

# **Report on an Evaluation of The Asian Development Research Forum**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The findings of the ADRF evaluation conducted between March and June 2000 indicate that the **forum is of value to Asia** with regards to development research and that a **niche** can be served by the continuation of ADRF activities.
2. When compared with other research and policy oriented networks, ADRF can be **justified** on the differences that members of the network intend to bring to the forum that are **sensitive to Asian needs, culture, history, experience and polity**, including the needs of policy makers in the public sector, decision makers in the private sector and action takers in the voluntary sector.
3. ADRF will be **differentiated by its**:
  - sharply focussed, well-understood objectives (research issues relevant to policy and strategy innovation for long term sustainable development purposes)
  - scope of development issues (multidisciplinary action-oriented research results with a definite Asian perspective)
  - flexibility of coverage of issues (addition of new, emerging and pressing issues while dropping old and irrelevant ones for the region)
  - types of activities in groups or for entire network (two-tier organization structure comprising general Network Meetings to permit breadth and narrower Working Groups for depth of issues covered by ADRF)
  - during-and-between meeting discussions and contact (through continuous improvement of communication processes within network by direct email contacts among ADRF members and with outsiders or newcomers through a better maintained and presented website in addition to conventional modes)
  - ownership and management of the network (Asian led and run with support from others)
  - participation criteria (emphasizes quality of ADRF output and deliverables through appropriate screening, reviewing and evaluation processes of research based ADRF products and services, and of ADRF management itself while building research capacity in Asia through collaboration)
  - result oriented activities (to target recipient of research results who can effect change for development in Asia based on ADRF research outputs that will be presented as concrete deliverables in the right form and at the right time)
  - long term approach (ADRF as an increasingly self sustaining network in terms of research, technical, intellectual, operational, financial resources through exchange, sharing and collaboration within the network)
  - Asian leadership (an International Steering Committee led by a rotating Chairman, with visionary guidance from an Advisory Committee, to plan and strategize future ADRF directions, including to seek funding from donors while supported by a Secretariat for network efficiency and development impact)
4. ADRF's **fundamental rationale** is :

To have Asians manage and run an action-oriented policy-research network themselves for the long term development of Asia, so that over a

time period this pan-Asian multidisciplinary network can become relatively independent and be able to contribute to development of the less developed areas within Asia and even elsewhere.

5. The most likely future strategies for ADRF can be stated as follows.  
ADRF is to operate as a **dispersed think tank for focussed areas of development** in line with a **clearly defined set of objectives** for the network. A **visible leadership** backed by a **secretariat**, shall draw up a **strategic plan** and shall decide on the **specific activities** that are to be carried out by different components of the network within **set time frames and financial resources**, so that **predetermined ADRF outputs that are measurable** will be delivered in the most **appropriate and effective forms**, to identified research users **targeted as recipients** of the deliverables, in a **timely manner**.
6. In **executing** programs and activities that will be contained in ADRF strategic plans, the working relationships within ADRF i.e. the **mechanism** of ADRF's organizational structure and management modalities must be sorted out for the network to work. This calls for urgent steps to fill the two important **missing links** identified.
  - **ineffective contact and co-ordination** within Working Groups
  - **absence of clear processes and channels of communication** at both the Network Meeting level and the Working Group level before, during and after meetings that must be deliberately addressed
7. To succeed, ADRF must be **marketed**. The network's activities need to be **publicized** among researchers in Asia so that the process of **access** to Working Groups and to Network Meetings is made known. Equally important, publicity targeted at the **clientele** for ADRF research output and for donors must be **strategized**.

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## **I Introduction**

### **1.1 Evaluation**

This paper constitutes a report on the Asian Development Research Forum, ADRF, based on a self-evaluation exercise conducted among individuals who had participated in ADRF activities. The evaluation was conducted between March to June 2000.

### **1.2 IDRC initiative**

The idea of forming the Asian Development Research Forum was initiated by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). An initial group of 35 researchers, research managers, decision makers and representatives of funding agencies first met in Bangkok, September 26-27, 1997, with the Thailand Research Fund as host.

### **1.3 First meeting**

The first meeting established ADRF's basic purpose of addressing the key challenges of sustained development in Asia and that the Forum be developed as a network of researchers that will experiment with three broad objectives:

- to produce and propagate policy innovations for sustainable growth and development in Asia;
- to generate greater collaboration and impact for policy-relevant research efforts of common interest in the region; and
- thematically, to focus on the balancing of social, economic and environmental imperatives.

### **1.4 Working Groups**

From a wide-ranging discussion of priority issues, the Forum chose to concentrate attention initially on "Implications of Ageing Populations" and on "Policy Innovation" as themes for trying out the role that ADRF could play with respect to the broad objectives. Issues pertaining to the two themes were to be discussed in two Working Groups. By the Second Meeting in Hong Kong, May 18-19, 1998, hosted by Lingnan College, the "Asian Financial and Economic Crisis" became the basis of the third Working Group. Several background papers on the crisis contributed to intense discussion and exchange.

