RDI NETWORK ANNUAL SNAPSHOT

November 2016

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In October 2015, ACFID received grant funding from DFAT to support the three-year program 'Improving Cross-sector Engagement and Evidence Based Policy and Practice' through the ACFID University Network.
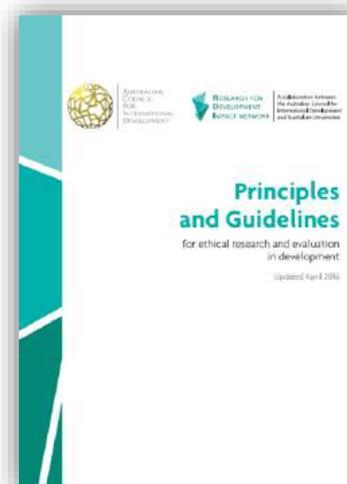
To signal expansion of the scope of the Network and bring visibility to its purpose, the Network was re-named and re-branded to become the Research for Development Impact Network - or RDI Network – at the beginning of 2016.

The RDI Network presents the following summary report to highlight key activities and achievements from the first year (Nov 2015-Oct 2016) of the three-year program. The report is framed to reflect the four identified program outcomes as stipulated by the DFAT program grant, recognising that certain initiatives and activities intersect multiple outcome areas.

OUTCOME 1: IMPROVED SECTOR CAPACITY TO UNDERTAKE EFFECTIVE, ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Capacity building for ethical development research and evaluation

A training module and supporting resources for the application of the Principles and Guidelines for Ethical Research and Evaluation in Development [PDF] is in its final stages of testing, ready for launch and application in early 2017. This module, alongside the resource itself, offers an important tool in improving sector capacity to undertake quality development research both effectively and ethically. It will utilise a mix of face-to-face training, online tools and teaching resources which will provide an interactive learning experience, and allow for the module to be adjusted and improved as input from the sector is incorporated.

Initial steps have been taken to inform ethics committees in a number of universities around the country about the importance and application of the Principles and Guidelines. The document has been disseminated widely through NGOs and academic networks, including the Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions (CESP) at the Illinois Institute of technology, receiving positive feedback and garnering interest in the opportunities associated with the training module mentioned above.

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OUTCOME 2: STRENGTHENED CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS AND LINKAGES ACROSS AUSTRALIA AND WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRY RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS.

RDI Network website

Following extensive scoping and consultation with internal stakeholders and peers from other sectors, the Network has commenced the development of a dedicated website which will provide the latest information about events and resources from the Network and beyond, as well as feature opportunities for interactive engagement between Network participants. As part of this process, an initial holding page was launched in October 2016.

The website will provide a primary means of communication with and between participants of the Network, and facilitate ease of engagement and shared information with academics and practitioners in developing countries, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

Some of the RDI Network's events have been specifically targeted at supporting relationship-building across sectors, as demonstrated by those highlighted here. Other events described under Outcome 3 also contribute to aspects of Outcome 2.

RDI networking events

The RDI Network creates space for semi-structured networking events with the purpose of strengthening cross-sector partnerships and linkages by providing opportunities to explore synergies without a topic-based agenda. In 2016, we hosted 2 events:

The Institute for Sustainable Futures (UTS) and Act for Peace have recently submitted a joint proposal to the DFAT Gender Action Platform as a result of connecting at the RDI networking event in Sydney.

a. Fostering partnerships in research for development - Hosted at the University of Sydney in August with over 30 participants.

b. Building networks for research, policy and practice in development - Co-hosted with the Centre for Evidence Implementation and Save the Children in Melbourne with over 35 participants.

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SDGs in the Asia-Pacific: a shared agenda for action

In June 2016, RDI Network hosted a one-day forum on the topic of the uptake of the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific, in partnership with three Sydney-based universities and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). 70 participants representing academia, NGOs, DFAT, the private sector and international organisations initiated valuable conversations which are currently being taken forward through various sector channels including in open dialogue with DFAT, the ACFID Development Practice Committee (DPC) and domestically-focussed SDGs advocates. An event summary report and call to action is available here. This event resulted in the initiation of a Sydney-based cross-sectoral community who have subsequently followed up through networking activities.

> *"The cross-sector and integrated approach to the SDGs is refreshing, given the historical silos within which most actors operate."*
>
> Participant, Sydney SDGs forum

RDI Conference 2017: initial planning

The Network commenced planning for its flagship conference towards the beginning of the grant, in order to build sector-wide support and maximise opportunities to collaborate with a range of organisations to produce this important event. This includes plans to engage students and early career researchers from developing countries in the region through provision of scholarships.

The University of Sydney was awarded the role of hosting the Conference through a competitive expressions of interest process. An organising committee of fifteen individuals representing universities and NGOs around Australia has been convened and meets regularly, advancing the initial planning regarding the conference theme, objectives and logistics. The conference will be a key component of the work-plan for the Network in the second year of the grant, taking place on 13-14 June 2017.

