



NEW DELHI

March, 2006

EVALUATION OF CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

RESULTS OF A PILOT EVALUATION

I. INTRODUCTION

Background and Purpose: Since its inception in 1999, the Global Development Network (GDN) has striven to advance its core objective of “*supporting high-quality, policy-oriented research in the social sciences for the purpose of development.*”¹ After six years of operation, progress towards achieving these goals can be assessed. This pilot evaluation of one objective—capacity building—was conducted in late 2005 and relies on quantitative and qualitative indicators representing the **process** aspects of GDN’s activities as well as their **outcomes** in both academic and operational senses. Data reported here on the volume and quality of research produced by GDN-supported researchers and their career development were collected from specially designed electronic surveys, interviews and focus group discussions with various stakeholders, an independent review of GDN-supported research output and routine reports submitted to GDN by its regional network partners. Comments are invited on both the specific results of this pilot and on its design in general so that the instruments can be refined and developed for future use.

Focus: The evaluation focuses on the capacity-building impact of GDN’s five core activities. The activities and their respective budget allocations in FY05 are as follows:

1. Regional Research Competitions (RRCs): An annual program of small grants administered by GDN’s Regional Network Partners (RNPs) with a total budget of \$2.1 million². The cost per study is \$15,100.
2. Global Research Projects (GRPs): Multi-country projects with as many as 30 – 60 component studies addressing major development issues. The total budget for the most recently completed project, *Understanding Reform*, amounted to \$1.81 million over three years and comprised 10 thematic and 42 country studies. The cost per component study was thus \$34,800.
3. Global Development Awards and Medals (GDAMs): An annual competition for the awards for Most Innovative Development Project and the Outstanding Research Proposal as well as medals for the best research papers on selected development-related topics with a budget of \$0.38 million³. The cost is \$29,000 per winner (13).
4. GDNNet: GDN’s electronic voice, website, and Knowledge Base (KB) with a budget of \$0.73 million. The KB provides researchers with access to papers, journals, datasets and links to research organizations around the developing world. The cost is \$160 per researcher registered in the KB.

¹ *Agreement Establishing the Global Development Network*, March 2004, Article I, Section 1.

² These funds were disbursed by GDN in FY04, but used to support the RRCs in FY05.

³ Excludes the costs of the Award for the Most Innovative Development Project (\$148,000) since the focus here is on research.

5. Annual Global Development Conference (AGDC): An annual conference with a budget of \$1.23 million, bringing together researchers and policy-makers working on development issues. The cost is \$2,500 per participant.

The form of capacity building varies across the five activities listed above. Researchers participating in the first two activities receive various forms of *mentoring* through reviews and workshops. Winners of the GDAMs primarily benefit from the *exposure* arising from winning an international competition. Since this is a competition for completed research papers, the scope for mentoring is limited. Rather, the intention of the GDAMs is to unearth new talent and promote their careers. The primary focus of the last two activities is *networking*. Researchers engaged in the fourth activity have registered their profiles in the KB and have participated in GDN's electronic networking activities while those participating in the last activity have attended one or more of GDN's annual conferences. Researchers may have engaged in more than one activity.

Approach: Assessing the impact of capacity building is notoriously difficult. In recognition of this fact, the current evaluation relies on a variety of approaches including quantitative techniques (primarily inferential statistics) as well as qualitative techniques including subjective assessments and focus group discussions. The use of multiple techniques can increase confidence in results and assist with interpretation. The evaluation therefore relied on the following instruments:

- ✓ A survey of researchers participating in GDN activities (934 respondents). The questionnaires designed by the GDN Secretariat contained both quantitative and qualitative questions. The survey was conducted by Code-Corner, a database managing company in Cairo.
- ✓ Focus group discussions with RRC-funded researchers held at the annual meetings of the East Asian Development Network and Economic Research Forum – GDN's partners in East Asia and Middle East, respectively – and with GRP researchers at the Seventh AGDC held in St. Petersburg in January 2006.
- ✓ A review by independent experts of 68 randomly selected outputs from GDN-funded research for FY02 and FY05. The selection of both the papers and the experts was overseen by the World Bank.
- ✓ GDN's audited accounts.
- ✓ A review of randomly selected CVs of researchers affiliated with GDN.
- ✓ Monitoring reports from the RNPs and other GDN reporting systems.

