



# RDI NETWORK ANNUAL SNAPSHOT

December 2017



RESEARCH FOR  
DEVELOPMENT  
IMPACT NETWORK

A collaboration between  
the Australian Council for  
International Development  
and Australian universities

This snapshot offers an overview of output and outcome-level results from the Research for Development Impact (RDI) Network program of work, as framed by the DFAT grant ‘Improving Cross-sector Engagement and Evidence Based Policy and Practice’.

The snapshot is produced by the RDI Network secretariat in consultation with the RDI Committee, and aims to reflect on key activities and achievements from the second year (Nov 2016-Oct 2017) of the three-year program. A snapshot from the first year of the grant can be accessed [here](#).

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

During 2017, the Network rolled out a series of workshops providing face-to-face training in ethical practice in conducting research and evaluation in international development contexts, based upon the content of the [Principles and Guidelines for Ethical Research and Evaluation](#).

- ◆ Initial ‘trial runs’ of the training were conducted with the support of an engaged steering group of RDI Committee members, which informed further refinement of the module’s content and delivery in this format.
- ◆ Two open workshops were hosted in Sydney and Melbourne, and were attended by 20 participants, including practitioners and researchers from 10 different NGOs.
- ◆ The Network has produced a limited amount of the module content in a free, user-friendly [online format](#), endeavouring to provide access to a basic level of information, tools and processes to a broad audience. The full training module has also been packaged into a product available for purchase by organisations, and this has already been taken up by one large NGO.

*“I feel more confident and enabled to engage with these [ethical] issues and to be a leader in this space in my team.”*

- Ethical Research and Evaluation workshop participant



In addition to the training module, the RDI Network has provided the sector with [guidance](#) for researchers in navigating in-country ethics approval processes in a selection of countries in Asia and the Pacific, for use when conducting research with human participants in development contexts. This resource has already received positive feedback from the sector in reducing the time required for investigating the relevant processes.

### Analysing development pedagogy in tertiary education

The RDI Network supported the inaugural symposium '[Rethinking Development Pedagogy and Practice: New Visions for Global Development](#)' in July 2017, hosted by James Cook University.

Through RDI Network connections, additional universities were represented at this unique forum.

- ◆ Convening university lecturers and course convenors of international development and related course, this event provided a unique opportunity for sharing ideas on course content, teaching methodologies, and student opportunities.
- ◆ Positive feedback from this inaugural symposium has already led to planning underway for a follow-up symposium in 2018.
- ◆ A review and synopsis of international development courses was carried out by the Network, incorporating dialogue from the symposium with a survey of students and teachers in the sector, as well as a literature review of development studies as a discipline. The Network is currently in the final stages of publishing this review report, including a series of recommendations for universities.



*Participants at the JCU symposium June 2017*

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

### RDI Network website

The [RDI Network website](#) was launched in two phases - in February and May 2017 - and has significantly increased the visibility of the Network to a wide audience, whilst building a greater opportunity for the Network to share information. The Network's online presence has built steadily in the period since launching, with over 5,400 individual users visiting the site, and a return visit rate of over 40%.

*"The Network provides a platform for conversations that the sector desperately needs. Even more importantly, it provides a vision of collaboration, of partnership, of engagement between actors"*

- Former RDI Committee member

A key feature of the RDI Network website is the [Find an Expert](#) portal, which facilitates direct connections between individuals in the sector in order to share expertise and explore opportunities for collaboration. Experts are self-identified, with moderation through the Network; a model that has proved successful in attracting 120 Experts to feature profiles on the portal (as of October 2017).

## Network-building event

The RDI Network has hosted or co-hosted 12 conferences, seminars and workshops in the past 12 months, attracting over 1,000 participants. A selection of key events are detailed below.

### RDI Conference 2017

The sixth in a successful series of cross-sector conferences since 2009, the [RDI Conference 2017](#) attracted over 400 attendees representing universities, NGOs, government, business and more from around Australia and the region. The value of this regular event was demonstrated by the commitment of the voluntary conference committee - constituting 15 individuals from 10 different ANGOs and universities – in driving the program development and building momentum and interest across the sector.

