is for the Danish resource base, communicating that it is important to make use of and nurture the Danish resource base. It connects well with NGOs and consultants, and has a good contact to the press and gets good stories covered.

A few also provided key words to sum up on two main roles:

- "Professional communication of personal contacts"; a "dating-centre" bringing people together; "Linked In of the development community"; "THE portal to the Danish development resource base";
- "Research-watchdogs".

These pictures very well summarise the issues of main concern to the informants and stress the importance of developing well functioning tools to facilitate contact among members but also to make the resource base visible (and valuable) to other stakeholders. The results of contributing should also be clear and visible. Furthermore, coordination with the other research networks and contact to the rest of the Danish resource base should also be made clearer. This also applies for the role of South members in a primarily Danish network.

Before summing up on the conclusions from the two phases of the needs assessment and formulating recommendations for how to develop communication channels in DDRN further to meet the needs of its members, chapter 6 briefly summarises the changes and developments occurred since the interviews were carried out. This is done in order to provide recommendations of current relevance to DDRN as of October 2008, i.e. a year after completing the interviews.

## 6. Recent traffic and improvements of news services

Although the process of finalising the needs assessment was set on stand by because of other pressing tasks, since the completion of the interviews small improvements were carried out on the DDRN website based on the suggestions from respondents and informants. This chapter briefly describes changes have occurred in the news services of DDRN and provides an indication of how these are used.

Minor changes implemented on the website regard improvement of the search function and correction of technical problems related to registration of data in the member profiles. Furthermore, new functions were introduced to register the use of website and newsletters.

### 6.1. Log statistics on website

To make it visible, that DDRN also includes members and users in the South, in October 2007 a 'Cluster Map' was uploaded on all pages of the website to show the geographical location of the visitors of the website. This is available at <http://www3.clustrmaps.com/counter/maps.php?url=http://www.ddrn.dk>. It also provides a useful tool to the secretariat, as it provides information on the areas where most visitors of the website come from. This has shown that the website is mainly used in Europe (particularly Denmark) and African countries (particularly Eastern and Southern Africa). In decreasing order of frequency, the website is also used in Asia (particularly India), USA and Latin America. The map has also shown that number of visits changes according to the activities carried out by DDRN. For instance, more visits were registered in Uganda and Southern Africa before and long after workshops carried out in October and December 2007 in these countries.

To get more details on the users of the website, in February 2008 the website was registered in Statcounter (<http://www.statcounter.com/>), which provides the secretariat with more detailed information about the number of visitors and their geographical location, duration of visits etc. The data provided by Statcounter present some discrepancies regarding the number of visitors as compared to the number provided by ClusterMap<sup>26</sup> but provide useful information by indicating trends in the traffic. The traffic registered is here presented according to:

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<sup>26</sup> Cluster Map shows 465 visitors in September 2008 as of September 11, 2008, while Statcounter counts 653 unique visitors of which 125 are returning visitors. This may be due to the precise timing of starting the counting on September 1. To provide a third source of information, the website will be registered in another statistic registration soon in October 2008.

- **Circulation:** The data indicate that the average number of visitors since registration with Statcounter started in February counts 58 visitors a day and the average number of page loads is 170. This indicates a good degree of circulation on the website. This is also indicated by recent data on the latest logs, indicating 110 IP addresses for the latest 407 logs<sup>27</sup>, thus showing almost four pages per address. Statistics of the duration of these visits indicate that 47,8% was shorter than 5 seconds, 8% from 5 to 30 seconds, 16,8% from 30 seconds to 5 minutes, 16,8% from 5 to 20 minutes, 2,7% from 20 minutes to one hour, and 8% longer than one hour. The large number of very short visits may be due to casual visits resulting for searches not aimed at the kind of information provided on the website, while long visits indicate circulation on the website and can thus be seen as interested traffic.
- **Frequency of visits:** A look of the days with most traffic on the website shows that traffic often is related to newsletters, but not necessarily. Looking at the 40 days with most traffic, it is interesting to notice that the first 10, with between 125 and 178 visitors, are related to newsletters. Among the following 30 days with most traffic, counting 90 to 121 visits, 10 are though not related to newsletters, thus indicating that higher traffic than average is not necessarily related to newsletters. Furthermore, statistics from Statcounter show an average of 1622 visitors a month. Most visitors were registered in April and May 2008 with more than 2300 unique visits, while less traffic is registered in the summer months, thus indicating a high influence of the vacation in the Northern hemisphere.
- **Source of entry:** As indicated above, there is a high degree of connection between newsletters and website. Many visitors enter the website through Google search. Analysis of the last 500 logs on the website, show for instance that 85 came from Google search in various countries (both North and South); while 280 refer to intern circulation on the website. A few originate from other searching engines, while the rest, i.e. about 130 came directly from addresses bookmarked by visitors, which indicates a good rate of returning visits.
- **Pages opened:** A look at the latest 500 logs on the website as of September 11, 2008, provides a 'snapshot description' of the pages counting most visitors. The data show that the pages opened by most IP addresses are:
  - Homepage: 40 IP addresses;
  - Student news - Scholarships and grants: 13 IP addresses;
  - DDRN activities - Upcoming events: 12 IP addresses;
  - List of members by name: 11 IP addresses;
  - 10 member profiles by: 10 IP addresses;
  - Agricultural production - Archives: 10 IP addresses.
 Most of the remaining traffic is mainly on pages in the section for student news, which can be related to the fact that a newsletter regarding inspiration seminars and video workshop for students was sent out on September 8. It is though worth noting that the pages visited are not only those referred to in the newsletter, thus still indicating circulation. Other pages visited regarded mainly DDRN news and organisation. The only other thematic pages with more than 3 IP addresses were Agricultural reports and NRM archives. This indicates that recent visitors seemed mostly interested in learning about DDRN as organisation and about its members.