Survey ratings: Throughout this evaluation, all value ratings use a five-point scale. A rating of "1" is positive but small; GDN's value is said to be "very low". At the other end of the scale, a rating of "5" signifies a truly substantial impact; GDN's value in this case is said to be "very high".

Organization: The remainder of this report comprises six sections. The next section reports on the general level of satisfaction with GDN (all respondents) and on the coverage of GDN's programs. Section III reports on the intensity and perceived value of GDN's capacity-building activities. Section IV examines the impact of these activities with respect to research output, policy outreach and career development. Section V presents a comparative analysis of various dimensions of capacity building for all five activities. And Section VI assesses the cost-effectiveness of the five activities in terms of their capacity-building impact per dollar of expenditure. The final section of the report draws some implications and describes next steps. The survey data used in this evaluation is available online as a spreadsheet. All feedback and queries may be directed to evaluation@gdnet.org.

II. GENERAL RESULTS

Overall Satisfaction

- ✓ **55 percent of all respondents rated their satisfaction with GDN as “4” or “5” on the five point scale.**

Of those respondents receiving funding and mentoring and/or exposure through the RRCs, the GRPs and the GDAMs (185), over 65 percent rated their satisfaction with GDN as “4” or “5”. This group is very knowledgeable about GDN as a result of its direct participation in GDN-funded activities. The remaining respondents (749) received neither direct financial support nor any mentoring. Nevertheless, since every respondent in this group is registered with GDNNet, its members benefited from GDN’s electronic networking activities and may have participated in GDN’s annual conferences. They are therefore knowledgeable about GDN’s activities, albeit to a lesser degree. More than 50 percent of this group rated their satisfaction with GDN as “4” or “5”.

“I have found the GDN’s activities to fully satisfy my needs regarding global research. It has provided me with the opportunity to present my papers to an international and diverse audience and gain valuable feedback.”

“At this stage of my career, GDN activities have been very effective and very valuable in enhancing my skills and profile as a researcher.”⁴

Coverage

- ✓ **GDN has funded and mentored over 1,300 researchers to date in over 100 countries.⁵**
- ✓ **The seven AGDCs have attracted over 3,500 participants, of which around 2,500 were from developing and transition countries.**
- ✓ **GDN’s electronic newsletter reaches 16,000 subscribers.**

While all regions of the developing and transition world are represented in GDN’s activities, there are variations across regions. The Middle East and North Africa and Eastern Europe, for example, have the lowest participation rates in the GDAMs and the AGDC. In addition to regional diversity, GDN is also interested in reaching typically underrepresented groups especially social scientists in disciplines other than economics, younger researchers, and female researchers. According to the survey, around 30 percent of GDN-funded researchers come from social sciences other than economics, almost 30 percent of them are under 35 years of age, and around 30 percent are female.

III. CAPACITY-BUILDING EFFORTS

GDN’s activities provide three vehicles for building capacity: *mentoring* is delivered through the RRCs and the GRPs; *exposure* of high-quality research by GDN-funded researchers is most obviously provided through the GDAMs; and *networking* and knowledge sharing become available through GDNNet and the AGDC. This section presents information on the intensity of mentoring and its value as perceived by participants in the RRCs and the GRPs. It then turns to the impact of recognizing high-quality research through the GDAMs on visibility of the researchers in the press and their career advancement. And finally it provides information on the perceived value

⁴ Answers to the open-ended question in the survey.

