

Danish Development Research Network (DDRN)

Proceedings from DDRN Workshop

**Shaping the New Network:
DDRN as a key agent of change or service provider?**

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Relevant documents

Powerpoint presentation "**Shaping the New Network: DDRN as a key agent of change or service provider?**", by Enrique Mendizabal, available at:
http://www.ddrn.dk/crosscutting/Powerpoint_Networks_Denmark.pdf

Hand out "**Form and Function: Research Policy Networks**", by Enrique Mendizabal, available at: http://www.ddrn.dk/crosscutting/Form_and_Function_Hand_out.pdf

Working paper "**Building Effective Research Policy Networks: Linking Function and Form**", by Enrique Mendizabal, available at:
<http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Publications/Documents/WP276.pdf>

Abbreviations and acronyms

Danida	Danish Agency for Development Assistance
DDRN	Danish Development Research Network
ENRECA	Programme for Enhancement of Research Capacity in Developing Countries
GEPPA	Research Network for Governance, Economic Policy and Public Administration
NETARD	Danish Network for Agricultural Research for Development
ReNED	Research Network for Environment and Development
SWOT	Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

Programme

The programme of the day was the following:

9.30-9.45	Welcome and introduction to workshop by Marten Sørensen, chair of the DDRN board
9.45-10.30	Presentation on 'Understanding Networks – The Functions of Research Policy Networks', by Enrique Mendizabal Discussion – Do we agree with the approach and categories?
10.30-11.30	Group work: The right Balance of the Network's Roles and ideal Functions. Presentation and discussion
11.30–11.45	Coffee
11.45-12.15	Presentation and discussion
12.15–13.00	Mendizabal: Organisational characteristics of networks and stages of network development
13.00–14.00	Lunch
14.00–15.00	Group work: SWOT analysis
15.00–15.30	Presentation and discussion
15.30-16.00	What's next? (Commitment from the secretariat and the members)
16.00-16.15	Closing remarks

Introduction

The Danish Development Research Network (DDRN) is the result of the merging of three former networks for development research within the sectors of agriculture (NETARD), environment (ReNED), and good governance (GEPPA), respectively. The process of integrating the members and fields of interest of three sectors is a challenging one, but at the same time it creates new opportunities for synergies and greater impact. It provides an expanded interface to members and partners in the South and paves the way for a more systematic approach vis-à-vis development programmes and collaborating national institutions in Danida programme countries.

To benefit the most from being organised in a network, it is important to be aware of the potentials and pitfalls of this way of organising. Research on networks carried out at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) points to the fact that networks carry out several functions within the spectre of two roles of agency and/or support. It is crucial to the success of a network to determine which structural characteristics (organisation, skills, resources etc.) the network needs in order to perform its functions most effectively ([Mendizabal 2006](#)).

Against this background the DDRN secretariat invited Enrique Mendizabal, a researcher from the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) group at ODI and author of the above mentioned research, to present some key points from his study on policy and research networks and to facilitate discussions among members of the new network.

Objectives

In order to increase the consciousness of members and secretariat of future challenges and opportunities of DDRN, following three objectives were defined for the workshop:

- Engage members in a discussion of the roles and functions of DDRN and create common understanding of the new network: What is the Network to provide for its members and for partners in Denmark and in the South?
- Discuss the working relations within the Network: How are the secretariat, the board, and the members to interact and coordinate their activities?
- Identify priority areas for the activities of DDRN and ensure commitment among the members and the secretariat, e.g. by initiating establishment of working groups.

Methodology

Based on his paper on research and policy networks, Enrique Mendizabal (EM) presented relevant results and opinions on the roles and functions of different types of networks. In the light of these presentations, EM facilitated a process, where the participants in the workshop could engage in discussions and reflections on how the new network is to organise itself and build on the achievements of the former networks. The programme was composed of group discussions, presentations of group work, and plenary discussions. The groups reported the outcome of their work and discussions on flip-overs, which were afterwards handed over to the secretariat as inputs to the present proceedings. When possible in due respect for the time schedule, the groups presented their work orally for comments and discussion in the plenary session.

