

IFRTD

**Governance Review
Summary**

August 2001

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1 Introduction

The IFRTD Strategy 2000 – 2001 had as one of its strategic aims “the Forum will aim to develop and maintain an appropriate institutional status and decision making structure consistent with the values of the Forum and which reflects the balance of interests of the different members of the global network”. To achieve this it was agreed “to conduct or commission a study . . . to examine different options for the long-term institutional status and governance of the Forum”.

IFRTD is currently an unconstituted organisation. The organisation is hosted by ITDG through IT Consultants who hold all the contracts relating to the funding of IFRTD and with whom there is a Memorandum of Understanding. The following groups participate in the governance of the network and/or its activities:

- **Advisory Committee** is the body that gives direction to the activities of the Secretariat, and to some extent to the NFGs, and has about 35 members including the founder members of IFRTD, representatives of donor agencies, representatives of partner organisations and networks and representatives of national forum groups. The Advisory committee meets annually.
- **Institutional members** of the Advisory Committee include some NGOs and consultancies e.g. IT Transport and ITDG and some regional networks e.g. ATNESA, some multilateral programmes e.g. RTTP and ASIST and donor institutions e.g. DfID, SDC.
- **National Forum Groups** are associated national networks that subscribe to the vision, mission and values of the Forum. The NFGs are key players in the Forum.
- **Members of the Forum** are those who participate in the Forums’ activities, mainly in receiving the newsletter.

In March 2001 this Governance Review was commissioned with the following terms of reference:

The consultant will be required to examine the different options for the long term governance and institutional status of the Forum and to make recommendations to the Advisory Committee meeting to be held in September 2001.

This will involve consideration of:

- The legal status of the Forum
- The relationships between key actors: the Advisory Committee, the national forum groups, the Secretariat and its hosts, the donors, institutional members, general membership
- The role and composition of the Advisory Committee
- The role and composition of the Secretariat, location, potential for decentralisation
- Management structures and lines of accountability
- Cost implications
- Other issues that may be appropriate

2 The Review

The Review was carried out between April and August 2001. Meetings were held with London based Secretariat staff, face to face and telephone interviews were carried out with institutional members (including Peter Roberts, Ray Holland, Cowan Coventry, Andrew Scott, Jerry Lebo, Paul Starkey, Simon Ellis and Gary Taylor) and E Mail discussions were had with NFG coordinators and other Advisory Committee members. In addition meetings were held with staff in other networks to discuss their approach to governance.

Overall there is a feeling that the IFRTD governance processes have worked well to date and that they have evolved as the Forum has developed and grown. The Secretariat is seen to have worked within the values of the organisation and therefore there have been few issues about how the governance works. The lack of bureaucracy around the governance has allowed the Forum to develop in a flexible and responsive way and develop a broad based membership, without the use of membership applications processes. This broad based international membership that has been working together in partnership has given credibility to the Forum with donors etc and the Advisory Committee meeting has given the opportunity for members from different backgrounds to network together on an annual basis. On balance the fact that IFRTD is not a separately constituted organisation is not seen as detrimental to its development or independence.

The review has however identified a number of weaknesses in the governance structure and processes of IFRTD that may, if not addressed, hinder the development of the Forum over the next few years. Firstly there is no definition of member or of the different kinds of member and the benefits to and responsibilities of different kinds of member are not clear. The decision-making processes and responsibilities are not well defined and it is not clear who the Executive Secretary/Secretariat is accountable to and how this accountability is exercised. The Advisory Committee is not felt to be an effective decision-making body because there is a lack of clarity about its decision making remit, who is eligible for membership, how do people get elected and how long is their term of office. The number of members of the Advisory Committee has grown as the number of NFGs and other members of the Forum have increased. The Advisory Committee is probably already too large to be a decision-making body and this situation will get worse as the number of NFGs and members grows. At present there is no clarity as to whether people are on the Advisory Committee as individuals or as representatives of a constituency e.g. NFG members in country.

The recommendations in this report try to build on the strengths and address the weaknesses of the current governance structure and processes.

The most important lesson learnt from the meetings with staff in other networks was that the greater the overlap of the objectives of the network and of the members the more those members need to have the opportunity to be involved in the governance of the network. Thus where members deliver the strategic objectives of the network, or the network delivers the strategic objectives of the members, then those members need to have the opportunity to influence the strategic direction of the network. Where there is little or no overlap of strategic objectives e.g. possibly for members who only receive Forum News then the need for those members to be involved in the governance of the Forum is very limited. It will therefore be crucial to recognise the different objectives of the various groups of members of the Forum when developing the governance structure and processes.

3 Recommendations

The recommendations have been set out under three headings:

- ❑ Membership
- ❑ Decision making and accountability
- ❑ Legal status

In all value driven organisations it is essential to ensure that the governance structure reflects the values of the organisation and is designed to most effectively achieve the vision, mission and strategic goals. If this is not done then it is likely that there will be conflicts within the organisation and that reaching the agreed goals will be made more difficult.

