

GDN 16th Annual Global Development Conference
“Agriculture for Sustainable Growth: Challenges and Opportunities for a New Green Revolution”

Casablanca, Morocco, 11-13 June 2015

Conference Feedback Survey Report



GDN M&E Unit
September 2015

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The perceptions and suggestions collected through an online feedback survey by the GDN M&E Unit on the 16th Global Development Annual Conference held in Morocco, Casablanca in June 2015 records a consistently high degree of appreciation of the Casablanca proceedings amongst a diverse sample of participants.

This report presents the feedback from 90 participants at the conference. The conference was attended by 350 persons and the survey was sent to 232 attendees (the attendees who shared their email address with GDN). The respondents represent 26% of the conference participants and almost 40% of those who received the survey.

- **Overall:** The feedback draws an overall image of the Conference as a highly interesting and formative event. **94% of respondents state they would recommend their colleagues to attend next years' event.**
- **Influence:** Respondents perceived the event as a significant opportunity for both professional networking and high-quality learning, with the diversity of the conference cohort being a unique asset for many. **Over 46% of the respondents stated that the Conference helped improve their knowledge on the theme and an equal number (46%) stated that the Conference helped in networking and making new contacts.**
- **Quality:** The focus of the Conference is clearly reflected in participants' recollection of their key learning and both **the quality of the sessions and of the conference logistics are rated without fail as 'high' (or above).** There has been a consistently 'high' appreciation of the quality of the presentations, across all formats of the Conference, with an average of 3.9 on a 5-point scale (and virtually no deviation, at 0.2 points) for the keynote, plenaries, parallel sessions and the Conference as a whole.
- **Innovations: Two significant innovations** in terms of format and communication efforts – the Conference App and the Controversy sessions – **were equally well accepted:** 81% of respondents used the App and valued it even more highly than the GDN website, and as many as 7% of the respondents mentioned Controversy sessions as their favourite session from the entire Conference.
- **Contribution to GDN's mission:** Respondents agree above 'highly' (4.4 on a 5-point scale) that the **Conference offers 'a platform for interaction among developing country researchers and between them and top global country researchers'**. However, the Conference is still to meet one of the secondary objectives of linking researchers to key policy actors.
- **Improvements:** The few critical comments recorded by the survey do not focus as much on shortcomings as on the **complex challenge of bringing together research and policy in the space of a conference**, confirming a wide support for GDN's value proposition of the Global Development Conference as a yearly appointment of global relevance.

A. Background

GDN held its 16th Global Development Conference in Casablanca, Morocco, on June 11th-13th 2015. The Conference discussed the nature, role and prospects of agricultural development in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, and in the context of the new international climate agreement.

Akin to previous editions, the objective of the Conference was to bring together cutting-edge academic and policy discussions to a diverse audience of research scholars and practitioners at different stages of their careers and from different global regions. The Conference featured papers and panels identified through a competitive process; sessions that showcase GDN funded research and early-career developing country researchers; and plenaries featuring high-level experts and policy makers. Concerted efforts were made to give broad visibility to the discussions as they unravelled, through internal and external communication, including a daily newsletter, a newly introduced Conference App, a blog and expanded translation services. The 16th edition also introduced “Controversy” sessions: 45 minutes panels in which three experts and/or academics debated particularly controversial aspects under the Conference theme.

B. Scope of this report and methodology

This report presents the feedback from 90 participants at the Conference. The conference was attended by 350 persons and the survey was sent to 232 attendees (the attendees who shared their email address with GDN). The respondents represent 26% of the conference participants and almost 40% of those who received the survey. The feedback was provided on a voluntary basis, through an open, online survey circulated by email by the GDN M&E Unit, after the end of the Conference. The report presents data on participant perceptions on quality and suggestions on a number of key dimensions of the event: the academic quality and format of the event, its usefulness in advancing individual research agendas, the contribution to of the Conference to GDN’s mission, and the logistics related to the event. The survey used both grading scales (Likert scale) and open-ended questions.

