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and
Lucie Lamoureux

Knowledge Management for Development Journal

Capacity building for networking

Knowledge Management for Development Journal

KM4D Journal is an open access, community-based journal on knowledge management in development for and by development practitioners and researchers. As an open access journal, all the papers can be viewed and downloaded at the journal platform: www.km4dev.org/journal

The journal offers peer-reviewed, practice-based cases, analysis and research concerning the role of knowledge in development processes, and provides a forum for debate and exchange of ideas among practitioners, policy makers, academics and activists world-wide. By challenging current assumptions, it will seek to stimulate new thinking and to shape future ways of working. It is published three times a year in May, September and December.

The journal is strongly related to the KM4Dev community of practice at www.km4dev.org and, at the same time, aims to promote knowledge management approaches in the wider professional development community.

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Editorial
Capacity building for networking

Urs Karl Egger, Georg Buchholz, and Marc Steinlin with Chief Editor Lucie Lamoureux

The Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) community of practice (www.km4dev.org) publishes a peer-reviewed, open access e-journal in the field of knowledge sharing for development, the 'Knowledge Management for Development Journal' (KM4D Journal) at www.km4dev.org/journal. This issue of the journal deals with *capacity building for networking*.

The team of guest editors working on this issue has over the past years been actively involved in capacity building for networking, as coordinators, facilitators, coaches, or advisors. Having been in contact with each other for quite a while, we have all been thinking about capacity building and networking in our various projects and initiatives. The catalyser for this special issue on capacity building for networking was a workshop on the 'Management of international networks for knowledge sharing', which took place on the 25-28 April 2006 in St. Gallen (Switzerland). The workshop, organised by the two Swiss organisations, Skat and Helvetas, brought together 45 participants from all continents.

The motivation for this workshop was based on our experience, that networking practitioners should have more and better opportunities to share their experiences how they manage and facilitate networks. We are convinced that more capacity building is required, so that networks can achieve a real impact for sustainable development and poverty reduction.

The results of this workshop are available at www.threads.ch. Two contributions ensuing from the workshop can also be found in this special issue: the Harambee case study and the dialogue between Peter Bury and Ndala Duma, which provide insights in the everyday life of networking practitioners. However, we did not want to limit this special issue only to the workshop participants, so this issue includes contributions from other authors working in the field of knowledge management for development, who share their thoughts on the theme. As a result, this issue contains contributions ranging from analysis of what kind of capacity building is needed, to insights in capacity building programmes for networking from a grassroots perspective, as well as from the perspective of networking practitioners.

About this issue

Networks are acknowledged as effective information, communication and coordination mechanisms in development cooperation. Considerable work has been done in international cooperation to support the establishment and management of

networks on local, regional and international levels in the developed and developing world, and various stakeholders strengthen capacities for networking. However, many networks struggle with similar challenges. In order for networks to work in a more effective and efficient way, to achieve a higher impact and to become more sustainable, capacity building is often essential. This issue addresses the question of how capacity building for networking can be made more effective and what capacity building strategies and approaches are required to allow networks to perform better.

This issue consists of three papers, three case studies, a dialogue, a book review and a story, as well as the regular KM4Dev Community Notes feature. Geographically, contributions have been submitted form various regions including Latin America, Africa, India and Europe. The papers and case studies cover a wide range of topics related to capacity building for networking, including challenges networks are facing and that require capacity building; social network analysis as a tool to analyse the situation and to identify starting points for capacity building; descriptions of three capacity building programmes for networking; a practical case of how a network contributed to capacity building; and last but not least, a contribution giving an overview of various formal and informal approaches for knowledge sharing capacity development.

Boru Douthwaite, Andrea Carvajal, Sophie Alvarez, Elías Claros, L.A. Hernández, and Louise Clark present two case studies conducted by CIAT (Centro International de Agricultura Tropical) and Imperial College (London). The cases studies investigate how the networking capacities of farmers in Colombia and Bolivia can be strengthened. A precondition to do so is a thorough understanding of the local situation through social network analysis (SNA). First results of this early exploratory research show that SNA helps to visualize networks and enables the actors involved to identify measures to strengthen their networks.

Joitske Hulsebosch, Bénédicte Marcilly and Loeki Schaeffers present in their paper the experiences of the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) in building the capacity of multi-stakeholder networks in the field of information and communication technologies for development in nine countries. The paper addresses the multiple role of IICD as advisor, funder and facilitator of these networks and concludes with lessons learned after five year of capacity building.

Rick James and Chiku Malunga summarise the results of an applied research project undertaken by INTRAC among four civil society networks in Malawi. The research project aimed to understand the development of the civil society networks over the last four years, assess their contribution to poverty reduction and economic growth issues, and appraise their current strengths and weaknesses in articulating a voice for civil society. The authors identify a number of challenges where more capacity building is required, such as working more efficiently and effectively in terms of achieving network goals, and strengthening committed leadership.

Andres Pablo Falconer and Dalberto Adulis present the case of *Redes*envolvimento, a capacity-building programme for networks for development proposed and implemented in Brazil by ABDL (Associação Brasileira para o Desenvolvimento de Lideranças). It introduces the justification and rationale of the programme as well as its main features, and describes the implementation of the first edition, carried out

between July 2005 and July 2006. The authors summarize the achieved results of the programme and present the main challenges in adapting more traditional training models to capacity building for network organisations.

Riff Fullan, Allison Hewlitt and Jacqueline Nnam present a case study on the Harambee Project which is designed to support increased capacity among the project initiators and a range of Africa-based networks and communities, to coordinate and facilitate the interactions of their respective constituencies. The project focuses on three main areas of intervention: supporting network coordinators, developing capacities related to network coordination, and filling gaps in existing training and research-oriented resources. The authors describe what has worked and what has not been as successful, and draw their lessons learned.

Lawrence Narteh, Mark Winslow, Ousmane Youm and Shellemiah O. Keya describe in their case study the mechanisms employed by ROCARIZ, the West and Central Africa Rice Research and Development Network, to establish multi-country, issue driven 'task forces' that decentralize the international research agenda to the national agricultural research programmes. The authors highlight five approaches that have been crucial to increasing knowledge sharing and improving capacity building.

Ndala Duma and Peter J. Bury present the notes of an online chat about their experiences with capacity building for networking on resource centre development in the water sanitation and hygiene sector. The dialogue reflects views from a Northern and a Southern practitioner, both involved in a Resource Centre Development (RCD) programme of the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre.

Jhumpa Ghosh and TK Omana share a story on the art of video making, how it was introduced to newcomers and then used to enrich their work with local communities in India.

In the KM4Dev 'Community Notes' section, Lucie Lamoureux summarizes discussion threads on developing the capacity of knowledge sharing approaches and techniques. Formal and informal ways of capacity development are described and a number of practical examples in application are given.

Finally, a 'Letter to the Editors' from Helen Gould of Creative Exchange discusses some of the themes raised in the 2005 issue of the journal on 'Understanding the role of culture in knowledge sharing: making the invisible visible' (*KM4D Journal* Vol.1, issue 3).

We hope you will enjoy reading this issue and find some insights that might inspire you in your work.

Urs Karl Egger, Georg Buchholz, and Marc Steinlin
with Chief Editor Lucie Lamoureux
Guest Editors, Capacity building for networking

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Building farmers' capacities for networking (Part I): Strengthening rural groups in Colombia through network analysis

Boru Douthwaite, Andrea Carvajal, Sophie Alvarez, Elías Claros and L.A. Hernández

Introduction to both case studies

Four major trends, namely climate change, economic globalization, HIV/AIDS, and population growth, are exposing rural communities to greater pressures and risks. The pace of change is so rapid that traditional innovation systems are generally unable to cope. As a result, many small farmers face grave threats to their livelihoods.

