RDI Network Committee Meeting
18 February, 9am – 5pm
ACFID House, Canberra

Minutes

Attendees: Tessa Hillgrove (chair), Jo Crawford, Dr Yadira Perez-Hazel, Jane Estoesta, Sarah Burrows, Dr Rochelle Spencer, Mary-Ann Nicholas, A/Prof Kurt Seemann, Gareth Beyers, Tom Sloan (observer), Dr Philippa Smales, Hansika Bhagani

Apologies: Prof Juliet Willetts, Dr Elise Klein, Dr Saba Mebrahtu, Dr Sumera Jabeen, Dr Peter Westoby, Thomas Soem

1. Welcome

Tessa opened the meeting and welcomed new Committee members. Special thanks was given to outgoing Committee members. Tessa provided an overview of the agenda for the day and then presented the minutes of the November 2018 meeting for review.

Minutes are confirmed with no changes.

2. Update from ACFID

Bridi Rice, Director of Policy and Advocacy, outlined ACFID positioning and priorities for the Committee.

The Policy and Advocacy Team at ACFID has a focus on policy-orientated projects, media and political engagement. Within the Team sit Media and Government Relations group, and Partnerships and Policy group. ACFID is currently engaged in work in key policy processes around a number of areas including SDG next steps, DFAT soft power review, independent inquiry into Sexual Exploitation, among others. ACFID response in the current aid decision-making landscape involves maximising influence through harnessing member voices, media, and engaging more with diverse actors.

With the upcoming Federal election, ACFID have put together an Election Policy Platform with six key asks. Ask three, regarding the principle of civil society partnership as a cornerstone of Australia's development cooperation program, and increase funding to the ANCP, could be a space for RDI Network to support.

Discussion following the presentation concentrated on the need to be connecting with the people that DFAT meet with and listen to, in order to achieve advocacy outcomes. There is a high level of influence RDI Network and ACFID can bring to support consensus-broking around policy and advocacy with DFAT.

Bridi briefly outlined ACFID's new project in thought leadership – later taken up by Tim Watkin (see item 5).

ACTION: Philippa to share Bridi's powerpoint with Committee –'ACFID Policy & Advocacy Update - BR - 28 Feb'

3. GY1 workplan update

Philippa gave an overview of the new three-year workplan, focusing on Grant Year 1. Philippa outlined the RDI Network partnerships with ACFID and DFAT, including governance structure, history, and Theory of Change. She explained how the workplan was formed through consultations, engaging steering groups, consultants, etc.

Successes from previous workplan were celebrated including the formation of the 2019 Conference, 'How to collaborate with Pacific churches' guide, and renewal of agreement with DFAT.

ACTION: Philippa to share Powerpoint presentation with Committee – 'RDI Committee Presentation Slides Feb 2019_fn'

1.1 – RDI Network Conference
Organisation of the 2019 Conference is going well. There has been an overwhelming amount of scholarship applicants for the budget allocated. There is an option to register and 'pay it forward' to scholarship applicants, for those that wish to support further applicants.

Action: Committee members to explore avenues for sponsorship and get back to Philippa.

1.2 Development Studies Association of Australia
RDI Network has supported two symposiums – one at James Cook University, and one at Murdoch University for development studies lectures and course conveners. The DSAA is being set up taking this work forward, and will have a soft launch at RDI Conference dinner, and a hard launch at a Conference at Deakin University in 2020. While Philippa is currently supporting the formation of the association, there is a long-term role for a member of the RDI Network to be on the Board. There will also be ongoing opportunities for collaboration and information sharing between the Network and Association.

1.3.2 Research with DFAT
Potential for a number of events with DFAT.

1.4.2 Networking events
Philippa is currently in discussion with IWDA around an event based around feminist participatory action research (FPAR) and with Sydney University and the University of Melbourne for networking events.

1.4.4 Informal sharing space
Work postponed until Grant Year 2

1.5 Joint programming with ACFID
Work postponed until Grant Year 2

2.2 Ethical research
Uptake of this resource is going well, and is being noted at universities, including at Senior Ethics Committee, Swinburne University (Kurt). It can be progressed through a further paper of ethics guidance in applied research, potentially involving a national statement group.