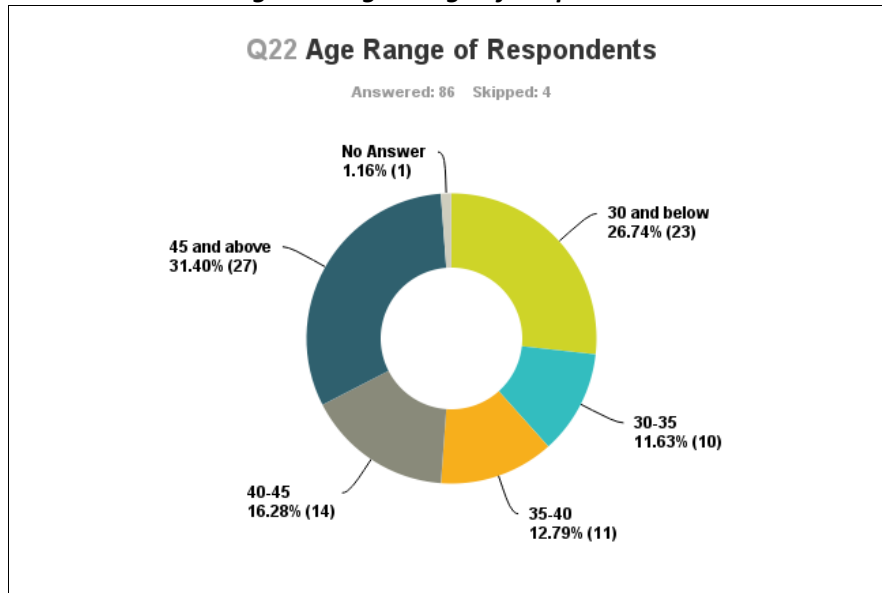
The significance of the feedback presented in this report is qualified based of the sample size (almost 40% of the conference participants responded to the survey) and – even more importantly – based on the sample’s specific features, chiefly among these its diversity in terms of roles and exposure to different dimensions of the conference. This data aims to guide future efforts to refine the format and content of future Global Development Conferences.

C. Number and profile of respondents

The survey collected the opinions and suggestions of 90 attendees (representing 26% of all registered participants), who voluntarily filled in an online feedback survey. Respondents represent 32 nationalities, with a maximum of eight respondents from the same country (namely Morocco, the hosting country). Significantly, three-fourth respondents belong to a developing country.

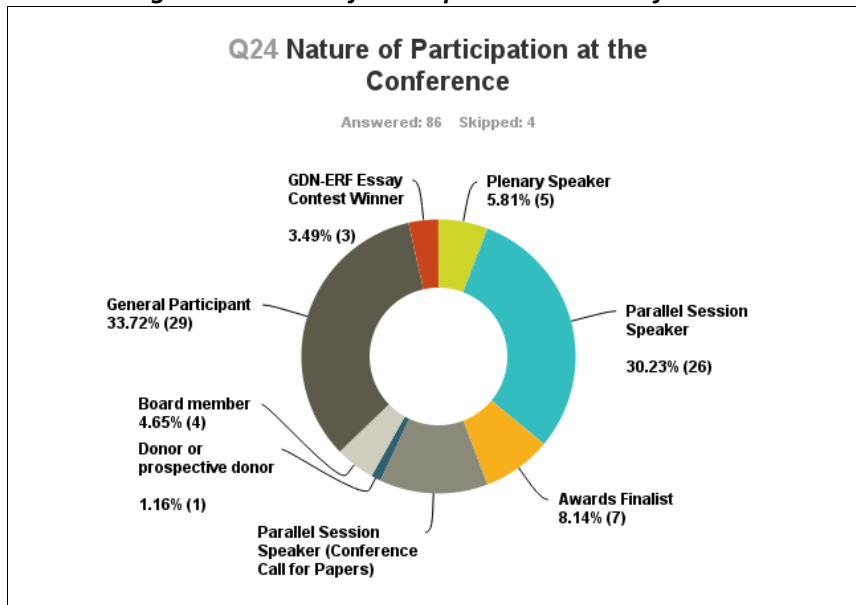
If the gender ratio is slightly skewed (two thirds, or 67%, of respondents are male, the remaining third female), the age distribution is remarkably widespread and is highlighted in figure 1 below. This distribution most likely reflects a wide and diverse pool of profiles, with participants at significantly different points of their career taking part in the event.

