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**NORTHERN POLICY RESEARCH
REVIEW ADVISORY NETWORK
ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

NORRAG

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NORRAG in perspective

1977 - 1995

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NORRAG in perspective (1977 - 1994)

Kenneth KING (NORRAG NEWS Editor)

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NORRAG was an attempt to pursue in a particular region of the world (the North as opposed to the South) some of the insights that had been gained through the work of the Research Review and Advisory Group (RRAG). The latter had been a 12 person advisory group set up and funded by Canada's IDRC in 1977, in the hope that it might review a great deal of the existing educational research (and especially that located in the developing world), and come up with advice to the donor agencies on educational investment. It was a group drawn more from the developing countries than the North. Bob Myers marshalled the original group, and did the staff work on the project with assistance from Beatrice Avalos and the late Susanne Mowat. The original members were Tunde Yoloye, Gelia Castillo, Pote Sapianchai, Ernesto Schiefelbein, Wadi Haddad, Pablo Latapi, Errol Miller, Jacques Hallak, Kenneth King, and Bill Fuller.

The mechanism selected for RRAG was the state of the art review, a way of synthesising and providing policy advice. The original group had difficulties with a concentration on a series of reviews for better investment, and instead focused on understanding the process of educational research, and especially examined the modes and character of educational research in the developing world. It did carry out one major state of the art review on a content theme: teacher effectiveness research; but is probably better known for its analysis of the educational research environments in the developing world¹.

After a few years, RRAG felt it might have greater impact regionally if money could be found to carry on some of the work of review and advice in different regions. This led to the idea of South East Asian Research Review and Advisory Group (SEARRAG) from the early 1980s, and to the Education Research Network for Eastern and Southern Africa (ERNESA) from late 1985. In Latin America, there already existed a network of centres that collaborated in abstracting educational research for a common data base. This Latin American network (REDUC) felt itself also to be a regional exemplification of the RRAG principle of emphasising the existence of local research, and synthesising it for policy.

Kenneth King had been the co-ordinator of RRAG from late 1983, and increasingly felt that there would be value in exploring a network that could access information across Northern research centres and donor agencies. Important encouragement came from both CIDA and SIDA to pursue this notion. IDRC meanwhile had been funding SEARRAG and had also agreed to fund ERNESA. Thus in late 1985 in Stockholm, there was the first meeting to examine the feasibility of NORRAG. This Stockholm meeting gathered together those in the North who had been involved in the international RRAG and those from the South who were co-ordinating or exploring regional RRAG networks. The meeting backed the idea of a Northern Research Review and Advisory Group, which could expect initial funding from SIDA.

With the establishment of NORRAG, the older notion of an international review group fell away. There remained the issue of how the regional groups could co-ordinate their activities. There was now no longer a RRAG secretariat or funding for joint activities. Over the ensuing five years the co-ordinators of the four regional groups have managed to meet from time to time, with the assistance of Canadian CIDA, Swedish SIDA and IDRC, but as far as exploring developments in other regions, and joint policies are concerned, it is worth noting here the absence now of any such initiative. It is an important gap, and one that needs to be reviewed. Indeed, in the Geneva meeting of NORRAG in 1994, the question of Internetwork collaboration was once more back on the agenda, and a very valuable discussion about new modalities is now underway.

The 'charter' and organisation of NORRAG

A principal reason for SIDA's being prepared to fund NORRAG was that NORRAG might be able to play a potentially useful brokerage role in informing Southern researchers (and especially those already operating in the RRAG tradition) about developments in the North, and particularly about the rapidly changing world of donor policies and priorities. This notion was graphically described by Patricio Cariola, director of CIDE, the co-ordinating centre for REDUC, as 'NORRAG being the eyes and ears of the South in the North'. Later on this notion would change, but certainly a strong thread in the early conceptualisation of NORRAG was that it would have a 'service role', providing information about the North to the South. These Southern networks especially asked NORRAG to concentrate initially on 'intelligence' about the donor community.