A more detailed look at the visits on the **member list and profiles** indicates that of the 11 IP addresses that read the member list, 4 were from Denmark, 4 from other European countries, and other included Kenya, Bolivia and Singapore.<sup>28</sup> The longest visits count between 12 and 28 minutes and are from Denmark, Kenya and Bolivia respectively. Data on the 10 registered visits on member profiles show the following geographical division: 3 from DK, 4 from other European countries and 3 from South (Beijing, Kampala and Nairobi). The profiles visited include researchers, students, two institutional members, NGOs and PhD, i.e. several of the stakeholder groups of the network. 6 of the profiles are entered via Google search and 4 of the profiles were left immediately as these did not match the category of information searched for. Five visitors also viewed other pages on the website and it seems clear that some of the 10 visits were not intended to

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<sup>27</sup> This number refers to the latest 500 logs registered within the latest 60 hours on September 11, 2008, at 2:42 PM, excluding the logs by the DDRN secretariat staff. The limitation of 500 log is due to the current registration with Statcounter. This will be changed in October 2008 to provide more detailed statistics.

<sup>28</sup> Two logs were not registered anymore at the time of checking, which is due to the limitation of remembering traffic of the latest 500 logs only.

find the specific profiles, while other were. These data indicate that while primarily used by visitors from countries in the North, and not exclusively Denmark, the member profiles are also visited by persons in the South.

## **6.2. Changes and statistics of newsletters**

Headings in the newsletters were made shorter. To follow the use of the newsletter and the links included, in March 2008 the secretariat changed the process of sending out newsletters so that links used in the newsletter are registered. Registration of newsletters opened is not precise, as registration requests that the picture in the top of the letters is viewed. Newsletters are read by between (at least) 15% and 30% of the members, mostly by around 18%-20% of the members on the mailing list. This number is quite low, especially when considering that receiving information is the main expectation of many members. It can be explained partly by the fact that the statistics do not register all readers. It is though very plausible that a high number of the registered members, especially among the 1100 who were 'transferred' from the old networks, are no longer interested even if they have not informed the secretariat that they should be deleted from the member list.

Data on newsletters relate to:

- **Items read:** The newsletters which are read most intensively and quickly by members typically regards calls for consultancies and calls for contribution to strategies. Looking at the monthly newsletters sent by DDRN since the registration of links was activated (i.e. March to August except from April<sup>29</sup>) the most popular links (generally read by - at least - between 10 and 30 members) regard, in order of frequency: Conferences and seminars in Denmark, including those arranged by DDRN; International conferences and seminars; Call for funding of activities and fellowships (including DDRN funding); DDRN reports (overviews, workshop and travel reports); Papers from international organisations, e.g. "GDN Toolkit: Proposal Writing and Fundraising" and UNDP/UNEP "Poverty and Environment Indicators"; Danida reports and calls; Link and report on climate change. It is interesting that in a newsletter including several reports on climate change, the one of most interest was one from African researchers.
- **Timing of reading:** Members generally read the newsletters briefly after they are sent out, mainly within two to three days, depending on whether newsletters are sent on Fridays. Many members read the newsletters after work hours and during weekends. This indicates that 1) the readers of the newsletters find it of relevance, as they read it straight away; and 2) many use after office hour to read at home, and as this does not apply only to students, it may also indicate lack of time for reading at work.