Figure 1: Age Range of Respondents



The distribution of the capacity in which respondents attended the Conference (highlighted in figure 2 below) provides us with further tools to value the feedback discussed below.

Figure 2: Nature of Participation at the Conference



Finally, for 78% of respondents, the conference was the first attendance of a GDN Global Development Conference. Returning participants (22%) attended on average two conferences in the past, and in 80% of responses within the previous six years.

Overall, data on respondents offers a significant microcosm of the diversity of the cohort.

D. Overall Feedback on the Conference – Quality and Value added

D.1 Recommending the Conference

The feedback recorded in the survey points to a remarkably high level of general appreciation of the Casablanca proceedings.

94% of respondents state they **would recommend attending next years’ event to their colleagues**. Among the reasons cited for this, respondents mention that:

It is one of the value adding scholarly events in the world.

The meeting gives an exceptional opportunity to deepen knowledge and establish new professional relations

It has improved enormously in the last few years; it adds to knowledge in the area; the topics are relevant for debates on development

D.2. Comparative Advantages of the GDN Conference

When prompted on **how the Global Development Conference differs from comparable global appointments**, respondent cite the fact that it gives a ‘world comparative perspective’. The Awards administered by GDN are also mentioned by a number of respondents as a highlight of the event. Further, 12% mention networking, and another 12% the chance it gives early-career researchers to gain critical academic and professional exposure. One respondent sums up the diversity of comments in the following lines:

The mix of academic, practitioners, and policy makers; the mix of young and old researchers; and the mix of developing and developed country researchers...

D.3. Key Takeaways from the Conference

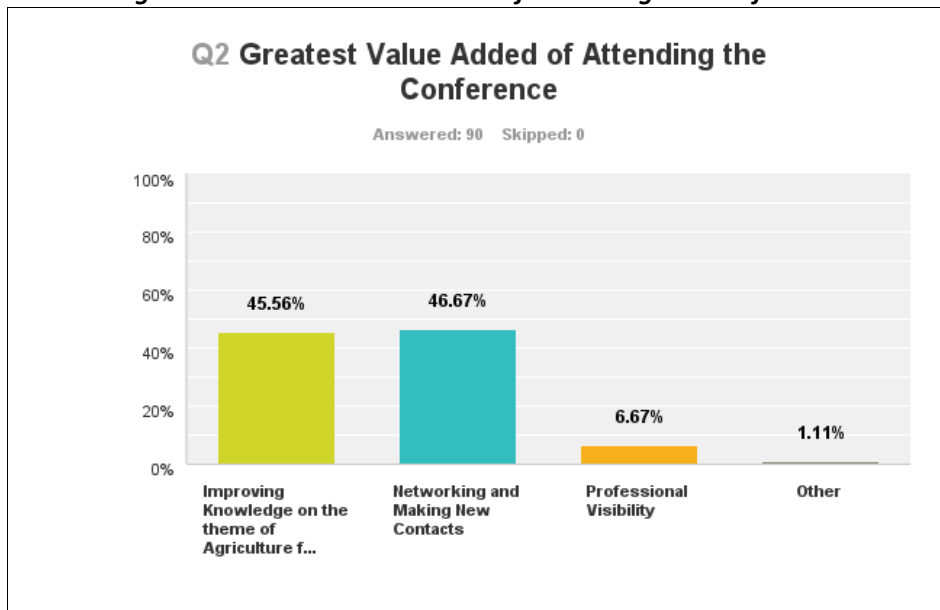
In terms of **the key message of the Conference**, most respondents stress the ‘great importance’ of agriculture for sustainable development, and the fact that a second Green Revolution would need to be different, including requiring different resources, from the first one in order to succeed. About 10% of responses mention women’s role, feminisation and gender aspects in their link to agriculture, 12% the growing importance of nutrition debates, and – significantly – for 16% (the highest frequency for a single theme not directly included in the Conference title) the key message is the centrality of research.