The concept was not one of an adversarial role towards the donor community, however. Indeed, the whole notion of NORRAG's information role concerning the agencies was dependent on close working relations with agency personnel. In the initial list of NORRAG contact points in the North, 6 were based in agencies themselves, and 12 in universities or research centres. There was a further dimension of NORRAG's relation to agencies that is worth stressing, and that is the advisory or brokerage role. This suggested that the process of NORRAG collecting, synthesising and disseminating information about agencies could be valuable to the agencies themselves. In other words, the agencies were a secondary but important audience for NORRAG.

NORRAG NEWS: NORRAG's most visible product

Given what has been said above about the dissemination of information to Southern networks and to agencies, it should not be surprising that a dossier for distributing this kind of material should be the most obvious product of NORRAG in the early years. Other tasks had been mentioned in the original proposal for funding, such as state of the art reviews on educational research and bibliographies of Northern research on education in the developing world, but there is no doubt that the key task came to be seen as the dossier - NORRAG NEWS (hereafter NN). The organisational aspects of the NORRAG network were principally discussed in relation to providing material for the network newsletter.

The first joint editors of the newsletter were located in the Institute of International Education in Stockholm University and in Edinburgh University, and the NORRAG contact points in Europe and North America were originally seen as contributors to the dossier. This was reinforced by the early issues of NN, which carried agency profiles, written sometimes by agency personnel and sometimes by another NORRAG contact point in the country. Thus from the beginning, there was a role for outside contributors. Indeed the bulk of the writing in the early issues of NN came from country contributors, with the editors playing a catalysing, commissioning and synthesising role. We shall return to the issue of NORRAG contributors other than the editors shortly, but it may be useful first to analyse the NN 'formula'.

The NORRAG NEWS 'formula'

The following have been the major ingredients of NN:

- donor agency profiles, with a focus on research priorities
- review of major donor documentation, policies, programmes, especially at a draft stage of development
- listing of key meetings related to education & development, with data on organisers
- network news, including of NORRAG, SEARRAG, REDUC, and ERNESA
- information on network membership, and about Northern research centres and scholars concerned with education & development
- information about other newsletters, books and periodicals

In summary, it may be said that NORRAG felt that it had identified a niche in all the writing about education in the developing world where it had some comparative advantage. This emphasis on the analysis of agency policies came at a time when several agencies and especially the World Bank were moving more firmly to identify their policies and priorities. There was evidence of greater interest in donor co-ordination, especially in respect of Africa, but also because of closer cooperation in Europe.

In respect of the above agenda, two or three notes are in order. First, some 16 agencies have been profiled thus far in NORRAG NEWS. These agency profiles were carried in the first six issues of NN. It may be useful at a later stage to consider updating the information offered at that time. There are still therefore some important agencies not covered. It is the intention to finish the series of profiles, and then consider an update of them all which could be produced in a self-standing occasional paper.

NN, secondly, has always been interested and ready to carry information about other networks, but certainly does not aspire to become the outlet for all other RRAG news.

Third, the listing of meetings is not intended to offer readers a chance to attend (many of the meetings listed are by invitation only). The purpose is to indicate

the range of what is being pursued, often by donor agencies, and to give a contact address for those wishing to learn more, or get materials in due course.

Information dissemination versus critical judgement

Getting the balance right between merely reporting and offering an analytical account of a particular development is something that has concerned NN. Consequently, the intention has never been to become the mouthpiece of the donor agencies, but when a good deal of the earlier issues was dedicated to agency profiles, it was possible to regard NORRAG as almost too close to the agency world. The purpose has rather been to be at arm's length from agencies.

A decision was taken after 6 issues of NN to develop a somewhat more judgmental editorial policy, to follow through on major themes, and to establish a somewhat longer time horizon. These decisions to become more judgmental were greatly helped by the onset of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) with its succession of drafts requiring rapid comment and feedback. NN was close enough to the whole Jomtien process to try and offer an account of how the Declaration and Framework had been arrived at. Shortly after the World Conference in Jomtien, it offered a view of what had happened. And since then, it has also sought to cover the multi - and bi - lateral dimensions of the follow-up to the Conference.

By NN9 (December 1990), the editorial team had shifted from a Stockholm-Edinburgh axis to a Hague-Edinburgh axis, with Wim Biervliet of CESO and Kenneth King as joint editors. Then from December 1992, the editorship has been based in Edinburgh with Kenneth King, at the Centre of African Studies.