#### What did we learn?

*“Partnership is like any relationship which takes time, understanding and trust, not just merely a piece of paper with terms, references and conditions”*

- RDI Conference 2017 participant

- ◆ Built around the theme of ‘Partnering for Impact on Sustainable Development’, an open call for conference papers received an overwhelming response of examples of researchers and practitioners, from Australia and the region, partnering towards shared development goals.
- ◆ A selection of the best papers and presentations from the conference will be published in a dedicated volume of the [Development Bulletin](#) in 2018.
- ◆ The conference attracted sponsorship from 11 different organisations including universities, NGOs, private sector, and government entities.
- ◆ A combination of notable speakers and innovative research presentations attracted media interest from diverse outlets, including ABC Lateline, Devex, The Guardian, ABC Pacific Beat and the PNG Post-Courier.
- ◆ As the conference host, the University of Sydney has carried forward the Conference principles through increased partnerships across sector, and has begun to integrate 2030 Agenda into its internal and external operations.
- ◆ 113 scholars from across the Indo-Pacific region were supported by DFAT to participate in the conference, including 11 who presented papers within the program. Included in this number were 103 Australia Awards recipients currently undertaking studies at Australian universities. The knowledge, experience and skills of these students added significant value to discussions and networking during the event.
- ◆ Through a competitive application process, a partnership between an Australia Awards recipient and a Perth-based student from Murdoch University was awarded one of two Students Partnering for Impact Awards to undertake training in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) with trainee teachers in PNG headed for placements in rural environments.



*Duncan Ivison, Helen Clark and Patrick Suckling at RDI Conference 2017*

City-based networking

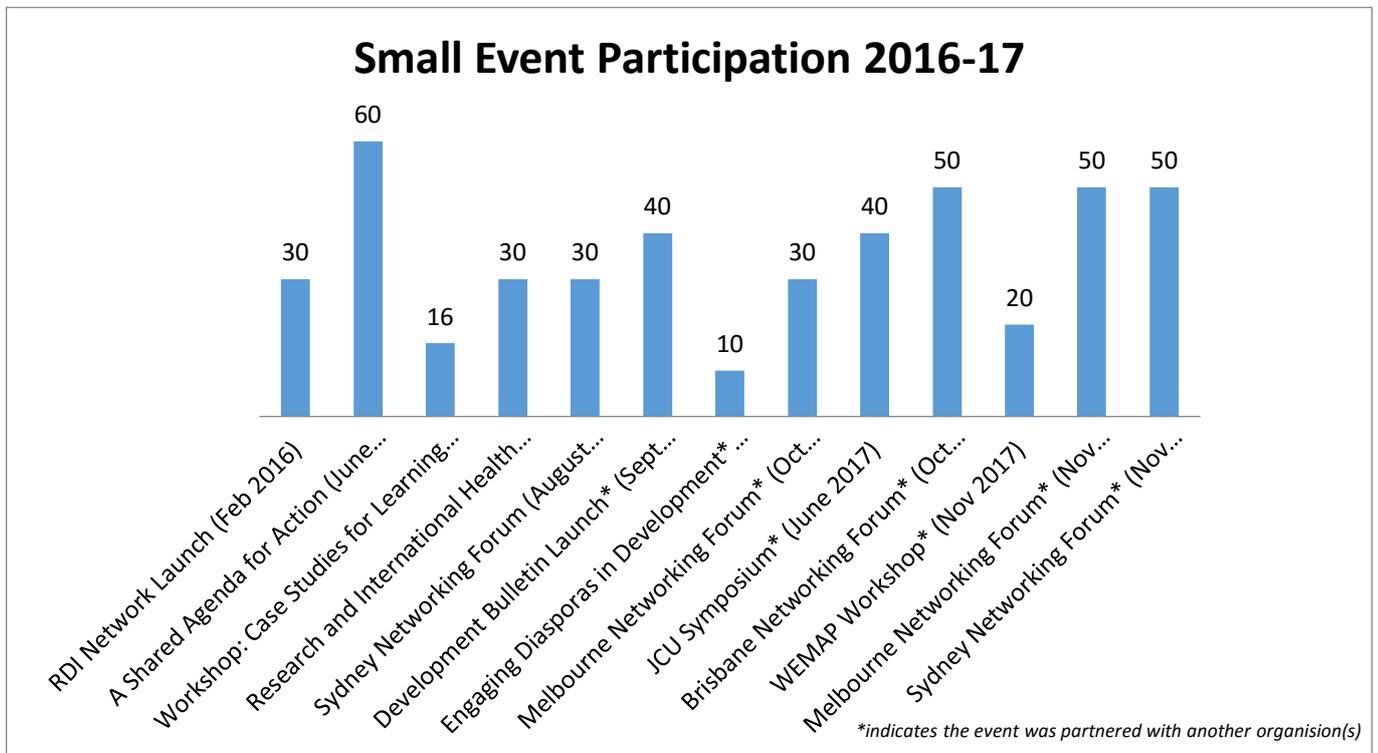
In late 2017, the Network partnered with universities in three cities to host networking fora, convening academic and NGO development communities in:

- ◆ **Brisbane:** held for the first time in Brisbane, 50 participants attended [Fostering Partnerships for Development Impact](#), tackling some of the tough questions about how partnerships across disciplines and sectors can lead to positive development outcomes.
- ◆ **Melbourne:** Showcasing diverse academic-practitioner partnerships, 45 attendees convened at the University of Melbourne for [Building Networks for Development Impact](#), to learn from lived experiences and test potential future opportunities for collaboration.
- ◆ **Sydney:** With a focus on the 2030 Agenda and the Voluntary National Review process, [this event](#) attracted over 50 participants, demonstrating a strong appetite for peer learning and sector-wide approaches to addressing and reporting against the complexity of the Sustainable Development Goals.

*"I valued seeing so many people interested and involved in the development sector in Brisbane"*  
 - Brisbane networking event participant

These events represent the continuation of a series of semi-structured networking events hosted in 2016, aiming to establish linkages between individuals and organisations based on complementary interests, skills and objectives.

The graph below highlights participation at our range of smaller events held by the Network from 2016-2017 around Australia, representing a combination of thematic foci and networking opportunities.



## Capacity building for research in development partnerships



In response to demand to increase the value of and capacity for cross-sector partnerships, the Network worked closely with the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney to produce the practical, user-friendly guide [How to Partner for Development Research](#). Targeted at academics and practitioners from universities and NGOs undertaking research, and recognising that effective partnerships require intentional management, the guide offers tools, tips and advice covering all stages of the partnership cycle.

This guide was launched in October 2017, and is in the process of being shared through various sector engagement activities. Part of the guide's development has been the sourcing of good practice case studies in research partnerships, which are being showcased in various formats to encourage greater visibility of partnerships in practice.

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

### Understanding how research has impact in policy and practice

Through a review of mid-long term impacts of the Australian Development Research Awards Scheme (ADRAS), the Network was able to highlight:

- ◆ the significant contribution of Australian Government funded aid research investments;
- ◆ the various types and methods of influence which were achieved through the Scheme; and
- ◆ an analysis of the factors within the research process which facilitated research uptake and use in policy and practice.

Initial findings of this review were enthusiastically welcomed at the Australasian Aid Conference at the Australian National University in February 2017. A final report is currently in the process of publication.

The review is underpinning ongoing work of the Network aiming to build sector capacity - particularly among research producers and translators - in knowledge, skills and practice related to research communications and uptake. This work is currently in initial phases of scoping and will form a priority work area for the third year of the RDI Network program.