D.4. Value Added of the Conference

Comparably, responses on the **‘greatest value added’** of attending the Conference are equally split between “Improving Knowledge on the theme of Agriculture for Sustainable Growth” (46%) and “Networking and Making New Contacts” (47%).

“Professional Visibility”, the third choice offered, is the greatest value added only for 7% of respondents.

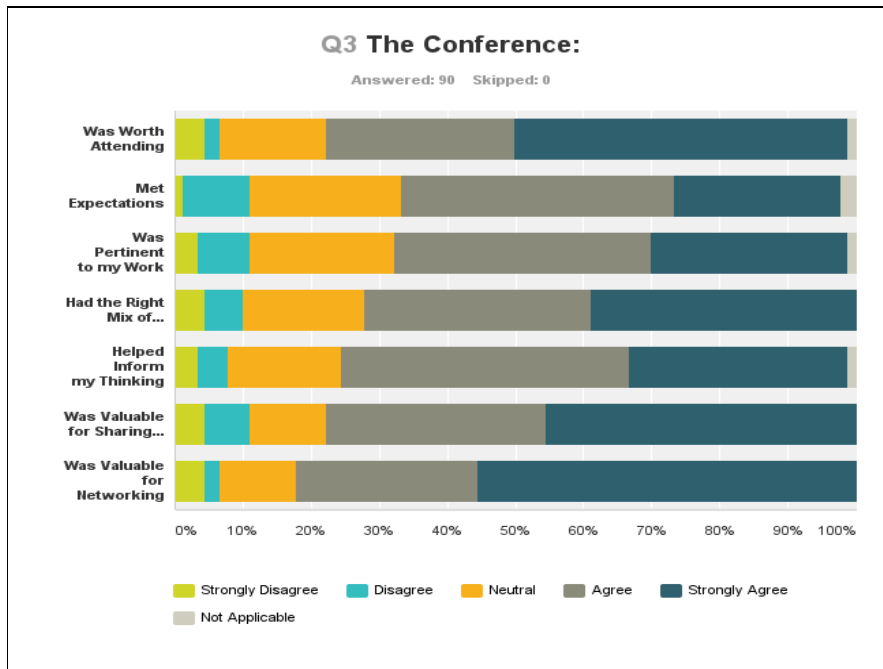
Figure 3: Greatest Value Added of Attending the Conference



D.5. Quality of the Conference

Moving from ranking to rating, however, respondents at Casablanca state their ‘full’ support to the full spectrum of GDN’s value proposition: respondents agree to a great extent with the statement that that ‘the Conference is a valuable opportunity to network and make new contacts’ (4.3/5), that it is ‘worth attending’ (4.2/5), that it is ‘a valuable opportunity to share information’ (4.1/5), that it has ‘the right mix of participants (policymakers, experts, early-career developing country researchers)’ (4.0/5), that the sessions helped ‘inform my thinking on Agriculture for Sustainable Growth’ (4.0/5), and that the content of the conference is ‘pertinent to my work’ and ‘met my expectation’ (both at 3.8/5). Figure 4 below presents the complete breakdown of the ratings with each statement.