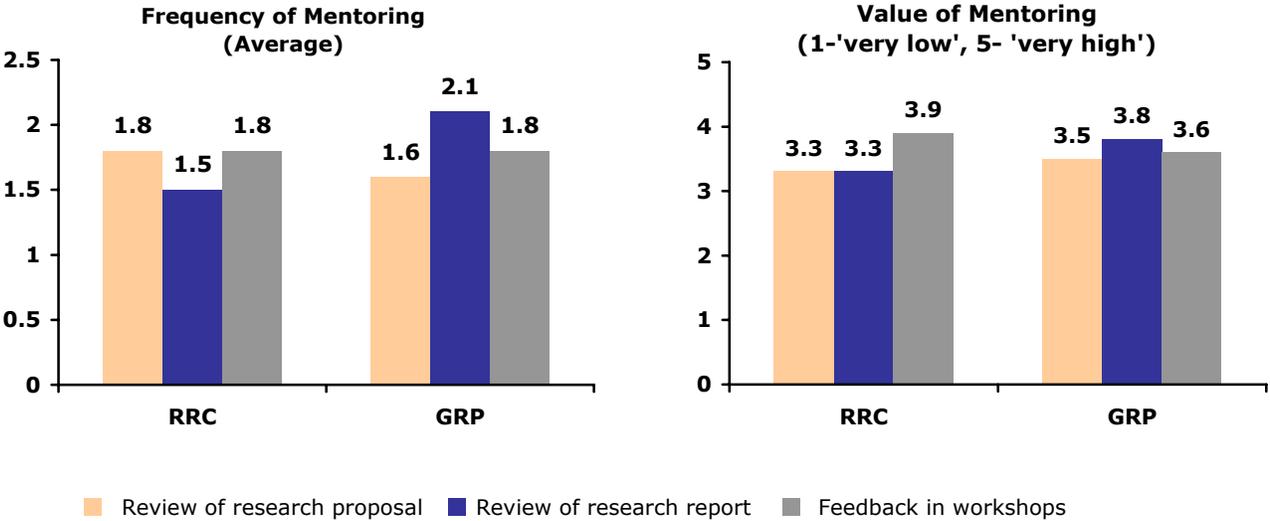
⁵ Of this figure 911 are principal researchers and the remainder are co-researchers.

of GDN’s networking activities not only in terms of their contribution to making contacts and sharing knowledge (intermediate goals) but also in terms of their contribution to capacity building (ultimate goal).

Mentoring

- ✓ **Researchers participating in the RRCs and the GRPs receive an average of 5 reviews directly from mentors and/or through feedback in workshops at various stages during the course of a grant.**
- ✓ **They rate the value of GDN-supported mentoring at 3.6 on the five-point scale.**

Mentoring and feedback typically take place at submission of the initial proposal and during implementation of the project through reviews of draft reports as well as at workshops. The charts show the frequency of reviews and how researchers value the various forms of mentoring for the RRCs and the GRPs. RRC participants attach the highest value to the workshops while GRP participants value the reviews of research reports most highly.



“The RRC grant’s main advantage over other grants is that it provides mentoring and feedback, not just funding.”

“The peer review of both the proposal and the study is the most attractive aspect of this competition.”⁶

Exposure

- ✓ **Prize winners rate the contribution of the GDAMs competition to their visibility (presentations, press) at 3.3 on the five-point scale.**
- ✓ **They rate the competition’s contribution to their career advancement at 3.7.**

⁶ RRC-funded researchers at the Focus Group Discussion held in Hong Kong in November 2005.

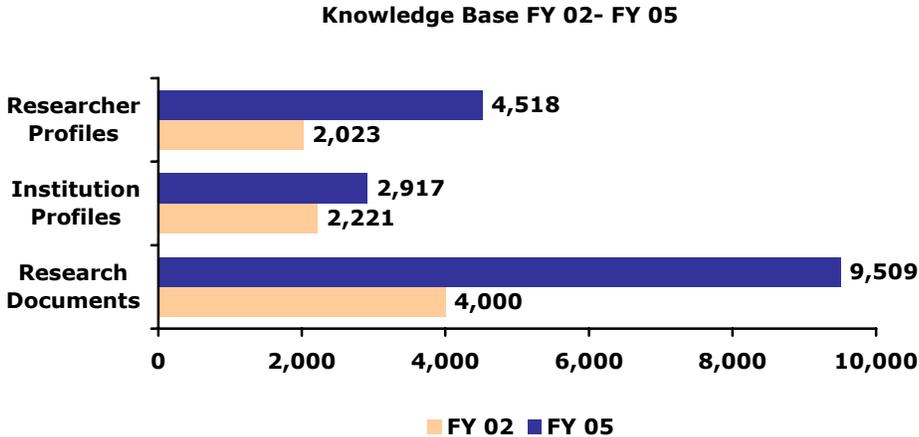
The exposure received by winners of the GDN prizes contributes significantly to their career advancement (see Section V).