Innovation can be defined as the application of knowledge of all types to achieve desired social and economic ends (Hall et al. 2001). It is essentially a social process in which people learn about new ideas and adapt and use them through their interactions with others (Allen et al. 1983; Douthwaite 2002). As a result innovations generally arise out of a network of actors and relationships (Conway and Steward 1998). A growing body of literature is showing that network structure, such as which actors are linked to whom, the number of linkages, the roles that different actors play and the degree of clustering, to mention just a few, determines how effectively networks are at fostering innovation (Krebs and Holley, 2004; Castells, 2004; Cross and Parker, 2002). Companies in developed countries are starting to use network mapping techniques to diagnose their social, innovation and communication networks as a first step to identifying measures to improve them (Cross and Parker, 2002).

This paper (Part I) present a case study of work conducted by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) to adapt network mapping techniques to a rural and developing country context. It reports on work in Colombia to develop a prototype network diagnosis tool for use by service providers who work to strengthen small rural groups. It is complemented by a further paper in this issue by Louise Clark (Part II) which presents work to develop a network diagnosis tool for stakeholders involved in agricultural supply chains in Bolivia. The prototype methods used in both Parts I and II are based on social network analysis (SNA) methodology. SNA is a rapidly developing methodology that is gaining increasing popularity as an analytical and visualization tool with a wide range of applications across a number of disciplines such as health care, psychology and business organization. The focus of SNA is the nature of the relationships that exist between different actors in order to better understand how an actor's position in a network influences their access to resources such as goods, capital and information.

In both cases, the method development and testing place as part of an action research process in which 'the researcher enters a real-world situation and aims both to

improve it and to acquire knowledge' (Checkland and Holwell 1998, p.9). We tested four hypotheses as part of this research:

1. Drawing network maps will help the actors involved (farmers, their groups and rural service providers) understand and visualize networks of relationships that are important to them;
2. Participatory analysis and discussion of these maps will build the capacity of the actors involved to strengthen their networks;
3. Strengthening networks will benefit the actors within them;
4. It is possible to develop a network analysis method that is simple enough for rural service providers to use with a reasonable amount of training.

Both papers explicitly build on the idea that 'rather than helping to build sustainable institutions and other capacities, technical cooperation tends to displace or inhibit local alternatives' (Fukuda-Parr et al 2002 p.5). Fukuda-Parr et al (2002) go on to say that 'the challenge should be to fully understand the local situation and move forward from there—step by step.' The papers contend that network analysis can help understand the local situation.

Neither case is complete. Both can be seen as an after-action review (Collison and Parcell 2001) carried out on the research to date. Both describe the step-by-step development of the method, what worked well, the capacity building required and what requires further consideration and research. The papers conclude with a final section to identify lessons learnt from both cases and make recommendations for future research. The work is structured as two case study papers because the work was carried out independently and the authors wanted the authorships to reflect this.

Introduction to the case

This case study presents the results of participatory action research carried out with two rural groups in Cauca, Colombia. The research is based on the premise that techniques from Social Network Analysis (SNA) that are used to foster innovation in business in the developed world can usefully be adapted to a rural and developing country context. We adapted Cross and Parker's (2004) approach which involves a consultant first discussing with management of a company what networks they are interested in mapping, and then designing and implementing a questionnaire to map them. Results from the questionnaires are analyzed using SNA software and then are presented to management before being discussed with staff. Consultants make money offering this service in developed countries, in particular in the USA (pers. comm. with Valdis Krebs 2004).

Krebs and Holley (2004) report similar use of social network analysis to map rural business networks in Athens, Ohio, USA. Biggs and Matsaert (2004) give examples of network mapping with government ministries, extension agencies, NGOs and farmers' groups to strengthen poverty reduction programmes in Nepal and

Bangladesh, although these maps were drawn in meetings without the use of questionnaires and SNA software. Gibbon and Pokhrel (1999) used social network mapping with rural women's groups in a similar way in Nepal. This is possibly the first time that the Cross-and-Parker-type approach has been used in the developing world as participatory diagnostic and planning tool, and subsequently reported in a peer-reviewed journal.

Methodology

The research was carried out in Cauca, Colombia with two Farmer Research Committees (CIALs –Spanish acronym): Fortaleza Carpintereña and El Progreso. The CIAL approach was developed by CIAT between 1990 and 1994 (Ashby et al 2000) and consists of a rural service provider, often an NGO, facilitating the formation of a farmer research group (the CIAL) that then carries out adaptive research as a service to their community. Both Fortaleza Carpintereña and El Progreso had carried out research on cost-effective feeding regimes for poultry production.

We selected to work with the two groups because they were different but comparable (see Table 1). The main difference was that one group was relatively old and well established and the other was relatively new and we thought this likely to produce differences in their networks. Both groups were well known to the research team and both were interested in participating in the research.

Our research approach was to first adapt the Cross and Parker method to participatory use in rural Colombian conditions using the existing experience of the research team. This included, for example, first introducing the concept of networks to the group (something that Cross and Parker do not do). The steps of the prototype social network analysis tool are shown in Figure 1. During the implementation of these steps we collected information and analyzed results in a number of ways, including through the use of after action reviews, recording of video, recording participants' comments on flip charts, note taking by the research team and key participant interviews. We collected and analyzed this information to test the four research hypotheses listed above.

To test the fourth hypothesis we invited two NGO staff[i] to accompany the research to help ensure that the network analysis method we were developing was simple enough for them to use.

Results

Group characteristics

There were differences and similarities between the two CIALs (Table 1). Both groups had carried out research on poultry feed, both had poultry projects oriented to generating additional income for member's households, and both were working on other projects. For example, Fortaleza Carpintereña worked on education and care for

Figure 1: Steps in developing the Social Network Analysis tool

1. **Exploring the nature and importance of social networks**
Different coloured wool was used to represent the different communication channels (i.e., a network) through which the workshop invitees received the invitation.

2. **Design and enumeration of a network questionnaire**

Encuesta para Análisis de Redes Sociales en CIAL Carpintero

Introducción

Esta primera búsqueda de información hace parte integral del trabajo de análisis de Redes Sociales *ARS* que el grupo CIAL Fortaleza Carpintereña ha iniciado, con el propósito de que sea una herramienta de trabajo grupal que les ayude a ver y entender de una mejor manera todas las relaciones internas, comunitarias y externas, para mejorarlas y/o fortalecerlas y así aumentar las posibilidades de lograr sus objetivos.

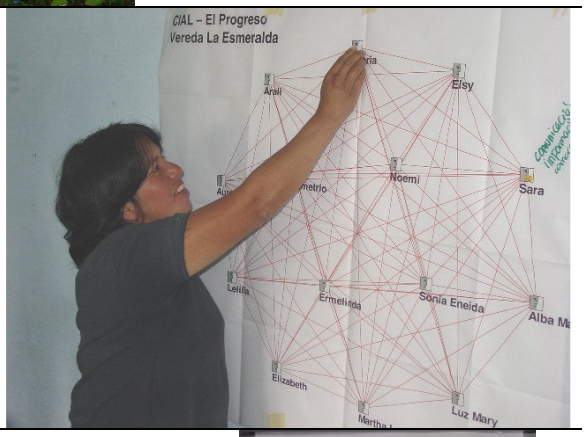
1. Información básica

Nombre Completo				
Vereda / Ubicación:				
Género:	F		M	
¿Desde cuándo vive en la comunidad?				
¿Hace cuánto pertenece al CIAL?				
¿Cuál es su papel/cargo/responsabilidad en el CIAL?				