### **1.4 Early activities**

In light of the range of related initiatives in Asia, ADRF chose the following areas of activity to complement the network Meetings and Working Groups:

- Networking;

- Selective Research Funding; and
- Resource Mobilization.

#### **1.6 Information sharing and website**

With respect to networking, participants agreed to concentrate on locating, circulating and “webbing” good information and sources on priority issues and facilitating communication among members and others. This was particularly, but not exclusively for matters that interest the three Working Groups.

#### **1.7 Selective research funding**

Arising from the decision that some resources be devoted to selective research funding, the IDRC office in Singapore would pursue the development of a selective Asia Research Directory. Following the outcome of the discussions, some resources would be devoted to selective research funding, namely, on the impact of the Asian Crisis, and in the less developed research systems of countries like Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

#### **1.8 Sponsors Group**

With respect to resource mobilization for development research, a Sponsors Group was formed, comprising the Thailand Research Fund, Research Institute of Development Assistance of the OECF, CIDA, IDRC and MacArthur Foundation. Assistance from institutions of ADRF participants and other donors could also be considered.

#### **1.9 Assessment of ADRF**

At the Third Meeting in Seoul, June 4-5, 1999, hosted by the International Development Research Centre, an attempt was made to assess ADRF’s development and to consider its future direction. Activities of various Working Groups were considered while a fourth Working Group on “Conflict Management” was started. Possibility of setting up yet another Working Group on environmental and technology issues and research foresight were discussed.

#### **1.10 Need for a ADRF Business Plan**

It was also decided that ADRF assess its network objectives and strategies. The need for a “business plan” for ADRF was discussed. The plan should be developed on the basis of three fundamental sets of factors:

- ADRF participants’ views of ADRF since its inception
- the status of development research activities and networking in Asia
- the interests of potential donors to support and participate in ADRF

### **1.11 This report**

The rest of this report focuses on the first of these three pillars needed for the Business Plan. Section II states the objectives of the ADRF evaluation exercise. Section III summarizes the approach taken. The findings of this report contained in Section VI are presented as follows:

- A Objectives and goals of ADRF
- B Coverage of ADRF research issues
- C ADRF activities
- D Organization and Management of ADRF
- E Recommendations for Future Directions

## **II Objectives of the Evaluation**

### **2.1 Niche for ADRF**

The evaluation attempts to determine if a niche can be served by the continuation of ADRF that will justify the network itself while comparing ADRF with other research or intellectual policy-action networks.

### **2.2 Strategic directions**

The evaluation is also intended to help map strategic directions for future ADRF activities, if a positive response is forthcoming with respect to its continuation.

### **2.3 Pertinent issues**

Some of the pertinent issues that required consideration and planning include:

- **ADRF goal definition** or redefinition
- **research issues and activities**
  - capacity building
  - policy impacts
- **structure and organisation**
  - membership
  - working groups
  - meetings
  - website
- **ADRF management**
- **future directions**



### **III Approach for Evaluation**

Different approaches were used for this evaluation exercise.

#### **3.1 Documents**

Existing reports and documents provided an important source of data on earlier objectives, activities and accomplishments since ADRF was first conceived.

#### **3.2 Questionnaire**

Meetings and informal discussions led to the development of a questionnaire, which included both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Respondents were given the freedom to answer as they thought best and also to add comments. The questionnaire consists of three sections:

- a) Involvement and Participation in ADRF
- b) Organisation and Management of ADRF
- c) Future Strategies and Direction of ADRF

#### **3.3 Mail survey**

In early April, a questionnaire containing 27 questions divided into 3 sections was developed and e-mailed to 89 ADRF participants. They included researchers, research managers, research users and sponsors. It was estimated that about 50 to 60 questionnaires were actually received due to relocations, address changes, technical difficulties with communication. By June, a total of 28 completed questionnaires were received by e-mail, fax and personal collection - after several reminders, phone calls and meetings.

#### **3.4 Discussions and consultations**

Face-to-face discussions with 17 individuals (including 5 potential ADRF members) were conducted in Bangkok, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur. A consultation with about a dozen core ADRF members and IDRC officers followed in Singapore, based on presentations made by the three Working Group co-ordinators and the preliminary findings of the questionnaires received.

#### **3.5 Respondents**

Majority of the respondents, i.e. about half, were academics. There were 7 "other researchers" who made up a quarter of the respondents. Five respondents were from donor and sponsor organisations, including IDRC officers. Only one respondent was from the business sector. Views of policy makers from the public sector were not included. For the purpose of the statistical analysis, 26 respondents were taken into consideration as one respondent gave answers to only open-ended questions and another questionnaire was returned after the completion of the

statistical work. A statistical summary of the views of the 26 ADRF members as expressed through the mail survey is provided in the Appendix of this report.