## Understanding How Change Happens

The RDI Network co-facilitated a multi-city tour for Duncan Green, Strategic Adviser of Oxfam GB, upon the publication of his latest book, 'How Change Happens'.

- ◆ The Network partnered with different organisations in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne to host a [series of public seminars](#) featuring Duncan - a globally-recognised expert and thought leader in international development.
- ◆ These events attracted over 400 participants, generated significant visibility for the RDI Network to a broad international and community development audience, and prompted media reports from Pro Bono Australia and Devex.



*Duncan Green speaks on a panel in Melbourne in April 2017*

## DFAT lunchtime Seminars

Through regular open seminars, the Network creates opportunities for Australian and international researchers to present cutting-edge evidence directly to DFAT personnel, and thereby fosters the development of relationships between those who produce research, and those who use it. In grant year 2, the RDI Network coordinated three seminars at DFAT offices in Canberra, attracting over 50 DFAT staff from a range of sections across the Department:

- ◆ Professor George Patton presented findings from the Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing
- ◆ Debbie Muirhead presented the findings from the Network's review of the ADRAS (see p.6)
- ◆ Dr Elise Klein presented research on the significance of mental health and psy-expertise in development

## Sector representation and engagement

Building upon strong foundation-building work in grant year 1, increased visibility and presence of the Network led to significantly greater representation at sector events and meetings throughout the year. This reflects a growing appreciation for the voice and expertise of the Network, both in terms of its broad reach through the university and NGO sectors, and its specific focus on advancing the role of research and evaluation and its application to a range of sector issues.

A selection of these events includes:

- ◆ ACFID-DFAT biannual gender workshops, Canberra
- ◆ Global Compact Network Australia partnerships workshops, Sydney and Melbourne
- ◆ Collaboration for Impact Conference, Canberra
- ◆ ACFID Development Practice Committee SDGs co-creation and systems thinking workshops, Melbourne and Sydney
- ◆ DFAT education forum, Canberra
- ◆ National Workshop on Responsible Research and Innovation in Australia, Canberra

The expanding value of the Network into the university sector is additionally demonstrated by the acceptance of four universities as new ACFID Affiliate members in November 2017 - each as a direct result of their engagement with RDI Network.

Increasingly throughout 2016-2017, the RDI Network was proactively approached by individuals and organisations in the sector seeking connections or access to particular Network community members, expertise or external stakeholders. For example, the RDI Network facilitated connections between the University of New South Wales and two different NGOs to explore potential partnerships for Colombo Mobility Plan Internships.

The series of events hosted or co-hosted by the Network throughout the year (see p.5) represent topics and themes of expertise and specialisation with broad appeal across the international development sector. Some examples of the topics covered include:

- ◆ The Sustainable Development Goals
- ◆ Women's empowerment and microfinance
- ◆ Development pedagogy and practice in tertiary education

*"The learning forums and workshops have been useful for me as my role covers different thematic areas such as climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian response, accountability and women's rights. It also provides networking opportunities to engage directly with Australian and regional researchers and practitioners."*

- RDI Network member

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

### Network governance and self-development

Annual partnership review: ACFID and RDI Network undertook a 'health check' of their formal partnership agreement which was signed in 2015. This review was a valuable opportunity for the RDI Committee and ACFID staff to reflect on the nature and purpose of the relationship, and refine an understanding of the goals of the two organisations. No significant issues or concerns were raised during this process, and it was agreed to continue the Partnership Agreement without amendment.

#### What did we learn?

*"Face to face contact was consistently identified as having the strongest impact and critical to Network engagement"*

- RDI Network mid-term review

Mid-term review: The RDI Network engaged external consultants to complete a mid-term review of the current grant program (Improving Cross-sector Engagement and Evidence Based Policy and Practice 2015-2018). The review confirmed the unique positioning of the Network at the interface of academia

and practice, and offered recommendations focused on five core areas:

1. Thinking and acting strategically
2. Proactively engaging stakeholders

3. Capitalising on existing strengths
4. Strengthening the Network's supporting role
5. Strengthening the Network's agency role

The review was accepted by the RDI Committee and a formal management response aims to guide the future strategic planning of the Network.