It should also be mentioned that a number of members have also provided items for the newsletters, typically events held at Danish research institutes and universities, Masters and PhD courses, as well as a few job announcements. Information was received primarily from researchers at Danish universities, but a few practitioners from international and African organisations also contributed.

## **6.3. Other developments**

In the period of time following the survey and interviews, a large number of new members have joined the network. DDRN does not dispose of detailed data on the about 350 new members, but a quick overview at their names and email addresses indicates that many are students, researchers, consultants and stakeholders from the South. The number of institutional members has increased to 17 organisations: 7 from Denmark, one Swedish NGO and NGOs and research and knowledge centres in developing countries. Inspiration seminars and activities carried out in the South by DDRN such and workshops and visits have resulted in an increase of members, but new members register also on a continuous basis. For example, an average of five new members a week was registered between mid August and mid September 2008, when no events were carried out by DDRN.

It is worth noting that in the period following the interviews, internal areas on the DDRN website were established for

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<sup>29</sup> Data on the April newsletter were not registered as registration requires Framemakers, the providers of the website, to send the newsletter and they were not available when the newsletter was to be sent.

two working groups in order for them to have a forum for discussion and sharing documents. These functions have though not been used and the initiators of the groups who at first expressed interest in these areas have not requested further instructions on how to use them.

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

### 7.1. Conclusions

The survey and interviews analysed in the needs assessment provide useful insight into the expectations and habits of members as regards their view and use of DDRN in general, and communication in the network in particular. Expectations are important in defining the attitudes of members towards the network, but in order to provide an understanding of the needs in the network, members' expectations need to be contextualised taking into account their use of information and communication in general and within DDRN specifically. Section 7.1 summarises these issues as analysed in the report, providing a picture of the network members and defining areas of scope for DDRN information and communication activities. Section 7.2 presents recommendations on how to proceed about these activities to meet the needs identified in the network.

#### 7.1.1. Who and what is DDRN?

DDRN is a network composed of members from different stakeholder categories of whom many are engaged in several categories, e.g. Danish researchers who also work as consultants in developing countries. The fact that DDRN is composed of a **broad base of various stakeholders** including both researchers and practitioners in Denmark and in the South is the characteristic of the network that informants consider most important. This is seen as both **potential and challenge**: While the network provides a channel to get information about many issues of relevance to development research and practice and to reach the resource base and identify potential partners, DDRN also needs to develop a focus to maintain the interest of all members.

Although researchers seem to consider DDRN as a very cross-disciplinary network oriented towards development and practice, other groups perceive it more as a *Danish* and *research* network, i.e. where South members are less visible and signalling a very high academic level. While the potentials of **linking research and practice** and of **promoting cross-disciplinarity** are generally seen as the main assets of the network, there seems to be a tendency for practitioners to focus more on the research-practice aspect, while researchers seem to focus more on the potential of cross-disciplinarity.

The research-practice divide mentioned above, along with the physical distance among members, are some of the reasons why some informants see **communications** primarily as a **challenge** in DDRN.

A few issues about the constitution of DDRN seem not to be clear to all members:

- The network is primarily composed of individual members but it also includes institutions and a clarification of the difference among the **two kinds of membership** is needed.
- Some uncertainty is also indicated with respect to the **role of DDRN**. While it is mostly seen as a service provider, still a number of members see it as a channel to influence policy, thus rather as a provider of change.
- Another issue that seems to need clarification regards the **coverage of DDRN** with respect to the Danish resource base, calling for clearer coordination with the other Danish research networks.

DDRN is generally seen as a very active, open and **dynamic network**. Ideas regarding the **balance among secretariat and members** as for who is to initiate and carry out activities vary. Generally, there seems to be satisfaction with a strong and proactive secretariat. There is though also a strong interest in engaging the member base, which should be based on concrete activities when relevant opportunities and needs arise.

#### 7.1.2. How do members access information and communicate?

The survey and interviews show that members make **regular use of the news services** provided by DDRN as well as of other sources. While researchers seem to make primarily use of the newsletters, other stakeholders also make regular use of the website. The website is also used by visitors who are not members, both in Denmark, other countries in the North and in the South, showing a positive level of navigation on the site. Impressions expressed by

members on DDRN news services are generally positive, although it must be noted that a large portion of registered members do not make use of these services.

The **member database** and list of members are some of the features on the website of primary interest to members and visitors of the website.

While many informants mention electronic media that could promote interaction in DDRN, students seem the group who is most used to e.g. **discussion fora and several kinds of e-groups**. Some members in the South had positive experiences using these channels, while other refer to the problems of accessing a fast connection, which calls for use of **non web-based media**. Some members from the South are e.g. used to CDs and posters as effective channels to disseminate information.