“The award provided us with the opportunity to concentrate exclusively on our research agenda and has also attracted the attention of national and international institutions now willing to read and understand our research.”⁷

Networking

- ✓ All respondents rate GNet services at 3.7 on the five-point scale.
- ✓ Attendees at the AGDC rate the conferences’ contribution to “networking and developing new contacts” at 4.1.
- ✓ They also rate the conferences’ contribution to “enhancing research skills/knowledge” at 3.8.

The high value attached to GNet services demonstrates its value as a means of networking and sharing information since the majority of respondents (749 overall) only participate in networking activities: they do not participate in activities that receive funding and mentoring. At the same time, those who do receive funding and mentoring (185) also give a high rating of 3.3 to GNet services, indicating that in their perception the networking activities complement the mentoring they receive and contribute to the realization of research output from GDN-funded activities. The high rating of GNet is reflected in its increasingly wide use by researchers in the developing and transition countries, with monthly visits to the website more than doubling over the three-year period from approximately 17,000 to 41,000. The chart below demonstrates the expansion in the KB for the same period.



“I have been benefiting from the GNet for the last two years. I have found the website very interesting and helpful that provides me enough support to carry out my academic pursuits. I (also) hope I will be able to utilize the information and knowledge received from the conference for the development of my country.”⁸

The ratings for the AGDC reveal a similar point: GDN’s networking activities are valued for their contribution to capacity building in addition to, or because of, their value as a vehicle for making contacts. Thus, attendees at the

⁷ Ana Maria Ibanez, Colombia, First Prize winner of the Award for ‘Outstanding Research on Development’, GDN Annual Report 2005.

⁸ Unsolicited email received from Azmat Rasul, Assistant Professor, University of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan in December 2005.

AGDC place a very high value on the conference's contribution to networking but they value almost equally highly its usefulness as a means of enhancing research skills and knowledge.

IV. CAPACITY-BUILDING IMPACT

GDN's capacity-building efforts, either directly through mentoring or indirectly through exposure and networking, are intended to help participants to generate quality research output, reach and inform policy makers, and develop careers. Each of these various dimensions of capacity-building impact is assessed in the following subsections.

Research Output

- ✓ **Almost 40 percent of funded researchers have published at least one article in a refereed journal based on their GDN-supported research.⁹**
- ✓ **Over 40 percent have published at least one chapter in a volume.**
- ✓ **Over 60 percent have produced a working paper as a result of their funding from GDN.**
- ✓ **Funded researchers rated GDN's "contribution to academic output" at 3.4 on the five-point scale.**

The number of published outputs is likely to increase given that 85 percent of funded researchers have presented their work in an academic event and can therefore be expected to produce at least a working paper at some point. In addition, some researchers are still in the early stages of their research and could not therefore be expected to have produced even a working paper. This is definitely the case for grant recipients in the most recent round of the RRCs and for the country authors in three of the GRPs (*Understanding Reform, Bridging Research and Policy, and the Impact of Rich Countries' Policies on Poverty: Perspectives from the Developing World*).

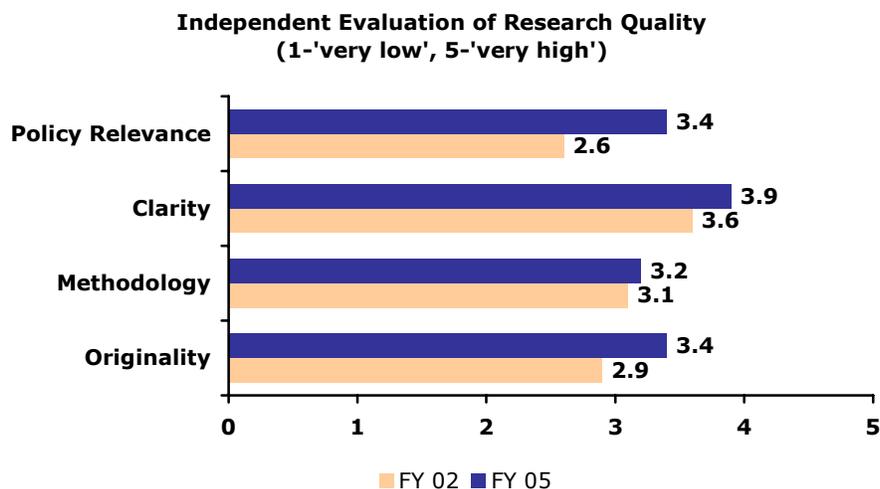
Extrapolating the survey results on research output to all studies funded by GDN (911) since 1999 suggests that:

- ✓ **GDN support so far has been associated with over 500 articles in refereed journals, over 500 volume chapters and over 900 working papers.¹⁰**

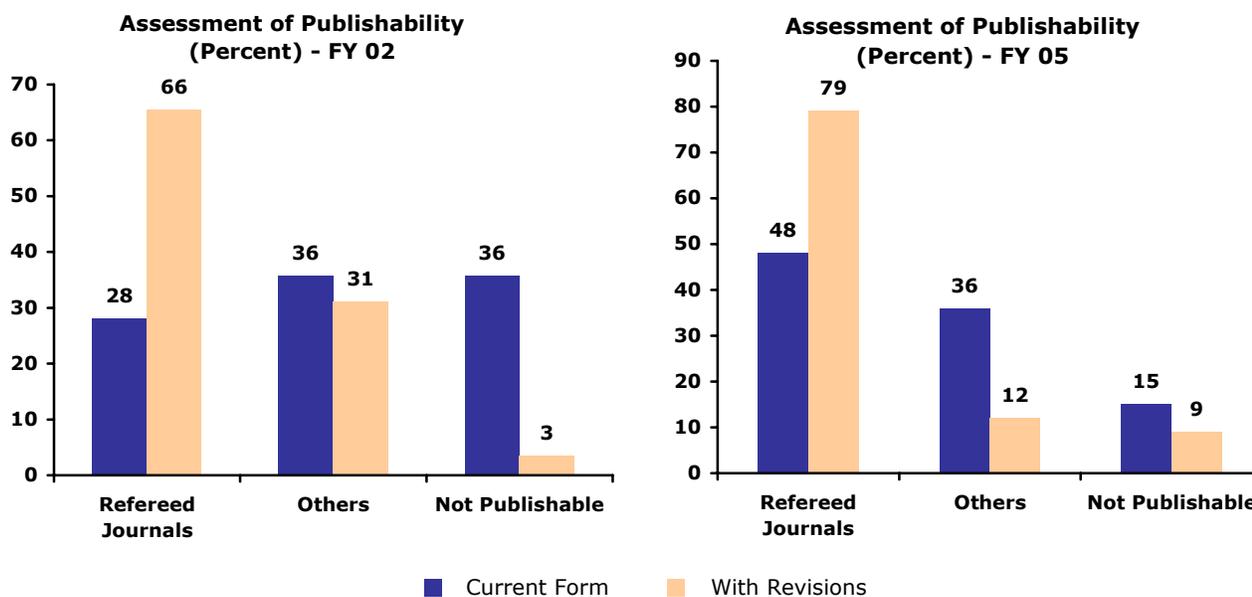
⁹ According to an analysis of 40 CVs of GDN-funded researchers, the refereed journals in which they have published ranged from internationally recognized ones such as the American Economic Review, *Economica*, Journal of International Economics, and IMF Staff Papers to regional ones such as the Middle East Journal and Asian Economies and national ones such as the Pakistan Development Review and the Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies.

¹⁰ The corresponding 95% confidence intervals are: 334.4 – 703.1 (refereed journals), 356.1 – 686.6 (volume chapters) and 719.3 – 1,147.7 (working papers).

Independent referees selected jointly with the World Bank from the Editorial Boards of the top international journals devoted to development were asked to assess the quality of GDN-supported research (68 papers) for FY02 and FY05.¹¹ The review was “blind”; that is, reviewers did not know the year of the paper they were reviewing or its authors.



The results attest to the quality of output and to improvement during the three-year period. The above chart shows that the scores in four dimensions of quality – originality, methodology, clarity and policy relevance – have increased, ranging between 3.2 and 3.9 on the five-point scale in FY05.