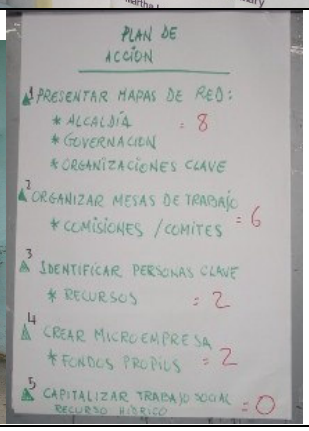
2. Membresía

¿En qué trabajos o proyectos económicos del grupo está trabajando o está involucrado? (Por ejemplo CIALs; producción de pollos; grupos de acción social, etc.)
Grupo 1:
Grupo 2:
Grupo 3:
Grupo 4:
Grupo 5:

3. **Mapping of the networks using SNA software and subsequent verification**



4. **Designing and the start of implementation of a strategic action plan based on this analysis**
Ranking was used to prioritize actions to be taken



5. Follow up of use of results of mapping and the implementation of action plans, including redrawing the maps

the elderly and children of their community. El Progreso members were involved in training in the production and selling of handicrafts. The main differences stem from Fortaleza Carpintereña being a longer established group that has received much more support from outside organizations in terms of financial resources and training.

Steps 1 and 2 of the prototype network analysis tool

The exercise we used to introduce the concept of a network involved group members tracing how the invitation to the workshop had arrived to each one of them using different coloured wool to represent different forms of communication (Figure 1). The subsequent discussions showed that people already had a good understanding of a network. For example, Sara Guetio, a member of the El Progreso CIAL, described social networks as:

> *…those invisible threads that bring people together, threads that you cannot see but can feel … for example, the bonds of affection…you can't see them but they are always with you.*

The questionnaire was designed to identify networks that were of interest to the respective groups and to us, the researchers. Both CIALs were most interested in their resources network –who seeks resources from whom and their strategic contacts – who in the group has contact with people who could potentially help the group. We as researchers were interested in their advice networks – who asks whom for advice about agriculture, and their network memberships - who was linked to whom through group membership. El Progreso were interested in mapping who had contact with whom with respect to commercialization of products produced by the group. We developed and enumerated a questionnaire to map these networks.

Results from the mapping (step 3)

We analyzed the data and drew the network maps using Inflow SNA software. We presented the maps to the group leaders to check for sensitive issues before presenting them to the whole group.

The maps and the mapping data (Figure 2 and Table 2) give insights into the social capital of each group. Woolcock (1998) identified three types of "structural" social capital that can be identified through network mapping. The first is *bonding* social capital that refers to relationships between family and friends, and a very immediate circle of neighbours, acquaintances and co-workers. The second is *bridging* social capital that refers to the connections that go beyond this closer circle with people who are not in frequent contact or who approach each other regularly. These bonds are of special importance when it comes to seeking resources and referrals outside of a person's immediate group. The third, *linking* social capital, is yet another step towards the outside, this time the ties between a person or group with the power structures that are usually represented in formal institutions.

The 'resources' and 'strategic contacts' maps are thus plots of the groups' respective bridging and linking social capital. Both are shown plotted in Figure 2 as green links. The red links are the CIAL members' links to each other through group membership and represent bonding social capital.

Comparison of the network data (Table 2) of both groups shows that Fortaleza Carpintereña reported three times as many internal linkages as El Progreso, suggesting that the longer established group has higher bonding capital. Fortaleza Carpintereña had more internal linkages because its members belonged to eight internal groups while El Progreso members belonged to just two. In contrast, El Progreso members were more likely to belong to external groups, reporting more than twice as many external links compared to Fortaleza Carpintereña. Fortaleza Carpintereña also had higher linking and bridging capital: its members reported twice as many strategic and resource contacts as El Progreso members (Figure 2).

Presenting the maps to the respective groups produced some good discussion and some changes to the maps. Fortaleza Carpintereña members included links to the people who they helped in their community work (see Table 2) including helping incipient groups by providing them with contacts and information. This was important for them as an incentive to do more, as they realized 'we have more to give than money', and since the modified map was later used for fund-raising, this new data helped show the group's impact and wide coverage.

Fortaleza Carpintereña members reported three times as many people asked them for information about agriculture compared to El Progreso (ratio = 3.29). This is not surprising given Fortaleza Carpintereña is longer established and is engaged in more activities. Only one Fortaleza Carpintereña member said she asked another Fortaleza Carpintereña member for information, compared to nine El Progreso members who asked advice from within their group. This confirms that Fortaleza Carpintereña has stronger bonding social capital – the members know each other better than El Progreso, and know more of what each other knows.

Over half of Fortaleza Carpintereña's strategic and resources links were made by just two people, the group leader and the treasurer. In El Progreso strategic and resources links were more evenly distributed, but were characterized by up to six CIAL members approaching the same person, indicating a lack of co-ordination in the group's fund-raising strategy.

Development of action plans (step 4)

The dependence of Fortaleza Carpintereña on their leader and treasurer was something of which the group was already aware. They saw that should either leave the group would be very seriously weakened. As part of their action plan the leader and treasurer agreed to start training others to maintain existing relationships, leaving the two of them free to form new strategic links to the outside. Others agreed to support those who might travel to attend meetings outside the village by doing some of their home and farm work.

Table 1: Characteristics of the participating CIALs

	Fortaleza Carpintereña, Vereda Carpintero, Municipio de Morales, Cauca	El Progreso, Vereda La Esmeralda, Municipio de Piendamó, Cauca
Year formed	2001	2004
Number of members	18	13
Number of internal sub-groups formed by the CIALs	8: chicken rearing; social work with the community elderly; selling aromatic plants; producing personal-hygiene products: bakery; organic coffee growing; home gardens; training in proper garbage disposal for children	2: chicken rearing; handicrafts
Resources received from outside organizations since group inception	- $1,600 from the local municipality (Alcaldía) for poultry rearing - 13,000 special coffee saplings from the Coffee Committee - Funding to install 15 chicken coops in their community from the Rural Development Foundation - A promise of several thousand dollars to buy a plot of land from the Rural Development Foundation	- 300 chickens from the Cabildo for poultry farming, plus some food - 150 chickens from the Piendamó Municipality, plus some food.
Trainings received	- Training in CIALs, Participatory M&E and Network Analysis from CIAT and CORFOCIAL - Training in project proposal development; accounting; chicken rearing; and processing of chicken meat from SENA - Training in managing organic manure; and, clean medicinal plant production from UMATA Morales - Training in bread making; motor mechanics; handicraft production; production of cosmetics from MIRA	- Training in CIALs, Participatory M&E and Network Analysis from CIAT and CORFOCIAL - Training promised by MIRA
Other characteristics	- Only women - Established as an EAT (Spanish Acronym for Associated Work Enterprise)	- Mixed - men and women

In El Progreso, the group decided all would play more of a linking and bridging role to the outside and that all members would share the responsibility for fund raising. They decided to focus on strengthening their relationship with SENA (Spanish acronym for National Learning Service which is the Government's technical education entity) and the local municipality (Alcaldía).

