

Evaluating the IFRTD

This update highlights the key issues raised by an external evaluation of the IFRTD. Carried out in 2004 to coincide with the final year of IFRTD's five year strategy and the end of one of its core funding cycles, the evaluation sought to assess the continuing relevance of the IFRTD mission and mandate, its effectiveness in functioning as a network, and its impact and sustainability. As IFRTD embarks upon its third phase of life we ask what impact has it had, and where it can be the most effective in the future.

The evaluation team found a mature network that they believe to be among the most effective and efficient networks to have emerged from the development field of the 1990's. Working to a relatively limited budget the IFRTD has functioned

effectively by developing its own methodologies and structure. A strong ethos of volunteerism has ensured the continued commitment of members time and personal resources to champion the Forum and its mission.

"I have been enormously influenced by IFRTD because of the way that it chooses to work as a network that is genuinely collectively driven and therefore following a 'southern agenda'. While many networks and organisations claim to be southern driven, I have not found many that actually operationalise this rhetoric in the way that IFRTD does. The techniques come neither from rocket science nor some pious evangelical belief, but from some quite determined application of basic guiding principles that are the cornerstone of participative development" – **Megan Lloyd Laney, Communications Consultant**

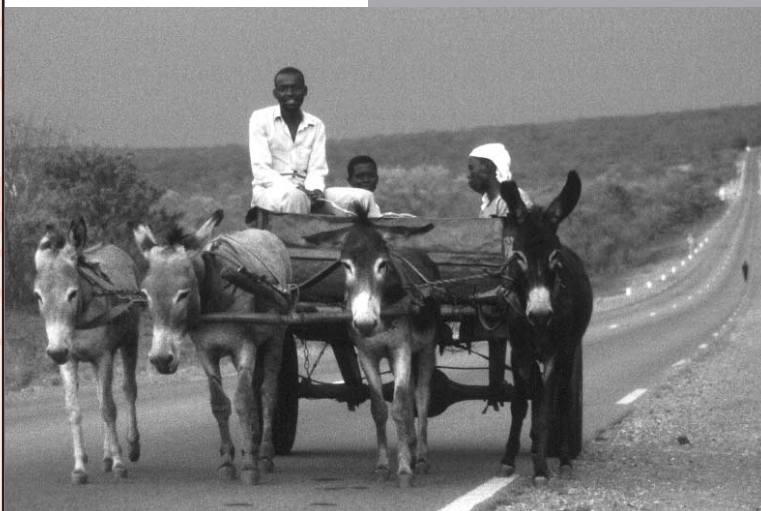
Who are the IFRTD?

The International Forum for Rural Transport and Development, known as the IFRTD or 'The Forum' is a global network of individuals and organisations working together towards improved access and mobility for the rural poor in developing countries. It achieves this mission through identifying gaps in knowledge and capacity and priority issues for change, supporting networking and new research, and pursuing a programme of advocacy work to influence donors, policy makers and practitioners.

In over 20 countries IFRTD members have joined together to form autonomous national networks that subscribe to the vision and mission of the international network and have become affiliated to the IFRTD as National Forum Groups (NFGs). IFRTD also facilitates a number of communities of practice which have emerged from specific IFRTD networked research programmes, including the GATNET gender and transport community and the Waterways and Livelihoods network.

The IFRTD is facilitated by a small decentralised Secretariat based in the UK, Kenya, Peru, Senegal and Sri Lanka. The Forum works in English, French and Spanish and its primary information tools; Forum News a thematic newsletter and the website www.ifrtd.org, are produced in all three languages.

IFRTD receives core funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID).



Project Bio:

Title:

External Evaluation of the IFRTD Network

Lifetime:

June to November 2004

Location:

International

Funders:

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Exchange

Project Core Team:

Terri Willard, Heather Creech and Kelly Moore of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), Rob Vincent and Andrew Cheetley of Exchange, and Madeline Church, Independent Consultant.

For more information about this evaluation contact:

The IFRTD Secretariat
See page 4 for address details

Proactive not Reactive

Rather than follow the dictates of donor financing trends or the traditional engineering interests of the transport sector the evaluation has demonstrated IFRTD's clear leadership in setting a **development agenda** for rural transportation. Having led the drive for international recognition that "roads are not enough", IFRTD continued to make waves from 1996 through 2004, introducing issues such as gender and rural waterways to international transport debate.