Furthermore, **personal meetings** are highly valued among informants as a good way of promoting communication in groups and networks, especially so by students. Most of the communication that takes place within DDRN is based on electronic media and only a small section of the network participates in DDRN events such as workshops and seminars held in Denmark and countries in the South. To some members, only reading newsletters and visiting the website does not mean *really* engaging in DDRN and **really using the network**. This is an important issue to take into consideration in order to avoid that members may feel excluded.

Informants indicate that communication in DDRN has the potential of being a first step towards cooperation, while **geographical and cultural barriers** and **time constraint** may pose serious challenges. Time pressure may explain why informants clearly prefer focussed information that very briefly provides good overview, the slow increase in number of member profiles made available on the website, and the relatively low number of members who contribute news items for the newsletters.

### 7.1.3. What do members expect of DDRN?

The survey indicates that receiving **information to keep updated** is the main reason for joining DDRN.

Information about funding sources is highly prioritised. Other categories of information of high interest to members are events, particularly of interest to Danish members, research reports and briefs, and network activities carried out by DDRN members. This information is primarily received through newsletters and website, but also by attending events organised by the network. Furthermore, there seems to be a stronger expectation of receiving information of broad character rather than very disciplinary specific knowledge.

**Establishing contacts** is almost as important to members as receiving information. While most informants seem interested in establishing contacts with members from other stakeholder categories, it seems that by joining DDRN, researchers mainly expect to establish contacts to other researchers, including N/S exchange. This suggests that this group is more, though not only, interested in establishing cross-disciplinary rather than cross-sectorial relations. This is in line with the difference concerning the potentials of DDRN listed above.

While many informants suggest that members should update profiles and contribute information to the website and newsletter, it seems clear that the **secretariat** is expected to be the main responsible for information flow in the network. This includes the particular task of identifying and defining ways to engage members in communication to share information and interact, including facilitating the process of establishing cooperation among members. Furthermore, more members expect to receive than to contribute information within DDRN. It is though relevant that there seems to be very strong interest for developing a new feature on the website to allow members to share **ideas for joint activities**.

Though less prioritised than other activities in DDRN, a number of members, particularly NGOs and consultants and the Faculty registered as institutional member, are interested in DDRN as a channel of **influencing policy**. By maintaining dialogue with donor agencies, DDRN can keep its members abreast of developments within donor priorities and international research trends.

On a long term basis, besides the same expectations for joining the network, some members also indicated that they would expect to disseminate information and results from own projects and Master's thesis (Students) and disseminating information about DDRN, which is envisioned to become better known in the South and by a few to contribute to higher priority to research in Danida. The main picture of DDRN in future provided by informants is being **'THE portal'** to the Danish development resource base, indicating an increasing focus in the linking function.

#### 7.1.4. How to promote information and communication in DDRN

The most important asset of DDRN is the network's varied and broad member base, who possesses a lot of valuable knowledge and can generate new knowledge, both within their already existing relations and together with other network members. Another great potential of DDRN in this respect is to promote the application of this knowledge (existing and new) in development practice.

Achieving these potentials requires active engagement of both secretariat and members of DDRN. Taking into consideration the expected level of involvement indicated by informants, the various habits and cultures regarding communication that they have, the different degree of knowledge of DDRN, and the general lack of time that most are affected by, it seems clear that the secretariat should start by providing clear and easily accessible guidelines so that members can engage most effectively.

To meet the needs in the network, information and communication in DDRN should be organised around three main tasks:

- **Making already existing knowledge visible.** This includes dissemination activities, e.g. electronic news services, overviews, other channels for South, seminars and conferences, mainly with focus on cross-sectorial and cross-disciplinary knowledge.
- **Facilitating establishment of contacts to generate new knowledge.** This includes promotion of N/N and N/S contacts among members as well as to other stakeholders through meetings and workshops, web-based member database, and other fora for interaction among members, e.g. posting of ideas for joint activities.
- **Disseminating information of relevance to generation of new knowledge.** This means helping members to access information about funding sources, donor policies and strategies etc. that might have influence on their future production of research and knowledge. Activities involve use of news services, meetings and lobbying with donors and research agencies.

When relevant, in all tasks special attention should be devoted to addressing the research-practice divide in order to enhance the opportunities of contributing to application of existing and new knowledge in development practice.

### 7.2. Recommendations

This section provides recommendations on how to promote effective information flow and communication in DDRN. The recommendations are formulated in grey boxes and addressed to the Board and secretariat of DDRN, who are responsible for taking strategic decisions and implementing activities, respectively. The recommendations also include detailed and specific suggestions in bullets, specifically targeted at the secretariat, who may include these in the activity plans of DDRN for 2008 and 2009.