As a result of discussing the maps, both CIALs identified as their first priority the need to hold a meeting to strengthen their ties with their resource and strategic contacts identified in the mapping (see Figure 2). The project (CIAT) helped finance both meetings at which the CIAL members made presentations of their activities and then engaged the invitees in a dialogue about future joint ventures and investment in the CIALs. El Progreso used network maps to explain their internal structure and outside links.

Follow up (step 5)

We conducted follow up interviews in both CIALs six months after their stakeholder meetings. Both CIALs had used their network maps in the intervening period. El Progreso made a presentation in the annual CIALs meeting, which was attended by 12 CIALS. Luz Mary Cobo, who made the presentation, said it was a motivating experience for them because there was much interest and they felt that they had something new and interesting to share with the other CIALs.

Fenix Sarria, the co-leader Fortaleza Carpintereña explained how they used their maps:

> *We took them to the governor's office to show them… the meeting was attended by the Cauca Secretary of Agriculture, the first lady of the Department and people from the Women's office from Bogotá, representatives of groups from all over the department [Cauca], and the maps were useful for us to show our work with other organizations, which is already at a national level, and they liked this a lot. They asked us how we had made the maps and we explained we had done them with your help in workshops with the whole group.*

Fenix Sarria also said that the most significant change for them had come through the meeting with their strategic contacts.

> *The meeting created much interest in the community and now there is more recognition and respect for our group of women. The community now will not be an obstacle to us working with other organizations. Now people (in the community) no longer say that there are many groups and we (Fortaleza Carpintereña) are just one of them. Now we can represent the community.*

This change came about in part as Fenix Sarria again explains:

> *People in the community could see with their own eyes that the group is strong and is supported by a number of organizations big and small and this has generated much credibility and now they respect us much more as a group of women.*

Other members of Fortaleza Carpintereña were not so positive. They reported that some community members felt that the meeting had been too lavish and the group had wasted the money they had donated, and refused to donate again for Fortaleza Carpintereña's work with the elderly and the school children.

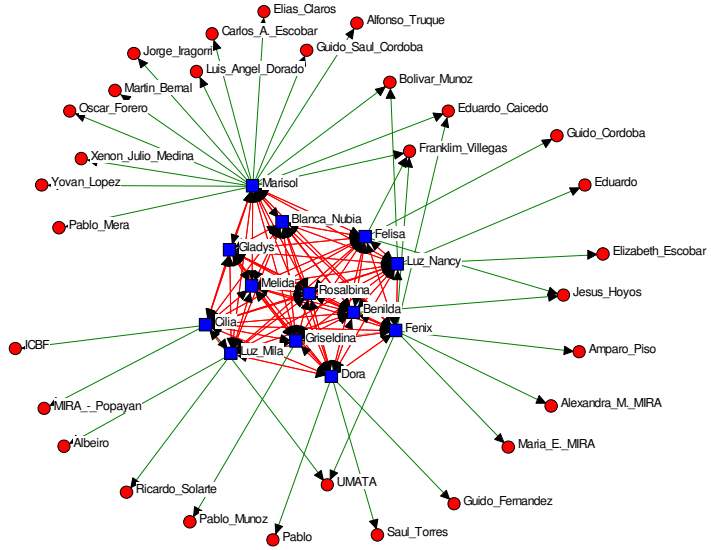
Fortaleza Carpintereña had not met as a group since the meeting, and had ceased some group activities including providing care to the elderly. In the follow-up interviews it emerged the main reason was they were waiting for the donation of plot of land, something that the group had invested a lot of time and effort in. Continual delays had proven demotivating, as had the problems with community fund-raising.

Table 2: Comparison of mapping data for the groups Fortaleza Carpintereña (Carp) and El Progreso (Prog)

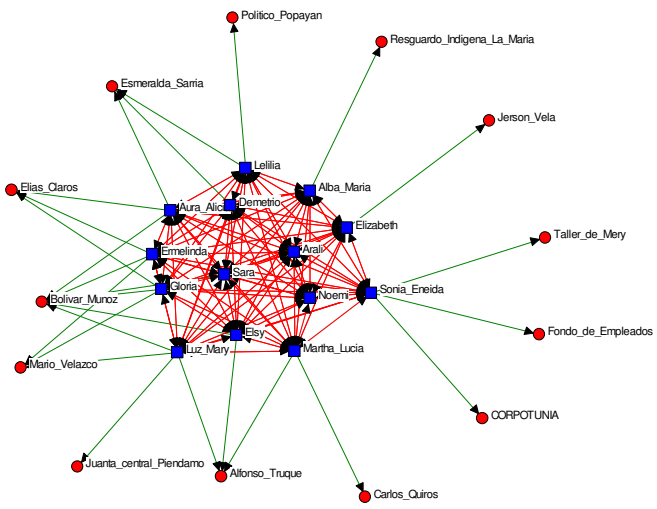
Network Question	No. of internal links between CIAL members			No. of links between CIAL members and outside			Number of external actors		
	Carp	Prog	Ratio	Carp	Prog	Ratio	Carp	Prog	Ratio
What groups are you a member of?	79	25	*3.16*	16	38	*0.42*	15	35	*0.43*
Who are your strategic contacts?	0	0	*n/a*	55	30	*1.83*	34	17	*2.00*
Who do you ask for agricultural info?	3	20	*0.15*	12	18	*0.67*	13	17	*0.76*
Who asks you for agricultural info?	1	9	*0.11*	23	7	*3.29*	21	6	*5.5*

Notes: The number of respondents in Fortaleza Carpintereña (Carp) = 13 and for El Progreso (Prog) = 13.

Figure 2: The Fortaleza Carpintereña and El Progreso Resources Networks. Blue squares are group members linked together by their membership of the their group (red lines), red circles are the people and organizations the group members contact for resources (green lines)



(i) Fortaleza Carpintereña



(ii) El Progreso

The most significant change for El Progreso was that the mapping had helped them see that as a group they had far greater numbers of links and influence than any of them individually. It helped them understand that they were stronger in a group than individuals alone, which was motivating. Also, the analysis of their poultry market links motivated them to seek training to improve these links, and to improve the financial management of the group.

El Progreso reported that it had bought a maize mill. Although this was not as a result of the network mapping *per se*, they understood that its function was to strengthen the group's bonding capital through providing the cash to carry out group activities such as the celebration of each others' birthdays.

Discussion

What was useful for the two groups?

The findings showed that the first two hypotheses held true for the both groups: drawing network maps helped group members visualize and understand networks of relationships that were important to them; and, group analysis and discussion of these maps build their capacity to strengthen their networks. Proof of capacity building was that both CIALs identified networks they wanted mapping which we the researchers had neither predicted, nor suggested, and that they subsequently used the maps on their own to make presentations in meetings. Both groups used their maps to help their strategic contacts understand better how they were working. The maps helped the strategic contacts appreciate that both groups were viable because they were receiving support from several sources. The fact that both groups were developing the capacity to analyze and improve their networks also helped increase the strategic contacts' confidence in them.

The maps also proved useful for Fortaleza Carpintereña in reinforcing what they already knew about their overdependence on their two leaders. It provided them with a new impetus to do something about it. Discussing the maps also helped Fortaleza Carpintereña better understand and articulate the different ways they provide resources to their community, and this better articulation helped raise their profile within their community.

