

Minutes from the 5th DDRN General Assembly

Wednesday May 26, 2010 - 13:00-15:00

Faculty of Life Sciences, University of Copenhagen
Aud. 2-02. Building 1-05, Ground Floor, Dyrmlægevej 1, Frederiksberg C

Agenda:

1. Election of chairperson and secretary for the general assembly
2. Approval of the agenda
3. Report by the board by Carl Erik Schou Larsen, chairperson of DDRN
4. Presentation of work plan for 2010 by Anne Sørensen, chief coordinator of DDRN
5. Election of board members and substitutes
6. Any other business
 - a. Brief on future prospects, challenges, and opportunities for DDRN

Ad 1. Election of chairperson and secretary

Anne Sørensen (AS) welcomed the participants and Carl Erik Schou Larsen subsequently opened the general assembly and gave a brief introduction to the meeting. Carl Erik Schou Larsen was elected chairperson of the meeting. Iona Eberle from the DDRN secretariat took minutes.

Ad 2. Approval of the agenda

The agenda was approved without changes.

Ad 3. Report by the board, by Carl Erik Schou Larsen

Carl Erik Schou Larsen (CESL) briefly introduced the objectives of DDRN and outlined achievements made in 2009 and early 2010 and future activities for DDRN. The website of DDRN and internet-based services such as newsletters and registration procedures etc. are continually being improved. DDRN has witnessed an 11% increase in visits to the website; and DDRN membership has grown by 35% with increased interest in DDRN particularly from the South; DDRN now counts 2025 members of which 40% are from the South. One survey report on the internationalisation of higher education and research in SANORD and guidelines on research project management have been developed. DDRN has made notable advancements in relation to research communication, one of DDRN's focal areas. Research communication seminars were held in 2009 in Tanzania and Vietnam for 80 participants, which have strengthened links to Danish embassies and communication units in Denmark. DDRN has established new collaborating partnerships with MOST from Vietnam, with whom the research communication seminar was organised, with PegNET (German sister network), NGO Forum, NGO Education network, and Nordic FAU associations. DDRN has provided policy and programme inputs to a number of partners, including PAEPARD (an EU/FARA network), RUFORUM (network of African universities), and UniBrain. The last is an initiative linked to the implementation of the Africa Commission's recommendations. RUFORUM will organise a Ministerial meeting on

higher education in Africa in November 2010, where DDRN will be involved as a member of the preparatory committee.

DDRN is continuously involved in the development of DDRN working groups; and the Climate Change Task Force and the working group on global value chains have provided inputs to Danida. Besides, DDRN is preparing introduction of a new initiative, the Science Shop, a student research project database for students.

CESL highlighted the following challenges for DDRN:

- Raising attention to research communication amongst researchers etc.;
- Measuring the impact of communication activities and strategies;
- Ensuring the quality of mappings and guidelines as well as the updating of competence profiles.

Moreover, seeing that this may be the final grant period of DDRN, a key challenge lies with cooperating with future DU platforms and ensuring that the expertise and network of DDRN will not be lost after the termination of DDRN's grant period.

Finally, accounts revealed that DDRN has only spent 34% of its total budget for the second grant period. This is partly due to the fact that for various reasons many activities planned for the first grant period were postponed into the second grant period, which meant that the level of activities to be funded by this grant was rather low in autumn 2009.

Ad 4. Presentation of the work plan for 2010, by Anne Sørensen

Anne Sørensen underlined that DDRN is working with a flexible work plan due to the current uncertainties. DDRN is involved in initial discussions with DU platforms on how to integrate DDRN into DU platforms and transfer DDRN competences.

The guiding principles for DDRN are flexibility in implementation, multidisciplinary with focus on cross-cutting themes, documenting the added value of DDRN, and inclusiveness, i.e. meeting the needs and wishes of DDRN's member base. DDRN's activities and plans are divided into three focal areas:

1. Linking research and development: In collaboration with DU platforms DDRN will organise a conference on modalities for support to higher education. Danida plans to invite European donors who support Higher Education in Agriculture in Africa to a meeting. DDRN is assisting in the preparations of this conference. A mapping of existing programmes on donor support to capacity development within higher education in developing countries will be developed as a background to this conference. DDRN is organising UniBrain's visit to Denmark and has been invited to comment on the action plan for gender equity within the new Danish development strategy together with the Danish Youth Council (Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd) and to participate in a World Bank meeting on gender.
2. Knowledge and experience sharing: DDRN issues 3 future calls for member-led activities in 2010; no calls will be issued in 2011 due to the termination of the DDRN grant. DDRN will be involved in a number of workshops and seminars in Denmark and the South, continue to improve the website and news services, and create new activities for the younger segment, e.g. Science Shop.
3. DDRN will continue to enhance existing partnerships with other networks, Danish universities, and DU platforms.

As a follow-up on the needs assessment of DDRN members carried out in 2009, DDRN has initiated a small email-based survey of the value of DDRN to South members. According to South members DDRN is a true North-South network, inclusive of the South. South members appreciate DDRN's multidisciplinary, online news services,

access to guidelines and other services provided on the website, and the possibility to link to researchers and stakeholders in the North via DDRN. Particularly, DDRN's contextual approach is highly valued by young researchers in the South. Finally, in relation to current and future challenges for DDRN, AS underlined the challenge of ensuring attention to members' needs and expectations while simultaneously approaching DU platforms and ensuring the continuation of DDRN's competences.

Ad 5. Election of board members and substitutes

Before continuing to the election of new DDRN board members, CESL thanked the board and the secretariat. CESL hoped that the practice of visiting different institutions in relation to board meetings would be continued as these had been very fruitful.

Five members of the board were to be elected. The mandates of the following board members stood for election: Arne Wangel (DTU), John Christensen (UNEP Risoe Centre, DTU), Carl Erik Schou Larsen (KU/LIFE), Thomas Nielsen (AU) and Olav Jull Sørensen (AAU). All wanted to stand for re-election and were re-elected to the board. T. Helene Ystanes Føyn (DTU) was elected substitute member.

Ad. 6. a. Brief on future prospects, challenges, and opportunities for DDRN

The floor was opened for comments and a brief discussion on future prospects for DDRN. John Christensen asked whether DDRN could contribute to the MDG meeting to be held in September 2010; and in case DDRN should exist by 2012, DDRN might contribute to the 2012 Rio Conference on climate.

Claus Jørgensen commented on DDRN's under spending. Lone Frederiksen explained that this was partly related to grants previously allocated to members for member-led activities, which had not yet been disbursed. Furthermore, AS noted that in case of any unused funds by the end of DDRN's grant period, Danida might be asked whether it is possible to extend the period. She also told that DDRN may have the possibility of taking on assignments on contract.

Finally, the future of DDRN and prospects for collaboration with DU platforms was discussed. It was noted that as DU platforms are more focussed on academic research and not on network activities, there is scope for DDRN to link to DU platforms; it would be a waste to lose DDRN's many contacts and experience acquired over the years. However, it was also underlined that the extent to which DDRN could be integrated into DU platforms is entirely dependent on the path that DU platforms wish to take and the set-up of DU platforms. At the moment it is envisaged that DU platforms should have decentralised secretariats, which does not include space for more general network activities and services, which is where DDRN has its core competences. Moreover, it was noted that education and research are not given the highest priority in the new Danish development strategy.

One of the ideas that emerged with regards as how to integrate DDRN into DU platforms is to include DDRN as a conditionality from Danida in the strategy plan of DU platforms.