The distribution of NN to particular constituencies

The original rationale for NN, we have said, was for it to go to Southern researchers as an information service. In particular it was designed to go to all the members of SEARRAG, to the directors of REDUC research centres, and to the ERNESA national contact points. Later it was sent to the ERNWACA network in West and Central Africa.

A second clear constituency was the donors. This too involved named individuals usually located in education and training divisions.

The third grouping were originally those contact points, often just one or two per country, who represented NORRAG outside the agency world. We have already noted that their role was initially seen as feeding information into the newsletter. Originally, there was a disinclination to spread NN more widely in the North, since the primary audience was the South, and it was felt that the North was already information-rich.

Gradually, there was some development of this third category. Germany led the way by xeroxing and distributing NN to a grouping of individuals in universities, agencies and foundations concerned with education in the third world. Holland distributed it to a small group of the key centres who were involved in their 'programming study' on North-South educational collaboration. In Canada, NN was sent to a set of individuals involved in teaching or researching education in the developing world. And in Britain, too, NN was sent to a group of individuals

who were directly concerned with an association or constituency linked to education & development.

The aim in this extension of the mailing list was ultimately to form NORRAG clusters at the national level. NORRAG NEWS was seen as being one of the levers towards the development of such a cluster. With the decision in 1992 to encourage direct membership of NORRAG in OECD countries, the idea of the clusters may now be more easily implemented.

The trade-off between circulation extension and commitment to networking

Although we have now moved to a membership organisation, as far as Northern countries are concerned, there remains a strong feeling in the Executive Committee that we want active, contributing members rather than just consumers of NN. It is for this reason that members are encouraged to contribute frequently to the Newsletter and to become involved in other activities.

NORRAG NEWS and its impact

Finally, we don't know a great deal about the impact of NN. We do know from a small number of people in both North and South that it is greatly appreciated. We have much less feedback from the copies that go out to the developing world but we have many fewer opportunities informally to meet with our Southern recipients and discuss NN's usefulness. We are aware that there are limits to the amount of impact a newsletter like NN can have. There is even a danger of seeking to over-evaluate such an activity.

NORRAG and a research activity

In the original proposal for NORRAG there was mention of state of the art reviews and of specialist bibliographies. These were mentioned at the time, not because there was NORRAG money to fund them, but because it was known that NORRAG members were involved in specialist bibliographies on Nordic Research on education in developing countries (See A. Johnston and C. McNab 1985)², and that K. King was doing a monograph on aid and educational research for ODA. (See King, 1991)³.

The notion of NORRAG itself carrying out research only arose seriously with the onset of preparations for the World Conference, and the feeling that NORRAG might have a role to play in analysing agency involvement in the follow-up. In the months after Jomtien, therefore, a research proposal has been developed, and a pilot stage relating to Tanzania has been reported in several issues of NN. In this pilot phase, research was carried out collaboratively between NORRAG and the Educational Research Network of Tanzania (ERNETA).

New relations amongst the 4 RRAG groups

Another outcome of the preparations for Jomtien and joint organisation of a roundtable involving all four groups is that the old rationale for NORRAG has changed. The initial conception had stressed a service role from the North to the South, and for attention to be directed to that field - information about donor agencies - which Southern RRAGs had suggested. The emphasis now, following a good deal of discussion with other co-ordinators, is that NORRAG should operate

in the same way as other RRAG groups. In other words it should develop and pursue those priorities it feels to be important. If these are well done, they will almost by definition be of value to the other networks, without them having to be justified as being 'for the benefit of the South'.

This recognition of the importance of symmetry in inter-network relations was very strongly re-emphasised in the NORRAG meeting of October 1994 in Geneva.

Co-ordinator or their representative from SEARRAG, REDUC and from ERNWACA were present and they endorsed the importance of working more closely together, through a network of networks. The modalities will be discussed over the next year.

Concluding remarks

What follows is intended to give a flavour of the NN formula that we have talked about above. Readers will appreciate that we have not included many of the items of more ephemeral importance, including the many hundreds of meetings we have alerted our membership to. We have also cut out many up to date references to new journals, new publications, and to some of the more routine developments within the various networks.