Opening

In his welcome speech Marten Sørensen congratulated the creation of the new network, expressing his hope that it will be able to exploit the synergy potentials of the three former networks being merged. Marten Sørensen presented the objectives of the present workshop; he expected the presentations by Enrique Mendizabel (EM) from ODI to give much useful information on networks and he wished that the workshop would facilitate fruitful discussions as a basis for the future work of the board and the secretariat of the new DDRN.

Mendizabel: Understanding Networks – The Functions of Research Policy Networks

In the first presentation EM introduced different types of networks and the tasks and membership basis related to their functions.

Introducing networks, EM presented the ODI approach, namely that networks should:

- Promote experimental mutual learning,
- Assure a balance of presenting and facilitating,
- Be relaxed, informal and fun.

Roles

One of the key points in the presentation was a definition of two distinct roles of networks: Agency and Support. The agency network receives inputs from the members and synthesizes these for influencing decision-makers. The *raison d'être* of support networks is that of offering services to their members for example through distribution of information. Most networks will of course see their role as one that lies somewhere in between the two extremities.

Functions

Next he presented the 6 key functions that networks can undertake:

- Community builders
- Filters
- Amplifiers
- Facilitators/learners
- Investor/providers
- Convenors

In short, these can be described as follows (see also Mendizabal's [powerpoint presentation](#)):

Community building focuses on sustaining values of a network of individuals or groups. There are often strong links between members, but few and weak links outside the network.

Filtering serves the objective of organizing large amounts of information for the use of decision makers and members.

Amplifying means transforming a complex or private message to a more comprehensible and public one. Amplifying may include two-way communication and advocacy.

Facilitating covers a wide range of member support and may in fact be difficult to differentiate from other functions since helping members carry out their activities can be seen as an objective of most networks. Facilitating networks help their members without being involved directly.

Functions

<i>Functions</i>	<i>Group 1</i>	<i>Group 2</i>	<i>Group 3</i>
Community building	20	25 (20)	10
Filtering function	10	25	10
Amplifying function	10	5	30
Facilitation function	20	15 (20)	10
Investor/provider function	10	10	10
Convening function	30	20	30
Total	100	100	100

The numbers in brackets (group 2) signify the imagined situation after an initial phase.

Presentation by group 2:

Group 2 proposed that the Network starts with a strong focus on community building in order to merge the three former networks and new members, including representatives from the South. Filtering was seen as a very important function, whereas amplifying should be the task of individual members. Facilitation and convening were important functions, which were expected to gain importance over time.

Activities related to functions

Group 1:

Functions

Community builders

Filtering function

Amplifying function

Facilitation function
(promotion)

Investor/provider function

Convening function

Activities

Thematic working groups

Interest/need assessment

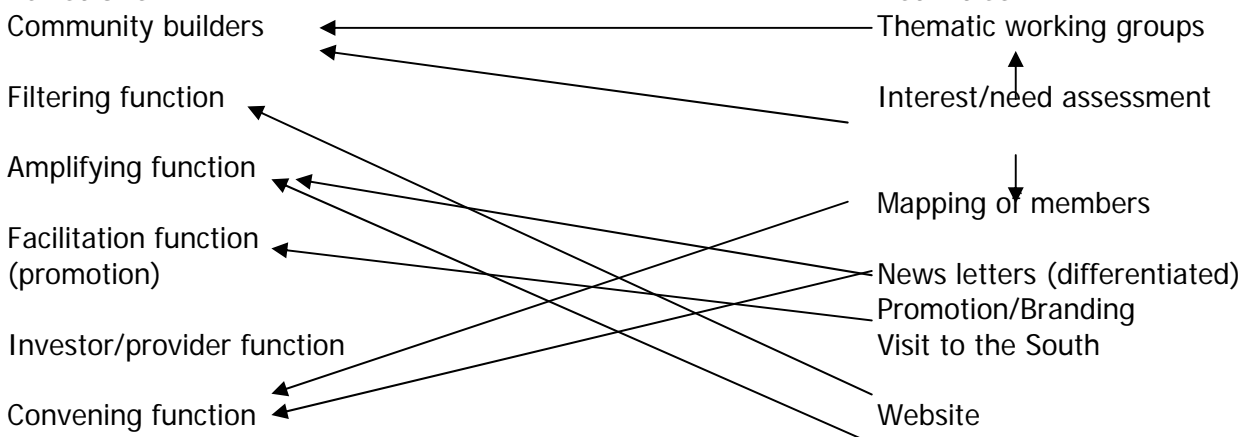
Mapping of members

News letters (differentiated)