### **3.6 Experience of respondents**

On average, respondents have 21 years of professional experience. Their experience ranged from 3 to 40 years.

### **3.7 Basis of findings**

The findings contained in this report resulted from the consultant's analysis after taking into consideration the views of

- ADRF members expressed through the questionnaire survey
- core ADRF members from meetings and consultations
- a few non-ADRF members
- IDRC officers from discussions held face-to-face and electronically.

## **IV. Findings**

### **A Objectives and Goals of ADRF**

#### **A-1 Relevance**

Generally, the overall objectives and goals of ADRF as a network for development research in Asia are well accepted. Most have expressed the importance and relevance of having such a network, explicitly stating that ADRF is valuable for Asian development. When asked to comment on the relevance of the ADRF objectives, a significant majority i.e. 92% of the respondents felt that they are relevant. This is indicated by the mean value of their responses of 3.3462 on a 4 point scale in the survey. Only two respondents disagreed.

#### **A-2 Clarity**

However, the understanding of what ADRF tries to achieve varied among individuals. Despite the finding that majority of the respondents i.e. 62.6% felt that the objectives and goals of ADRF are relatively clearly defined, as many as a quarter felt that the goals and objectives of the ADRF are only somewhat clear while one felt that the goals are not clear at all. Evidently, the objectives and goals of ADRF need re-definition.

#### **A-3 Validity**

While several said that the initial objectives and goals of ADRF are valid, the survey responses showed that almost everyone had their own version of what ADRF is trying to attain especially in terms of concrete output and deliverables - and this is a serious problem for the future of ADRF if unresolved. The concepts underlying the visions of ADRF need clarification and the goals of ADRF need refinement, if the network of researchers is to serve any purpose at all.

#### **A-4 Reminder: the initial objectives were**

- to produce and propagate policy innovations for sustainable growth and development in Asia
- to generate greater collaboration and impact for policy-relevant research efforts of common interest in the region, and thematically
- to focus on the balancing of social, economic and environmental imperatives i.e. multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary in nature.

#### **A-5 Urgent need**

Other than networking among researchers in Asia as a key ADRF objective, there is an urgent need for ADRF to spell out:

- the explicit goals that ADRF is trying to achieve e.g. innovations
- the target audience or clientele of ADRF activities e.g. change agents
- the concrete outputs that ADRF will attempt to produce e.g. specific recommendations preferably in terms of measurable result indicators
- the mode of delivery of those outputs with specific time frames e.g. type, form, manner, timing of content to be communicated, channels of communication
- the strategies for ensuring that research outputs get the attention of relevant research users e.g. methods of matching users' needs and reaching them
- the strategies for sustaining ADRF itself e.g. reorganising ADRF and its management systems, processes for ADRF effectiveness and efficiency, and methods for obtaining resources for operating the network

#### **A-6 Fundamental rationale**

As the evaluation proceeded, it became increasingly clear that a fundamental reason for having ADRF in the first place had not been, and is still not discussed, understood nor fully appreciated. The rationale for ADRF can be stated thus:

*To have Asians manage and run an action-oriented policy-research network themselves for the long term development of Asia, so that over a time period this pan-Asian multidisciplinary network can become relatively independent and be able to contribute to development of the less developed areas within Asia and even elsewhere.*

There is an urgent need for Asians, particularly ADRF members to realise that they cannot continue to rely on "crutches" for too much further into the future, especially when income levels in Asia are rising and as Asian researchers and research institutions are growing up. This does not imply that Asia does not require the help of the more developed nations in terms of expertise, technology and resources for development research. But effort to indigenise research so that perceptions of researches who live and work in Asia and who better understand the context of the development issues should be given due consideration.

#### **A-7 ADRF mission**

It was strongly felt that the ADRF mission needs to be explicitly stated and that it should be much more tightly focused than in the past. ADRF research coverage, hence activities should reinforce each other. While coherence is needed

with activities geared at long term Asian development issues rather than the professional interests of individual, a multidisciplinary approach will ensure that the diverse fields important for sustainable development will be included.

## **B Coverage of ADRF Research Issues**

### **B-1 Scope of ADRF activities**

While some felt that the goals of ADRF in terms of scope or field covered are too broad and even unrelated, others felt that they are too narrowly focused as they are confined to the few thematic working groups. However, a few saw the logic of the apparent contradiction in a multidisciplinary network and thought that the groups within the network would cater to both breadth and depth. The breadth and depth of the areas included for ADRF activities will have implications for its organisational and management efficiency and effectiveness in contributing to research and policy agendas.

### **B-2 Comparison with other networks**

A majority felt that ADRF has a role to play, different from other existing networks which tend to be inclined towards economics or medical/health or other related areas, rather than development oriented issues across disciplines. In the search for solutions to current development problems and understanding of long term development concerns, many emphasised the need for the ADRF network to address Asia's economic, social, and political challenges in an interdisciplinary manner.