Based on the values of IFRTD we can then identify those that specifically impinge on the governance of the IFRTD. These are:

- ❑ Membership is open to all who share our vision, objectives, values and principles.
- ❑ We strive to provide all members with equal opportunities to participate in the activities of the network
- ❑ We encourage members to take ownership of the network and participate in its decision-making processes.
- ❑ We are committed to decentralisation of decision making and implementation of activities
- ❑ The Secretariat supports the activities of the members under the guidance of the Advisory Committee
- ❑ The Secretariat will always adopt a multi-disciplinary, multi-lingual, flexible and pragmatic approach
- ❑ Taking a networking approach to working with each other and freely sharing knowledge and information.

These values have been used as guidance in making recommendations about the IFRTD governance structure.

3.1 Membership

Relevant IFRTD value

Membership is open to all who share out vision, values and principles

There are currently three categories of member of IFRTD, National Forum Groups, Institutional Members and Members of the Forum i.e. people who are on the mailing list for Forum News. There is however no clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the different categories of member nor is there any process of application for membership which assesses the commitment to the values of the Forum. It is unlikely that most of the people who receive Forum News actually see themselves as members of the Forum, receiving and reading the newsletter being the extent of their participation.

This means that there is a lack of clarity as to which members should be involved in the governance of IFRTD and about how different members can be involved. It is also not clear how

if members are required to share the vision, mission and values of the Forum this is to be assessed and whether membership would be withheld from those who do not conform.

Recommendations

- 3.1.1 That the Forum recognises three groups of members:
- ❑ **NFGs**, the national networks of members, who are key members of the Forum and partners in delivering the strategy of the Forum. The NFGs should be expected to achieve minimum criteria for membership as follows:
 - subscribe to, and demonstrate in their activities, the values of the Forum
 - contribute to the strategic objectives of the Forum
 - ❑ **Institutional members**, organisations that benefit from having a strategic institutional relationship with the Forum. This includes donors e.g. DfID, SDA and strategic partners e.g. ILO ASIST, RTTP, SUSTRAN, ITDG. It is to be expected that these members would also share the values of IFRTD.
 - ❑ **General Members**, those people/organisations who receive the Forum News and may, or may not, participate in other Forum activities. There is no specific strategic relationship with this group of members.
- 3.1.2 That the NFGs and the Institutional members must be represented in the governance structure if the strategy of IFRTD is to be successfully implemented. It is not so important to the delivery of the strategy that the general members are involved but there should be mechanism for their inclusion should they wish to participate.

3.2 Decision-making and Accountability

Relevant IFRTD Values

- ✓ *We encourage members to take ownership of the network and participate in its decision-making processes*
- ✓ *We are committed to decentralisation of decision-making and implementation of activities.*
- ✓ *The Secretariat supports the activities of the members under the guidance of the Advisory Committee*
- ✓ *We strive to provide all members with equal opportunities to participate in the activities of the network*
- ✓ *Taking a networking approach to working with each other and freely sharing knowledge and information*

The Strategy states that the Advisory Committee gives direction to the activities of the Secretariat and does this by approving and adopting the Strategy, providing inputs into developing appropriate institutional status and decision making structure for the network, identifying priority areas for advocacy, information production and research and developing internal mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. However in practice the Advisory Committee meeting has had a major focus on networking and sharing information and has not given sufficient attention to its decision-making role. The Secretariat has therefore filled this void, which in the long term will not be satisfactory. This is particularly so because it is not clear to whom the Secretariat/Executive Secretary is accountable and how this process is carried out.

As the number of members of the Forum has grown new people have been added to the Advisory Committee and as there have been no resignations the committee is now too large to operate

effectively as a decision making body. The fact that the membership is multi-lingual also makes participation more difficult for those who do not have English as a first language. It is not clear who is eligible for membership of the Advisory Committee what is the minimum and maximum number of members, how do people get elected and for how long and are people there as individuals or as representatives of groups of members or institutions. All these factors could lead to a position where members question the authority of the Advisory Committee to make decisions for IFRTD.

At the present time it could be said that the NFGs represent the members in their country. However some members of IFRTD do not belong to their local NFG and there are members in countries where there is no NFG. Also the number of NFGs is now 19 and this is expected to increase over the next few years. It is difficult to envisage an effective decision making body which has as members all individual NFGs as well as Institutional Members and probably General Members. Therefore in order to encourage maximum participation in decision making and decentralisation the current regional structure could be developed and the concept of regional representation on the Advisory Committee be introduced. This would allow a reduction in size of the Advisory Committee, increase the participation of members (NFGs and General Members) in decision-making, particularly at regional level, and hopefully create a greater sense of ownership of the network amongst members.

