Dgroups Development Through Dialogue

Dgroups Activities Report 2014

Working together for a world where every person is able to contribute constructively to dialogue and decision-making for international development and social justice

What is Dgroups?

Dgroups is a partnership of leading international development organisations with a shared vision to promote international development through dialogue.

Dgroups is financially supported and managed by the Dgroups Foundation, a non-profit foundation established in the Netherlands in 2009 and owned by the Dgroups Partners. The Partners are committed to supporting Dgroups as a global public good of online groups, networks and communities.

Dgroups is currently used by over 150,000 professionals worldwide with over 700 active online groups. The Foundation is committed to make Dgroups accessible and affordable to all development organisations.

What can Dgroups offer?

Individuals and organisations working in international development need reliable, easy-to-use, accessible online communication tools in order to interact and share experience and expertise. The Dgroups platform supports email-based and online interaction of groups, communities and networks of all sizes. By using email as the core of its operations, the Dgroups platform is especially well-suited to low bandwidth users in the South, making it easier for their voices to be heard. The Dgroups platform is very easy to use, non-commercial, cost-effective, and respectful of data privacy. With Dgroups you can:

- Create a new discussion group in less than three minutes;

- Configure each group to fit its purpose ;

- Create small or large, public or private groups;

- Maintain an automatic online archive of discussions.

How to join Dgroups?

We welcome requests from organisations working for international development, human rights and social justice who would like to join the Dgroups Partnership. We ask a modest financial contribution which pays towards the costs of supporting the platform and administering the Partnership. Please see our website for details.

In consultation with its Partners, the Dgroups Board introduced a new membership structure for financial contribution as follows:

Organisations with an annual turnover more than 1 million Euros are invited to apply for Full Dgroups Partner membership.

The annual contribution for Full Partners will increase to 5000 Euros from January 2015.

Full Partners have the following benefits:

- create an unlimited number of Dgroups;

- host an unlimited number of smaller affiliate organisations;

- top-level URL on the Dgroups platform;

- logo display on Dgroups website and publications;

- voting rights in strategic and operational decision-making;

- eligibility for Dgroups Board membership.

Smaller organisations have three options:

- Pay the annual contribution and join as Full Dgroups Partner;

- Pay a smaller contribution and become an Associate Partner. Small organisations with an annual turnover of less than 500,000 Euros pay 500 Euros per annum, while larger organisations pay 1000 Euros. Associate Partners have the option to create an unlimited number of Dgroups.

- Seek affiliation with a Full Partner. The Dgroups Foundation will actively help *any* small development organisation to go "under the umbrella of" an appropriate Full Partner.

For inquiries and to discuss options, interested parties should contact Dgroups Coordination Support, Pier Andrea Pirani at dg-coordination[at]dgroups[dot]org

Dgroups Board: Areas of work

The Dgroups Foundation board fulfilled its responsibilities across nine work areas:

1. Strengthen the Partnership
2. Platform improvement (Lead: Kristin Kolshus)
3. Service reliability
4. Users' support for optimum use of the platform
5. Engagement with current partners
6. Marketing and outreach
7. Governance and administration
8. Finance
9. Monitoring and evaluation

1. Strengthen the Partnership

What we set out to achieve in 2014

1.1 We shall develop a shared vision statement

1.2 We shall promote connections among the Partners and among individual Dgroups

1.3 We shall promote connections among and between other CoPs (outside Dgroups)

What we achieved in 2014

1.1 We developed and agreed the following vision statement and included it prominently on the dgroups.info website: "A world where every person is able to contribute constructively to dialogue and decision-making for international development and social justice".

1.2 We developed the criteria for a Dgroups Directory by primary theme sector (eg health, education, agriculture, environment, human rights), theme geography (eg Euro, Africa, Asia, Americas) and language (eg En, Fr, Sp, Pt). We worked with WA-Research to prepare this with a view to public launch in early 2015.

1.3 Connections outside Dgroups await progress on 1.2.

2. Platform improvement (Lead: Kristin Kolshus)

What we set out to achieve in 2014

2.1 We shall continue to improve the platform through a user-driven process.

2.2 We shall identify and monitor functionality issues as raised by users.

2.3 We shall resolve functionality issues as prioritised by users.

2.4 Improve metadata and public directory (Lead person: Pier Andrea Pirani)

2.5 Continue to explore how Dgroups can take advantage of mobile opportunities

2.6 Continue to develop API in response to demand (Lead person: Hapee de Groot)

What we achieved in 2014

2.1 We maintained **open communication** on functionality among the Partners via the [redesign] group (36 members).

2.2 We maintained a **detailed spreadsheet** on functionality issues, providing columns with the following headings: - Date; Raised by; Issue; Details; Comment from WA-Research; Feasibility; Cost; Related to/Next step; Priority; Resolved?; Updates. At the end of 2014 the responsibility for Functionality Improvement was passed to board member Saskia Harmsen (IICD). At around this time the spreadsheet was moved to **Google Docs** to allow more flexibility and easier access

2.3 The following **functionality issues were resolved**:

- Banner upload

- Custom welcome email

- Password reset

- Spanish language interface

- Calendar date sorting

- Optional email address visibility member list

- Basic stats download

2.4   A **spreadsheet with metadata** of Dgroups was prepared and passed to WA-Research for use as public Dgroups directory (Lead person: Pier Andrea Pirani).

