

## **Minutes from DDRN seminar**

### **How can knowledge generation and utilisation improve development cooperation?**

**Wednesday May 9, 2007, 15:00 – 17:00  
Danish Institute for International Studies  
Strandgade 71, 1401 Copenhagen K**

#### **Programme:**

**Open debate with short introductions from the panel:**

- **Margrethe Holm Andersen (MHA), senior adviser Evaluation Department/Danida**
- **Helle Munk Ravnborg (HMR), senior researcher DIIS**
- **Poul Buch Hansen (PBH), partner Development Associates AS**
- **Hans Peter Dejgård (HPD), advisor Sustainability Watch**

Ole Mertz, member of the board, had accepted to take the chair. Minutes were taken by Lone Frederiksen from the secretariat.

#### **Short introductions by the members of the panel:**

**Margrethe Holm Andersen** focused on three main issues:

- A. Need for knowledge of how different organisations and institutions responsible for administration of development aid best manage their mandate in cases like the following:
  - when it is necessary to change current approaches (e.g. because of corruption);
  - when encountering concrete problems (e.g. choice of crop);
  - in response to questions related to the economic situation of development countries.

We have to take into account that the conditions for successful results of development aid are not the same for all players in the world of development aid.

- B. Knowledge and research should answer the actual needs experienced in the South. Solutions proposed should be economically sustainable; and the standards of research should be high. It is, however, difficult for partners in the South to define relevant areas of research.
- C. It is desirable to include support for definition of the research agenda in the sector programmes. Strong, opposing interests in the recipient countries must

be taken into account, as must the fact that the partners in the South have not chosen the North partners with whom they collaborate.

MHA explained that Danida is soon going to initiate an evaluation of the usefulness of development research. This will be preceded by a desk study on similar evaluation experiences from others.

**Helle Munk Ravnborg** stressed the importance of considering all kinds of relevant knowledge, not only research. Development strategies and programmes must be based on knowledge; and it appears that there is an increasing openness in Danida towards including new knowledge in development aid. The policies for development aid are changing internationally towards more harmonization, basket funding etc. Development aid is based on a wish for change, but often local decision makers (the elite) want to maintain status quo. It is desirable that we obtain and disseminate knowledge of whether individual programmes support change that is useful to broad strata of society or whether they preserve status quo. Much knowledge has been gathered ad hoc by visits to the South, but as a consequence of the new development policies such visits are being rarer; and this source of knowledge risk to dry out. Accordingly the coupling between policy makers and practitioners will diminish even more. Often, research is only introduced in development policies at a certain point of their elaboration; and it is important to exploit these 'Windows of Opportunity'. There is a need for new ways of creating relevant knowledge and for considering where in the development process this knowledge is best employed – an important challenge for DDRN!

**Poul Buch Hansen** underlined the fact that existing knowledge is not used sufficiently in development programmes. PBH focused on three main questions:

- A. What knowledge do we need?
- B. How do we use the relevant knowledge in the practical development work?
- C. How do the different institutional frameworks influence on the development work?

Ad A: We need broad analyses of society and of natural resources, including analyses at grass-root level. Economic growth is necessary, but not sufficient – and how do we distribute our focus? Local inequality and discrimination is among the evident areas of research.

Ad B: Research-based knowledge must be used in designing country strategies and in the sector programmes. The sector approach is problematic since the sectors are very broad. Cross-cutting themes might be more useful. As to the question of administration costs, these should be reconsidered with a view of finding out whether they constitute bases for necessary dialogue with the South partner, or whether they are superfluous costs.

Ad C: Conditions and options are highly different according to whether a programme/project is managed by Danida, by researchers, by consultants, or by NGOs. PBH suggested that a consortium consisting of different types of stakeholders might be worth while considering, also as recipient of Danida support.