Promotion/Branding

Visit to the South

Website



Among the contributions mentioned during the subsequent discussion in the plenary session, were the following:

- Focus on recruiting new members, in particular from the South and among young researchers and students;
- Include being an agent of influencing policies in the overall objective of the Network;
- Show the importance and impact of the Network to others when marketing the Network;
- Identify the strengths of Danish development aid as a basis for developing the Network's strategy;
- Identify where the Network can find synergy according to its identity and message.
- How do we assess the roles and wishes of South members?
- How do we convince Danida of taking research-based knowledge into account in their strategies?

Mendizabel: Organizational Characteristics of Networks and Stages of Network Development

Keys to success of networks

1. **Clear governance agreements** – to set objectives, identify functions, define membership structures, make decisions and resolve conflicts.
2. **Strength in numbers** – the larger the numbers involved the greater the weight given to networks.
3. **Representativeness** – is one key source of legitimacy (and thereby influence).
4. **Quality of information** – affects both the credibility and legitimacy of arguments.
5. **Packaging of information** – is crucial to effective communication.
6. **Persistence** – change or influence often requires sustained pressure over a long period of time.
7. **Membership of key individuals** – especially influential figures in the organisation / policy area.
8. **Making use of informal links** – these can be critical to achieving many network objectives.
9. **Complementing official structures** – by their nature, networks add most value by complementing rather than duplicating official structures.
10. **Good use of ICTs and other networking opportunities** – ICTs are opening up great new potentials for networking.

Characteristics of networks

EM explained how the functions of a network are defined through its characteristics such as membership base, resources, capacities and skills, location and scope, internal governance, communication, and its strategic and adaptive capacity. Likewise, the external environment will influence the ways a network functions. See also the figure in the [powerpoint presentation](#) by Mendizabal.

Stages of Networks

The focal areas of a network will depend on whether it is in a planning and start-up phase, at the stage of sustaining and developing its activities, or in a closing phase. The usual picture of activity level is that it increases very fast during start-up excitement, often with a workshop or formal meeting. The sustaining phase will be one of varying intensity and here it is important to nurture members' needs, introduce new perspectives, assure recruitment of new members, etc. Closing will of course mean drop of activities, normally within a short period of time either the closure is due to the end of its purpose, to a fragmentation into smaller units, or to other causes.

During the discussion following the presentation, it was underlined that when considering the advice given in these points, it is important to estimate whether each of them supports or hinders obtaining the Network's goals. Another issue discussed was that of institutional versus individual membership, each of them implying different roles and impact. Institutional members often have a greater impact than individual members, but may on the other hand be too bureaucratic if all communication with the Network has to pass through official channels at the institution.

Group work 2: SWOT analysis

The task for the second session of group work was to make a SWOT (Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats) of DDRN. Again, participants were divided into three groups. First every

individual participant should write a 3 suggestions of each S-W-O-T after which each group should prioritize the members' suggestions and make a common scheme. The SWOT should be based on the objectives, roles, functions, and keys to success of the Network. After filling in the scheme the groups should consider how to build on strengths and overcome weaknesses.

The totality of suggestions from the group work can be seen in appendix 2. Among the cross-cutting issues, mentioned by the groups, were:

Strengths:

Diversity of members

Increased resources to the secretariat compared to each of the former networks

Existing contacts to researchers from the former networks

Weaknesses:

Too much diversity of members

Weak links to the South

Opportunities:

Direct link to Danida with possibility of influencing development policies

More impact through multi-disciplinary and cross-sectorial resource base

Access to Danida and other partners in the South

Threats:

Uncertain political priority for knowledge-based inputs

Most members are very busy, perhaps too busy to engage seriously in voluntary work

How to build on strengths and overcome weaknesses

The second task of this group work was to suggest how best to build on strengths and overcome weaknesses. Only group 2 had worked with this question. Their suggestions were the following:

Build on strengths:

Strong diverse membership base → nurture members, carry out multi-disciplinary activities (e.g. conference).