We hope nevertheless that these main sections of the particular issues do communicate something of the NORRAG style of critical advocacy. We hope also they reflect in the very large number of contributors the range of people (many of the NORRAG members) who have played such a vital role in the bulletin.

This is an appropriate occasion to underline how grateful we are to have been able to call on them for their inputs. The diversity of commentary has been crucial to the NORRAG recipe.

References.

1. S. Shaeffer and J. Nkinyangi, Educational research environments in the developing world (IDRC, Ottawa, 1983). Robert Myer, Connecting worlds: a survey of developments in educational research (IDRC, Ottawa, 1981). B. Avalos and W. Haddad, A review of teacher effectiveness... (IDRC, Ottawa, 1981).
2. Anton Johnston and C. McNab, 'Nordic research on education in developing countries 1975-1985' (report no. 72, Institute of International Education, University of Stockholm, 1985)
3. Kenneth King, Aid and education in the developing world (Longman, 1991).

NORRAG development (1986 - 1992)

Wim BIERVLIET¹ (NORRAG NEWS Co-editor 1990 - 1992)

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The RRAG roundtable at Jomtien on 'Dissemination and Utilization of Educational Research: Experiences and Potential of RRAG' defined the RRAG research network as essentially the interactions among individuals and groups of individuals to share information, and thereby increase the potential for utilization of this information to improve the quality of education. In that sense, the RRAG network can be perceived as one of the existing inter-regional instruments for enhancing education research capacities in developing countries.

NORRAG as part of the RRAG network has the following functions:

- **"monitoring"** through focusing on developments in policy and practice among donor agencies and on Northern research on education in the South.
- **"forum"** through exchange of information, views and commentaries on key developments to increase awareness and improve cooperation.
- **"animation/brokerage"** through providing information on critical educational research requirements as perceived by the South and helping initiate joint North-South education research projects.

The Stockholm 1985 RRAG meeting, in conjunction with the Nordic Symposium, referred to challenges such as:

- Could the character and richness of the RRAG experience at the individual level be extended to a much wider community of scholars and policy-makers in each region?
- Could a mechanism be developed which could transfer to groups of individuals in the South the latest information on donor agency priorities and trends in the North directly affecting educational research in the South?¹

As NORRAG has reached the end of its first form, reflection by members of the network is required on achievements and constraints as a basis for planning of a subsequent phase and to look for continuing support for NORRAG and NORRAG NEWS.

NORRAG NEWS 9 contained a plea for rethinking the wide, free of charge circulation of NORRAG NEWS against a more restricted and defined dissemination based on a reciprocity and exchange criterion. We solicited for comments among receivers of NORRAG NEWS which further substantiated our views on the appreciation and utilization of NORRAG NEWS. We also

1. CESO - Centre for the Study of Education in Developing Countries - Netherlands

distributed the NORRAG Review asking key NORRAG members to share with us ideas concerning the past and the future of NORRAG and NORRAG NEWS based on a checklist with key questions covering:

- Objectives of NORRAG
- Views about the NORRAG constituency and NORRAG identity
- Participation in NORRAG activities
- Southern RRAG perspectives on NORRAG and inter-RRAG linkages
- NORRAG NEWS and its utilization and the trade-off between open and closed access.

The views of NORRAG members and members of Southern RRAGs have been incorporated in a further assessment of achievements and constraints in the past as a way of outlining future prospects.

Any network needs a number of joint activities which strengthen the feeling of network membership and the commitment to shared objectives.

NORRAG's main activities consist of network meetings, review and critique of policy papers and NORRAG NEWS. All activities focus on the processing and dissemination of information in order to strengthen the links between research, policy and improved practice related to education in the developing world.

NORRAG Meetings

Through piggy-backing on the fringe of regular meetings assuming participation of members of NORRAG and Southern RRAGs in such meetings, it was attempted to arrange for a low-cost, although improvised approach.