The most significant change resulting from the work was different for each group, reflecting their differing levels of maturity. The most significant change for El Progreso was that the mapping had helped them see that as a group they had far greater numbers of links and influence than any of them individually. For Fortaleza Carpintereña the most significant change resulted from a meeting the project helped organize with their strategic contacts. The consequences were mixed. Some in the group feel that they had gained respect in their own community as a result of the meeting when people 'could see with their own eyes that the group is strong and is supported by a number of organizations, big and small.' Others felt that the meeting had appeared expensive and had damaged their ability to fund-raise in the community.

The follow up interviews showed that the increased capacity of both groups to understand their networks helped strengthen them, thus validating the third hypothesis. Both groups held a meeting to strengthen links with their strategic contacts, which they themselves

suggested. Fortaleza Carpintereña reported better relationships with its strategic contacts after their meeting, and El Progreso was given 300 chickens and chicken feed as a direct result of theirs. El Progreso is using income from a maize mill to build its bonding social capital.

What was useful for the research team?
We learned a great deal in carrying out the research in terms of how to carry out social network analysis in rural settings, and what the method can offer. We learned that comparing the ratio of internal to external links between the two groups was a good way of comparing their levels of social capital and may eventually prove to be a useful tool to characterize groups. A hypothesis for further testing is that mature groups will have higher numbers of internal links with respect to group membership, and higher numbers of external links with respect to being asked for advice, and links to strategic contacts.

Network mapping helped better understand the groups not just as farmer research groups (CIALs), but groups who manage a portfolio of activities of which their CIAL work is a part. The mapping also helped us to understand that both groups were motivated by both self-interest – to help themselves improve their livelihoods – and to help their communities. Both motivations are linked as shown when Fortaleza Carpintereña stopped most of its community work while waiting for a donation of a plot of land.

An interesting finding was also that we, as outsiders, were more interested in their advice networks (who gives and receives information from whom), while both groups' first interest was in identifying their resource and strategic contacts networks. Our interest in their advice network stems from our interest in innovation and the premise that healthy information flows are a sign of a healthy innovation system. The groups' interest, quite rightly, was first in their own sustainability.

What was useful for the NGO (the potential user of the method)?
The NGO (CORFOCIAL) who accompanied us during the testing of the prototype SNA tool is now using it to map the strategic contact networks of the CIALs they work with. As with Fortaleza Carpintereña and El Progreso their main motivation is to use the maps to better understand and communicate how they are working to existing and potential donors.

CORFOCIAL benefited from being part of the research team developing the prototype by: 1) learning that the maps are useful as communication and fund raising tools; 2) helping them understand the types of networks CORFOCIAL wishes to map; and, 3) helping with the design of their questionnaire and its enumeration. CORFOCIAL is now in the process of interviewing 27 CIALs using its own resources. The CIAT research team is providing some technical backstopping with respect to use of the software and interpretation of the maps. CORFOCIAL is driving this work, not CIAT.

What still needs more work?
More work is still needed to test the fourth hypothesis that it is possible to develop a network analysis prototype method that is simple enough for rural service providers to use with a reasonable amount of training. The current prototype is expensive in the number of visits needed, and in the training required if NGO staff are to use the SNA software. Another issue is the cost of the program. We have subsequently switched from InFlow© to

Netdraw©, which is free. The author of the Bolivia case has developed a NetDraw user manual (Clark 2006) for NGO and national program staff in Bolivia which we are field-testing. However, it remains to be seen whether expecting NGO staff to learn and use a relatively sophisticated program is realistic.

Another area for future inquiry and improvement is the follow up of action plans resulting from analysis of the network maps. Network mapping is likely to greater benefit groups if it is implemented as a component in an ongoing relationship between the service provider and the group, and not just as a one-off event.

Conclusions

The first step in building capacity for networking in rural communities is to help rural people and their service providers understand and visualize their existing networks. The results presented in this paper suggest that social network mapping techniques used to foster innovation in business in the developed world can help achieve this first step. Furthermore the research shows that this understanding can lead to the identification of measures that do strengthen these networks, and that this in turn brings benefits, at least to the groups who carry out the network analysis. The benefits included: giving the group a clearer sense of identity and a clearer idea of the benefit of being in a group; clarifying and communicating a group's impact on its community; identifying internal group management issues; and, clarifying a group's strategy towards funding raising and seeking support from outside.

The use of interviews and network mapping software to generate social network maps requires rural service providers to learn new skills. It remains to be seen whether it is possible to develop a network analysis prototype method that is simple enough for rural service providers to use with a reasonable amount of training. Further work is also needed to better link the use of network mapping to monitoring and evaluation so that actions identified are more likely to be implemented. Analyzing networks and intervening based on that analysis can have both positive and negative consequences. More research is needed to identify the types of interventions that strengthen networks.

The data generated from network mapping helped characterize the two groups. For example, the ratios of internal to external links proved to be useful measures of the groups' social capital and development. If such data is collected for a number of groups it may be possible to specify expected values for mature and functional groups and signal how these metrics should change with group development. These metrics could provide monitoring and evaluation milestones.

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Abstract

This paper (Part I) present a case study of work conducted by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) to adapt network mapping techniques to a rural and developing country context. It reports on work in Colombia to develop a prototype network diagnosis tool for use by service providers who work to strengthen small rural groups. Drawing network maps helped group members to: develop a clearer sense of identity and a clearer idea of the benefit of being in a group; clarify and communicate their contributions to their community; identify internal group management issues; and, clarify their strategy towards funding raising and seeking support from outside. We, the researchers, benefited from a better understanding of group functions and motivations. Comparing ratios of internal to external network links allowed us to assess relative levels of bonding, linking and bridging social capital. Subsequent participatory analysis and discussion of these maps built the capacity of group members to strengthen their networks. Research is ongoing to test whether computer-based SNA is simple and practical enough to be used by rural service providers.

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Building farmers' capacities for networking (Part II): Strengthening agricultural supply chains in Bolivia using network analysis

Louise Clark

Introduction to both case studies

Four major trends, namely climate change, economic globalization, HIV/AIDS, and population growth, are exposing rural communities to greater pressures and risks. The pace of change is so rapid that traditional innovation systems are generally unable to cope. As a result, many small farmers face grave threats to their livelihoods.

Innovation can be defined as the application of knowledge of all types to achieve desired social and economic ends (Hall et al. 2001). It is essentially a social process in which people learn about new ideas and adapt and use them through their interactions with others (Allen et al. 1983; Douthwaite 2002). As a result innovations generally arise out of a network of actors and relationships (Conway and Steward 1998). A growing body of literature is showing that network structure, such as which actors are linked to whom, the number of linkages, the roles that different actors play and the degree of clustering, to mention just a few, determines how effectively networks are at fostering innovation (Krebs and Holley 2004; Castells 2004; Cross and Parker 2002). Companies in developed countries are starting to use network mapping techniques to diagnose their social, innovation and communication networks as a first step to identifying measures to improve them (Cross and Parker 2002).

This paper (Part II) presents work to develop a network diagnosis tool for stakeholders involved in agricultural supply chains in Bolivia. It is complemented by a further paper (Part I) by Boru Douthwaite and colleagues in the same issue of this journal which presents a case study of work conducted by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). The prototype methods used in both Parts I and II are based on social network analysis (SNA) methodology. SNA is a rapidly developing methodology that is gaining increasing popularity as an analytical and visualization tool with a wide range of applications across a number of disciplines such as health care, psychology and business organization. The focus of SNA is the nature of the relationships that exist between different actors in order to better understand how an actor's position in a network influences their access to resources such as goods, capital and information.