2.5 Mobile interface was discussed with WA-Research, who pointed out that almost all users use Dgroups via email. Mobile interface had not been requested or mentioned by users during the year, suggesting low demand. It was agreed that a mobile web interface for Dgroups is not considered a priority at present.

2.6 The **WA-Research API** is publicly available: https://github.com/wa-research/api. Through the API, Dgroups has now been integrated with Wordpress, so that Dgroups runs in the background and when users register on the Wordpress site, they actually register onto a Dgroup. In this sense, the API opens up a whole new set of possibilities and allows to connect and integrate different applications.

3. Service reliability

What we set out to achieve in 2014

3.1 We shall maintain service reliability at or very near to 100%.

3.2 We shall increase our disaster preparedness, so that normal service is maintained in the event of disaster (eg technical breakdown, illness, injury).

What we achieved in 2014

3.1 In the previous year (2013) there were no interruptions to service in the entire calendar year. There were two episodes in 2014, with a loss of service of 2-5 days. Full service was restored with no loss of data. The failures were due to hardware failure at ISP level (ie upstream of WA-Research). Occasional minor delays in distribution of approved messages improved in the second part of the year.

Two members of the board became administrators of the Dgroups Twitter account, enabling an immediate communication to Partners and users in case of interruption to service or other technical problem.

3.2 Damir Simunic is Dgroups technical lead and is responsible for day-to-day maintenance and operation of the system. As discussed at the previous Annual Partners Meeting, Damir has taken steps to appoint a named deputy to ensure continued service in the event of unexpected personal incapacitation.

4. Users' support for optimum use of the platform

What we set out to achieve in 2014

4.1 We shall introduce a peer support/training programme

4.2 We shall organize regular online peer exchange sessions (1 each quarter)

4.3 We shall continue to develop the dgroups.info website.

What we achieved in 2014

4.1 This work is being carried on **together with ECDPM** as part of their contribution to Dgroups. The idea is to organize a series of **live webinars** that will help users understand how to setup, facilitate and grow an online community. The project plan will be concluded before the end of 2014 and the webinars should take place early in 2015.

4.2 While it has not been possible to organize any peer exchange sessions in 2014, we aim to re-launch these events in 2015.

4.3 The Dgroups website continues to evolve and grow.

5. Engagement with current partners

What we set out to achieve in 2014

5.1 We shall encourage members to make full use of their membership, including the possibility to create Dgroups for affiliated organizations.

5.2 We shall maintain regular communications with all our Partners, through 1-to-1 calls (at least 2 times per year).

What we achieved in 2014

5.1 In 2014, in consultation with Partners, we introduced a new type of membership - Associate Partner - to enable more small organisations to have access to Dgroups (see below)

5.2 We have maintained one-to-one communications with Dgroups Partners during the year.

6. Marketing and outreach

What we set out to achieve in 2014

6.1 We shall continue to improve the Dgroups website

6.2 We shall register 6 new organisations to the Partnership

6.3 We shall translate the Dgroups leaflet in different languages

6.4 We shall engage 6 current partners to help with marketing of Dgroups

6.5 We shall develop marketing personas of key groups.

What we achieved in 2014

6.1 The Dgroups Foundation website (dgroups.info) continues to grow. It now includes two new sections:

Help us to Promote Dgroups: Dgroups leaflet (see below) is now available in 4 languages (En, Fr, Sp, Pt) (with thanks to Translators Without Borders, who provided translation pro bono)

A generic PPT presentation is available that may be adapted for presentation at meetings and conferences

What People Say about Dgroups: Testimonials from Dgroups users.

Also, the information on how to join Dgroups has been improved and updated:

6.2 During 2014 we engaged 2 new Full Partners (**Tropical Health and Education Trust** and **United Nations Capital Development Fund**) and 4 new Associate Partners (**Access Agriculture**, **Enda Energie**, **Euforic Services**, **The Broker Online**).

6.3 The **Dgroups leaflet** (see below) is now available in 4 languages (En, Fr, Sp, Pt) on the dgroups.info website (with thanks to Translators Without Borders, who provided translation pro bono).

