GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

ON

"Doing Research – Assessing the Environment for Social Science Research in Developing Countries"

1. **Overview**

GDN is inviting applications from multi-disciplinary research teams, for a research grant to undertake a systematic study of the research environment in developing countries. The research project is generously supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Agence Française de Développement (AFD), and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The "Doing Research" project, through these studies, seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors (pertaining to policy framework, institutional factors, and informal relations) that influence the organization of social science research, its quality, quantity and social relevance. In doing so, the project expects these studies to make significant contribution to the development of a systematic methodological framework for measuring research environment and research productivity in developing countries. The research grant will support studies that promise to use credible and innovative research techniques to systematically analyse facets of the research environment both within institutions and at the country level that will help in developing an objective assessment of the links between the research environment and research productivity, quality and social utility. In doing so, the project will focus on a broad set of objectives, which include:

    I.   Identifying and developing objective measures (both qualitative and quantitative) of key elements of the research environment that have significant impact on the ability to train researchers in developing countries to undertake quality research and communicate it effectively to a broad range of stakeholders.

    II.   Exposing important shortcomings and barriers to research to the relevant stakeholders including academia, policy-makers, civil society and donor organizations in order to bring into mainstream, issues related to the research environment, research support and funding and the demand for it as one of the key policy concerns in developing countries.

    III.   **The ultimate goal of the project is to build a systematic framework to document the research environment in developing countries around the world.** The country case studies supported under this initiative will be used to inform a broader discussion on a systematic methodology and framework that could be used to observe, analyse and document the research environment in a larger number of countries in a consistent and comparable way, as the project is expanded to cover a larger number of countries in the next phase.

2. The Call

The research studies supported by this grant will have to be based on developing countries from Africa, South and East Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The research teams supported by this grant will have to be based in developing countries and may involve research collaborators based in developed countries with the potential to bring in specific expertise and value added to the research proposed by the team. This initiative, in accordance with GDN's mission will support researchers from these regions to engage in meaningful academic collaborations on the thematic issue in a globally interconnected way.

The *call for proposal* looks to support 6-7 extensive research studies within the overarching theme of "Doing Research". The grant provided under this initiative will be up to a maximum ceiling of **US\$ 43,000** depending on the scope (in terms of geographical coverage and the level of data and information to be generated) of the proposed research**. The proposal evaluation team will consider higher budgets on a case-by-case basis, provided the scope of the proposed research justifies a higher budget given in the proposal (as in the case of a multi-country study or in a large federal state with significant sub-national diversity).** The grant will be awarded to the organization/researcher(s) whose proposal to conduct research holds the greatest promise for improving our understanding of issues pertaining to the above mentioned theme and where the potential for learning is greatest. We expect the proposed research study to put forth clearly articulated analytical underpinnings of the research environment within their countries and well researched policy implications to address the relevant problems.

The last date for submission of the full research proposal in the application template, CVs of applicants (research team members), and other supporting documents is **30/07/2014 (GMT 11: 59 PM).**

3. Topic

The environment for undertaking socially relevant and useful research in developing countries is most often characterized by both systemic and extraneous factors that lead to low research capacity, sub-standard quality of research, poor advice to governments, or unused knowledge. This ultimately may also impact the quality of public opinion and policy discourse in these countries. A comprehensive review of existing literature identifies a number of factors that directly or indirectly and in varying magnitudes affects the way research, particularly in social sciences, is undertaken and disseminated in developed as well as developing countries around the world. The essential elements *inter alia,* of this "research ecosystem" include a) the quality of higher education institutes (HEIs) that exist, b) think-tanks or research institutes and their linkages with the HEIs, c) policy framework that is supportive of an independent academia, an independent research agenda and research uptake, d) stakeholder groups like industrial or civil society groups or media that translate research into policy inputs or material to influence public opinion, and finally e) the ability of the research system to attract, nurture and retain talent.

The factors that determine the quality of the research ecosystem, themselves operate within a larger institutional framework that determines their effectiveness. This larger institutional framework encompasses a broader range of issues which include a) the political-economic framework within which the research systems operate (existence of rule of law and guarantee for freedom of expression), b) a regulatory and quality assurance framework for higher education and research that directly determines the quality of HEIs and their internal research environment, c) availability of physical infrastructure and agglomeration of institutions of similar calibre and strength determining opportunities of networking, collaboration and inter-disciplinary research, d) presence of information dissemination mechanisms signifying the ease of getting published, e) nature and quantum of funding that is available, which in varying degrees determine the research agenda and f) the accountability and incentive mechanism through which researchers are linked to their institutions and which in turn are linked to funding agencies (whether public or private).

The literature on research environment is, however, silent on the existence of a clear set of defining properties that characterizes a high quality and productive research environment. A high quality research environment is almost always assumed to exist in developed countries, although there is a lot of variance in the way research is produced and disseminated in these countries. Most importantly, the mode of

production of research in the developed countries has evolved significantly, often in tandem with evolution in polity and changes in economic modes of production. While frequently, countries in the developing world have tried to emulate the different models of research production from developed countries in North America or Europe, in most cases the mode of knowledge production and dissemination has remained archaic and most often a function of their historical-political legacies. On the other hand, there also exist many isolated islands of excellence in social science research in developing countries despite several constraining factors that frequently hamper quality research production. At the level of organizations, the research culture or informal relations and processes that define funding, promotions, peer reviews, professional networking abilities and mentor-researcher relationships also play an important role and it would be interesting to examine these.