OUTCOME 3: IMPROVED UPTAKE AND UTILISATION OF NETWORK MEMBER RESEARCH AND EXPERTISE TO INFORM POLICY, PRACTICE AND DISCOURSE ACROSS THE AUSTRALIAN DEVELOPMENT SECTOR.

Hosting, partnering and supporting sector events is one of the primary ways through which the Network provides platforms for research produced by academics and practitioners in Australia and the region to be showcased and shared. Through these important opportunities for cross-sector actors to meet, dialogue and debate, research uptake leads to change in practice and policy.

In the past 12 months, approximately 350 people have participated in events and training run by the RDI Network, and an additional 190 have participated in events or activities for which the Network has been a sponsor or partner.

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Below is a list of key events the RDI Network has led or contributed to, to date:

Building stronger connections between research and international health programming

On behalf of the RDI Network, the Burnet Institute hosted a half-day symposium in August 2016, showcasing cross-sector research partnerships. Over 40 attendees engaged in learning and discussions relating to the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating research and programming for international development. A series of blogs based on presentations is being produced.

Diasporas in Action: Working together for peace, development and humanitarian response.

*Diasporas in Action Conference
Melbourne Oct 2016*

Partnering with Diaspora Action Australia and the University of Melbourne, the RDI Network sponsored and sat on the organising committee of the inaugural Diasporas in Action conference in Melbourne in September. The conference welcomed strong support from DFAT and an opening address by the Minister for International Development and the Pacific. Over 160 attendees representing diverse actors in peacebuilding, humanitarian action and development engaged in meaningful dialogue regarding cross-sector partnerships with diaspora communities.

Keynote speakers also travelled to Canberra to meet with key DFAT representatives and to present a public seminar in collaboration with the Development Policy Centre at the ANU. The Conference summary video can be viewed here, and the outcomes document is available here [PDF]. As a result of the conference and continued interest from DFAT, those in the organising committee continue working together as the Diaspora Learning Network.

Launch of the Development Bulletin No.77

Featuring papers from the 2015 ACFID University Conference on the theme of *Evidence and practice in an age of inequality,* the Bulletin represents a valuable collation of papers showcasing innovative partnerships to research in development. This anticipated resource represents the latest volume in a highly-reputed journal and was launched at ANU in September with over 40 academics and practitioners in

"Rigour & evidence coupled with genuine solidarity with people living in poverty is more important than ever. Reflective space is so important for those engaged in development work"

Sue Harris-Rimmer, Griffith University, guest speaker at Launch of Development Bulletin Vol.77.

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attendance. By highlighting Australian and regional research and partnership examples, the Network is actively championing quality development research through ongoing promotion of this publication.

ACFID Conference Workshop: Collaboration, evidence and impact: the future of research in aid and development

The RDI Network was chosen from a number of member proposals to facilitate this workshop as part of the ACFID conference program in October. With over 60 participants representing NGOs, researchers and DFAT policymakers, participants engaged in robust discussion regarding pathways and opportunities for collaborative research to influence and inform the future aid and development agenda in Australia. The presentation materials were sought after by participants following the workshop as means of continuing discussions within and between organisations.

Sector representation

Other significant sector events which the RDI Network was represented at by Committee and/or Secretariat members during the year include:

- Rethinking Foreign Aid: A roundtable discussion, 2015, RMIT, Melbourne
- The Australasian Aid Conference 2016, Development Policy Centre, Canberra
- The Australian SDGs Summit 2016, Sydney
- The Civil Society Women, Peace and Security Dialogue, Canberra
- Measuring Gender equality and women's empowerment, and Ending Violence Against Women, DFAT / ACFID Gender CoP Workshops 2016 Canberra
- The Australasian Implementation Conference 2016, Melbourne
- Various Development Policy Centre sector events, Canberra

These representation opportunities have significantly increased the Network's level of reach throughout the sector through the establishment of relationships with individuals and organisations. This reach will help build a more coordinated and integrated networking function for future initiatives and collaborations in research for development in Australia and beyond.

In addition to sector events, the Network has undertaken a series of initiatives targeted at informing and improving policy and practice in the international development sector in Australia.

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Policy and practice impacts of research

An analysis of the impact of the Government-funded Australian Development Research Awards Scheme (ADRAS) has been undertaken, with the final report due for submission early in 2017. Initial findings were presented to DFAT in December. This project will provide an evidence base for future development research investments. The Network is also working to develop materials that support researchers to engage end-users in their research and develop policy-relevant research outputs.

Case study methods and tools for learning and impact

NGOs and universities working in international development are well-placed to present their work, expertise and experience in the form of case studies. In order to contribute to more effective training and teaching of students, researchers and practitioners, and to encourage critical thinking and analysis, the Network is working to develop a resource kit to assist teachers and trainers to better use case studies for the purposes of training and learning. An initial workshop to inform this work was held in Melbourne in August, with facilitation by Murdoch University and case teaching expert, Prof. Peter McKiernan. Ongoing follow up with participants will feed into this resource development.

