**O.R. IN DEVELOPMENT: ACTION POINTS FROM THE IFORS CONFERENCE JULY 2002 – THE FRIDAY AFTERNOON DISCUSSION**

– Report by Dick Martin

# Introduction

A major thread at the Conference was ‘O.R. in Development’. This ran throughout the week, starting on Monday with the presentation of shortlisted papers for the O.R. in Development Prize. From Tuesday onwards there were three consecutive streams on O.R. in sustainable development; community development and capacity building; and managing international development. The development theme then provided the basis for the final Plenary Session.

A report-back on the three streams emphasised the importance of tackling poverty and the role that O.R. could play in this, particularly in capacity building and knowledge building. Dr Francisco Sagasti in the Plenary address said ‘Let us not wait until the emerging fractured global order leads to disasters and chaos before taking action. O.R. was born at a time of crisis and of extreme danger, we are facing a similar situation now!’

Following the Plenary, participants in the stream met to discuss how to drive forward the role of O.R. in Sustainable Development. This note highlights action agreed at that session to take place now, and areas where action is required.

**Developing the Network – Who Drives Now?**

All participants agreed that the activities of O.R. in Sustainable Development which started in Ahmedabad in 1992 needed to be driven forward. John Friend, who has recently been the driving force in maintaining the network, needed to retire from this key role (while still being involved in the network’s activities). He felt that it was important that the person(s) taking over should have an institutional basis to support the development of the network. Given that membership of the network was world-wide, it was agreed that the normal means of communication would be by email.

ACTION: Subhash, Leroy, Paul, Alberto, Jackie and Elise[[1]](#footnote-1) agreed to liaise re developing the network. Leroy has already circulated a list of 18 participants’ email addresses and John has up to 12 names to add to the network.

**Opportunities to address real problems**

The single most important issue to the participants was to develop opportunities to address real problems in sustainable development. This very practical approach underlies many of the other proposals from the group including gaining influence for O.R. in development projects, publishing case studies, the role of O.R. education for development, the types of intervention by O.R. people, and philosophies of development.

ACTION: This issue was almost too big to start to discuss as indicated by the, above, linked activities which will be discussed below. One specific proposal was to find out from funding agencies what types of project were being funded and discuss what roles O.R. might play. The network might consider this issue to provide a focus for much of its future activity.

**Influence**

Gaining influence on the decision-makers and the funders was an issue raised by Subhash and received wide support from participants in the following discussion.

Subhash stressed the importance of working with local agencies at country and district level including arms of government, NGOs and international agencies. He contrasted this with attempts to gain influence at Head Offices of such organisations. Two key contributing factors to increasing influence were:

– gaining institutional and financial support from IFORS/EURO in backing bids for O.R. intervention

– developing multi-country participation in proposed interventions

ACTION: Subhash would write a brief discussion paper on this matter.

## Types of Intervention

Issues of Capacity Building, Sustainability and Participation had underlain many of the papers in the stream at the Conference. Together they had received a high number of red dots.

ACTION: No current action was proposed, but further consideration of these issues, and O.R. people’s role in them, is relevant to increasing influence, addressing real problems, education for O.R. in development, type of published material, and could be criteria for the O.R. in development prizes. (My personal view, not openly discussed.)

# Education for O.R. in Development

Consideration of this topic only just began to scratch the surface of a topic for future discussion. Distinctions were drawn between ‘mainstream O.R.’ and ‘O.R. for development’ as taught in both developing countries, and in countries such as the UK to participants from developing countries. This linked to other topics such as information flows and learning from North to South/South to North (‘developed world’ to ‘developing world’ and vice versa) to published materials, particularly case studies (see below), and addressing real problems.

ACTION: This is a major area for consideration by the network. Jonathan and Claudio are currently working on a reader for O.R. for Development which could provide a springboard.

## O.R. in Development Prize

The O.R. in Development Prize had been offered by IFORS every three years from 1987. There was a concern that many of the papers submitted in 2002, whilst discussing projects in developing countries, were not specifically about development. There was also disappointment that presenters of the papers this year hadn’t played a role in the conference stream. It was agreed that the Guidelines for papers to be submitted for the prize should be reviewed – the new guidelines would state that papers should deal with major development issues and should have a section discussing the impact on development. We should consider promotion and publicity for the prizes to attempt to increase the numbers of papers from other developing countries. There was considerable discussion on this matter including problems of reaching O.R. workers in countries where O.R. was in the early stages of development. No firm proposals on outreach were made at this stage – a possible activity for development by the network?

ACTION: Jonathan, who had played a key role in drafting the original Guidelines, agreed to propose new Guidelines for discussion by the group.