Figure 4: Feedback on the Value Proposition of the Conference



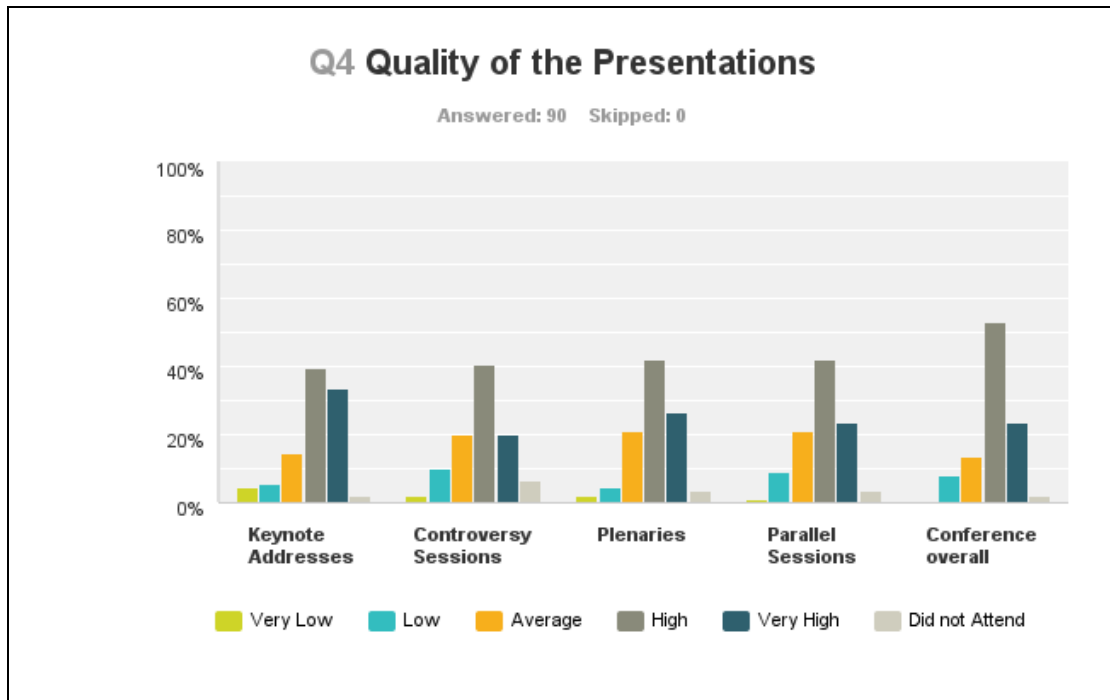
The Conference as a networking opportunity also prevails in **open comments on what respondents ‘liked the most’**, with direct references in one out of every four comments. Open comments also gave the opportunity to highlight other aspects, among which emerges the diversity of the Conference cohort, mentioned by 21% of responses, often with genuine enthusiasm, as in the comment below:

The truly international mix of researchers - incredible!

Further, 19% liked most the knowledge contribution made by the Conference, with a further 11% stressing the quality of the proceedings. Over 10% mentions the participation of youth as the aspect they appreciated the most.

This feedback matches a consistently ‘high’ appreciation of the **quality of the presentations**, across all formats, with an average of 3.9 on a 5-point scale (and virtually no deviation, at 0.2 points) for the keynote, plenaries, parallel sessions and the conferences as a whole. The same holds for the ‘Controversy’ sessions (rated at 3.7/5), which were mentioned as a favourite part of the Conference by 7% of respondents in open comments.

Figure 5: Quality of the Presentations at the Conference



A separate finding from the survey, further confirmed by a dedicated question below, is the fact that as many as 17% mention the Conference organisation as the aspect they appreciated the most. One of the respondents writes:

Franchement l'organisation de l'événement était presque parfaite et ça se voit qu'il y avait beaucoup d'efforts derrière. [Frankly, the organisation of the event was virtually perfect, and it was clear that a lot of work had gone into it]

D.6. Contribution to GDN's Overall Mission

With regard to the **contribution of the Conference to GDN's overall mission**, the feedback from Casablanca corroborates the picture emerging from the figures above. Respondents agree above 'highly' (4.4 on a 5-point scale) that the Conference offers 'a platform for interaction among developing country researchers and between them and top global country researchers'. The goals of 'building research capacity in developing countries', 'generating new and useful academic knowledge on development' and 'connecting research with policy', received instead a relatively lower - but still consistently 'high' – rating (3.9/5).

Open comments throw more light on this point, particularly regarding the genuine interest among participants to be part of an event that pushes the boundaries between research and policy as part of the conference:

I am unsure of the 'research to policy' link: is the GDN role to provide researchers with a 'reality check' from some policy community, or to inform such a community on advances in knowledge from research?