### **B-3 Asian perspectives**

Some pointed out that Asian perspectives for Asian problems should be stressed through the network. However, a sense of ownership of the network was distinctly absent among the researchers contacted. Passion for development paths for Asia as a whole was not discernible. National development issues seem to have a higher priority as expressed through apprehensions of duplication with national level effort or activities.

### **B-4 Policy innovation**

Several respondents thought that ADRF as an agent of change should emphasize the network's early policy innovation initiative, even with research in the area itself started within the Asian environment. There is a need for stronger indigenous policy criticism and insight, in order to change the policy-making process in Asia, as the economies and intellectual infrastructure mature. In an increasingly complex and pluralistic political situation, ADRF could become a useful informal tool

in evidence-based policy-making, which builds on Asian innovations through a broader spectrum of intellectuals who are mindful of, but without being tied to, national policies, cultures or institutions.

#### **B-5 Contribution to research collaboration**

ADRF did not seem to have contributed to the members' research efforts or to development thus far. Research managers have even expressed disappointment that research collaboration had not taken place through the Forum. There is still willingness and hope that improvements be made to facilitate specific inter-country joint, common, comparative or related research projects. For further co-operation to take place, the issues of specificity of goals, targets and outputs on the one hand, and the way ADRF makes decisions in relation to the substantive issues to pursue on the other must be resolved.

#### **B-6 Emerging areas of research**

More working groups along other relevant, emerging areas should be formed as and when needed or when interests are expressed. For instance, there are indications that technology (including biotechnology) and development is important for Asia in the long run. Another emerging area pertains to environment issues. However again, the working relationships and mechanism within ADRF, as well as with external sponsoring partners, must be sorted out for the network to move towards the goals which presumably will be better defined.

#### **B-7 ADRF research expectations**

In developing a forum for exchange of views among members of the research and academic community for the benefit of users of research output for policy innovation and for business decisions, ADRF is expected to strengthen development research in diverse fields that are relevant and important for Asia by pursuing the following:

- listing of research demands
- prioritising the needs
- maintaining a directory of researchers with particulars
- disseminating research findings as concrete ADRF outputs in forms that are useful, accessible and readily comprehensible (seminars, conferences, publications, policy briefs, newsletters etc)
- targeting specific recommendations based on research to relevant decision makers at the right time and right place (e.g. at periodical high level meetings, summit gatherings, heads meetings, relevant government agencies and departments etc)

## C ADRF Activities

### C-1 Improvements needed for ADRF activities

Table 1 below shows the main activities of ADRF and the views of survey respondents when considering the improvements needed for the various activities, bearing in mind resource requirements and the value for development and for development research in Asia.

**Table 1 Main ADRF Activities and the Changes needed  
(frequency of respondents in percentage)**

Type of activities (number of valid responses)	Replaced	Continued after major improvements	Continued after slight modifications	Continued as before	Discontinued	Total
Meetings (22)	4.5	18.2	50.0	27.3	-	100.0
Working groups (22)	4.5	9.1	59.1	27.3	-	100.0
Web site (21)	4.8	38.1	23.8	33.3	-	100.0
Electronic discussion (20)	5.0	30.0	20.0	40.0	5.0	100.0
Small grants (19)	21.1	15.8	10.5	52.6	-	100.0
Publications (19)	5.3	26.3	26.3	42.1	-	100.0
Others (2)	-	50.0	-	50.0	-	100.0

### C-2 Meetings

It was felt that meetings are important and should be retained after some improvements. But the agendas and conduct of the meetings needed more focus.

More planning should help improve the quality of the meetings and to retain interest and to attract new network members. Though expensive, personal links need to build on face-to-face meetings even if held infrequently.

### C-3 Website

Generally, electronic networking is recognised as potentially important and should be retained with improvements. Although the ADRF website has been fairly well used, ADRF members fail to see its effectiveness as a means of research communication among network members thus far. It is thought to be more useful for non-ADRF researchers such as businesses and the general public. Web surfing is seen as too time consuming among ADRF members who prefer direct attention-calling communication, such as the e-mail.

Many respondents were of the view that the website should be made more useful for specific research areas as decided by the network. Further building and linking of the website were thought to be necessary. The website should be driven by the users more than before to sustain the network and links with research users and non-members of ADRF.

### C-4 Statistical Report on ADRF Website

Table 2 contains statistics generated on 24 March 2000 for the total activity of the ADRF website from 11 December 1998 to 24 March 2000. Within the period, there had been 615 hits for the ADRF home page at <http://www.panasia.org.sg/adrf/> and 17,668 successful hits for the entire site. On average there were 37 hits per day with an average reading of 24 page views per day. At the time of writing, the ADRF website is already undergoing improvements and the new address is <http://www.ADRF.org>.