Action: Kurt to share talking points/paper and talk to the issue at next Committee meeting. Interest generated to form a sub-group of Kurt, Jane, Mary-Ann, Tom looking at progress of applied ethics guidance.

3.1.1 Research Communication and Uptake
This work has been released online, and was announced at a presentation by co-author Melissa Kamp at the Australasian Aid Conference. Further promotion of the material is being developed.

4. Reflections and learning (health check)

Sarah Burrows gave an overview of the partnership between ACFID and RDI Network, and how both organisations work together through joint initiatives, shared communications and networking. The placement of the RDI Secretariat in the Policy and Advocacy Team, and an ACFID co-chair on the RDI Network ensures collaboration is formalised.

Learnings from project – Community of Practice (COP) grants

Three grants were given to three ACFID COPs to produce evidence-based research. These included the Sexual Rights in Development COP, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander COP, and Urban COP. The RDI secretariat managed the process including receiving Expressions of Interest (6) and funding (3). The selection committee for the grants included the members of the RDI Network Committee, Secretariat and ACFID.

This was a good project for ACFID, who were able to connect practitioners who often don't have a regular link with researchers, leading to a practical outcome. It extended the base of the NGOs RDI Network engage with, and raised the visibility of the Network. This was a useful value-add for both ACFID and RDI Network that didn't require too many resources from either organisation.

Challenges included turnover in project teams and tight timeframes. Currently some of the research products are still in production. Some EOIs were ambitious and opportunistic.

Learnings from project – MEL across scale

Kate Angus outlined the strengths and challenges of the jointly funded and organised RDI Network and ACFID DPC project, MEL across scales.

A TOR was developed for this research, which was subsequently desk-based, a Executive Summary was compiled, and a workshop was held in Sydney with 60 people.

Challenges included lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities in the work, and reliance on just a few members from RDI Network. More time investment in planning, roles and responsibilities and in developing TOR's was required, and should be considered in all future projects.

Action: Secretariat and Co-chairs to work with Sarah and Bridi to ensure awareness of ACFID / RDI Network workplan overlap and to maximise opportunities.

5. Strategic research planning

Discussion around future opportunities for RDI Network and ACFID centred on ACFID strategic themes – Civil society relationships, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment, Chinese civil society collaboration, infrastructure financing, climate change, aid in the Pacific. It was noted the End of Program Outcome focused on 'alternative development' and projects should consider what would be well-suited to the outcome.

It was noted that this collaboration piece would be for GY1, other opportunities will develop for GY2 and GY3. The project for GY1 could be an umbrella project that delves into topics of regions in GY2 and 3.

Action: Sub-groups to present briefing on each topic that results in research questions, ready for next co-chair meeting 12 March.

<u>ACFID thought leadership platform</u>

Tim Watkin outlined a new ACFID project in developing a thought leadership platform. ACFID has had success in influencing discussions where it works through coalitions of experts. Advancing this, ACFID will allocate some budget into creating informal coalitions to produce thought leadership papers. Coalition members may have access to MPs, senior level DFAT staff, or a strong media presence. The pilot phase will begin in the next few months. There may be space for RDI Network Committee to be on a coalition, and ACFID will keep the Committee informed of developments.

6. Strategic program planning - feedback

Group activity developed ideas for the GY1 workplan Output 2.1 and 3.2.

7. Comms and engagement

Presentation by Melissa Kamp from Coffey International Development on 'Research Communication and Uptake snapshot'. This report is now on the RDI Network website, and will be launched at the Australasian Aid Conference this week. Committee members welcomed the summary of the snapshot and further discussion opened on understanding who and where research communicators are at, and where audiences are. There is still an audience for good research communication that is relevant, and uses common terminology. There may a resistance to active stakeholder engagement throughout the research process as it may be seen to influence research processes and outcomes. Considering the amount of research communication available, ease of access was a primary consideration, including through trusted networks.

ACTION: Philippa to share Powerpoint from Melissa – 'AAC Presentation Melissa Kamp - Research Uptake'

8. Wrap up

Thanks were again given to leaving Committee members.