

Executive summary

The Danish Development Research Network (DDRN) has demonstrated how researchers and practitioners from the global North and South can work together to create needs-based knowledge that can contribute to sustainable development. Over the past four and a half years, this broad and inclusive knowledge network has attracted over **2,300 members**; 60 per cent of who are based in the North, mainly Denmark, and approximately 40 per cent in developing countries.

Between 2007 and 2011 DDRN has carried out a wide range of activities. A few highlights include:

- Holding, co-organising or funding over 90 conferences, workshops and seminars that were attended by a total of over 3,500 participants;
- Developing and maintaining a website that has received an average of 6,000 unique page views (a third of which come from the South), provided content for over 400 newsletters and a membership database containing more than 1,100 online profiles.
- Facilitating eight working groups and two platforms, all including participants from various sectors, and some particularly promoting North-South (N-S) cooperation;
- Organising eight awareness and training workshops on research communication for over 200 participants in Denmark and in the South.

This report was written by the DDRN secretariat staff members and has a dual purpose. On the one hand, it aims to

inspire future network practice, and on the other hand, to contribute to conceptualising and measuring the value of knowledge networks within the development sector. It focuses on three key activity areas where the Network has proven to be of added value to its users and members. These are:

- 1 **Outreach and uptake of research-based information.** The uptake of research has been a very high priority throughout the existence of DDRN. The network acknowledges the importance of providing easy access to research-based knowledge for people who may already be overwhelmed by the amount of online information available. It is also based on the acknowledgment that development-focused research that is communicated widely and strategically can contribute to improved implementation of development programmes and guide decision makers in formulating new policies.
- 2 **Multi-stakeholder dialogue and collaboration.** To promote 'out-of-the-box' thinking, which is necessary to address a range of complex and interlinked problems faced by developing countries, DDRN has brought together



researchers and practitioners across a range of disciplines to create an enabling environment for interaction, and facilitate interdisciplinary and cross-sectorial sharing and collaboration. Bringing together not only stakeholders from different professional categories, but also members representing different stages of their career, is another approach prioritised by DDRN to broaden inputs and perspectives.

3 North-South cooperation. The involvement of the South as members, users and key actors in the Network has been crucial in achieving the overall objective of DDRN, i.e. to contribute to the inclusion of research and research-based knowledge in development. The actors in

the South are the ones who know the research needs of their respective countries, who can act to address these needs and guide policy makers to make evidence-based decisions.

Lessons gathered in this report demonstrate how a number of factors contribute to the success of the various activities carried out. The most significant are highlighted here:

Being a network enables DDRN to access and share information for **online news services** that might otherwise not be broadly known. As well as filtering a range of broad sources, DDRN uses active networking of the secretariat staff and contributions by network members to generate further news that might be of interest to its members.

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Students at
Makerere
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It is also important to provide information through a flexible system that allows for adjusting themes and categories based on the interests of members while maintaining an overall structure that makes navigation easier.

Training workshops on research communication are a very good tool to enable the strategic communication of research. When carrying out these kinds of events, it is crucial to promote local ownership and relevance to participants through 1) Tailoring the contents of the training workshops to the specific needs of the projects involved; 2) Promoting cross-fertilisation and mutual learning by including experiences of local projects; and 3) Delegating responsibility for parts of the preparation to local partners. Furthermore, opportunities for learning are optimised by planning for timing and contents of the workshop that allow for immediate application and further development of outputs after the workshops.

When organising **conferences, seminars, workshops, and meetings**, it has proven very valuable to co-organise events with other partners to increase participant outreach and available resources. Most importantly, co-hosted events enable the contribution of inputs on cross-cutting and issue-based themes that reach beyond the sometimes narrowly defined research agendas of research institutions and departments. Good planning of direct face-to-face communication and exchange at events that allows for active participation and discussions of strong interest to the participants can be fine breeding grounds for further cross-thematic and cross-sector collaboration.

Working groups have proven a particularly useful low-cost mechanism for engaging researchers and practitioners in interdisciplinary collaboration and experience-sharing. Here, as for events driven by members, facilitation support and seed money from DDRN has enabled these groups to run. This support is especially necessary in the initial phase where a core group needs to be consolidated. Experiences also stress the value of having key capacities that are well respected and connected in a working group to help broaden the scope of the outputs of the group.

To engage students in development and research, DDRN's web-based *Science Shop* which links students to the private sector and NGOs with projects in developing countries, has shown to be an effective and inspirational entry point. Another valuable way of linking students to various stakeholder groups in the development sector is organising seminars for Master students, where personal accounts from experiences 'in-the-field' provide inspiration to their future study.

Platforms are a way to promote **North-South-South knowledge sharing and cooperation** around a theme of shared interest and to enhance South-led cooperation. DDRN have been able to support the initial phase of setting up platforms through a flexible work plan combined with a strong secretariat, whose main functions include process facilitation, information services and logistic support. This support highlights the importance of identifying research gaps and of mapping



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Rural market,
Uganda

the institutional landscape in order to help shape and focus platform activities and avoid overlaps. It has also proven to be important to establish links to existing research initiatives within the same or related topics in the country or region where the research is expected to take place.

Entering strategic alliances with existing regional Southern-based structures on North-South research and higher education has proven to be the most effective way of including the voice of the South and promoting South leadership in

North-South-South research cooperation. Events conducted through alliances have shown to be very effective, for example, in terms of lobbying African governments to pay more attention to higher education and research in their priority setting and budget allocations. Alliances can help reveal the different types of challenges faced by universities and research institutions in the South, and between the South and the North. This can in turn be a first step in building capacity and correcting existing imbalances in North-South cooperation.