Institute for Public Policy Research

152 Robert Mugabe Avenue PO Box 86058 Eros Windhoek Namibia Tel: +264 61 240514/5 Fax: +264 61 240516 ippr@iway.na www.ippr.org.na

IPPR Readers' Survey No 1, January 2002

Is Anybody Out There? The IPPR Readers' Survey 2001

As part of an ongoing effort to measures its effectiveness, the IPPR launched its first readers' survey in October 2001. This survey revealed that, already in its first year, IPPR research has managed to attract a large number of devoted readers who forward IPPR research to many others. These readers are interested in the Interview, Briefing Paper, and Opinion Piece series and find them easy to understand. As a result of the survey, the IPPR will change the style of its electronic messages and make its research available by post and in PDF format from the IPPR website.

How effective is the Institute for Public Policy Research? How does an organisation that delivers a public good work out if anyone actually wants its products since they are not sold in a market to willing buyers? How do funders make up their minds whether their money is being put to good use? These are the sorts of question that research organisations such as the IPPR as well as other not-for-profit organisations and government agencies have to try and answer if they are to justify their existence and sustain themselves from either donations or taxes.

Since its inception, the IPPR has been acutely aware of the need to measure its effectiveness on an ongoing basis. One way of doing this is to monitor the dissemination of its research output. The IPPR distributes its research free of charge in three ways: by e-mail, via its website www.ippr.org.na, and as printed papers. The IPPR e-mail list is growing week by week and now contains over 450 addresses. Anyone interested in IPPR research is encouraged to send us their name and e-mail address to add to the list. Our simple website was launched in September 2001. I-way provides an additional service free of charge for monitoring how the website is being used. We can measure how many hits the website receives, which pages are being read, what is being downloaded, and where users are located. The IPPR prints 500 copies of each research paper and delivers them directly to all parliamentarians, media organisations, selected government offices, educational establishments, embassies, donors, libraries, and bookshops. At present delivery is mostly confined to the Windhoek area. Research is presently only produced in English.

As a first step in the process of monitoring effectiveness, the IPPR conducted its first Readers' Survey in October 2001 to coincide with the end of its first year of existence. Although the IPPR was only officially launched in April 2001 and its electronic mailing system set up at around the same time, its first month of work was actually November 2000. The Readers' Survey involved sending out an e-mail message on 9 October 2001 containing 12 simple questions to everyone on the e-mail list. All respondents had to do was click "reply" in their e-mail software and type in a cross in the appropriate boxes provided as well as answer three open-ended questions. A reminder was sent out on 19 October 2001. By 31 October a total of 84 responses had been received out of a mailing list of 412 addresses, a response rate of approximately 20% or one in five.

Here are the results of our survey question by question:

Q1: Have you ever read any of the IPPR research that has been forwarded to you by e-mail?

Of the 83 valid responses, 30 (36%) had read all of our material, 52(63%) had read some of them, while only 1(1%) had read none of them.

Q2: Can you read IPPR e-mails?

Out of 82 valid responses, 65 (79%) replied they could always read IPPR e-mails while 16 (20%) stated they could only read them sometimes. One replied they could never read them, mysterious in view of the fact that they had replied to the survey.

Q3: Do you open attachments to IPPR e-mails? If not why not?

A total of 74 people (88%) replied that they opened attachments while 8 (10%) replied they did not, three of whom cited security as the reason for not opening them.

Q4: Do you forward IPPR research to other people?

Out of 83 valid responses, a total of 46 people (55%) replied that they forwarded IPPR research to other people. Of these, 40 (87%) forwarded research to less than five people while 5 (11%) forwarded research to between 6 and 10 others. Only 1 respondent forwarded research to more than 10.

Q5: Please indicate how you feel about the following IPPR series: Interviews, Briefing Papers, Opinion Pieces.

We asked people to rank how interesting they found the three main IPPR series. Broadly speaking, people found all three series interesting. Significantly more respondents stated they found the briefing paper and opinion series "very interesting" than the interview series.

Q6: Could you indicate which publications you have found most interesting?