After a previous period of contraction, the Dgroups Partnership is now **growing and is stronger at the end of 2014 than at the beginning of the year**. This is despite constraining factors such as reducing budgets available to partner organisations, competition from free or lower-cost commercial tools, and internal development of intranet tools, which are outside the control of the Dgroups Foundation.

The growth and increased strength of Dgroups are largely thanks to the diligent efforts of individual Board members with respect to the Work Areas described above, and the continuing quality and improvements of the technical platform.

6.4 We reached out to Partners to help with marketing of Dgroups. We are grateful to IICD for potential communications support and FARA for promoting Dgroups in Africa.

6.5 Marketing personas were not developed.

7. Governance and administration

What we set out to achieve in 2014

7.1 We shall expand the number, skills and influence of the Board location

7.2 We shall continue to improve Board representation: gender and geographical

What we achieved in 2014

7.1 We recruited three new board members.

7.2 At the end of 2014 the Board consisted of 5 male and 2 female members (compared with 3M & 2F in the previous year). One new board member was enrolled from sub-Saharan Africa, while the other 6 are in Europe (compared with all 5 board members in Europe in the previous year). (Note: The Board acts on behalf of the Dgroups Partners, which are mostly based in high-income countries, but greater geographical diversity is seen to be important.)

Kristin Kolshus (FAO) stepped down from the Board in December 2014 due to work commitments. Kristin is warmly thanked for her proactive work as a Board member over the past years, particularly with regard to implementing and leading on Functionality Improvement. This latter role is now being taken over by new board member Saskia Harmsen (IICD). In 2014 the Board also welcomed new members Krishan Bheenick (CTA) and Dady Demby (FARA).

In the second part of the year, the role of Secretary was transferred from Rob Witte (ICCO) to Sarah Cummings (Independent).

At the end of 2014, the board comprised 7 members: Neil Pakenham Walsh, representing INASP, and Rob Witte (ICCO) continue as Chair and Treasurer, respectively; Sarah Cummings as Secretary; Hapee de Groot (Hivos), Dady Demby (FARA), Krishan Bheenick (CTA) and Saskia Harmsen (IICD).

Administration

In the course of 2014, the Board of the Dgroups Foundation met 4 times online. The **minutes of the Board meetings** are all available on the Dgroups members page of the Dgroups wiki.

During 2014, **Euforic Services** continued to work with the Dgroups Foundation and its Board in the areas of management support; administration; communications and member relations.

In terms of communications with existing Dgroups partners, the **Dgroups wiki** has been maintained as a reference and archive for all documents and procedures related to the life of the Dgroups Foundation. All minutes of Board meetings, as well as documents and reports relevant for the administration of the Dgroups Foundation are available. At the end of 2014 the usability Dgroups wiki was improved, including archiving of materials no longer needed, and clear guidance to new users on the relative roles of the wiki and Google docs (active documents for use by Board).

During the year, the **dg-partners list** was used regularly to inform Dgroups partners of new developments on the platform and partnership, as well as collect feedback, ideas and suggestions.

8. Finance

(A full financial report is being prepared separately)

What we set out to achieve in 2014

8.1 We shall implement a new membership and financial contribution structure.

8.2 We shall strengthen the financial position of the Dgroups Foundation.

What we achieved in 2014

8.1 We successfully introduced a new type of membership (Associate Partner) for small organisations, and managed the increase (from January 2015) to 5000 Euros per annum for Full Partners.

8.2 Thanks to engagement of 2 new Full Partners and 4 new Associate Partners, our **financial position at the end of 2014 appears to be slightly stronger** than at the end of 2013.

9. Monitoring and evaluation

What we set out to achieve in 2014

9.1 Provide basic stats to Partners on a quarterly basis

9.2 Collect examples of benefits/impact

What we achieved in 2014

9.1 We requested WA-Research to provide basic stats on a quarterly basis. These are awaited.

9.2 We have started a new section on the dgroups.info website to highlight testimonials and examples of impact.

Annex - List of Dgroups Partners at 31 December 2014

Full Partners

(Partners who joined in 2014 are indicated in **bold**)

1. CIDSE
2. Department for International Development (DFID)
3. European Centre for Development Policy Making (ECDPM)
4. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
5. Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)
6. Humanist Institute for Co-operation with Developing Countries (Hivos)
7. ICCO
8. International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD)
9. International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP)
10. Natural Resources Institute (NRI)
11. Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN)
12. Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)
13. Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA)
14. **Tropical Health & Education Trust (THET)**
15. UNECA
16. **United Nations Capital Development Fund**

Associate Partners

(All joined in 2014)

1. Access Agriculture
2. Alfa Redi
3. Enda Energie
4. Euforic Services
5. SAP International
6. The Broker Online

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