A prerequisite for more targeted efforts is more detailed knowledge of the member base. Therefore this section starts with recommendations concerning definition of DDRN membership. These are followed by recommendations grouped around main areas involving different actors in and outside the network, i.e. information disseminated by the secretariat, communication among members, and coordination with donors and other knowledge organisations.

It is suggested that all information and communication channels are continuously monitored, which means both keeping track of the traffic on newsletters and website and introducing evaluations of all activities carried out to promote knowledge sharing and establishment of contacts among members. It is also suggested that DDRN increases interaction with international knowledge intermediaries to exchange experiences and get inspiration on how to go about challenges related to communication activities, e.g. reaching the South and bridging the research-practice divide.

#### 7.2.1. Definition of membership

Though many members are engaged in several stakeholder categories, it would be an advantage for planning strategically targeted activities in DDRN, including communication activities, to have more detailed knowledge of all members than is the case at the time of writing this report. More information on membership in the network would also be an advantage for recruitment of new and engagement of existing members. More specifically, these issues give rise to the following recommendations:

#### Rec. 1: Register basic data on members, including gender and stakeholder category

- Change procedure for registration of new members, e.g. by introducing a form to be filled by applicants and either sent to the secretariat or uploaded directly on the website.
- Gather supplementary information from members already registered.

#### Rec. 2: Define share of actual members

- Contact members who have not read the newsletters during the last six months nor uploaded a profile to assess whether they still are interested in being members or can be deleted from the database. This might reduce the number of members, but the network would become more even and lively, as it would improve the member database.

#### Rec. 3: Define categories of DDRN membership

- Clearly state on the website the equal 'legitimacy' of various ways of engaging, i.e. *only* using news services, attending events, or engaging in working groups and board of DDRN, indicating that level of engagement may vary over time.
- Consider ways of addressing the various ways of using the network to replace one general definition as 'member' (Board).
- Clearly define the different implications of registering as individual or institutional member, including a clarification of information dissemination procedures in the network.
- In order to promote that all stakeholders feel included and addressed in the network, develop clear and visible guidelines on the website on how specific groups may benefit from joining and using the network. Special attention should be devoted to defining the role of South members.

### 7.2.2. Information from DDRN secretariat

Receiving information is the main expectations among DDRN members, of whom many have short time for reading and looking for news. It is therefore very important that it is provided in a very clear and easy way in order for members to use the shortest time necessary. Furthermore, it is important that the thematic coverage of the news services includes issues of interest to all.

#### Rec. 4: Develop a clearer thematic focus

- Choose one or a few themes that can include the interest of members across professions and disciplines, e.g. climate change (Board)<sup>30</sup>.
- Still provide information about more specific, cross-disciplinary themes of interest to members.
- Update the division among thematic areas on the website and newsletters to reflect the area of focus prioritised in the network.

#### Rec. 5: Improve user friendliness and accessibility of the news services

- Provide clear guidelines on how to use the website depending on kind of information looked for, i.e. set up the homepage as a kind of guide to the website.
- When possible, provide simple versions of documents and report to improve the process of downloading with slow internet access.
- Consider providing text format of website and newsletter for users with slow connections so that users can select between plain text or html versions.
- To make sure that long visits on the website can be seen as positive, make a test of navigability to make sure that users easily can find the information they are looking for.
- Introduce better tools to monitor in details the traffic on the website, including the member database, e.g. by increasing log size in Statcounter.

#### Rec. 6: Provide information on issues of main interest to members

- Provide more information on sources of funding, e.g. calls and links.

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<sup>30</sup> It must be noted that shortly before the time of publishing this report in October 2008, the Board has selected three themes of main focus in DDRN: Climate change, Food security, and Research communication.

- If DDRN intends to attract and maintain the interest of students, more time is to be used for updating the student section of the website and the secretariat may consider sending newsletters every second week rather than once a month.
- Reorganise the categories of information on the website to make it easier for user to find relevant information, e.g. by dividing 'Events' into 'Events in DK' and 'Events in other countries' and dividing the 'Paper and document' sections in 'Reports' and 'Briefs'.

#### Rec. 7: Develop other material for dissemination in the South

- Besides easier access to electronic news services mentioned above, consider producing CDs and posters to be distributed to potential partners and active members on regular basis.
- Produce small 'introduction packages' to DDRN that secretariat staff and members financed by DDRN to attend international events can distribute to interested stakeholders.
- Consider how to increase information dissemination in other languages than English besides providing links available links to French and Spanish versions of documents posted on the website, by translating briefs and overviews to be produced by DDRN if particularly relevant to non-English speaking areas.