DFAT policy engagement

The Network has actively pursued opportunities to contribute expertise, contacts and research outputs to inform DFAT policy discussions throughout the year, as well as practice and discourse across the development sector. The Network sourced examples of local and regional research outputs for several topics addressed by the DFAT 2030 Papers including: 'What kind of growth?', 'The role of the Addis Ababa Development Finance agenda and the SDGs in the Indo Pacific region' and 'Australia's role in the international partnership for the 2030 Agenda'.

The Network also provided contacts to DFAT in response to direct requests for input towards work on the Blue Economy, details of the Australian delegation attending Habitat III, and gender in development experts from ACFID member NGOs and universities.

Contributing to key multi-stakeholder dialogue on the SDGs

The RDI Network is actively contributing to multiple processes and dialogues advancing the uptake of the SDGs, following on from the successful cross-sector Forum detailed above under Outcome 2. This has included the co-hosting of a sector dialogue with DFAT on November 3. The Network also actively contributed expertise to inform practice through an ACFID-led process developing tools for ACFID members to integrate the SDGs agenda into their programming.

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OUTCOME 4: A PROFESSIONAL, SUSTAINABLE, EVOLVING NETWORK CHAMPIONING, SHAPING AND PROVIDING LEADERSHIP IN EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH, EVIDENCE AND PRACTICE, AND CROSS-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS.

Established Network governance and processes

Following a consultative partnership brokering process in 2015, the RDI Network and ACFID signed a Partnering Agreement, signalling new ways of working between the two entities and outlining the roles and responsibilities of both partners in delivering the grant program. The RDI Network employed a secretariat which is hosted by ACFID, and the partnership is sustained by the representation of one co-chair of the RDI Committee being a member of ACFID staff, as proxy for the CEO.

The RDI Committee established a renewed ToR for its own operation, and a round of elections was held to confirm six NGO representatives to sit on the committee; including some new and some continuing members. The full committee of thirteen met regularly throughout the year, and actively engaged in nominated activities of the work-plan, as well as providing strategic direction and oversight for the program as a whole.

The Network, represented by the Committee co-chairs, met quarterly with representatives of the DFAT Global Development Branch to discuss progress against the Network program and explore ad-hoc opportunities for engagement between the Network and DFAT.

The Network made significant progress towards confirming a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework, to inform the ongoing effectiveness and plans of the Network. Initial data collection and synthesis has commenced as an integrated element of work-plan activities.

RDI Network launch

The RDI Network was launched under its new name and brand at the DFAT Canberra office on in February 2016, with First Assistant Secretary Blair Excell welcoming the new form of the Network. The launch was an excellent opportunity for stakeholders representing academia, practice and policy to reiterate shared commitment to the aims and objectives of the Network.

*RDI Network Launch
February 2016*

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Growing Network recognition

A key goal of the Network's work in the first year has been to grow awareness of the Network's new identity, including its renewed brand and objectives. Maintaining a synergistic relationship with ACFID, the Network has leveraged its increased independence in name, operation and aims to reach a wider audience beyond the ACFID membership during the grant period.

The RDI Committee agreed to the importance of using the period of the first year of the grant to clearly communicate to existing Network participants the continuation of the Network in form and purpose. This goal was prioritised through the development and implementation of a communications strategy.

Key results of the communications strategy from the first year of the grant have included:

- Creating consistent branding and branding guidelines, applied across a variety of documents and publications through the year.
- A steady increase in the number of individuals subscribed to receive our monthly newsletter from 856 to 1052 (~ 20% increase), expanding our audience across ACFID members, non-ACFID members, universities and Government.
- In September 2016, launching a dedicated Twitter account, allowing the Network to communicate news and engage in sector dialogue in real-time.

The Communications strategy will continue to drive consolidation and growth of participation in the Network from practitioners and academics in Australia and the region for the next two-years.

DFAT lunchtime seminar series

Urbanisation: Challenges and Opportunities in the Asia Pacific – May 2016

Aromar Revi (Indian Institute for Human Settlements) and Dr Paul Jones (University of Sydney) presented the challenges and opportunities of urbanisation in the Asia-Pacific region. They spoke about opportunities for greater collaboration and action to reduce poverty, and support sustainable and inclusive growth in urban settings. 12 DFAT staff from various divisions attended.

Doing Development Differently: Impact Evaluations – October 2016

Howard White, CEO of the Campbell Collaboration, offered his internationally-recognised expertise on the importance of impact evaluations in guiding programming and investment decisions for international development. DFAT representatives from across multiple divisions, including the ODE, were able to share and discuss the opportunities and practicalities associated with impact evaluation in the Australian Aid program. 15 DFAT staff from various divisions attended.

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This annual snapshot provides an activity-level overview of the major initiatives undertaken during the first year of the three-year program supporting the RDI Network. It draws attention to the solid foundations that have been developed, and the broad reach established across NGOs and universities involved in research for international development.

A mid-tem review of the program will be undertaken by mid-2017, aiming to evaluate the program against the proposed outputs and outcomes. A formal review report will be provided to DFAT by July 2017.

Keep up to date with the Network at www.rdinetwork.org.au.

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