Since 1986 the following NORRAG piggy-backing meetings were organized:

- *Jyväskylä, Finland, September 1986, NASEDEC meeting.*
- *Washington, November 1986, REDUC meeting.*
- *Toronto, June 1987, CIES meeting.*
- *London, March 1988, DICE International Conference on Education and Development: Sharing our Experience.*
- *Ås, Norway, June 1988, NASEDEC Conference on Education and Production.*
- *The Hague, December 1988, CESO Symposium on Education, Culture and Productive Life.*
- *Montreal, June 1989, WCCES Conference*
- *Geneva, IUED, September 1990, ICE Conference.*

- London, May 1991, DICE/CESO International Conference on 'Primary Education Pre-Jomtien. Project Lessons for Education for All.
- Bonn, July 1991, DSE Meeting on Strengthening Analytical and Research Capacities in Education: lessons from national and donor experience.

Through these meetings NORRAG reached a large group of members and researchers from the South. However, participation is often incidental and the core group of persons, apart from the co-ordinators, frequently attending NORRAG meetings is very small. The character of the meeting determines participation in the NORRAG piggyback e.g. NASEDEC meetings will have a strong representation of researchers from nordic countries, but only few participants from other NORRAG country clusters; NORRAG piggybacking at ICE will lead to reaching few researchers but more agency personnel etc.

The piggy-backing character, moreover requires NORRAG meetings to be organised in the fringe of the main Conference agenda, often having to be organised in the evenings or during weekends. Considering these constraints, the attendance of NORRAG meetings on average, has been relatively large given the restricted travel funds available for university-based researchers in the field of education and development in the North and the long planning period required to obtain such funding.

In the Stockholm NORRAG launching meeting (October 1985) it was indicated that "one of the cardinal points of NORRAG's modus operandi was to ensure that there is significant Southern participation in any major meeting on future directions, planning etc."

However, it proved to be difficult to obtain funding for enabling co-ordinators of Southern RRAGs to participate in NORRAG meetings. Another factor constraining optimal inter-regional RRAG exchange and cooperation is the growing emphasis on patterns of information dissemination increasingly based upon facsimile technology, which given non-availability of a fax or lack of funds for communication costs places certain regions in a disadvantaged networking position. Communication reflects upon the significant discrepancy between the infrastructure for communication between North and South.

Also, NORRAG representation in meetings of Southern RRAGs and South-South network interaction tends to be rare because of constrained funding.

Considering the unique character of NORRAG as a platform for exchange between researchers from the North and South and education sector specialists in agencies, a distortion in the balance in participation of these groups in NORRAG constitutes a serious threat to NORRAG's identity and comparative advantage.

In consulting our constituency we posed the following questions:

"To what extent have these activities allowed for participation of various categories of NORRAG members and members of Southern RRAGs"

Some of the views expressed are:

- "What first comes to my mind is RRAG's agenda and its renewed significance. RRAG's agenda is to relate research to educational policy both in agencies in the North and national bodies in the South. And to do this in a co-ordinated North-South and South-South way. This is important and no group has taken up itself to advance this practice around the world." (REDUC co-ordinator/CIDE Director).
- The Chairperson of the Committee on 'Educational Research in Cooperation with Third World Countries of the German Educational Research association' made reference to a meeting of Comparative Education Societies in Europe concentrating on research on education in developing countries, such as previously organised in Brighton and Wageningen and which is presently being planned. Such a meeting might constitute an adequate platform for reaching researchers from NORRAG clusters in several European countries.

Advisory Services and Reviews of Policy Documents

NORRAG has attempted to get rapid feedback to donors on early drafts of their new policy documents. Such a service was demanded by CIDA to NORRAG and the Southern networks to critique and improve draft policy work. A special meeting to that effect was convened:

- *Hull, October 1987, CIDA Sector Review/IDRC programme review.*

NORRAG was also invited to participate in expert meetings such as:

- *Turin, March 1987, ILO expert meeting 'Training for the Informal Sector'.*
- *Hornbaek, Denmark, March 1991, NASEDEC Mini-Symposium on the draft World Bank Policy Note on TVET.*

NORRAG country clusters were encouraged to review and exchange comments on early drafts on the World Charter on Education for All and on the Framework for Action to meet Basic Learning Needs. Short meetings were organised in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Canada and Germany. Comments were exchanged and incorporated in a short common outline drafted during a working meeting at Schiphol Airport (December 1989). This constituted a unique example of the potential of mobilizing and tapping expertise available in NORRAG's country cluster as a means of awareness raising for an instant review and information service.