**Table 2 Statistics on ADRF website activities**

<a href="http://www.panasia.org.sg/adrf/">http://www.panasia.org.sg/adrf/</a>	Number per day
Number of Page Views (Impressions)	11,346
Number of User Sessions	3,233
User Sessions from United States	33.28%
International User Sessions	44.04%
User Sessions of Unknown Origin	22.67%
Average Number of User Sessions Per Day	6
Average User Session Length	00:15:07



## **C-5 Electronic discussion**

Although most agreed that electronic discussions had been important for communication, respondents' views on the effectiveness of the discussions varied. Several limitations were observed. It was felt that in order to work properly, e-forums need a small group of keen, knowledgeable partners who are willing to commit time and energy to the subject. Other members were concerned with the lack of participation. Many emphasised the need to consult participants on communication needs and also on the need to keep experimenting. Again, electronic discussion cannot catch those whose views are pertinent unless they are specifically addressed through more personal methods of communication.

## **C-6 Publications**

Many were not aware of any ADRF publication. This is not unexpected because plans for producing an ADRF Research Paper Series were only implemented during the survey period. It was felt that ADRF should create more impact with specific target audience in mind when compiling and disseminating research results through the network. Many felt that ADRF needs to press on with more purpose oriented publications.

The idea of launching a ADRF journal, though attractive as an avenue for ADRF members to disseminate their research findings, had to be weighed very carefully against the ability to sustain the publication without real financial and manpower commitments beyond two issues. It has not been ADRF's intention to initiate a publication series as an alternative for researchers, especially those from the academia who already have a plethora of choices. Bearing in mind the need to strive for high research output standards, any research paper of publishable quality should not encounter difficulty in finding acceptance by existing publishers.

In line with ADRF objectives and goals, it is more expedient to embark on a publication series of high quality research papers in separate volumes of books, as and when they appear, either as collections along specific development issues, or across different fields but with focus on actionable suggestions for development as the underlying theme. Such an approach will not be subject to time and resource constraints from the viewpoint of production, as would be the case for a journal.

For policy innovation purposes, another series of policy briefings based on ADRF members' work should be published to earmark identifiable research output users. The policy briefs should be based on well researched and thoroughly reviewed, discussed and revised papers, and they should be summarized for fast and easy reading by key decision makers. It is envisaged that ADRF meetings can

serve as a platform for the initiation of research ideas and subsequently for the discussion of the outputs before their dissemination as published policy briefs. The full papers may be included in the ADRF Research Papers Series.

### **C-7 Working Groups**

Working Groups would form the heart of ADRF as they are organised along development research issues, interests and research activities. Some survey respondents felt that the old Working Groups should continue as before while others believed that older Working Groups should be replaced by newer ones, with different themes, when they outlive their purpose. It would not make sense nor be worth while to sustain Working Groups even if they had not outlived their purpose yet but if members cannot sell the concepts and gain support from a critical mass of participants and donors.

There is a need to clarify the modus operandi of Working Groups within the ADRF network, as well within respective Working Groups themselves. There is a possibility that clusters of members could work more effectively in small sub-groups, e.g. along lines of interest, research activity and geographically. Smaller meetings of core members within Working Groups, together with specialists on integrating or crosscutting issues, may be held.

There is also a possibility for ADRF to expand by adding more Working Groups e.g. on technology and research foresight for development in Asia. Working Groups should provide the flexibility required for ADRF to cope with newly emerging issues.

### **C-8 Small grants**

Many among those surveyed agreed that small research grants are very helpful to members as basic or seed funding. The need to target limited resources directly, to key ADRF or Working Group objectives, was considered important. Up till now however, the criteria for qualifying for the small grants, the process for accessing the grants and the selection mechanism are far from clear. It is also imperative for ADRF to seek additional funds for the future if this activity is to continue. Decisions regarding division of responsibilities are needed.

### **C-9 Other activities**

A major criticism was that the ADRF activities are not well known among researchers in Asia due to limited publicity and unknown processes of access to working groups and to the main meetings. Solid case studies as well as comparative analysis within different Asian contexts have been suggested by several respondents as areas of specific ADRF research co-operation and exchange. Fund raising should be considered an important activity along with suggestions that potential donors and

sponsors be invited to join in appropriate ADRF activities. It is important to bear in mind the specific objectives of possible donors, and to have ADRF package requests accordingly, in order to receive attention.

#### **C-10 Participation in ADRF activities**

##### ***Initial contact***

Majority of the participants, 18 individuals representing 70.4% of the total, had been invited to join the ADRF. Four learnt about ADRF from colleagues who were already members – which illustrates the importance of networking. Four respondents knew about the network through the internet or the ADRF web-site, or through other sources. Others from IDRC helped to conceive and organize ADRF itself.