Overcome weaknesses:

Establish stronger collaboration with South-based researchers → increased access to development programmes.

Plenary discussion

Apart from what is mentioned in the summary above, the following subjects were discussed:

- How define and delimit DDRN as distinct from other similar networks?
- Diversity of members, and also a possible inclusion of institutional members, may be strength as well as a weakness.
- Needs of individual and institutional members are different. Can we satisfy both?
- Increased collaboration with researchers in South may give us better needs assessment, but there may be different agendas for researchers in North and South.
- Suggestion of a contact person for DDRN in collaboration countries.
- Possible multidisciplinary and cross-sectorial conference on National Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (NPRSP).

- Sharing experiences from ENRECA and registering other experiences from collaboration with South partners.
- Developing South partnerships and facilitating the 'sifting down' of knowledge to extension workers.
- 'Who is the South?'

What to do next?

This last session built on what had been achieved from the workshop so far. It was to focus on how each one of the participants – secretariat as well as board and other members – could contribute to achieving the goals and make the Network fulfil its mission. The method was a plenary brain-storming with EM as facilitator:

- Increase efforts to attract master students as members.
- Both secretariat and Network members should consider themes for workshops and conferences.
- Mapping of experiences with South partners by members and secretariat.
- Identify good practices of how to disseminate research to practitioners.
- Objectives are not very clear and should be clarified.
- The website of the Network could include descriptions of and references to good practices, like the one Danida has developed for ICT.
- Members should share with colleagues and others to increase the member base.
- Members form groups related to themes, tools and methods, and geographical focus (supported by the secretariat).
- The Network should facilitate discussions of the recent restructuring of Danida.
- Consider how best to facilitate contact with the South (outreach officer?).
- Contacts should be used systematically, e.g. through encouraging profiles and other inputs from members.
- Apart from activities with a broad focus relevant for all the Network's fields of interest, there should also be activities focusing on each of the three fields individually.
- The Network will be measured on impact in the South – we must consider how we want to be evaluated.

What do members expect from the secretariat?

Finally, everybody was invited to give their opinion as to what they saw as the immediate tasks of the secretariat – and of the members:

- Secretariat: Systematization of contact persons in the South, with inputs from members.
- Secretariat: Systematization of members' profiles.
- Secretariat: Introduce MSc students to the Network, with participation from present student members.
- All: Suggestions of themes for workshops and sub-groups.

Closure

Mr. Marten Sørensen closed the workshop thanking all participants and in particular Mr. Mendizabel, whose presentations had provided the Network with valuable tools for a more focused and effective process of initiating DDRN. The discussions among the members had given fruitful inputs both to board members and to the secretariat.

Appendix 1 The right balance of the Network's Roles and ideal Functions

Each group presented one sub-theme of the group work to the plenum. Their presentations are reported in brief below the summary of the discussions and syntheses from each group:

Roles:

Presentation by group 3:

Group 3 had participants from research communities as well as representatives from consultancy agencies and from NGOs. The first category preferred the network to focus on taking on the role of agent of change, whereas the other two stressed the support role. A consensus in the middle was agreed upon.

Functions:

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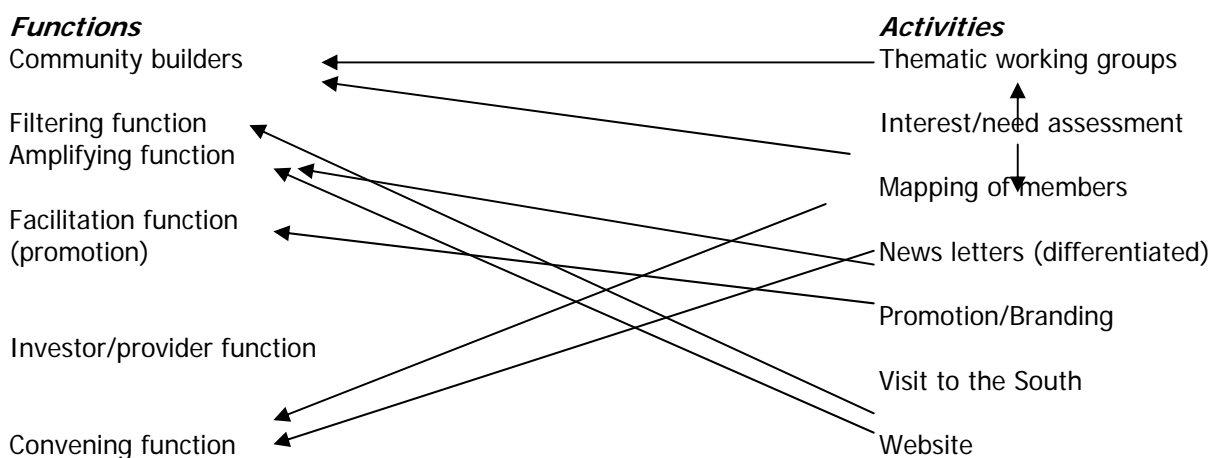
The numbers in brackets (group 2) signify the imagined situation after an initial phase.

Presentation by group 2:

Group 2 proposed that the Network starts with a strong focus on community building in order to merge the three former networks, new members, including representatives from the South. Filtering was seen as a very important function, whereas amplifying should be the task of individual members. Facilitation and convening were important functions, which were expected to gain importance over time.

Activities related to functions

Group 1:



Group 2:

Functions	Activities
Community building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Introductory cross-cutting interaction (workshops, blogs, coffee meetings, etc.).➤ Recruitment of South-based and new (young) members
Filtering function	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Acquiring information on on-going research, development work, and funding possibilities.➤ Communicating this info on website or through other means.

Group 3:

Functions	Activities
Convening	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Conferences + workshops as before BUT more North & South➤ Thematically organized working groups.➤ Thematic input to formulation of sector programmes & policies to ensure knowledge based aid/support – from North & South.➤ Policy advocacy: change AMG to make knowledge based input from North & South compulsory.
Amplifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ “Knowledge out of network”.➤ Stimulate/oblige researchers to formulate policy/practice implications.

Presentation by group 3:

Community building could be facilitated through a needs assessment leading to creation of thematic working groups.

The convening function could include mapping of members and production of newsletters.

Facilitation/promotion should include recruitment, advocacy, and raising the consciousness of members' capacities and needs.

Appendix 2 Discussion of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

Group 1: The group had not agreed on priorities, so all suggestions are listed below.

<p>S</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross-disciplinary diversity Ensuring linkages Danida ↔ researchers Creating platforms of communication Bringing research to development agenda Diversity of members Personal relations Strong secretariat with resources to support the network Strong research community with long-lasting experience in the field of development research New beginning, but with experience Motivation + clear need Good infrastructure (funding, secretariat, organizational capacity) Stronger network → more influence 	<p>W</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few members Uncertain funding Extroverted unknown Weak involvement of partners in the South Geographically dispersed members Diffuse member group Not clear goals/agenda (re-decentralization) Danida motivation + real interest? Secretariat a bit isolated from research activities Diversity of members
<p>O</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concrete links to sector programmes (timing) Involving development world researchers Rigorous follow-up on activities Input to design & implementation of development activities A gap to be filled in Many possible activities/strategies Lots of interest among members Cross-disciplinary innovation Cross-theme innovation Become known for capacities Cross-sectorial cooperation → innovation Involvement of other development actors than Danida, e.g. NGOs → broad application of research based knowledge More scope for cross-sectorial cooperation Previous experiences/lessons learned A mean for networking 	<p>T</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of member interest Lack of “receiver” interest (development agencies, governments) Lots of efforts, few tangible results No Danida/embassy engagement Too diffuse/inhomogeneous member group Too little time/surplus among members to engage themselves Insufficient understanding of culture, ethnicity, politics Missing linkages Non-understanding of local circumstances Loosing interest (non-profitable) Lack of planning Conflicting interests – very different groups of members Challenge of merging 3 “cultures” → risk of not being able to reach consensus Lack of community

Group 2: The group had agreed on priorities, and only those are listed below. For a full list of suggestions, see below.

