

Development Policy Review Network is gaining ground

Having started as a loosely organised network of scholars interested in bridging the gap between science, policy and development practice, DPRN is now gaining ground. A Task Force has been created, the yearly thematic meeting at the CERES Summer School has been planned and, last but not least, a substantial subsidy from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS/DCO) has permitted the organisation of annual regional expert meetings and the development of a web portal with a search facility for regional and thematic expertise in the coming three years. The following is a review of the current state of affairs .

The Development Policy Review Network (DPRN) has obtained a more formal status with the creation of a Task Force which broadly represents the development sector. Jan Donner, President of the Royal Tropical Institute, presides over the Task Force, of which Dr Paul Hoebink (CIDIN) is the convenor. Other members include Ton Dietz and Lolita van Toledo (CERES), Paul Engel (ECDPM), Mariecke van der Glas (ICCO), Johan van de Gronden, Jan Gruiters (Pax Christi) and André Leliveld (African Studies Centre). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is still considering whether to send an observer to the Task Force meetings. The Task Force has met twice, mainly to discuss which institutes would be invited to coordinate the regional expert meetings and to prepare the thematic meeting on Millennium Development Goals at the CERES Summer School on 28 June 2005.

A subsidy from DGIS' Cultural Cooperation, Education and Research (DCO) department gave a major boost to DPRN's activities. The subsidy is meant to be used to organise yearly expert meetings for 13 world regions in 2005, 2006 and 2007. These regions are Central America, the Caribbean, South America, North Africa and the Middle East, Western Africa, Central Africa, Southern Africa, Eastern Africa, the Horn of Africa, South Asia, Eastern Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, and the region east of the EC. The aim of the meetings is to bring together scientists, policymakers and development practitioners from the Netherlands and Flanders with a view to exchanging knowledge and experience and promoting more synergy between each others activities. The first meeting is planned for 22 June 2005 for the East Africa region (see <http://www.ascleiden.nl/regiobijeenkomsten/OostAfrikadag>). The others are going to follow in the period between September and December 2005, with South America (16 September) and Southern Africa (23 September) being the first. The meetings will offer the participants an opportunity to find out 'who's who' and 'who is doing what' and provide a forum to discuss actual developments in the

regions that need attention from both a scientific and development-oriented perspective. In the course of thematic sessions, representatives of the three sectors will hold more in-depth discussions on topical issues and agendas for research, policy and development.

In addition to offering a platform for researchers, policymakers and development practitioners, the DGIS/DCO subsidy is also meant to be used to develop a web portal with a search facility to find development expertise in the Netherlands and Flanders. The web portal, which will become operational under the name 'Global-Connections.net', will have sub-sites for each of the continents, based on the structure used for the 'Connecting Africa' portal of the African Studies Centre (see <http://www.connecting-africa.net>). The search facility will not only provide access to scientific expertise, but also development expertise at ministries, embassies, co-financing organisations, private development organisations and consultants. The web portal is intended to provide insight into:

- Geographical expertise (at country level);
- Thematic expertise;
- Publications and reports; and
- Partner organisations in the South (second phase).

DPRN started negotiations with various institutions either with a view to taking the lead in developing one of the sub-sites or to contributing in some other way to the web portal. With regard to the latter, opportunities are being explored to 'harvest' data from various existing databases such as those maintained by the Netherlands Institute for Scientific Information Services (NIWI) or the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO).

DPRN has also planned a thematic session that is going to take place at the CERES Summer School in June 2005. On 28 June (at 3.00 p.m. at the Institute of Social Studies) a debate is going to be held on the Millennium Development Goals as a challenge for international development scholars and practitioners.

The thematic and regional expert meetings and the supporting web portal will greatly increase the effectiveness of the dispersed, but extended involvement of Dutch and Flemish experts in the world outside the EU, by enabling greater numbers of people to acquire information more rapidly and more efficiently about each other's publications, activities, opinions and policy and research plans.

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