Recommendations

Regionalisation

- 3.2.1 IFRTD should adopt a regionalised structure to carry out its work and to maximise member participation and decentralised decision-making. This will require the appointment of regional co-ordinators, probably one based in each region.
- 3.2.2 There should be an annual regional governance meeting at which all NFGs in the region are represented and which sets priorities for the region, suggests international priorities for advocacy, information production and research and which selects representatives to the IFRTD Advisory Committee. In addition to NFG representatives the Regional Co-ordinator and regional institutional members would attend the regional meeting.
- 3.2.3 The annual regional governance meetings would also provide a networking opportunity and the non-decision making part of the meeting could be open to all members in the region.
- 3.2.4 Once every four years (based on four regions) a region could host an international networking conference to which all members of the forum would be invited. This would be an information sharing and networking conference and not part of the governance (decision making) structure.

Advisory Committee membership

- 3.2.5 The NFGs should form the core and majority of the Advisory Committee. Each region should select NFG representatives at the regional governance meetings.
- 3.2.6 Other members of the Forum (Institutional and General) should participate in the Advisory Committee through a process of co-option.
- 3.2.7 In the first instance the size of the Advisory Committee should be limited to 15 members with the option of rising to a maximum of 20 over a period of time.
- 3.2.8 Each of the four regions should select 2 NFG representatives (8 total) and the Advisory Committee should co-opt a further 7 people from the Institutional and General membership. The co-options should include at least one donor – proposed by the donors at the annual donor meeting. Decisions about co-options would be made on the basis of

strategic importance to IFRTD and to having a broad base on experience on the Advisory Committee.

- 3.2.9 Members would be elected for a period three years. In the first instance one NFG regional representative would be elected for 3 years and one for 2 years to allow for continuity. A similar arrangement should be made for co-opted members.
- 3.2.10 The Secretariat should ensure that all Advisory Committee members can participate fully in meetings by providing appropriate translation facilities etc.

The role of the Advisory Committee

- 3.2.11 The Advisory Committee gives direction to the activities of the Secretariat and does this by approving and adopting the Strategy, providing inputs into developing appropriate institutional status and decision making structure for the network, identifying priority areas for advocacy, information production and research and developing internal mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. It should do this based on the regional plans, advice from the Secretariat and the views of members of the Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee should also ensure that the funding of the Forum is appropriate to its strategic and operational needs.
- 3.2.12 The Advisory Committee should delegate to the Secretariat and the NFGs the responsibility for implementing the strategy. If the Secretariat and/or the NFGs wish to work outside the Strategy they will need to refer this back to the Advisory Committee for approval.

Accountability

- 3.2.13 The Secretariat should have the overall responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy and the authority to make operational decisions to ensure the efficient and effective running of the Forum.
- 3.2.14 The Chair of the Advisory Committee (or an appropriate designated member of the Advisory Committee) should line manage the Executive Secretary. From the regular line management meetings they would identify issues that need to be referred to the Advisory Committee between meetings (probably through E Mail discussion). NFGs should refer to the Secretariat all matters that they feel need Advisory Committee attention between meetings.

3.3 Legal status

IFRTD works as a global network with a flexible and loose structure. It has no legal or institutional registration and is hosted by the Intermediate Technology Development Group.

At the present time ITDG are willing to continue the present arrangement, which has three parts to it:

1. IFRTD benefits from ITDG's registration as a company limited by guarantee and as a charity under UK law.
2. Intermediate Technology Consultants provide administrative services for which IFRTD pay a management fee.
3. ITDG has a transport programme as part of its own strategy and there are a number of areas of shared interest and collaboration.

The major benefit of this arrangement is that IFRTD has not needed to register the Forum as a charity and a limited company under UK law (or some similar registration in an appropriate

location) with all the administrative responsibilities that this entails but still has the benefits arising from registration. IFRTD has strategic partnerships and relationships with a number of other institutions and the strategic relationship with ITDG is not dependent on IFRTD being hosted by ITDG. The administrative services could be purchased on a best value basis from elsewhere.

Therefore the circumstances in which IFRTD would independently register as a charity and company limited by guarantee (or equivalent) would be:

1. If a host could not be found who would share their registration with IFRTD
2. If it was found that registration would give greater funding opportunities e.g. UK Community Fund.

Recommendations

- 3.3.1 Remain “hosted” by ITDG for the present time.
- 3.3.2 If ITDG or IFRTD wish to end the current relationship IFRTD should seek another appropriate host who will share the benefits of their registration. If another appropriate host cannot be found IFRTD should explore the opportunities for registration both in the UK and overseas.
- 3.3.3 IFRTD should consider registration if it becomes clear that this will give access to new funding sources.

4 Conclusions

IFRTD has shown its commitment to developing its governance structure and processes by undertaking this review and the members and the Secretariat have given considerable time to providing information and ideas to the consultant. The recommendations are intended to build on the existing governance structures and to clarify and redefine rather than suggest radical change. The most radical change recommended is the move to regional representation on the Advisory Committee and the addition of regional governance and networking meetings. However the foundations for working on a regional basis already exist.

If adopted the recommendations should ensure the effective governance of IFRTD over the next few years and encourage increased member participation in decision-making and the activities of the network.

I would like to thank everyone that has participated in this review. I have learnt a lot about IFRTD and wish the Forum every success in future.