"The recent activities on water transport for example. This has been neglected but is now more recognised and mainstreamed, so they deserve credit for this. They are good at picking up on issues like this." - **Tseggai Elias, SSATP**

Making an Impact?

IFRTD aims to change both policy and practice. Although the Forum's original information strategy identified a broad base of 'boundary partners', the individuals, groups and organisations whom the network directly interact with to influence. The evaluation has found the reality to be a small core of groups; national governments, local governments, communities, local and national private sector, and national NGOs. Giving a very national focus to the international network's overall sphere of influence.

IFRTD and its members work individually and collectively to seek a variety of changes in their boundary partners:

- Attitude and awareness – introducing new ideas and ways of thinking into debate.
- Knowledge – improving understanding of specific approaches, activities and opportunities.
- Relationships and communities – fostering new relationships of trust and an ethos of sharing.
- Capacity – ranging from research to project management to advocacy skills.
- Policy making and practice – often the evolution of other types of change.

To bring about these changes IFRTD has employed four interlinked strategies of; advocacy, research and information dissemination, networking, and capacity building. Given the challenging nature of the Forum's desired outcomes it would

not be surprising to see greater evidence of IFRTD's contribution to improved awareness than to actual changes in policy and practice. However the evaluation revealed IFRTD contributions to outcomes at *all levels*. Here in the words of IFRTD's members we see how Forum activities are:

- raising awareness "I am getting the regular newsletter that is very much useful to me to rethink my job and responsibility to promote access,"
- forging and maintaining new relationships "I feel IFRTD's presence has added significantly to the professional community in which I work. It has brought a range of actors into the debate on transport and social development and poverty that may otherwise not have been involved," and are ultimately:
- influencing policy "The local governments have incorporated a broader vision of transportation and accessibility for the poorest segment of the population that needs to sell their harvest and/or deal with their daily needs".

The Strength of Networking

The Forum has sought to provide information for and engage with individuals from stakeholder groups at national, local and international level. The resulting participant mix is impressive. However the Forum continues to be under-represented in Asia, has a gender imbalance and lacks representation from the private sector.

Participation in the IFRTD network ranges from general information seeking, through subscription to Forum News to active participation in multiple IFRTD or NFG activities. Network participants contribute to the achievement of IFRTD's goals by various means including; aligning their individual activities with the network mission; using IFRTD to add value to their own work; and building relationships and engaging in joint activities with other network participants. The Forum uses various communication tools such as newsletters, interactive CD roms, list serves, websites, workshops and meetings to facilitate the building of relationships. The evaluation team highlighted IFRTD's mastery at managing the interfaces between various communication tools, and the impact of the hidden from view communications between the Secretariat and members, and between members, that constitute the bulk of IFRTD networking.

In addition to communication activities IFRTD has increasingly developed joint research and advocacy projects involving network members and NFGs. These activities have led to the formalisation of the innovative *networked research* and *interactive dissemination* methodologies, that have challenged assumptions about who is capable of conducting research and how it should be carried out.

A Viable Option?

The sustainability of the IFRTD network relies upon human, organisational and financial resources. The evaluation demonstrated IFRTD's success in mobilising human resources; establishing good relationships, with a breadth of stakeholders, that have demonstrated longevity particularly when network participants move up into positions of influence.

"I think the IFRTD is very innovative in developing new relationships between donors, developing country professional communities and researchers.. IFRTD talks outside of the boundaries." – **Jeff Turner, Consultant**

Financially, network participants believe that IFRTD has done very well to maintain a solid funding base for so long

Evaluation Methodology:

The methodology used for the evaluation was an amalgamation of approaches piloted by IISD and Madeleine Church with the International Development Research centre's **Outcome Mapping** methodology. Tools used included; a desk study and literature reviews, focus group activities at IFRTD regional and NFG meetings, interviews with NFG Coordinators, international and national network participants, surveys posted in the newsletter, on the web and sent to IFRTD project participants, plus a regional case study of the Latin America region utilising online interaction and extensive in person interviews.