Note: ('Others' refers to chapters in volumes and working papers)

The reviewers were also asked to assess the publishability of GDN-supported research. The above charts indicate that much of GDN-supported research is of publishable quality: with revision, 66 percent of papers in FY02 were judged to be publishable in refereed journals rising to almost 80 percent in FY05. Progress is also observed in the

¹¹ Papers reviewed included all RRC papers available for FY02 and FY05 as well as papers randomly selected by the World Bank, produced through the other major GDN activities (GRPs, GDAMs and AGDCs) in FY02 and FY05.

decline in the number of papers not considered worthy for any form of publication in current form from 36 percent in FY02 to 15 percent in FY05. The charts also reveal the value of mentoring all the way to publication: the number of papers in FY02 worthy of publication in refereed journals increases from almost 30 percent to 66 percent if they are appropriately revised. The corresponding figures for FY05 are almost 50 percent and almost 80 percent.

“The mentor also helps the team get the study in publishable format and that is the most valuable and irreplaceable part of the process.”¹²

Policy Outreach

- ✓ **60 percent of funded researchers have produced at least one policy brief based on their GDN-supported research.**
- ✓ **In addition, over 60 percent have given at least one presentation at a policy briefing or roundtable.**
- ✓ **GDN-funded researchers rated GDN’s contribution to their “ability to extract policy recommendations from their research” at 3.2 on the five-point scale.**

Again, the number of policy briefs and briefings is likely to increase as the more recently initiated research comes to fruition.

“I am very pleased to see a variety of topics and good teams of researchers working extensively on interesting topics. I don’t think it could have happened without the initiative of GDN because all of these efforts together created a nice record of research activities in the region. I think that in a few years, we will talk about the results and how successful these pieces were to alerting policy makers to important dimensions which still lack a lot of knowledge.”¹³

Extrapolating the survey results on policy outreach to all studies funded by GDN (911) since 1999 suggests that:

- ✓ **GDN support has been associated with over 700 policy briefs and more than 1,100 policy presentations.¹⁴**

Career Development

- ✓ **60 percent of funded researchers have received at least one promotion since their involvement with GDN.**
- ✓ **Almost 60 percent have received at least one job offer.**
- ✓ **GDN’s contribution to “career advancement” was rated at 3.1 on the five-point scale.**

Extrapolating the survey results on career development to all funded researchers (911) since 1999 suggests that:

- ✓ **GDN-funded researchers have received over 900 promotions and over 1,100 job offers.¹⁵**

¹² RRC-funded researcher at the Focus Group Discussion held in Hong Kong in November 2005.

¹³ RRC-funded researcher at the Focus Group Discussion held in Cairo in December 2005.

¹⁴ The corresponding 95% confidence intervals are: 532.4 – 912.2 (policy briefs), 843.2– 1396.3 (policy presentations).

¹⁵ The corresponding 95% confidence intervals are: 656.9 – 1,128.7 (promotions), 869.1 – 1,442.5 (job offers).

V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CAPACITY BUILDING

GDN's five core activities were originally selected on the basis of a survey of the expressed needs of researchers in the developing and transition world and the view that no single activity can meet all aspects of those needs, the original rationale for GDN's "menu" approach. The survey of 934 researchers provides the first opportunity to revisit this rationale for the current mix of activities. The table below shows the perceived value of GDN's contribution by activity to various dimensions of capacity building and provides support for this approach. Thus, the RRCs are perceived to be especially effective in generating research output (3.5 on the five-point scale); the GRPs on the other hand score highly on contributing to knowledge of one's subject reflecting the cross-fertilization characteristic of these projects (3.6); the visibility (presentations, press) associated with GDAMs results in the highest rating for career advancement (3.7); and, as might be expected, the AGDCs rate highly on their contribution to making research contacts (3.6). Also as might be expected, those whose main contact with GDN comes only from the fact that they are registered with GDNNet give fairly uniform ratings to GDN's contribution to these various aspects of capacity building. GDNNet services themselves, however, received high ratings (see Section III).