Concerted inter-regional RRAG efforts were noted in preparing for the RRAG roundtable during the Jomtien Conference. Joint preparations for this roundtable were made:

- *Badajos, Spain, October 1989, REDUC-Spain Conference.*

The policy advisory and policy document review role built-into NORRAG's core activities and into NORRAG NEWS also covered early awareness raising in the South of agency policy documentation and shifts.

The REDUC co-ordinator commented as follows:

"We need NORRAG help to convince agencies that research, as part of a process of analysis and dissemination cum brokerage embedded in networks of researchers and policy-makers is a productive investment. The best help is NORRAG actually showing that this active commitment to both research and policy is productive. Also by suggesting that loans to countries include "RRAG type" activities."

NORRAG NEWS

NN is certainly the most visible activity of NORRAG and contributes extensively to our image in the outside world. 16 issues have so far been prepared starting from a simple approach of a loose 'cutting and gluing' of contributions in the first two issues to a neater but far more labour intensive approach opted for in later issues with a heavier emphasis on thematic approaches.

General NORRAG co-ordination and the editing and production of NORRAG News are combined leading in the course of time to a heavy 'co-ordinators task profile', which could only partially be compensated for by funding from external sources. Time investment in planning and preparing NORRAG News was further increased by an agreement within the co-ordination team to work towards a balance of information provision and a more judgmental and analytical approach. The growing appeal of NN also caused distribution to grow to some 900 copies for NN8. Considering the growing cost-spiral of NORRAG News, its free distribution and its character of an information medium for and by its constituency including Southern RRAGs, the co-ordinators proposed the network to consider an approach of:

- reciprocity of information exchange: entitlement to receiving NORRAG News would depend on willingness to provide information.

This would especially apply to our constituency in the North.

- restricted readership to be defined based on a set of criteria to be agreed upon.
- NN 9 was produced in 600 copies for distribution

Our consultation covered the following aspects:

- **The use of NORRAG NEWS.** How has NN been used in your work and what do you feel about the move to make NN more judgmental and analytical, and to involve more people in contributing?
- **The trade-off between open and closed access.** There is an ongoing discussion about the dissemination of NN: between circulation expansion and restriction to a membership group with expectations of contributing. We also asked for views on in-country dissemination of NN in the North and the South.

The co-ordinators received a large amount of letters indicating appreciation of NORRAG News. We will quote from some letters received commenting on the issues raised.

From the South:

"We have benefited very much from NORRAG NEWS. It has been distributed among all the founding members of the Ethiopian Educational Researchers Association (EERA). We have already started encouraging individuals to send you articles." (EERA co-ordinator/Head of the Institute for Curriculum Development and Research, Ethiopia).

"The future NORRAG NEWS dissemination principles and plans make a lot of sense to me. It is only fair that contact points should be those that are active in RRAGs and are in a position to disseminate information to their respective constituencies. Your policy on the reciprocity principle is understandable. However, I hope that it will not be too strictly applied to some of us in the South who are new in this game of information networking and operate under severe shortage of resources. I can assure you categorically that NORRAG News has been very useful and informative to us in BOLESWA (Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland Educational Research Association) and LERA (Lesotho Educational Research Association). Copies are deposited within the Institute of Education Documentation Centre and receive wide readership. We also display copies in all our LERA meetings and workshops/seminars. At the national level we are in the process of establishing a newsletter which we hope to share with you." (ERNESA Facilitator and LERA Chairman, Lesotho).

"I have personally read around 60% of the content of the issues that I have received and it has proven extremely useful for many of our ongoing projects. NORRAG NEWS is a great idea, both for making knowledge being brewed accessible across continents and for guiding action projects and political decision making. The limitation for countries like ours is, of course, its language of publication. And also, maybe, the good intention of balancing access to information between North and South has probably led to a heavy imbalance towards information from the North. This could probably be corrected in the future, although a regional Latin-American adaptation of NORRAG NEWS would probably be the ideal." (Academic Director of the Centro de Estudios Educativos, Mexico, one of the REDUC affiliated centres).