It is important to note that the evaluation was of the IFRTD as a whole and is not a detailed evaluation of either network projects or the functioning of NFGs.

Wheels of Change

Examining IFRTD's impact on national policy and practice

Reflecting the responsibility of national governments for national infrastructure planning, the primary focus of IFRTD has been at national level, advocating for changes to national policy to enable a more effective response to the needs of poor rural communities. IFRTD's affiliated national networks known as National Forum Groups or NFGs have been able to make a direct impact on national policy development.

Following an IFRTD Improving Mobility workshop the Tanzania NFG organised a Parliamentarians' seminar to raise the profile of rural transport issues. The outcome has been a positive change in the orientation of policy makers towards rural mobility issues and the establishment of the Tanzania NFG as a key actor in the formulation of government policy.

Similarly the Indonesian NFG hosted the international seminar of one of IFRTD's research initiatives and used the opportunity to raise the profile of rural waterways in the Kalimantan region. This opened the doors for a dialogue with the regional government to address rural water transport issues, putting the rhetoric delivered by IFRTD's Waterways and Livelihoods programme into practice.

Other examples include the Kenya NFG influencing their government to zero tax bicycles making them cheaper and more affordable and the Sri Lanka NFG ensuring that rural transport issues are addressed in their PRSP.

and that it extracts a great deal of value from its resources.

"The network gets formidable bang for its buck. I see other agencies working on 5-10 times their budget and make less ripples in the water" – **Anonymous**

IFRTD's recent concentration on fundraising for core activities at regional level is yet to reap significant reward however IFRTD continues to be successful in leveraging additional grants for specific project work. In the future IFRTD needs to improve its ability to raise additional funds from foundations and agencies with no previous experience in transportation but strong interests in broader development issues such as health, education, agriculture, and gender.

In the short term the Forum's biggest obstacle to sustainability is internal, the departure of its Executive Secretary. With the Forum since its formal establishment she is clearly considered a significant leadership force. The evaluation highlights the danger of 'founders syndrome', which occurs in organisations when a dynamic founding leader who has imprinted his/her vision and values on an organisation moves on. Organisations become immobilised and risk adverse, losing many of the relationships that have previously been built. In the short term the evaluation team is confident of a strong regional Secretariat team, however the decentralisation process may still be too recent for the regional coordinators to constitute an effective virtual team and without a strong centre the Forum risks crumbling into a collection of regional networks.

Staying Relevant

IFRTD's relevance depends upon its continued ability to set the agenda for rural transportation and development.

"I really admire what IFRTD do, I think they have an awful lot of guts, and enthusiasm. They have their own agenda, they don't fit into the happy club, they speak out."
– **Anonymous, UK**

As it looks ahead the Forum must pay careful attention to planning for external change in the field of rural transportation. Interview data gave a clear picture of IFRTD's ability to monitor external trends but less indication of its ability to adapt its programs accordingly. Recent work on transport indicators carried out with the World Bank did demonstrate responsiveness, but this must now be replicated across a broader range of issues. IFRTD needs to continue to find the balance between responding to donor issue cycles and reflecting the issues and desires of its Southern members. As the dynamic underlying IFRTD's agenda setting has become more Southern driven the issues of the international community have taken a back seat and this will continue to increase the tension between IFRTD's agenda setting function and its need to be responsive to international issue cycles, especially since the latter is critical for fundraising.

The Forum must also strive to continue to challenge the directly transport infrastructure interests of its participants (both donors and individuals) and encourage them to grow in new directions.

"I was a roads person. This (IFRTD) opened my eyes to the problems of access. I am an industrial engineer, I see the industrial problem, work from the institutional super-infrastructure, and I started to think more about the social side, through this dialogue."
– **Emilio Salomon, Engineer**

Internal and External Accountability

For a growing network, accountability within the network and between the network and its supporters and collaborators is vital. As the IFRTD has grown its internal governance structure and external relationships have grown to meet the challenges. Donors are happy with clear consistent reporting and the Forum's operational guidelines accurately detail the roles and responsibilities of network participants and staff. Additional formal accountability to donors is provided through IFRTD's hosting arrangement with the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG). The growth of IFRTD and its budget have strained this relationship particularly regarding potential fundraising conflicts, and legal and financial responsibilities. However these tensions are an indication of the maturation of the relationship and can and are being addressed.