##### ***Form of involvement***

Almost all the respondents, with the exception of two, had attended meetings. Nine had submitted papers, seven contributed to the ADRF web-site and nine others had given comments and suggestions. Five of the respondents contributed as sponsors of the network. Another five were engaged in other activities, including organising funding, project coordination and project evaluation.

##### ***Level of participation***

Majority of the respondents, that is 57.7% of those who responded to the survey, considered themselves “inactive” within the network. Their mean of 2.4 out of 4 tells their degree of ADRF involvement. Only 42.3% considered themselves active.

#### **C-11 Personal goals of ADRF participants**

Considering the importance of informal or personal goals, because they could either obstruct or assist in the attainment of ADRF goals and objectives, the views of the survey respondents on the manner ADRF contributed to their personal goals are shown in Table 3. Evidently, ADRF had been most important for international and social exposure but least helpful in providing opportunity for research.

**Table 3 Importance of ADRF in meeting members’ Personal Goals**

<b>Personal Goal</b>	<b>Number of valid responses</b>	<b>Weighted Mean on 4-point scales</b>
Personal development	23	2.565
Social Contribution	25	2.212
International and social exposure	25	2.820

Opportunity for research	25	1.912
Other personal goals	23	2.000

### C-13 Selection of participants

In seeking respondents' feedback on the present participant selection process and the qualities important for the selection, the following suggestions are obtained.

Most important factors for *selecting participants*:

- experience
- enthusiasm
- relevant field of training

*Type of participants* to be included:

- interested and relevant donors and sponsors
- users of research outputs
- representatives from the private sector
- active researchers with independent source of funds
- scholars from Asian countries not yet represented in ADRF

**Criteria** important for selecting *core participants* for key ADRF activities:

These are shown in Table 4. The criteria for core members, as obtained from the survey, appear consistent with those for selecting participants as indicated above.

**Table 4 Criteria for selecting core ADRF Participants for Key Activities**

	Number of valid responses	Mean on 4-point scales
Age	25	1.52
Experience	25	3.04
Field of Expertise	25	3.2
From Developed Countries	25	2.16
From Developing Countries	25	2.16
Users of Research	25	3.36
Sponsors	25	3.36
Non-Asian Developing Research	25	2.06
Asian Development Activists	25	2.64
Others	5	3.6

**C-14 Effectiveness of ADRF in mobilising and motivating participants**

An attempt was made to gauge the effectiveness of ADRF in reaching out for the purposes of the networks' original intentions. Surveyed respondents were asked to indicate the extent of effectiveness according to their own perceptions for four groups of ADRF targets, namely,

- producers of research

- users of research
- sponsors of development research
- Asian development activists

For each group, different levels of effectiveness were expressed as follows:

- awareness i.e, heard of ADRF
- understanding or know of ADRF
- interest to participate in ADRF
- may consider adoption of recommendations of ADRF

The low response rate for the above - because many did not know – resulted in a weak feedback with regards to effectiveness in mobilising and motivating participants. Among those who did provide answers, the majority felt that ADRF had been more effective in mobilising and motivating producers of research (i.e. researchers) rather than users of research output (i.e, policy planners and decision makers), other participants (i.e. development research sponsors) and Asian development activists. This suggests the need to focus on target participants more deliberately when planning future ADRF activities.

## **D Organisation and Management of ADRF**

### **D-1 Need to address shortcomings**

There is a general lack of ownership of the network among members, who other than attending meetings have not contributed much. Apart from the work of IDRC, only a handful have been engaged in research exchange within specific Working Groups. Two important missing links have been identified by the survey.

#### ***Weak contact and co-ordination***

First, contact and co-ordination within Working Groups have not been as effective as expected. Electronic communication had been rare within Working Groups, even between lead co-ordinators and core group members. This has led to inaction between meetings.

#### ***Unclear communication processes and channels***

Secondly, at both the Network Meeting level and the Working Group level, the processes and channels of communication had not been clear either before, during or after meetings. They had not been deliberately addressed thus far.

Electronic networking especially through the ADRF website is recognised as potentially important and should be improved. Members' experience shows that the website is more effective for reaching out to non-members and users of ADRF output

than as a means of research communication among network members. ADRF members prefer direct attention-calling communication, such as e-mail, rather than to engage in web-surfing which takes too much of their time.

***Effectiveness of communication methods***

Most survey respondents agree that meetings followed by e-mail are the most effective methods of communication. Tables 5a and 5b show respondents' views on the effectiveness of different methods of communicating

- a) Among participants, and
- b) Between participants and new-comers.

**Table 5a Effectiveness of Communication Methods among ADRF participants**

	Number of Valid respondents	Effectiveness (%)
Meetings	23	95.6
E-mail	22	81.8
Conventional methods like letter and phone calls	22	50
Web-site	22	63.7
Others	1	100

**Table 5b Effectiveness of Communication Methods between ADRF participants and new comers**

	Number of Valid respondents	Effectiveness %
Meetings	20	80
E-mail	20	70
Conventional methods like letter and phone calls	19	26.3
Web-site	20	55
Other	1	100

***Publicity and visibility***

It is felt that ADRF activities are not well known among researchers in Asia. Steps are needed to publicise ADRF and the process of access to Working Groups and to Network Meetings if membership and interest in ADRF are to grow.