<p>S</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Diversity ➤ Stronger secretariat ➤ Building blocks in place ➤ Danida link ➤ No institutional members (?) 	<p>W</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Diversity ➤ Members are busy ➤ No institutional members (?) ➤ Overlaps with existing networks ➤ No direct representation from South
<p>O</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Large pool of available information ➤ Novelty ➤ Access to Danida partners in South 	<p>T</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lack of commitment from Danida missions (demand) ➤ Short time frame

➤ Multi-disciplinary & cross-sectorial activities → impact	➤ Lack of political responsiveness
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Totality of suggestions from group 2:

<p>S</p> <p>Diversity, synergy</p> <p>No institutional members</p> <p>Instability → fragmentation, different language → lack of funding</p> <p>Novelty</p> <p>Stronger secretariat</p> <p>Danida Link</p> <p>Access to Danida partners in South</p> <p>Danish resource base visible</p> <p>Interdisciplinary diversity</p> <p>Pooled resources → better access to Danida & South based research</p> <p>Database and sources of data collection already established by earlier networks</p> <p>Information up-date</p> <p>Awareness of resources</p> <p>Already members and partnerships from 3 former networks.</p> <p>Broad member basis</p>	<p>W</p> <p>Member base: busy researchers</p> <p>Prior networks will continue as before</p> <p>Hard to focus (many diverse interests)</p> <p>Overlap with existing networks</p> <p>Diversity too big</p> <p>Difficult to keep individual members active</p> <p>No institutional memberships</p> <p>Short time frame</p> <p>No direct representation from South</p>
<p>O</p> <p>Provide entry point for young researchers who need to join networks</p> <p>Multidisciplinary North-South approaches → more impact</p> <p>Access to Danida partnerships in South</p> <p>Danida are changing their strategies offering new opportunities</p> <p>Public opinion in DK shifting – more openness to development assistance</p> <p>A closer collaboration with Danida</p> <p>Better recruitment of South based researchers</p> <p>Increased cross-sectorial & cross-disciplinary activities</p> <p>Diversity synergy possible</p> <p>Multidisciplinary approach → more impact</p>	<p>T</p> <p>Individual partners inactive</p> <p>Support for using research in aid planning may be lacking in some Danida missions</p> <p>People are busy, engaged in many activities</p> <p>Not much openness in politics to listen seriously</p> <p>Instability because of fragmentation, different 'languages' → lack of funding</p>

Group 3: The group had agreed on priorities, and only those are listed below. For a full list of suggestions, see below.

<p>S</p> <p>➤ Broad and diverse membership base</p> <p>➤ Experience from previous networks</p> <p>➤ Funding secured for 2½ years</p> <p>➤ Well resourced secretariat</p> <p>➤ Relevant research exists</p>	<p>W</p> <p>➤ Different needs of members</p> <p>➤ Lack of shared objective among funders & members</p> <p>➤ Unclear objective</p> <p>➤ Too diverse membership</p> <p>➤ Weak link with South</p> <p>➤ Unclear definition of North/south membership</p> <p>➤ Weak research communication competence</p>
<p>O</p> <p>➤ Rethinking & serious questioning ongoing among donor organisations (cross-sectors,</p>	<p>➤ T</p> <p>➤ Insufficient political priority for knowledge base & research results</p>

concepts, etc.) ➤ Rendering our knowledge visible and useful to development ➤ Link to Danida ➤ ICT (internet)	➤ Fragmentation/fractioning in network of aid ➤ Inward looking focus ➤ Drop in interest and/or funding ➤ No demand for DDRN research
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Totality of suggestions from group 3:

S Lots of relevant research (unused) Framework + resources (incl. human) Growing out of existing networks (community) Contacts between different groups (researchers, NGOs, consultants, donor representatives) Well resourced secretariat Diversity of members Experience from 3 former networks Funding secured for 2½ years Broad membership base	W
O Render our knowledge visible and useful to development Funding secured for 2½ years Link to Danida International Identification of identity valves (areas of research strength) Identification of direction of change Input to policy formulation & implementation methods Contribute to shaping the Danish fingerprint on development Re-thinking and serious questioning ongoing among donor organizations Promising environment for cross-sectorial work	T

Appendix 3 List of participants

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