Accountability within the network is seen with a much broader lense than formal operational guidelines. IFRTD places great emphasis on its accountability to the poor rural people whose lives they seek to improve, and here the Forum's networked research methodology has enabled a form of accountability-in-action.



In terms of quality standards network members highlighted outputs such as research and written materials, processes such as networking, and participation in debate, and knowledge creation and sharing. Less was said about mechanisms that exist to uphold standards but there was a strong sense of confidence in the standard of Secretariat staff as arbiters of quality.

Looking to the Future

Six key recommendations for the IFRTD emerged from the evaluation:

1) Consolidation and expansion – IFRTD has much to offer the international development agenda including a broad constituency that can synthesise the social implications of rural transport development for a wider development audience. IFRTD's 2005-2010 strategy should seek to build upon its existing influence within the transport sector and also to engage with these new audiences and the new international indicators for poverty reduction such as the Millennium Development Goals and Commission for Sustainable Development.

"IFRTD is very good on the ground. But they need to be more strategic in their approach; they need to align with the MDGs and link in with wider sector strategies". – Derek Longley, DFID

2) Share organisational experience – The IFRTD has valuable operational experience; the stability and effectiveness of its small decentralised Secretariat, the application of its 'scaling up' strategies, its introduction of social issues to a predominantly technical sector and the development of its Networked Research methodology, that have a relevance beyond its immediate sphere of influence i.e for other networks and organisations.



3) Monitoring and evaluation – The Secretariat needs to establish an ongoing system of monitoring and evaluation to systemise the gathering of anecdotal evidence; an individuals experience at a workshop, a discussion on an email list, a meeting between an NGO and a policy maker. These are the stories that reveal the true value and impact of the IFRTD network and ultimately validate its existence.

4) Beware network drift – IFRTD's value rests in its ability to represent its constituents. As the IFRTD has expanded the evaluation notes a natural drift with members which requires some fine tuning of member relations. The evaluation team recommend; refining the definition of members to be an open community of practice, establishing common protocols for maintaining and sharing contact lists, reinstating the NFG news section of the newsletter to encourage greater visibility of the IFRTD community to itself, and to consider hosting a major international networking conference to bring the wider network together.

5) Strengthen and advance donor relations – IFRTD should seek new and additional champions for its work within the core donor group. In

particular IFRTD should continue to work with the Transport Knowledge Partnership (TKP) initiative of DFID. For the TKP to succeed it must live up to its goals of building upon and bridging existing networks. Donors should see an investment in IFRTD as a cost effective investment in anchoring the rural transportation and development elements of the emerging TKP.

More donors should be encouraged to follow the model of the World Bank in its proactive use of the Forum to rapidly source and engage expertise for its suite of rural transport projects.

6) Continue to address hosting issues – The Evaluation team recommend that IFRTD continues with its current hosting relationship with ITDG. However the relevance of the relationship needs some work. IFRTD needs to promote the strategic opportunities that their relationship with ITDG offers; an important constituency; a model for other activities, forums and partnerships; experience in networked research, scaling up strategies and communications; and substantive expertise that can contribute to ITDG's AIM3 objectives.

Find out More:

For more details on the IFRTD evaluation methodology please contact:

Knowledge Communications
International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)
1 61 Portage Avenue East, 6th Floor,
Winnipeg, BR3B 0Y4, CANADA
Tel: +1 204 958 7700
Fax: +1 204 958 7710
Email: info@iisd.org

For a copy of the full evaluation report or more information about IFRTD please contact:

The IFRTD Secretariat:
113 Spitfire Studios,
63-71 Collier Street, London, N1 9BE,
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7713 6699
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7713 8290
Email: ifrtd@ifrtd.org
Web: www.ifrtd.org

This IFRTD Update series profiles key learning from projects and activities carried out by members of the IFRTD network. If you would like to share your work through this series please contact the IFRTD Secretariat.

Edited by Kate Czuczman
Layout by www.kroworks.com

Disclaimer: The content of this update reflects the views of the external evaluators and not the IFRTD Secretariat.