*Elise (email 31/7/02) has asked Paul Fatti from Wits University in South Africa, the incoming chair of the O.R. Prize in O.R in Development, to come up with his ideas – Jonathan and Paul Fatti to liaise as suggested by John (email 1/8/02).*

## Publishing

It was agreed that there was a need for more publications on O.R. in development, specifically of case studies. (This links to the issue of education, discussed above, and the book by Jonathan and Claudio). Suggested media were the internet and O.R. Insight. Becky is an Associate Editor of O.R. Insight and is keen to receive articles on Community O.R. and O.R. in development.

ACTION: Those interested to contact Becky (after September 6th).

# Other Conferences including ICORD

Participants had received notification of a number of conferences in O.R. taking place in developing countries or on O.R. in development. Surprise was expressed that in some cases there seemed to be a concentration on O.R. techniques rather than of development issues. There had been concern about a conference calling itself ICORD (International Conference on O.R. in Development) which had not been sanctioned as an official ICORD event at the time.

ACTION: Would Elise please update the network on the current situation re the proposal?

*Elise (email 31.7.02) reports that IFORS has come up with guidelines for its conduct every three years – could she please update us on this?*

Elise is going to the Burkina-Faso conference – could she please report back to the network? N.B. Also, Graham Rand is on the Programme Committee.

CLAIO Conference in Latin America. Is anybody going, can we get a report?

# Funding for work in O.R. or Development

There was little discussion on this topic although it is an important matter, particularly to those who are not northern academics. It is relevant to the discussion of influence (see above).

# Check what has been done on previous action points from earlier conferences

There was a need to check on action points from previous conferences to report on progress and also to avoid re-inventing the wheel at each conference.

ACTION: Could Arabinda please remind us of any outstanding points?

# Ethical Issues/Knowledge Divide

These topics were not discussed further at this stage but are both relevant to development of the network and other matters such as education and publication.

# Other feed-back on the stream – not discussed on the Friday

Finally, our rapporteurs, Abi and Ajat captured major points during the stream and on the Wednesday planning meeting. There was not time for all of them to be addressed on the Friday, but they have both produced draft reports which will be available when finalised.

Dick Martin

Updated 6/8/02

**Names of participants in the 12 July Edinburgh workshop referred to in this report:**

*Members of group who agreed to work together in driving the electronic network:*

*Elise: Elise del Rosario, Philippines: IFORS Vice-President for Developing Countries*

Subhash: Subhash Datta, India: Professor and Chairman, Consulting Services, Management Development Institute, Gurgaon near Delhi

*Leroy: Leroy White, UK: Reader, School of Health Studies, South Bank University, London*

*Paul: Paul Randall, UK (adviser to government of Namibia): OR Service, HM Treasury, London*

*Alberto: Alberto Franco, UK (from Peru): Senior Lecturer, Kingston Business School, Kingston-on-Thames.*

*Jackie: Jackie Phahlamohlaka, South Africa: Senior Lecturer in Informatics, University of Pretoria and Chair of Management Committee, Siyabuswa Educational Improvement and Development Trust.*

*Co-ordinators of Reporting from Discussions at IFORS 2002:*

*Dick: Dick Martin, UK: Dick Martin and Associates, London.*

John: John Friend, UK. Stradspan Ltd., Sheffield

*Other participants agreeing to undertake particular tasks:*

#### Jonathan: Jonathan Rosenhead, UK: Professor of OR, London School of Economics

Arabinda: Arabinda Tripathy, India: Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad; Editor of the IFORS OR in Developing Countries Newsletter

#### Becky: Rebecca Herron, Community Operational Research Unit, University of Lincoln

*Student Reporters appointed through competition sponsored by Steve Cook Memorial Fund:*

Abi: Abi Jagun, Nigeria: Doctoral Student at University of Strathclyde, Scotland

Ajat: Ajatshatru Sharma, India: Masters Student at University of Hertfordshire, UK

*Others mentioned in this report but not present at action planning meeting:*

Francisco: Francisco Sagasti, Peru: Plenary speaker at IFORS 2000

Graham: Graham Rand, UK: University of Lancaster, IFORS liaison with Africa

Claudio: Claudio Bornstein, Brazil: Federal University of Rio de Janeiro

*Others at the action planning meeting on 12 July:*

Maritha Snyman, South Africa; Mark Westcombe, UK; Mike Floyd, UK; Duncan Shaw, UK; Kerry Costello, Australia; Lynn Crawford, Australia.

*Other key contributors to development streams not present at action planning meeting:*

Colin Thunhurst, Ireland, Goutam Dutta, India; Arjan Shahani, UK; Alejandro Ochoa, Venezuela; Ernesto Lleras, Colombia; Rangalal Bandyopadhyay, India.

Gawie Engelbrecht, South Africa; Frank Linard, Australia; Howard Turner, UK.

*Please contact John Friend at* [jfriend@btinternet.com](mailto:jfriend@vtinternet.com) *for any corrections or additions to this list*

1. See page 5 for fuller list of names and affiliations of people mentioned here [↑](#footnote-ref-1)