## **D-2 Two-tier structure**

The structure that will best serve ADRF's objectives is that based on long-term development research issues, in order that the network addresses policy innovation for development in Asia. Generally, a two-tier structure is deemed suitable for ADRF.

1 Network Meeting forms the top level

2 Working Groups that focus on thematic areas constitute the second level.

The upper Network Meeting level provides breadth as new development issues may be added when necessary while the Working Groups that concentrate on selected areas can provide the depth for related interests. For long term sustainability of interests in ADRF, informal sub-groups either country based or research-issue based may be formed if sufficient members can be gathered for a specific area.

## **D-3 Leadership**

### ***International Steering Committee***

A stronger and more visible leadership with executive responsibilities is needed to set future paths for ADRF. An International Steering Committee (ISC) is recommended to perform the following functions.

- to plan strategies for ADRF
- to set policies and processes for implementing ADRF strategies
- to determine activities and processes for ADRF components, including future Network Meetings and Working Group activities
- to co-ordinate all ADRF programs and activities
- to seek and approach donors for funding ADRF activities, with the help of other ADRF components
- to be responsible for resources available to ADRF
- to be accountable to the network as a whole for deployment of funds and resources
- to receive reports on results of ADRF activities in various measurable forms (such as paper presentations at Network Meetings, manuscripts for ADRF publications, seminar papers prepared for ADRF or other forums, financial reports and other appropriate formats)
- to seek advice from the Advisory Committee and other relevant parties

Membership of the ISC should include Working Group Co-ordinators, representatives of research output users such as persons from the private sector and regulators from the public sector. Diversity of country representation is expected,



preferably to reflect an Asian profile. A rotational working Chairman should be elected among the members of the International Steering Committee to lead the committee in an active manner. For continuity, a staggered system may be devised to ensure that a mix of old and new ISC members serve at any one time.

### ***Visionary leadership***

A super level group of well-connected eminent individuals familiar with and concerned about development research in Asia may be appointed:

- to provide foresight and visionary leadership on development research issues in Asia
- to guide the ISC in performing its role when advice is sought
- to provide feedback on ADRF plans and strategies
- to serve as linkages with research users from the private sector and from government agencies
- to open doors to potential donors
- to assist in ADRF fundraising when called upon
- to support ADRF in achieving the network's objectives

### ***Working Group Co-ordinators***

Working Groups are to be headed by Co-ordinators. Working Group Co-ordinators are expected to be drawn from the institutions that host the core activities of the network with respect to the designated areas of research. The Working Group Co-ordinators are expected to lead members of ADRF within the group by:

- acting as the focal point for research conducted by members in the related area of interest
- contacting and liaising with group members on members' research activities and when providing information on the WG or ADRF as a whole
- providing a platform to exchange ideas, results and future development research agendas in the specific area of interest
- presenting the Working Groups' proposed programs and activities to the ISC for co-ordination, approval and funding support if relevant
- holding members' interests within the respective groups through implementation of ADRF activities agreed to by the ISC
- monitoring and suggest to members on possibilities of producing policy briefs and/or publications from their research results
- assessing the need to revise the Working Group from time to time,

including replacing it with other themes

- liaising with the rest of the network through the International Steering Committee

#### **D-4 Secretariat**

An ADRF secretariat is deemed essential to take over the functions thus far performed by the IDRC office in Singapore (the de facto secretariat since the start of ADRF). A rotating secretariat among ADRF members' institutions is favoured by survey respondents although experiences of other networks seem to suggest that a fixed secretariat will work better.

A skeletal staff is needed for manning the secretariat, comprising a full-time or part-time executive secretary, a mid-level administrator and a general clerk. A rotating secretariat may be able to draw on some assistance from the host institution apart from benefiting from free facilities of host institutions whereas a fixed secretariat may have difficulty justifying similar treatment. On the other hand, a fixed secretariat may be more amenable for avoiding problems associated with transfers between locations.

An annual budget is needed to operate the secretariat and the International Steering Committee that oversees the secretariat.

The secretariat will:

- implement decisions of and be accountable to the International Steering Committee
- perform the following tasks, among others:
  - arranging meetings
  - co-ordinating the passing around of research materials (proposals, correspondence and research output papers etc) among members and with non-members
  - assisting in clerical work related to publications
  - assisting in dissemination of research results
  - maintaining links with all levels of ADRF
  - keeping ADRF records of members and projects
  - tracking activities of Working Groups
  - maintaining contact with donors
  - assisting in clerical work related to fund raising for projects
  - operating ADRF accounts (in conjunction with IDRC Singapore)
  - maintaining ADRF communications and web-site (although the web-site should be operated from Singapore for the time being)

## **D-5 Hosting Network Meetings**

Different countries are expected to take turns in hosting the Network Meetings that will be convened periodically. The rotation of Network Meeting host helps to promote ADRF visibility in different countries and to create wider interest within Asia.