In both cases, the method development and testing place as part of an action research process in which 'the researcher enters a real-world situation and aims both to improve it and to acquire knowledge' (Checkland and Holwell 1998, p.9). Four hypotheses were tested as part of this research:

1. Drawing network maps will help the actors involved (farmers, their groups and rural service providers) understand and visualize networks of relationships that are important to them;
2. Participatory analysis and discussion of these maps will build the capacity of the actors involved to strengthen their networks;
3. Strengthening networks will benefit the actors within them;
4. It is possible to develop a network analysis method that is simple enough for rural service providers to use with a reasonable amount of training.

Both papers explicitly build on the idea that 'rather than helping to build sustainable institutions and other capacities, technical cooperation tends to displace or inhibit local alternatives' (Fukuda-Parr et al 2002 p.5). Fukuda-Parr et al (2002) go on to say that 'the challenge should be to fully understand the local situation and move forward from there, step by step.' The papers contend that network analysis can help understand the local situation.

Neither case is complete. Both can be seen as an after-action review (Collison and Parcell 2001) carried out on the research to date. Both describe the step-by-step development of the method, what worked well, the capacity building required and what requires further consideration and research. This paper concludes with a final section to identify lessons learnt and makes recommendations for future research. The work is structured as two case study papers because the work was carried out independently and the authors wanted the authorships to reflect this.

Introduction to the Bolivia case

The work presented in this case study was conducted during the Redcampo projec[i], an action-research initiative to develop methodologies to promote the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve information flows for smallholder farmers in supply chains. Fieldwork was carried out in three project sites within the coffee, peach and chilli supply chains in Bolivia during 2005, in coordination with three Foundations for Technical Assistance (FTDAs – Spanish acronym) associated with the Ministry of Agriculture to identify existing information flows between supply chain actors. Despite having no previous experience of social network analysis, the research team recognised the potential of the tool to map the relationships in supply chains. Hence the research team faced the challenge of first developing the capacity to adapt and apply SNA to the reality of rural communities in order to test whether network maps could help identify the key actors, information flows, bottlenecks and demands in the supply chain and help to improve the communication of agricultural information between the different actors. Developing the skills to apply SNA to agricultural supply chains was a first step towards addressing our fourth hypothesis; that it is possible to develop a network analysis prototype method that is simple enough for rural service providers to use with a reasonable amount of training.

The importance of identifying existing information flows in rural communities responds to recent literature on both the digital divide (Girard 2003, Hongladoron 2004, Moetsabi 1998) as well as development theory (e.g., Fukuda-Parr et al. 2002) which state the importance of building on existing systems and networks, and not creating new ones.

Central to this idea is the concept of information intermediaries who receive information and redistribute it in locally contextualised formats, giving it validity and an appearance of trustworthiness (Heeks 1999, Legesse 2002). In social network terminology these actors are referred to as brokers who have the ability to control the flow of information and resources to other less well connected actors (Burt 1992, Haythornthwaite 1996, Wellman 1997).

Understanding supply chains as social networks has emerged within a Northern industrial context to help explain the increasingly complex social and economic relationships, resulting from increasing use of information technologies (Castells 2004, Lazzarini et al 2001, Storer et al, 2003). There is at present very little written about what this same focus can tell us about how rural communities gain access to information and markets and whether or not they too can benefit from the use of ICTs to improve their livelihoods.

The work presented in this section is a first attempt to address some of these questions and develop a simple tool that can help supply chain actors, and producer groups in particular, better understand the networks in which they interact.

Methodology

In contrast to the application of SNA in Colombia discussed in Part I, the work conducted in Bolivia was in three regions where CIAT had no previous experience or contacts. The sites were selected in collaboration with three FDTAs to represent three different agro-ecological zones (Chaco, Tropics and Valleys) in order to gain a diverse range of experience so that the tools developed would be neither location nor supply chain specific. The FDTAs put us in contact with their counterpart organisations, who were conducting technical assistance on their behalf. Nevertheless the project team found itself in an entirely unfamiliar environment and the first challenge was to identify potential information intermediaries.

Although the research in Bolivia also used Cross and Parker's (2004) work as a starting point from which to design the study, it faced very different challenges to the team in Colombia and needed to quickly develop a practical tool which would help us understand the social relationships between different supply chain actors. To this end, the researchers were forced to move away from the traditional organisational applications of SNA as they needed to include a variety of geographically disperse actors in the investigation. One of the key challenges of this work was therefore identifying ways to decentralise the approach and understand its potential and limitations when applied to non-specific social groups with no clear boundaries.

Despite a growing body of literature discussing a wide range of applications of SNA, there is still very little literature that gives practical guidance in the design of a social network study (Cross and Parker 2004). After examining SNA studies used by other researchers (pers. comm. with J.C. Gallego 2003), a survey was developed and piloted to see if the questions were relevant and to develop the skills required to use social network software. The lack of literature on how to develop surveys, process data and use software was an extremely limiting factor in these early stages.

The social network element formed only part of the RedCampo research which also used more traditional survey questions to develop a profile of the different actors in each of the supply chains in order to understand their role, influence, types of information managed and specific information demands. Survey teams were contracted to interview producers while other supply chain stakeholders were contacted and interviewed directly by the project team[ii] using snowball techniques in which any actor mentioned became a potential candidate for interview.

The social network data proved the easiest to process. Basic network maps emerged almost immediately, in contrast to the more traditional questionnaire data that took weeks to analyse. The network maps focussed on three key variables: the actors, the information content exchanged between them and the communication media used. Other elements included in the network questionnaire such as frequency, reliability and timeliness of information, while responding to the researchers need to be meticulous, in fact added little to the analysis. The survey teams provided feedback that by asking too many questions the quality of the responses was compromised, as the questions became quite repetitive. This highlighted a very important issue in SNA survey design: keep it simple.

The resulting network maps make no claim to be exhaustive studies of these supply chains as limited human and financial resources restricted the number of interviews. Nevertheless this is the reality of working in rural development and suggests that it is possible for actors with limited resources to develop the capacities to use this tool. The network maps proved to be sufficiently complete to identify key stakeholders and generate useful discussions when presented to supply chain actors, suggesting its future potential as a diagnostic tool.

Results

The data was analysed and mapped using Ucinet© and Netdraw© and a report was written for each case study. While the network maps instantly gave an overview of the situation in each supply chain, the metrics generated could not be considered accurate and centrality and betweeness measures proved to be of little use as small sample size meant network maps were incomplete. The more basic metrics of in-degree (number of times named as an information source) and out-degree (number of information sources named) were much more relevant to our objectives. This provided another important lesson in developing a tool for rural development practitioners, suggesting that the cost-benefit ratio of paying for the licensed software Ucinet© would be a limiting factor in promoting this methodology and in order to disseminate the tool amongst local organisations with limited resources the decision was made to focus our attention on the visual rather than metric results generated from field work.

The overall survey results were presented to project partners and local stakeholders in a series of workshops to validate our preliminary analysis of the supply chains and confirm the utility of the tool. The network maps generated considerable interest, serving as a starting point to generate discussion of the social structure surrounding each of the supply chains.

Chilli

In the chilli supply chain, in Monteagudo, Chuquisaca (Figure 1), Proinpa, the technical service provider is clearly the most influential actor, although this was also our point of contact with the producers interviewed. Analysis in Netdraw showed that two Farmer's Associations (Apromají Sauces and Apromají Pedernal) do not act as information intermediaries as they have not been named as an information source by any of their members, suggesting that organisational strengthening is required before increasing information flows to these Associations would have an impact on the producers. In general the producers lack strong links with traders and input suppliers, suggesting that the whole network structure is over dependent on Proinpa.