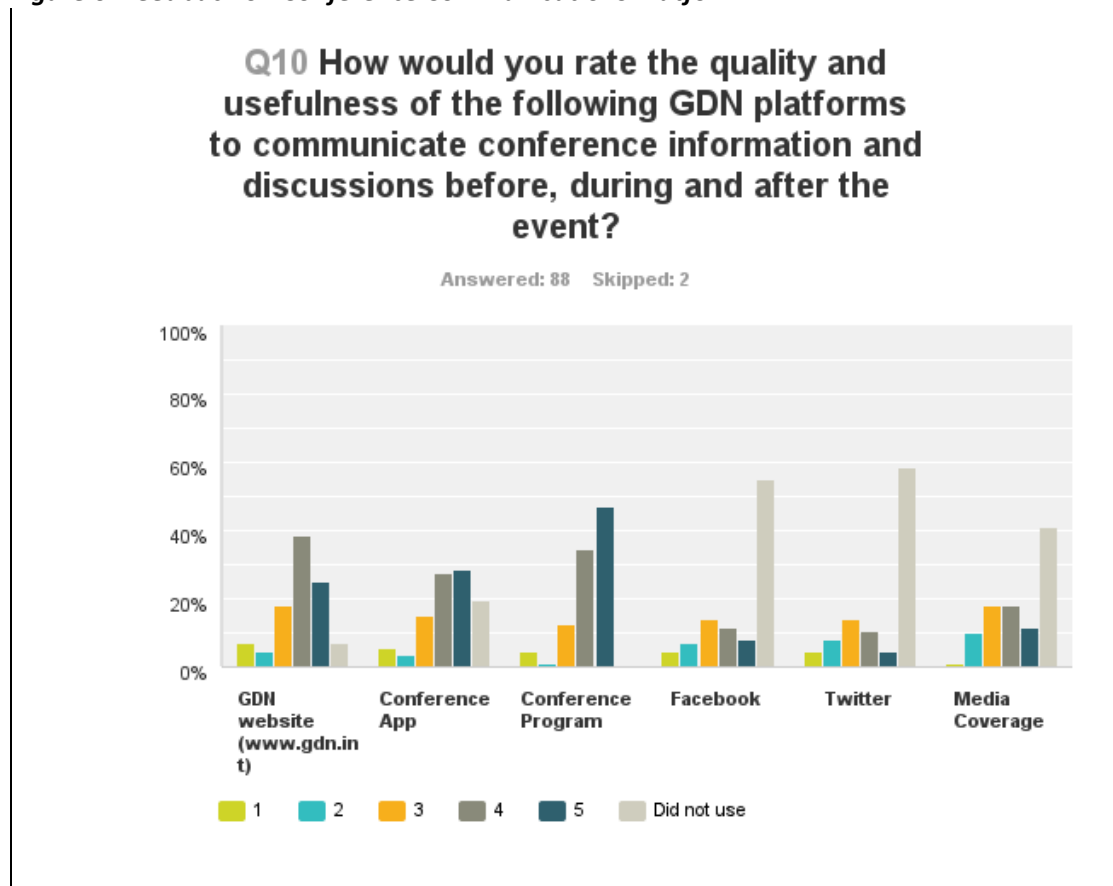
[...] Though international policy drivers like World Bank were present at the Conference, it looked like they were using this platform to push the shift in their policies and urging researchers to think on those line rather than taking cue from research to shape useful policies.