## **E Recommendations for Future Directions**

### **E-1 Perceived value of ADRF**

When considering the findings of this evaluation for the purpose of setting future paths for the network, a critical question is whether ADRF has any perceived value vis-à-vis the presence of other forums and networks that are already well established. Almost every one of the survey respondents agreed that there is value in having the network. ADRF has initiated some ties among researchers through the meetings which otherwise would not have existed, and ADRF has funded some research. The value of ADRF is believed to come from the following:

- Asia-specific development research issues and topics
- Asian owned and operated for relevant insights and experiences
- multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary in scope
- a pan-Asian coverage and interconnection
- focussing on a few critical areas where there is expertise and interest
- the ability to present results to users of research and others

The challenges for ADRF are:

- the ability of bringing different national and individual perspectives on relevant issues
- the ability to make policy recommendations that can carry weight
- the nurturing of a sense of ownership among ADRF members in order that members grow professionally and personally
- commitment and push from among Asian researchers, research managers, research users and from sponsors
- the tenacity to see that ADRF delivers the outputs and to achieve the development objectives that the network set out to attain

### **E-2 Similar Networks**

ADRF members have named numerous networks that are operating in Asia or that concern Asian development. Majority of them focus on more narrowly defined areas in specific economic disciplines, in security issues, policy issues, in health management and so on. Examples include the Asian Research Forum (ARF), Pacific Economic Co-operation Council (PECC), East Asian Development Network (EADN), Pacific Trade and Development Conference (PAFTAD), APEC Study Consortium,

International Clinical Epidemiology Network (INCLEN), Council for Health Research and Development (COHRED), etc.

However, ADRF is justifiable in view of the need for a multidisciplinary approach, a truly Asian-based network and a development policy-action orientation. Survey respondents felt that having more networks should not be a deterrent, even if the objectives and scope overlap with those of other networks, provided they cater to needs, add value to development and if different researchers or members are involved.

To differentiate the network from existing ones, besides the points already raised above (in E-1), more interactive forums on key issues with regular (monthly) highlights of the most interesting discussions would be useful. Although researchers from developing and developed countries should be encouraged to conduct joint or common research on the issues of interest to ADRF through the network, there is a need for more involvement and direction from Asian researchers rather than from donor agencies.

### **E-3 Approach**

It is undoubted that ADRF should take a more pro-active approach. There is a need to invite more policy makers and users of research to deliberate on results generated by ADRF members. Linkages with other groups, such as through joint seminars will also enhance the role and impact of ADRF. Suggestions for improving and expanding existing activities have already been discussed. In particular, constant updating of the website with new information sources and encouraging e-group discussions have been emphasized.

As the network's success will be dependent on its membership, the value of ADRF to its members will be kept up if the network provides:

- information utility
- professional contact utility
- research support utility in various forms, including funding
- research dissemination utility e.g. through publications, seminars and policy workshops or even through training sessions
- other development research related utilities, ideas, guidance, collaboration

### **E-4 Future strategies**

Several alternative strategies for different aspects of ADRF have been considered through the channels used to gather views and opinions for this evaluation. Many of the suggestions have already been pointed out throughout this report. The major thrusts for ADRF's future direction are recapitulated here.

***ADRF is to operate as a dispersed think tank for focussed areas of development in line with a clearly defined set of objectives for the network. A visible leadership backed by a secretariat, shall draw up a strategic plan and shall decide on the specific activities that are to be carried out by different components of the network within set time frames, so that predetermined ADRF outputs that are measurable will be delivered in the most appropriate and effective forms, to identified research users targeted as recipients of the deliverables, in a timely manner.***

For sharper focus and more strategic dissemination of research results, cost effective approaches adopted and tested by other networks should be considered. A clear example is the Pacific Trade and Development Conference, PAFTAD. While attempting to provide opportunities for excellent Asia-based research results to impact on development policies and strategies, ADRF should guard against being another academic conference.

ADRF can differentiate itself by being a more interdisciplinary and a research application platform by focusing on issues with clear implications for development decision-making such as policies which affect trade, investment, investor and consumer confidence, regulatory environment, financial controls, political stability (e.g. social safety nets, conflict management, governance agendas), and long term socio-demographic-economic trends in Asia within a rapidly globalising environment.

ADRF will inevitably be involved in management of research planning and collaborative research. Maintaining external linkages with others that share ADRF goals, especially other networks, development agencies, research institutes, universities, government agencies and departments, donors, media, NGOs and activists, will be important for ADRF's success in the long run.