**GDN's Contribution to Various Aspects of Capacity Building
(1-'very low', 5-'very high')**

<i>Group</i>	<i>Technical Skills</i>	<i>Knowledge of Subject</i>	<i>Research Output</i>	<i>Research Contacts</i>	<i>Career Advancement</i>	<i>Visibility</i>	<i>Policy Relevance</i>
<i>RRC Grantees</i>	3.0	3.3	3.5	3.4	2.8	2.7	3.2
<i>GRP Grantees</i>	2.7	3.6	3.3	3.3	2.9	2.5	3.2
<i>GDAM Winners</i>	3.1	3.2	3.5	4.0	3.7	3.3	3.2
<i>GDNNet Registrees</i>	2.6	3.2	2.9	2.9	2.4	2.3	2.8
<i>AGDC Attendees</i>	2.9	3.6	3.4	3.6	2.9	2.8	3.4

VI. COST EFFECTIVENESS

As an input to the assessment of GDN's cost effectiveness, this section compares the direct costs (described as Program Costs in the Audit Report) of each activity with its actual output or coverage. To permit comparison across activities, a uniform allocation of \$50,000 to each activity is examined. Regarding the three research-producing activities, research output (refereed articles and chapters in volumes) per \$50,000 of expenditure is greatest for the RRCs (5) followed by the GDAMs (2) and the GRPs (1). As noted in Section IV, however, three of the GRPs have yet to publish all or even any of their results. The low figure for the research output of GRPs should, therefore, be interpreted with this in mind. Moreover, a full assessment of cost effectiveness should also allow for the different contributions of each activity to capacity building that were analyzed in Section V and for the quality of output or its contribution to knowledge. In this respect, the unique cross-fertilization characteristic of the GRPs and their concentration of researchers worldwide on a single topic provide capacity-building features not present in the RRCs or the GDAMs and can be expected to yield a greater understanding of the process of development. Turning to the two networking activities, coverage per \$50,000 is greater for GDNNet (300) than for the AGDC (20) as might be expected.

Direct costs exclude overheads (denoted as Support Services in the Audit Report). To complete the picture on costs, therefore, it is also necessary to examine the share of support-services costs in the total budget as reported in the FY05 audit: total support services, including fund-raising, amounted to 8.1 percent of total revenue. GDN secretariat staff time allocated to support services was unusually high in FY05, however, as a result of the relocation to New Delhi. Certain other once-only costs were also incurred in connection with the move. The corresponding figure for FY06, therefore, provides a better estimate of steady-state costs.

- ✓ **Total costs for support services are estimated to represent less than 5 percent of total revenue in FY06.**

VII. IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Implications: The broadly favorable results presented above echo and substantiate the main conclusion of the 2004 external evaluation, namely, that *“GDN’s programs and activities meet a clear demand of a global market for development-relevant knowledge and are designed to build research capacity in those countries where it is most needed. These programs and activities must continue.”*¹⁶ The GDN Board of Directors may wish, however, to consider reallocating funds across activities based on the results of the comparative analysis of capacity building (Section V) and the cost-effectiveness analysis (Section VI). It will be difficult to make changes in the FY06 program at this stage but modifications are certainly feasible in the future, subject to the limitations introduced by the practice of earmarking followed by most donors. In addition, these generally encouraging results mask several weaknesses in performance in some aspects and in some regions as revealed by region-specific analysis (available on request from evaluation@gdnet.org). Mentoring and diversification of GDN beneficiaries in terms of discipline, age, and gender require more attention in general and in some regions in particular.

Next Steps: These conclusions suggest the following actions:

- ✓ **The GDN Secretariat will prepare a note for the next meeting of the Board setting out options for reallocation of funds across activities in FY07.**
- ✓ **The GDN Secretariat will address the need for more mentoring and more diversification especially in certain regions through its routine interactions with the RNPs and through its management of the activities more generally and will report to the Board at its next meeting.**
- ✓ **The instruments used in the current pilot will be refined as necessary and made part of GDN’s routine monitoring system in preparation for the next full external evaluation scheduled for end-FY07.**

¹⁶ *Global Development Network Independent Evaluation* by Peter Muth and Frederick Gerlach, March 16, 2004, available at http://www.gdnet.org/pdf2/surveys/GDN_external_evaluation31Mar04.pdf.