It is in this context, that GDN would like to support research teams based in developing countries to examine the social science research environment within their country context in order to bring forth new data, objective indicators of measurement and analysis of facts.

1.1 Guiding questions to frame the research proposal:

How research is produced?

- Does the quality of the research environment significantly affect the quantity and quality of research outputs and outcomes? How does the sociocultural, political and economic dimensions juxtapose with the prevailing research environment in your country's context?

- Is there a clear policy framework that supports social science research and dissemination in your country? Research in developing countries is constrained not just by insufficient inputs (human and financial), but by organizational and systemic weaknesses (institutions, policies, procedures, incentive structures, processes), and by external environment constraints. How does the policy framework address these issues?

- What are the potential sites (e.g. universities, think-tanks, civil society or individual researchers) in which social science research takes place in your country? What are the characteristic organizational differences in terms of the prevalent environment, human capital, nature and quality of research output and publications? Is there a way in which such inter-organizational variety can be measured and accounted for?

- What kind of infrastructure is essential for an enabling research environment? To what extent are these available in your country? Is there a variance in infrastructural endowments in research centers across different regions or different type of institutions in your country?

- What is the extent of networked and collaborative research taking place in your country? Are there adequate opportunities for being part of professional networks or undertaking collaborative and inter-disciplinary research projects? What are the factors that promote or inhibit inter-disciplinary research?

- How do the regulatory and quality assurance measures vary with the different types of research organizations or entities in your country?

- What are the major sources of funding for research in social science within a particular country context? How do these funding sources influence the research agenda of the organization or the researcher? What are the accountability practices do these funding organizations enforce?

- How do organizations measure research performance by their research or academic staff? What are the accountability and incentive mechanisms in place? Does having performance measures for academic staff distort or drive performance?

- How do the different channels of "research accountability" interplay? To what extent does institutional processes and informal relations, affects research environment?

How is research capacity building organized?

- Is there a culture of training and capacity building for research within the organizational frameworks? To what extent are these effective? To what extent do young researchers receive effective mentoring in their formative years?

- Does the training and capacity building framework encourage critical thinking and analysis? Is there a strong quality appraisal system for doctoral and post-doctoral thesis? How well is this implemented?

- What are the channels of "research accountability" at play? Are there clearly laid down policies on research ethics? How do these affect the quality of research?

- Are socio-economic and gender- or other barriers to entry adequately addressed?

How does demand for research emerge?

- What is the level of interaction between the research community and the policy community comprised of policy makers, civil society and other stakeholders within your country?

- Is there an unmet demand for social science research from the policy community? How does the demand for research affect research environment? Does demand for research translate into potential funding opportunities?

- How do the researchers assess the demand for socially relevant research? To what extent is the focus on "social utility" of research conducive to the development of research as a free and independent means of producing evidence? How does it affect formulation of long-term priorities in the country's or organizations' research agenda?

- Does publishing in a major journal enhance the chances of getting noticed by the policy community? To what extent is getting published in your country easy for a researcher? Are there publishing avenues that identify and focus on socially relevant issues in your country?

How to measure the research environment?

- Indicators and data describing research environment can pertain to inputs determining supply of research, demand for research and those measuring quality and quantity of research outputs. What is the set of indicators that within your country context can best summarize the research environment? To what extent is the data for such indicators already available and for which indicators would new data need to be collected?

- Is there a possibility of an objective measure of research productivity suited to social science research in your country's context? What would be the key constituents of such a measure?

The above research questions are provided to guide the potential applicants to present a strong case for undertaking a research study on the research environment in their own countries.

4. **Essentials for a Successful Application**
Completed Applications will be reviewed and screened by an advisory committee comprising of experts in the sector. Applications should cover the following areas.

4.1 Research Agenda:

- The research proposal needs to display a clear understanding of the problems/issues in assessing the research environment, to be addressed through this research.

- The proposal should adequately situate the research problem within a well-articulated country context.

- The proposal needs to make a compelling case for studying the research environment within the proposed country.

- The proposed research design should be appropriate to observe the factors that influence the research environment and provide a meaningful lead on a global measure of research environment.

- Lay down very clearly the research questions to be addressed. The research questions should be able to indicate the issues in research environment (within the given country context) that the proposed research will analyse and document.

- The proposal should put forward a well justified research method appropriate for this study and the expertise of the team.

- The proposal should provide a comprehensive summary of available data and potential data gaps for studying the research environment in the proposed country.

4.2 *Project Management*:
- The proposal should provide a clear and reasonable project management plan and configuration of roles and responsibilities that are appropriate for the given project.

- The credentials of the investigators and host institutions should display levels of skills and expertise appropriate to deliver the project. The credentials of one or more investigators or institutions involved in the project, reflecting demonstrated research capacities in the area of higher education, research management, knowledge production or knowledge economy is highly desirable.