Experimenting with the data we can see the effect of removing Proinpa, leaving a lot of isolates who have no other connections in the network (Figure 2). Of these isolates 11 are producers who have named Proinpa as their sole source of agricultural information while the other 3 isolates are sources of information for Proinpa which have no other channel through which to flow into the network. A number of producers receive information from FONDECO which is a financial institution. The map also shows that removing Proinpa does not affect the relationships towards the right of the network map. This suggests that mechanisms to create links between producers and this cluster of actors would be one way to strengthen the network, improving information flows and consequently market access for chilli producers in this region.

Feedback

FDTA Chaco, the project partner, concluded from the map that the supply chain was over dependent on their Proinpa for information, raising concern as the project financing its activities was about to end. Their next question was what to do about it. They recognised the need to decrease dependence upon Proinpa, whilst involving them in a strategy to strengthen the network and assure that the knowledge accumulated by the project is not lost.

A meeting was held to present the results to local stakeholders which was only attended by 5 people, 3 of which were Proinpa staff. Although the meeting confirmed the results of the network map, it also raised the issue of how to strengthen local networks in the context of weak institutionality, with little interest in short term projects.

Coffee

The coffee supply chain around Caranavi, La Paz was by far the most complex supply chain studied due to the large number of different organisations, NGOs and traders involved marking the difference between supply chains with a regional-national, compared to international focus. The network map produced by this data was incredibly complex, teaching us that there are limits to the versatility of this tool in terms of visualising very dense networks. However when individual producers were removed from the map the inter-institutional relationships became clearer as can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 1: Network of actors in the chilli supply chain

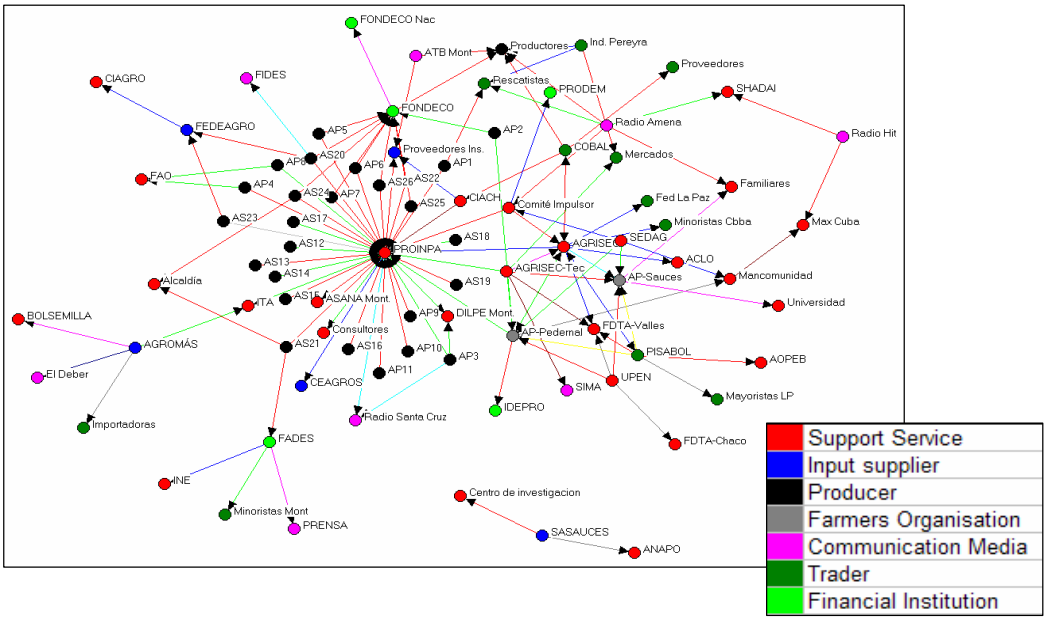


Figure 2: Chilli supply chain without most central actor (Proinpa)

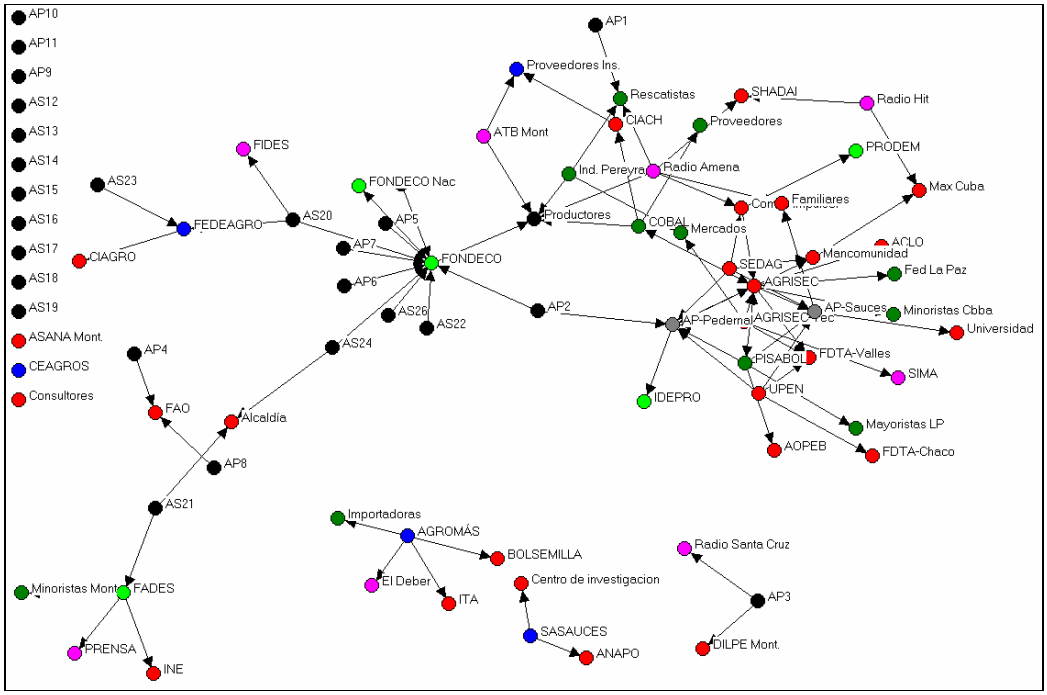
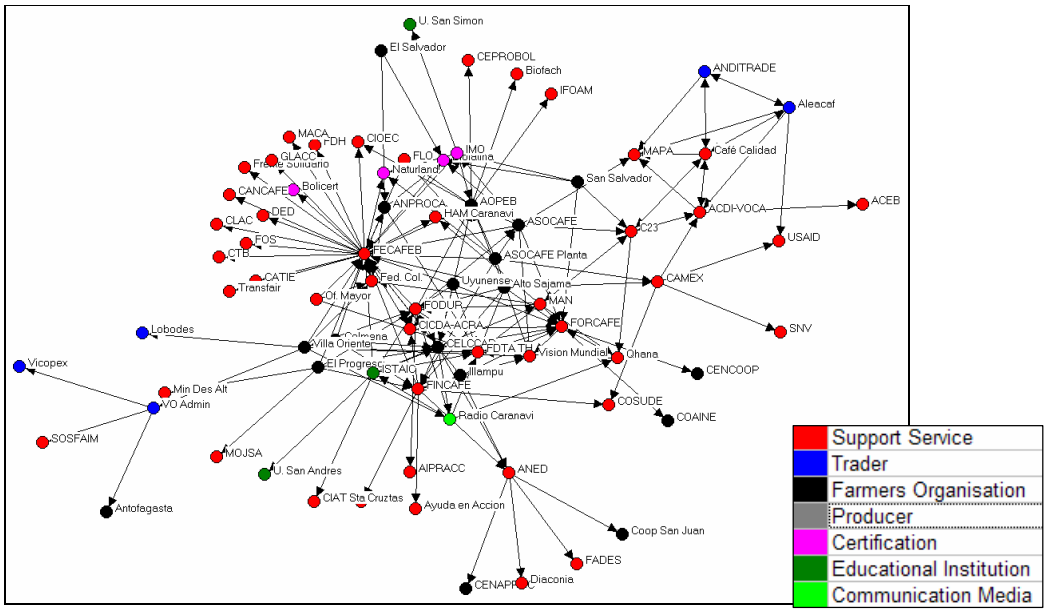