E. Conference communications – quality, usefulness and effectiveness

E.1 Quality of the Communication Platforms Used

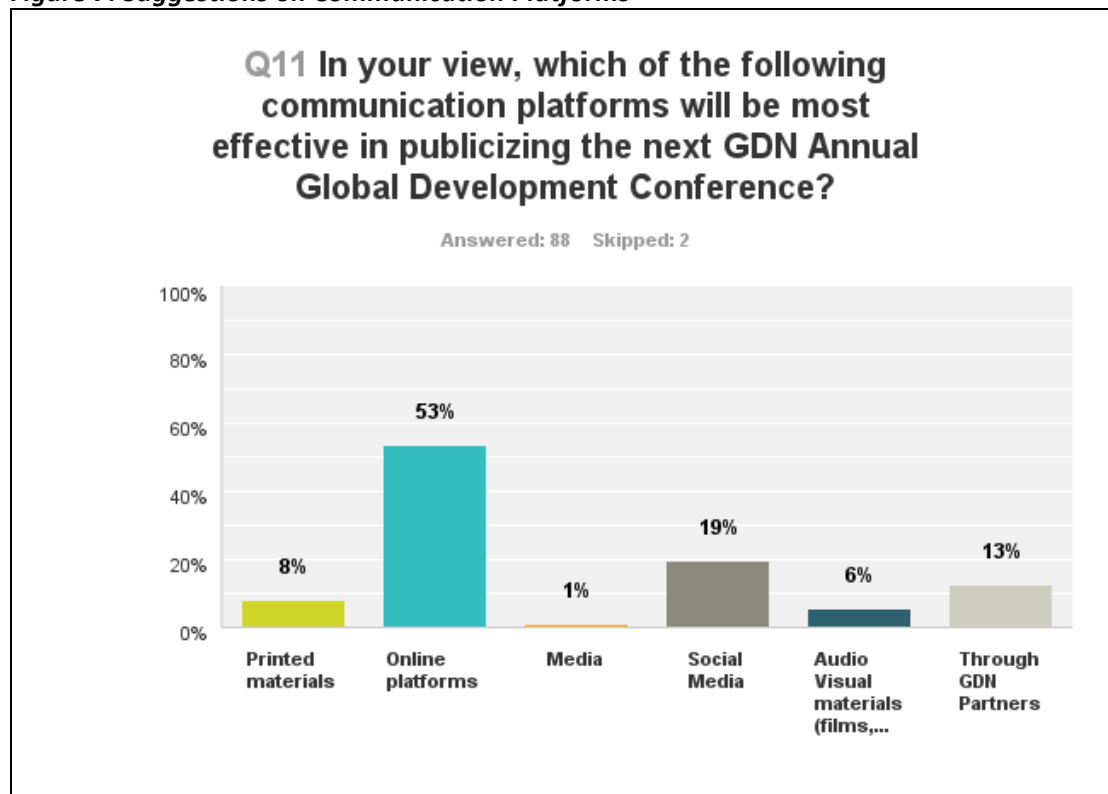
Respondents were asked to **rate the quality and usefulness of GDN’s internal and external communication platform** at the Conference. In order of appreciation, respondents value ‘highly’ or ‘very highly’ the Conference programme (accessed by all respondents, and rated on average 4.2 on a 5-point scale) and the GDN website (used by 93%, rates 3.8). Significantly, the newly-introduced Conference App was used by as many as 81% of respondents, and rated higher than the GDN website itself, with an average of 3.9 on a 5-point scale. Media coverage, Facebook and Twitter ranked slightly lower, between ‘medium’ and ‘high’ (respectively 3.5, 3.3 and 3.1 on a 5-point scale). Social media in particular were used by less than half of respondents (47% for Facebook, 43% for Twitter).

Figure 6: Feedback on Conference Communications Platform



For over half of respondents (53%), online platforms remain the **most effective way to share information and publicise the next Conference**, followed - from far - by social media (19%). Only 13% think GDN partners are an effective communication channel, and 6% to 8% would opt for printed or A/V material. Among few suggestions given, stands out the proposal to make the presentations and papers available before the start of the proceedings, on an online platform.

Figure 7: Suggestions on Communication Platforms



E.2 Daily Conference Newsletter

With specific reference to the **daily Conference newsletter**, respondents provided further positive feedback. 71% received and read it daily, and while 19% did not receive it, only 9% received it but did not read it. Those who read it (62%) agree that ‘the newsletter was noticeable and available in a timely manner’ (4.0/5), ‘the newsletter was informative and summarized the previous day sufficiently well’(3.8/5) and ‘the newsletter’ was well structured and easy to read’ (3.8/5).

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Please rate your answer on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being completely disagree and 5 being completely agree)	
	Average rating
The newsletter was noticeable and available in a timely manner	3.8
The newsletter was informative and summarized the previous day sufficiently well	3.8
The newsletter was well structured and easy to read	4.0

F. Feedback from Award & Prize Finalists

The eight respondents who were GDN Award & Prize Finalists show a high level of satisfaction (regarding specifically the additional events they took part in) comparable to the overall positive appreciation of the conference proceedings by other categories of participants.