**Hans Peter Dejgaard** expressed broad consensus with the three former speakers, adding the fact that many NGOs elaborate descriptions of the impact and

shortcomings of development assistance. Among the large and medium-sized NGOs (e.g. Third World Network, Institute of International Development, and the Danish 92-group, which is a formal collaboration among 20 different organisations) many focus much on advocacy and lobbying, in order to let the voices of South countries be heard at international assemblies. Some large NGOs (e.g. Oxfam) also have very competent research departments.

Among urgent needs, HPD mentioned the following:

- Research carried out in the South;
- Transmission of research-based knowledge to practitioners;
- Focus on the relationship between politicians of changing governments and development;
- Revision of EU trade agreements;
- Thorough preparation of the climate summit in Copenhagen 2009.

### **Open debate**

The first round of comments centred on questions of how to prioritize research:

- Priorities are not necessarily the same in North and South;
- The present trend facilitates large, common research projects, where individual researchers do not have easy access;
- Is it OK for individual researchers to have their own agenda?
- We have to collaborate with our embassies, which have money, competence, and a network to which we should link up.
- Our research must focus on perspectives of development;
- Consortia should also include researchers from the South;
- Do we produce too much research? – if it is almost entirely used in relation to the above-mentioned 'Windows of Opportunity'.
- Who among South partners do really need our research?
- How does DDRN relate to poverty reduction?

Responses from members of the panel were among others:

MHA: We should attempt to focus on local partners and alliances; and strategies should be developed in interaction between our agenda and local priorities.

Individual country strategies are becoming less important.

Tools for evaluation are being increasingly better adapted, such as independent, local institutions in the collaboration countries, who evaluate on poverty criteria. It is essential to evaluate the impact of different approaches (sector support, projects etc.), since not all development aid are channelled through states.

HMR: We have to accept that the priorities of donors and recipients are not necessarily the same. Capacity building may bridge some discrepancies. In each instance we must decide when to turn our backs and leave and when to build on 'Agents of Change'. With due regard to tax payers and policies, we all have to work with a maximum of transparency. It is also a fact that Danida's country strategies do not always coincide with those of the recipient countries. HMR mentioned that an idea

for DDRN could be to arrange inspiration seminars for senior researchers with participation of young researchers.

PBH: It is important that we work on the basis of our (Danida's) strategies, but equally important that there are South members in consortia, and that these are consulted when themes for research are being established.

The second round of comments and questions mainly dealt with ideas of what good and relevant research is:

- Ownership at all levels is important; but is this possible in reality?
- Production of research applicable to development in the field is a serious challenge partly because theories of science differ from one culture to another.
- Danida often demands research à la consultancy reports, which is not what promotes the careers of researchers.
- There are three types of research-based knowledge that may support development policies, strategies, and practice: 1. Accumulated fingertip knowledge; 2. Consultancy-like research; and 3. Analyzing basic research.
- How can DDRN meet the challenge of improving the conditions for production of relevant research of good quality?
- Are the platforms of DDRN supposed to focus on particular fields of Danish competence within the three thematic areas of the network?

Hanne Carus explained that Danida has granted DKK 100 mill. for research projects on top of another DKK 100 mill. for long-cycle projects. It could be a task of DDRN to discuss recommendations for use of these grants.

Responses from members of the panel were among others:

HPD: Most people working with development assistance are very busy. People working at embassies do not travel much into the country, and the coupling of research and practice is rarely good. It is important to enhance the possibilities of meetings between policy makers, researchers, consultants, and practitioners. Consultants, NGOs, Danida and others should be encouraged to put forward ideas for research projects. There is for example a need for research into the conduct of the EU within the European Partnership with Africa (EPA).

PBH: We must distinguish between research on development countries and research on development aid. Researchers should be free to choose their themes, but their results can be used for dissemination of useful knowledge. The procedures of Danida should be changed to allow for slow, far-sighted research, as opposed to consultancy.

MHA: It is a challenge for DDRN to reinforce the Danish fields of competence, and all kinds of research-based knowledge are important:

- Knowledge gained from consultancy reports;
- Research in 'best practices';
- Basic research.

These were the final remarks before the chairman closed the seminar.