We asked people to indicate which IPPR publications they had found most interesting. They were allowed to select more than one. A total of 352 responses were received. The most popular paper in terms of the number of responses was Briefing Paper No 4 on the government budget while the least popular paper was Interview No 3 with the President of the IPBC. On average, measured using the number of responses, Briefing Papers were slightly less popular than Interviews and Opinion Pieces.

Q7: Do you find IPPR publications written in a way that is difficult to understand?

Out of 82 valid responses, a total of 78 (95%) respondents stated that they did not find IPPR publications difficult at all while 4 (5%) found them difficult.

Q8: Would you prefer to receive IPPR publications in PDF format?

We asked if readers would prefer to receive IPPR attachments as PDF documents which they would have to read using Adobe Reader which can be downloaded free of charge from the Adobe website. Out of 83 valid responses, only 12 (15%) replied they would prefer PDF while 51 (61%) stated that it didn't matter. 20 (24%) stated they they would not prefer PDF.

Q9: Would you prefer to receive IPPR publications by post?

Only 8 respondents (10%) stated that they would prefer to receive IPPR publications by post while 61(74%) preferred to continue to receive IPPR publications by e-mail. 13 (16%) replied that it didn't matter.

Q10: Would you prefer to download IPPR publications from the internet in PDF format?

10 respondents (13%) replied they would prefer to download documents from the internet while 28 (35%) replied that they would not. It did not matter to 42 respondents (53%).

Q11: Are there any other comments you would like to give us?

Many respondents replied simply by wishing the IPPR well.

Q12: Do you have any suggestions for further research?

Respondents mentioned a wide variety of issues which they wanted looking at. No particular patterns were observable. Clearly, however, people are interested in reading research on public policy issues that is unlikely to find funding from the usual sources.

Conclusions and recommendations

The challenge facing the IPPR was to find a cheap, quick and cost-effective way of finding out what readers thought of its research and how research was being disseminated. We chose to conduct an e-mail based survey. Several problems are inherent in this method. First, many readers probably decided not to bother replying either because they were too busy, did not consider it important enough, or could not reply due to technical reasons. It is impossible to estimate how many people this group contains. Second, the responses received are self-selecting. Those who had never read the IPPR e-mails they received or those unable to read them because of technical problems were hardly likely to respond to the survey. It is difficult to get round these problems without undertaking a more direct survey. We may consider this in the future.

What conclusions can we draw from the survey? The first is that a response rate of 20% is not bad for a survey of this nature. Most people receive large numbers of e-mail messages they do not want. Many recipients of our research may be interested in the research yet still consider surveys of this type a nuisance. During our first year the IPPR e-mail address book consisted in large part of people we placed on the list rather than people who had requested to be put on it. This is likely to change dramatically in the second year as all new addresses have asked to be put on the list. It is also significant that we have not received requests from those who did not reply to the survey to take them off the mailing list. To date we have had only a handful of requests to do so. If people really did not want to receive our messages (which often contain large attachments), they would probably have requested us to delete their addresses.

Clearly the IPPR already has a fairly large number of hard-core readers and is reaching them in a fast and cost effective manner. Furthermore, the majority of these readers forward our material to others which means more people are being reached than just this hard core. Preliminary statistics from our website support this finding.

The survey also suggests that the IPPR is filling a gap in the market for research. The core readership finds the broad range of IPPR material interesting and easy to understand. There seems to be general interest in the three research series suggesting it is worth continuing to produce them.

As far as dissemination is concerned, those who are happy receiving our material by e-mail were in the majority by far. This is unsurprising given that this is the result of an e-mail based survey. Despite this, a significant minority of respondents want to receive material in other ways such as by post or via the internet in PDF format. Certain readers have however experienced problems reading the material we have e-mailed to them. Furthermore, many have problems with the main e-mail message which presently incorporates our logo and other formatted information.

These conclusions suggest five recommendations:

- The IPPR should continue to produce the current range of research material in the current style.

- The IPPR should continue to disseminate research electronically and ensure it is virus-free.

- The IPPR should give people more options to access its research. The IPPR will therefore establish a postal mailing system and allow people to download publications from the internet in PDF format. We will also try to make downloading Adobe Reader software as easy as possible via a link from our website to the Adobe site.

- The IPPR should simplify its main e-mail messages so that people who cannot receive logos and formatted messages can read them.

- The IPPR should continue to monitor who is reading its research.