Award Finalists agreed unanimously that they received ‘useful and insightful’ feedback from their presentations, that presenting in parallel sessions boosted their ‘confidence and visibility (individual and institutional) (3.8/5), that the feedback would be instrumental to ‘strengthening my research/project’ (3.8/5). Finally they agree with the fact that the pre-conference research communications training enabled them ‘to communicate my work more effectively’ (3.7/5) and ‘receive feedback from peers and resource persons’.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Please rate your answer on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the completely disagree and 5 being the completely agree)

The comments provided on my work at the end of my presentation at the parallel session were useful and insightful	4.0
Presenting my work at the plenary session has built my confidence and improved my visibility/my institution's visibility	3.8
Based on the feedback received during the parallel sessions, I will be strengthening my research/project	3.8
The pre-conference research communications training enabled me to communicate my work more effectively	3.7
The pre-conference research communications training was useful to receive feedback from peers and resource persons	3.7
Overall Average	3.8

G. Post-conference follow-up actions

Early-career researchers were not the only one to acknowledge the professional implications of attending the Conference. Overall, 90% of respondents declare they will be able to apply some of the knowledge gained at the conference in their own work. About 59% and 57% respectively declare to plan following up on work-related contacts made during the Conference, and sharing learning and information from the conference with others. About 48% read or downloaded the papers or the blog entries posted during and after the end of the conference. Approximately 7% declared to have already written a blog post or an article inspired by the Conference.

Comments include the following:

I will be able to stress the importance of social network as underlying agricultural decision making etc. in terms of productivity and how small holder farmers engage in agricultural production. This will be highlighted in articles and papers I am intending to write.

Many of the researchers in Africa and Asia were working on similar areas as that of mine and they had very interesting research on these aspects. I would be planning a couple of studies on those lines in my study areas too.

H. Conference Logistics

Singularly, the feedback on the logistics of the Casablanca Conference surpasses feedback on all other dimensions, with an average of 4.3 on a 5-point scale against all 11 dimensions respondents were prompted to rate.

Please rate the following conference components on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.	
	Average
Quality of the Hotel Accommodation	4.5
Appropriateness of the Venue (Hotel Hyatt Regency)	4.4
Appropriateness of the Location (Casablanca)	4.4
User Friendliness of the Online Conference Registration	4.3
Support provided by the GDN Secretariat	4.3
Appropriateness of the IT Support (Audio Visual Support, Internet Access etc.)	4.3
Support on the Air Tickets	4.2
Comprehensiveness of the Pre-Conference Logistics Note	4.2
Timeliness of the Visa Support	4.2
Comfort and Timeliness of the Airport Transfers and Local Travel Arrangement	4.2
Quality of the Conference Meals	4.1
OVERALL AVERAGE	4.3

Adding to this vast appreciation, is the figure (cited above) of as many as 17% mentioning the ‘conference organisation’ as the dimension of the event they ‘liked the most’ in open comments.

On logistics, the only dissenting voices in the otherwise very positive picture are two participants who faced trouble with flight bookings, and a couple of respondents who question the politics of choosing a luxury venue for the Conference:

A less posh venue would be appropriate for a development conference discussing poverty (even though the service provided was excellent)

A five-star hotel seems inappropriate for a "development"-related conference.

I. Willingness to Pay a Registration Fee

Finally, when asked whether they would be **willing to pay a registration fee** to attend future Global Development Annual Conferences, more than half of respondents (56%) answered positively, indicating an willingness to pay an average of USD 156 (median USD 100).

J. Suggestions for Improvements

Respondents were also asked to provide inputs on **how to improve the Conference**. Specific suggestions included

- making the papers available before the Conference;
- expand the Conference and spread the timings of the parallel sessions (to allow participants to attend more sessions); and
- guarantee translation services throughout all of the conference proceedings.

The single consistent input (mentioned by as many as by 22% of the sample) is however about involving more systematically practitioners, industry/private sector representatives and policy makers, particularly at mid-level. The spirit of these suggestions is well articulated in the following comment:

We need to have more policy makers invited and even take part in discussing papers, their experience to go a long way in not just improving those papers but enriching particular aspects of agriculture/any other development aspect - not just in a general sense as happened in the conference that just concluded. GDN could also solicit [the presentation of] research work that has actually had policy impact, such work can motivate other researchers on how to influence policy better than what is being done.