### 7.2.3. Communication and contact among members

In contrast to the questionnaire survey, the interviews show a quite high degree of interest in webfora and interactive communication tools. Experience with the fora established for working groups of which none has been used so far show though that this opportunity may not be used anyway. Therefore, except from considering new very simple solutions, DDRN should focus on building on other channels already used.

#### Rec. 8: Develop page on DDRN website for informal contact among members

- New page for members wishing to share ideas on new projects or interested in a particular issue, but not interested in establishing a working group in DDRN. New requests can be disseminated through the secretariat and taken up through direct contact among members.
- Set up clear instructions on how this function is to be used.

#### Rec. 9: Explore the possibilities of integrating use of interactive tools already used by members

- Consider using Facebook to reach the youngest section of the member base.
- As students are interested in establishing contact to other stakeholders as well, consider to open this forum to other stakeholders as well, e.g. consultants, NGOs and researchers who are interested in contact with students.
- Inform members that webfora can be opened on DDRN's website upon request, i.e. if and when need arises.
- Keep updated on other channels emerging that DDRN could make use of.

#### Rec. 10: Improve the member database

- Consider how to increase the number of registered profiles in connection with the revision of registration procedure (see 7.2.1.)
- Disseminate information on increase in number of registered members and use of member database, e.g. 'new members' or 'new profiles' section in monthly newsletter. Consider also including general log information on profiles visited.
- Improve and make available page containing information on projects that members are engaged in.
- Consider possibility of uploading pictures of members.
- Introduce raking on most relevant areas of interest and expertise so that profiles are more relevant to people looking for resource persons, e.g. limiting the number of areas of expertise to 5.
- Keep track of users of the database in North and South.
- Explore ways of integrating the research and competence overview produced by DDRN with the member database.
- Make it possible to select degree of involvement in the network and kind of contacts wished.

#### Rec. 11: Promote sharing of knowledge and research results among members

- To make visible the large bulk of knowledge available in the DDRN base, consider editing 'results of the month' in the news services. This would be a way of linking the high interest for research papers and the willingness to provide information about research results expressed by more than half of the respondents.

- Ways should be explored on how to motivate researchers and other to contribute and disseminate their results within the network.
- Organise meetings to promote sharing of knowledge and face to face meetings where all groups can interact, also including informal meetings, e.g. after work meetings that could be held at members' institutions or organisations.
- Use the potential of workshops strategically. This tool can serve as both dissemination of knowledge, establishment of contacts and generation of new knowledge. If facilitated properly, this tool is a very effective way of promoting all functions of DDRN as concerns communication (see 7.1.4.).

**Rec. 12: Facilitate the establishment of working groups in DDRN**

- Working groups seem to be an ideal forum for effective and engaging communication in DDRN. Establishment of these groups should be facilitated by making existing guidelines even clearer.
- Follow up on existing working groups to investigate whether initiatives need to be taken to improve their communication in the groups, e.g. to start using fora on DDRN website, and communication to other network members.

**Rec. 13: Increase focus on research communication as theme**

- Provide members with inspiration on how to go about communicating their research results and bridge the research-practice gap.
- Establish and maintain close cooperation with other knowledge intermediaries to continuously improve approaches adopted by DDRN.

#### **7.2.4. Lobby and policy**

Though not being the primary focus of DDRN, lobby and policy related activities are also important for communication in DDRN. It should also be noted that information and communication activities can indirectly serve to influence policy, as communication of e.g. research results may have an impact on development strategies and priorities.

**Rec. 14: Maintain links to Danida and EU**

- Many Danish members already receive news from Danida, but maintaining a dialogue with Danida can improve chances of engaging members when need may arise and of increasing their level of information about new development and opportunities.
- Keep members updated on funding opportunities and development research priorities at EU level, which is a very time requiring activity for individual members.

**Rec. 15: When opportunity arise, involve members in contributing input to strategies**

- Even if many may not contribute, continue providing members with an opportunity of contributing, as some may consider this a motivating opportunity to engage in a concrete activity aimed at specific result.

#### **7.2.5. Coordination with other organisations and networks**

It seems clear that in order to become 'the' portal to the resource base, clear information is to be included on who is to find in the DDRN database and where to find others.

**Rec. 16: Provide very visible links to 'sister organisations'**

- Provide links to organisations in Denmark that engage other sections of the resource base, e.g. other research and NGO networks, directly from the home page of DDRN's website so that links are visible to visitors as soon as they enter the website of the network on [www.ddrn.dk](http://www.ddrn.dk).
- Identify similar organisations at international level and consider gathering links to these in one page on the website in stead of spread by geographic area.
- Increase coordination with and provide links to Danish universities.