"I have received 8 issues and shared them with several other centres and people. I have mentioned NORRAG to educators in the region through the Bulletin of the Major Project in the field of Education that is sent to some 2000 people in the region. Probably it will take time to fully use the materials in Latin American countries, but there is no doubt that NN is a way to help Latin American educators to grow." (UNESCO OREALC)

"NN should be more analytical and judgmental. NORRAG has accomplished its aim of information dissemination to Southern researchers on developments in the North. It should further emphasize its informal advisory cum brokerage role. Southern RRAGs should contribute to NN. We have all to gain by becoming known. NN might have a space for "signals from the market". Offers of research capacity, of projects that could be useful elsewhere; offers of joint ventures; demand for research in new agency projects; different research needs to follow-up on Jomtien as seen by researchers in the South" (REDUC co-ordinator).

From the North many letters of appreciation were received indicating willingness to contribute. The following issues were raised:

"There are two discussions, one on how wide distribution should be, and the other on how it can best be managed. Both link to the nature of the network and how it should be run. My position has consistently been that the information should be available to all those interested to read it, both North and South, donors, researchers, administrators. Putting NN together is a lot of hard work, so why should we then hide it from all but a chosen few. Does wide distribution necessarily diminish the role of the few who are active in providing information, writing the articles, editing etc? I don't think it does. The active participants are the ones who then have a voice in what gets networked via NN. The other role they should have, which ties to the physical distribution question, is of being secondary distributors within their own communities and countries. The idea of national distribution in the North should be further developed. A person in a recognised education institution in each country could be sent a master copy and could print up as many copies as they want and distribute them. Mailing to the South, particularly Africa, still probably needs to be done from the North. Leaving decisions on local distribution to national co-ordinators could be a step, token but not trivial, in democratizing the network." (Education Division, SIDA, former NORRAG joint co-ordinator).

"I think NN might be more effective if it was shorter, more like a newsletter and less like a journal. While all the information is of value one really needs to choose between length and number of readers. The problem at the moment is that there is so much to read; those of us lucky enough to receive it do not need it immediately and therefore do not pass it on to colleagues quickly enough. Some of the longer articles might find a better outlet in a journal like IJED". (DICE, London University).

Many recommendations should be seriously considered including the continuation of free distribution especially in the South, further focusing on a judgmental and analytical approach in NN and to look into the possibilities of accommodating the language issue leading to access constraints in Latin America and Francophone Africa.

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1. The Development of a Northern Support Group Concerned with Education Research in Developing Countries. (Report of a RRAG meeting in conjunction with the Nordic Symposium, I.I.E., Stockholm University, 21-23 October 1985, by Kenneth King, co-ordinator.)

NORRAG evolution and challenges (1992 - 1994)

Michel CARTON (NORRAG Co-ordinator)

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The two previous pieces, by K. KING and W. BIERVLIET, speak for themselves : NORRAG has evolved in a period of eight years from an informal group of individuals to a specific kind of semi-organisation called a network, composed of more than 150 members (end of 1994) both individual and associate (organisations) belonging mostly to OECD countries and international organisations. The challenge of this transformation is clear : how to keep the pros of an informal functioning without facing the ... of a structure ? Or, by the opposite, how to overpass the identity, recognition limits of a small group of persons and to use some organisational facilities for better reaching the objectives of NORRAG ?

The network approach, which is today so much in fashion¹ seemed to be the best solution for NORRAG in 1992 when it constituted itself as an association under Swiss law - a network being supposed to take the better of two worlds - the individuals and the organisations. If we agree with N. MCGINN, NORRAG President, that networks are the best support for developing qualitative conversations among individuals themselves and with organisations, NORRAG has chosen the right way. After two years of functioning, it is possible to say that half of NORRAG members are having interactive conversations, through NN and meetings, the other half being only consumers of information. The question posed to NORRAG today is whether it prefers to address itself to committed people, with a clear objective of enlarging the membership to develop some "pressure group" components at the national and international levels; or whether it accepts to have also a passive information dissemination role addressed to people for whom we can't appreciate the efficiency of our work but who might become more active thanks to NORRAG activities ?