**Committee elections:** A strong response to the elections for academic representatives of the RDI Committee demonstrated the value that both individuals and institutions have in supporting the ongoing contribution that the RDI Network makes to the international development sector. Through peer-selection, the Committee refresh of academic representatives in the past 12 months has seen continued representation from the University of Sydney, Murdoch University, Swinburne University of Technology and the University of Technology Sydney. The University of Melbourne and the University of Queensland have successfully nominated incoming Committee members, increasing their engagement with the Network's strategy and activities.

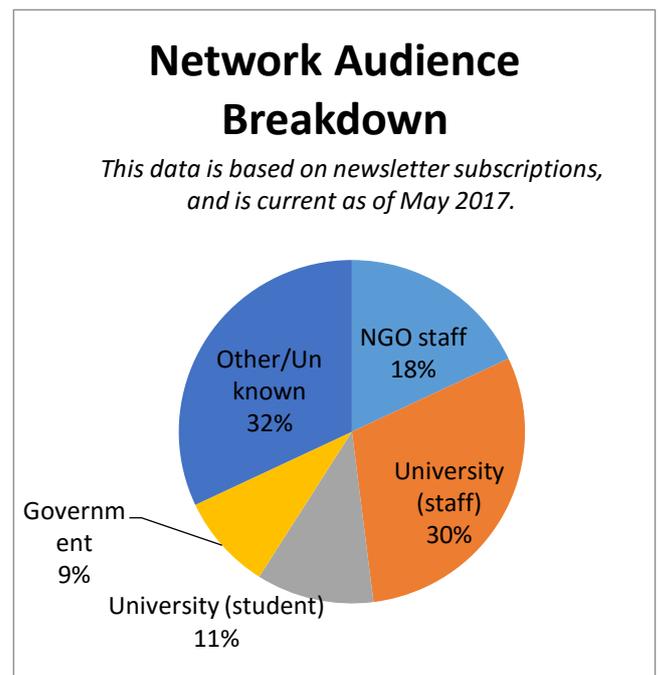
The RDI Committee met quarterly throughout grant year 2, engaging in key strategic discussions and planning for the current and future work areas of the Network.

### **Growing Network recognition and engagement with peer organisations**

Having invested heavily in building Network branding and recognition in grant year 1, year 2 produced continued growth in numbers of participants, and offered further opportunities to raise the profile of research and evidence across the international development sector.

The communications strategy which was agreed in year 1 continued to be implemented, with illustrations of success including:

- ◆ Newsletter subscription growth from 1050 in November 2016 to 1520 in October 2016.
- ◆ Twitter engagement growth: launched in October 2016, the Network has 600 followers as of October 2017.
- ◆ Uptake of appropriate media opportunities, particularly the profiling of the RDI Conference 2017 in mainstream media channels including ABC Radio and Lateline.



The Network secretariat and Committee continue to invest time in building relationships with peer organisations, networks and movements in the sector, opening up opportunities to work together and bring a unique evidence-driven perspective to shared problems. This increased sector engagement is demonstrated by a positive working relationships with:

- ◆ Development Policy Centre: publication of pieces on the DevPolicy Blog and mutually sharing events.
- ◆ Developmental Leadership Program: co-organising the Duncan Green series of events and subsequent request for expertise towards informing the next iteration of the Program.
- ◆ Sustainable Development Solutions Network Australia/Pacific: mutually promoting events and resources.
- ◆ Diaspora Learning Network: core member of steering committee and key engagement in strategic and operational planning.
- ◆ ACFID's Development Practice Committee: co-resourcing an original research report on capturing, integrating and reporting evidence of outcomes and impact across different scales (forthcoming).
- ◆ ACFID Communities of Practice (CoPs): active participation particularly in the Education and gender equity CoPs.