**Rec. 17: Avoid duplication of information**

- Keep updated on news circulated through DanidaDevForum and U-landsnyt to avoid unnecessary overlap.
- Increase cooperation with Danish universities to get better insight into the information provided to the largest part of DDRN members.

# ANNEX 1: Questionnaire

## Assessment of information and communication needs in DDRN

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: Female \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_

### Theme 1 – Membership

1. Which of the following stakeholder groups do you belong to and where do you work? (Mark with X)

	Denmark	Developing country	Other EU country	Other: _____
Researcher				
Ph.D. student				
Consultant				
Danida				
Other aid agencies				
NGO				
Master's student				
Other: _____				

2. Which are your expectations as a member of DDRN? Please choose in prioritised order (1 to 5, using 5 to indicate your highest priority) between the following options:

	Get in contact with development researchers and practitioners for possible cooperation			
	If you have chosen the option above, please indicate whether you are interested in contacts in:	North: _____	South: _____	North and South: _____
	Get information on events, research projects and/or sources of funding in your field of research/work			
	Channel to influence debates at policy level			
	Other: _____			
	Other: _____			

### Theme 2 – Information and communication channels in DDRN

3. Please answer the following question regarding the temporary website and newsletter of DDRN:

		Yes	No	If yes: Once	More than once
a	Have you visited the temporary website of DDRN?				
b	Have you read the DDRN newsletters?				
	If you answered yes to a) and b), please answer c) and d), otherwise proceed to question 4.				
c	Was there something you particularly appreciated about the temporary website/newsletter?			Why?: _____	
d	Was there something you particularly disliked or missed in the temporary website/newsletter?			Why?: _____	

4. If you are interested in receiving information from DDRN, please mark the options below in order of priority (1-11, using 11 to indicate your highest priority):

	National and international conferences, seminars and workshops
	New research papers on issues of current interest within the fields of DDRN
	New policy documents within the fields of DDRN
	Calls for contributions to comments on research priorities and policy issues
	Information on network activities carried out by DDRN members
	Information on other members (research/work areas, country, etc.)

	Links to Danish, international and Southern research institutions
	Links to funding possibilities for research projects
	Job openings and grants at research institutions
	Other: _____
	Other: _____

5. As the members of DDRN cover a wide spectrum of themes of work and research, from very specific to cross-cutting issues, the secretariat intends to focus the information flow on overall issues regarding research and knowledge for development as well as themes of broad interest, which may vary over time according to changing priorities in the research and donor communities. Please indicate which of the following themes you are interested in (please mark with X):

	Climate change		Urban development
	Organic production		Trade and liberalisation
	Livestock		Promotion of human rights
	Biodiversity		Migration
	Forestry		Development aid policies
	Livelihood		Financial and private sector development
	Food security		Social development, gender and poverty
	Natural resource management		Public sector governance
	Corporate social responsibility		Rural development
	Local service delivery		Fight against corruption
	Research communication		Other: _____
	Other: _____		Other: _____

6. Are you interested in channels for communication with other members to be provided on the website? Please indicate the degree of your interest (please mark with X).

	Very interested	Interested	Fairly interested	Not interested
Webfora – discussion groups				
List of members' proposals for joint activities				
Information on other members				
Other: _____				

7. If you are interested in having access to information on other members, please indicate which of the following types of information you are interested in (mark with X):

	Name		Country experience
	Institution		Publications
	Contact details		Link to member's website
	Stakeholder group		Other: _____
	Themes of research / field of work (indicating keywords)		Other: _____
	Brief presentation		Other: _____

8. Are you interested in contributing with information to the network (please mark with X)

	Very interested	Interested	Fairly interested	Not interested
About your self				
Your research results				
Events within your field of research/work				
Ideas for joint activities/research				

projects				
Other: _____				

9. Do you have any suggestions to improve the user friendliness of the DDRN website and newsletters?  
Please write your suggestion(s) here: \_\_\_\_\_

Theme 3: Other sources of information

10. Which other sources of information on research and development do you use regularly (please mark with X)?

	Website	Newsletter		Website	Newsletter
Eldis			Ulandsnyt.dk		
Id 21			Other: _____		
Danida DevForum			Other: _____		
Sci-dev.net			Other: _____		
Other Danish research networks			Other: _____		

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Please send the questionnaire to Marianne Forti at maf@ddrn.dk no later than May 21, 2007.