Being based in Switzerland, NORRAG can only provide a compromise answer : both paths have to be further explored as the tension between them is a kind of protection against the danger of becoming only a club or, on the contrary, a publishing company (whatever the support is). It is only by combining the never ending necessity to make the network better reach its objectives through the commitment of a growing number of active members and of the Executive Committee with the imperatives of a close to market situation for the dissemination of information to consumer members that NORRAG can keep its originality and meaning. It is clear that the management of such situation becomes difficult : how to become and remain informally efficient so that the social and technical components of the activities are preserved ?

¹ M. CARTON - Les réseaux : approche sociologique - La Lettre de NORRAG N° 2 - Mai 1994



Network for international policies and cooperation in education and training

Réseau sur les politiques et la coopération internationales en éducation et en formation

NORRAG HISTORY

NORRAG is a direct descendant of the Research Review and Advisory Group (RRAG). This was a 12 person international advisory group set up and funded by Canada's IDRC from 1977, in order to review the existing educational research (especially from the developing world), and come up with advice to donor agencies on educational investment. It was a group drawn more from the developing countries than the global north. The mechanism selected for RRAG's dissemination was the state of the art review, a way of synthesising and providing policy advice.

After a few years, RRAG felt it might have greater impact if there could be regional RRAGs. One example of such a regional RRAG would be the Education Research Network of West and Central Africa (ERNWACA). Another would be the REDUC network of documentation centres in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Kenneth King, who had been the co-ordinator of the original RRAG from late 1983, felt that there would be value in exploring a network that could synthesise key information on education policy across Northern research centres and donor agencies. Thus in late 1985, there was the first meeting of the Northern Research Review and Advisory Group (NORRAG), as it was first called. It was agreed that its main task would be to produce an aid policy bulletin. Swedish SIDA agreed to support the production and dissemination of the bulletin.

NORRAG NEWS (hereafter NN) was thus born. Getting the balance right between merely reporting and synthesising, on the one hand, and offering a critical, analytical account of a particular development, on the other, is something that has concerned NORRAG from the beginning. NN has always appeared twice a year.

The original idea was for NN to go to Southern researchers as a critical information service. Thus it was sent to the ERNWACA and REDUC networks. A second obvious constituency was the donors, and NN was sent to named individuals usually located in education and training divisions. The third NORRAG target were originally those academic contact points, often just one or two per country. All three groups had a role in feeding information into the newsletter. In these early years, NORRAG was really a small grouping of like-minded academics and agency policy people in the Global North and the Global South. It was more like a 'club' than an organization.

In 1992 it was decided to encourage a paying membership of NORRAG in OECD countries; but NN continued to be sent free to Southern networks. NORRAG also then constituted itself as an Association under Swiss law and it located its coordination point in Geneva with Michel Carton at IUED, now IHEID. Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) started to support the coordination. At that point also it changed its name from 'Northern' to 'Network' to reflect its more global reach.

NORRAG is more than just NN. NORRAG has also pulled together meetings to review key policy papers and key themes. It was often supported by DSE, now InWent of Germany, in organizing and publishing material from these NORRAG meetings. In addition, NORRAG has always organized a section of the biennial Oxford UKFIET conference since it started in 1991.

During the second half of the 1990s, NORRAG broke new ground in its role of policy review and advice by becoming one of the organisers, with ILO and Swiss Development Cooperation, of the Working Group on International Cooperation in Skills Development. This continued till 2009, and there is a valuable set of critical documentation on its web site.

NORRAG has always been aware that its largest challenge was to expand its work and its impact in the developing world. It could not achieve this by sending a few copies to a handful of selected people in the South and a small number of paying members in the North.

The key decision was therefore taken in 2003 to make NORRAG NEWS free online. This has led to a very rapid expansion in membership in both the Global North and Global South; NORRAG members worldwide increased from under 200 in 2003 to over 4,300 by January 2013.

It would not be appropriate to close this account without mentioning a word on the agencies that have supported NORRAG. Originally supported by Swedish Sida from 1985, then Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) since 1992, and DFID from the later 1990s, NORRAG is currently (in 2009) funded by SDC and DFID, with support in kind from NUFFIC (the Hague). SDC was the leading supporter of NORRAG's work in catalysing the Working Group for Skills Development.

We owe a considerable debt of gratitude to these three bilateral agencies, from Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.

3/3/2014