5. **GDN Support**
   GDN will work closely with the successful applicants to provide them with the support needed (beyond funding) to define the scope of research, effective implementation of the research agenda and monitoring of the research outcomes throughout the grant period. Additionally, GDN will also engage a panel of advisors to mentor and support the selected research teams throughout the period of the research project. These advisors will provide guidance on the research design, implementation, analysis and effective research outcomes. GDN actively promotes professional networking amongst researchers in the project and believes in cross-fertilization of ideas and knowledge. In support of these ideals GDN organizes peer-review workshops, facilitates presentations of research findings at appropriate international fora and policy interface wherever applicable.

6. **Competition Rules And Guidelines**
   Please review carefully. Any application that does not follow the guidelines will NOT be considered.

   6.1 Eligibility Criteria
   - The grant is open only to research teams based in developing countries with the requirement that the applicants (researchers) need to be permanent residents of these countries. Teams can have research collaborators based in developed countries; however such an individual cannot be the Principal Investigator.

- The Principal Investigator has to be based in the country which is being studied. In case of multi-country studies (2 or more country studies), a resident senior research collaborator is mandatory for all the countries under study.

- Citizens of developing countries temporarily residing in a developed country for no more than five years are eligible to apply as part of a team. However, the principal investigator of the research proposal must currently reside and be a permanent resident of a developing country and she/he should be affiliated to an organization headquartered in either of these countries. At least half of the researchers (including the principal investigator) of the team must currently reside in the proposed country to be studied.

- Staff members of multilateral and bilateral organizations (AusAID, DFID, IADB, IMF, UN agencies, World Bank, and other similar organisations) are eligible to participate only as external advisors. They cannot be recipients of grant funding or salary compensation from the project, although their indirect costs of participation in workshops and meetings may be reimbursed from the budget provided for grant funding. Previous employees of the GDN are not eligible to apply.

- Applicants should clearly mention if this proposal is receiving or scheduled to receive funds from other sources. It should be clearly explained how the additional funds provided by the grant would reinforce/complement the existing funds for successful completion of the research.

- We welcome applications that have multidisciplinary research teams and/or are joint applications from researchers proposing to undertake the study simultaneously in 2 or more countries.

6.2 Things to Remember

- Applicants must be based at an organisation with the capacity to undertake high-quality research. The institution should possess existing in-house capacity to host a grant and to carry out research and demonstrate an independent capability to undertake and lead research programmes.

- Grant will be awarded to the institution of the principal investigator, and this institution will be responsible for the proper disbursement and accountability of the grant received.

- The grant holding institution will be subject to standard terms and conditions for GDN grants with regard to the disbursement of funds to co-investigators at other institutions, and with additional programme-reporting requirements.

- Applications should be submitted in electronic format as per the prescribed application template provided along with this call. Applications not in prescribed template will not be accepted.

- Duration of the Research Project: **12 – 15 Months**; Maximum individual grant Size: **US$ 43,000**.

- GDN-supported research programs or capacity building programs must be carried out in accordance with common research and professional ethical standards, related to plagiarism, surveys and other forms of data collection that involve human subjects, confidentiality and transparent use of financial and human resources. In their proposals, applicants are required to clearly identify all possible ethical issues relating to their proposed program.

- Please note that all forms of academic dishonesty are unacceptable to GDN, plagiarism being one of them. Plagiarism is unauthorized use of other people's work, ideas and/or writings (in part or in full) and presenting or giving notion of these work(s), ideas and/or writings being one's own work, idea(s) and/or writing(s). GDN takes plagiarism very seriously and will take immediate and appropriate action including and not limited to withdrawal of funding for any such grantees found guilty of plagiarism.

6.3 How to Apply

- Applications need to be submitted online to the **email address dr-cfp@gdn.int**, with the subject line **'Doing Research Application – [country]'**.

- Please ensure that the application follows the provided application template and guideline.

- Attach the CVs of the research team members as one document in the same email.

- Please attach a document with a **brief profile of the organization of affiliation of the principal researcher**.

- Proposals must be submitted in **English or in French**.

- Incomplete applications will NOT be considered.

- Please note that all personal information details provided in the application (along with the CV) should be correct, else the application will be liable for disqualification.

- In case of any further queries, contact us at **dr-cfp@gdn.int**, with the subject line: **'Doing Research Application Request'**.

7. **Timeline of the Project**
   - Deadline of Submission: 30th July, 2014

   - Selection of Team: 15th August, 2014

   - Launch of Country Studies: September, 2014

   - Peer Review Workshop on Methodology: November-December, 2014

   - Peer Review of Interim Findings: 15th March, 2015

   - Final Study Reports and Papers: 31st July, 2015

8. **List of Priority Countries:**
   An indicative list of preferred countries considered to constitute interesting case studies is given below:
   India, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Senegal, Malawi, Zambia, Mali, Mozambique, Botswana, China and Indonesia.

   However, GDN welcomes interesting research proposals from all developing countries around the world. Completed applications from developing countries apart from those listed above will receive equal weightage in the evaluation process.