## Annex 2: Individual interview guide

o Intro	Examples
<p>Thanks</p> <p>How long have you known / been member of DDRN?</p> <p>Member of former networks? Which?</p>	
1 Membership	
<p>What is your motivation for being a member? What do you expect from your membership?</p> <p>What do you see as particularly relevant in DDRN for members of your stakeholder category (e.g. researchers in the South)?</p>	<p>What?</p> <p>Why?</p>
2 Knowledge and impression of DDRN	
<p>What image do you think DDRN has? What kind of network does it seem to be?</p> <p>The network includes various groups of members (incl. North/South) – Do you see any challenges and/or potentials in this board composition?</p> <p>Is there any group of members/stakeholder categories that you are particularly interested in linking up with?</p>	<p>Active? Knowledge? Big?</p> <p>How potential/challenge? For whom?</p>
3 Expectations from communication in DDRN	
<p>Now discuss communication more specifically..</p> <p>Could you give me one example from a network or group of persons where you felt that the communication within the network/group was functioning very well? Or the external communication to others?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What made it work? What did you like the most?</li> <li>- Do you have similar experiences from communication across North/South?</li> </ul> <p>Taking into account your experience with how communication works best, do you see any specific potentials and/or challenges for the communication within DDRN, considering the many stakeholders and North and South members? And from DDRN to other actors?</p> <p>Is there any information channel that you are particularly interested in using?</p>	<p>Who did what? What did you do? How did you use it?</p> <p>Examples</p>
4 Joint action - 'vision'	
<p>What roles do you envision for the secretariat and the members in order to promote a well functioning communication in DDRN? What can we/they do?</p> <p>Now thinking a couple of years ahead – what results do you expect from being a member? (given and/or received)</p>	<p>Examples</p>

## Annex 3: Suggested tasks to promote good communication<sup>31</sup>

### Tasks for DDRN members

- **Update member profiles<sup>32</sup>**
- **Send information for website and newsletters (on new projects, reports, project calls, links to secretariat)**
- Arrange conferences
- Communicate via forums
- Engage in working groups
- Make links for the network when in the field
- Inform others about DDRN
- Share scientific knowledge
- Connect people through networking
- Enhance cooperation among resource institutions
- Use the network (and the secretariat) to start ad hoc cooperations
- Contribute to the networks' joint input to Danida's strategies, policies and sector programmes<sup>33</sup>
- Make sure that DDRN makes use of platforms that members can use and contribute to, e.g. Wikipedia, LinkedIn, Google Groups, etc.
- Inform about areas where research is needed, e.g. as topics for Masters' thesis
- React to information from DDRN on basis of relevance and interest

### Tasks for DDRN secretariat

- Send precise and targeted info
- Make sure that the searching functions in the database work well. Øget dynamikken i søge kriterierne i medlemsbasen, så der kan søges på; navn, efternavn, institution, tidligere arbejdsplads, tematisk fokus, projektsamarbejdspartner, egen kontakt netværk,
- Inform about new info to be found on the website
- Develop open and accessible discussion fora
- Send reminders to members that they can send info for the website;
- Consider including room for N/S cooperation
- Arrange seminars
- Strengthen exchange across professional groups and finds out how to involve practitioners, not only communicate research results;
- Disseminates themes for research to be carried out by students ("bestillingsopgaver")
- Keep updated on global trends and keep the members abreast of global trends including tender and project calls
- Provide visible information on how to use the website
- Choose a fewer issues to focus on
- Introduce DDRN to other networks, universities etc.
- Make already existing relevant research visible.
- Be very active with respect to working groups: arrange meetings and workshops, facilitate that the right people meet and develop
- Provide information on Danish institutions that are involved in international councils, cooperation, and projects
- Arrange 'mutual expectation meetings' once a year with researchers, Danida, consultants and industry representatives.
- Strengthen cooperation with international offices at Danish universities
- Facilitate the process whereby members make their contributions to Danida strategies and policies
- Use the least possible resources on establishing initiatives and in stead inform members of the possibility of receiving assistance from the network when relevant
- Strengthen dialogue and establishment of links among
- Promote more openness among members e.g. by establishing an interaction codex
- Consider developing the Danish Journal of Dev Research
- Describe network activities in journalistic way. e.g. the 'focus of the month'
- Publicise examples that indicate how the member base was used

<sup>31</sup> The list of task results from asking members about what the secretariat and members could do to promote communication in DDRN. Most of the suggestions result from written lists provided by participants of group interviews (as explained in section 5.3.4 on page 19)

<sup>32</sup> The first two are in bold as these are the tasks mentioned by most informants.

<sup>33</sup> Comment by informant who during interview commented that input to governance strategy in 2007 had been a good process.