Figure 3: Network of actors in the coffee supply chain without producers



While the central part of the network map is still a tangled mess (the sign of a healthy network) it is also easier to see that FECAFEB (Federation of Bolivian Coffee Exporters) acts as an infomediary for the coffee sector which has both the greatest in-degree (number of times named as an information source) and out-degree (number of information sources) in the network. On the right hand side of the network map are a cluster of actors who represent the different projects funded by an Alternative Development programme which aims to encourage coffee production as part of its coca eradication strategy. The fact that it is somewhat apart from the rest of the network suggests that it has yet integrated well into the wider coffee network.

Feedback

The project partner, FDTA Trópico-Húmedo was extremely enthusiastic about the potential of the tool such that the presentation and discussion scheduled for the morning carried on into the evening. Staff immediately started discussing how they could use the information portrayed in the maps to better understand the problems faced by a new client ANPROCA (National Association of Coffee Producers) who prior to the emergence of FECAFEB had acted as the national representative of the sector and was seeking to strengthen its position again. Analysing the network maps, they said, gave them a clearer idea of the challenge facing ANPROCA and helped them see the importance of overcoming the rivalry between the two organisations and identifying ways to work together for the benefit of the producers.

FDTA Trópico-Húmedo was also considering the possibility of accepting financial assistance to work with the Alternative Development projects. It emerged that they were hesitant about this union as they felt that such an alliance could compromise their credibility with the producers. They said they found the maps a good way to be able to voice these concerns and created a framework from which they could easily analyse the

pros and cons of such a move. The FDTA Trópico-Húmedo staff were interested to develop capacities to use the tool for themselves, as they saw their work being primarily about creating relationships between different types of supply chain actors.

Subsequently the network maps were presented to a number of local stakeholders in Caranavi, where even the fact that we managed to get so many stakeholders to sit down together was seen as an achievement in itself. Quite surprisingly Rodrigo Burgoa, manager of Anditrade, a coffee processing plant with strong links to the Alternative Development programme immediately expressed his interest in the network map stating:

> *I have been working here for 10 years and I could not have explained the problems facing the coffee sector as well as you just have with these maps.*

In a subsequent conversation Rodrigo recounted how after seeing the network map he was concerned about the isolation of the Alternative Development Programme and circulated the network map amongst these projects to make them aware of their segregation. He also said that the map had led to a change in strategy as it gave him a clearer idea of the nature of the other actors in the supply chain and particularly the influence of FECAFEB. Where as previously the coffee processing plant had gone to the farmers in search of coffee, a strategy which was making the plant unpopular with coffee cooperatives, he recognised it was better to wait for farmers to come to the plant to sell their excess coffee, commenting

> *To try and break the existing organisational structure is a waste of time, there is enough coffee for everyone, we don't want a monopoly. We need to find the balance between the farmers' organisations and the private sector.*

Peaches

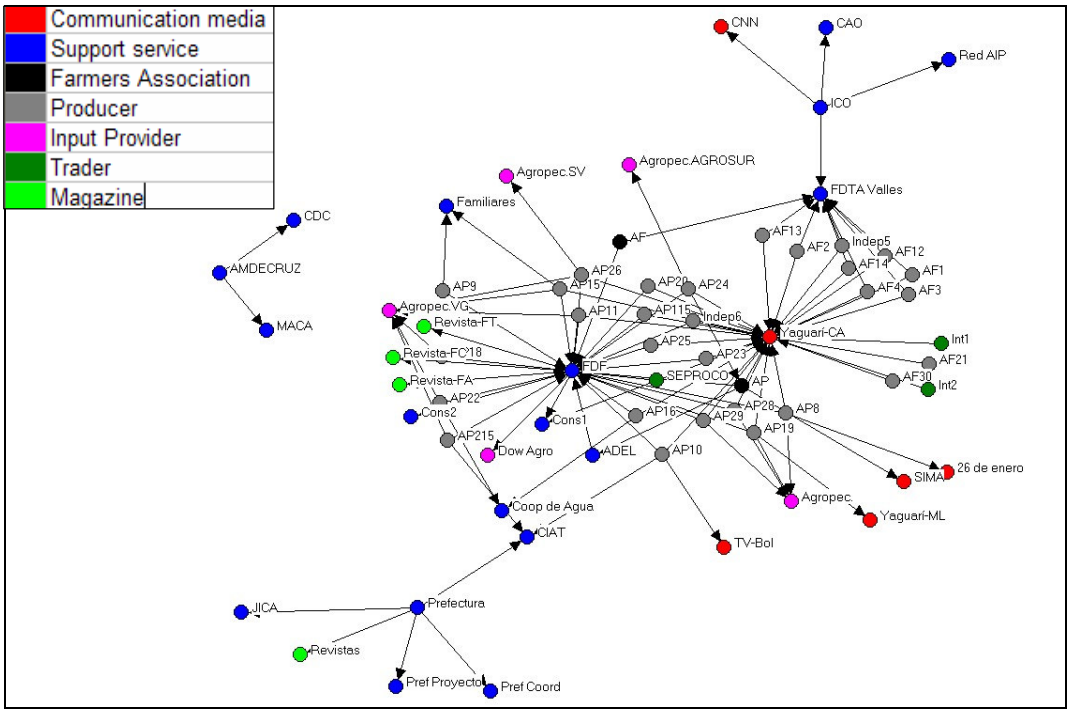
The peach supply chain mapped in Vallegrande, Santa Cruz was an interesting case as two principal sources of information were identified: FDF, the technical assistance provider; and, a radio programme "Correo del Agricultor" (Farmers Post and shown as Yaguari-CA in the network maps) which broadcast localised price information (Figure 7).

Experimenting with NetDraw it was possible for us to manipulate the network maps, to show information flows related to different types of content. By removing price information (Figure 8) we see that the influence of Correo del Agricultor is largely related to this subject, and is not a source of more technical information, although the popularity of its price broadcasts suggests that this would be a good medium to disseminate information and be sure it reached the farmers.

Feedback

Feedback was less positive than with the other two supply chains. The project partner – the FDTA Valles – felt that the network mapping was a distraction from other project objectives, namely designing a training programme to help farmer's better understand radio broadcasts of price information. They were not concerned that the local broadcast of Correo del Agricultor was much more popular than the FDTA Valles own price programme SIMA (Agricultural Market Information Service) as it subscribes to their own price bulletin.

Figure 7: Network of actors in the peach supply chain



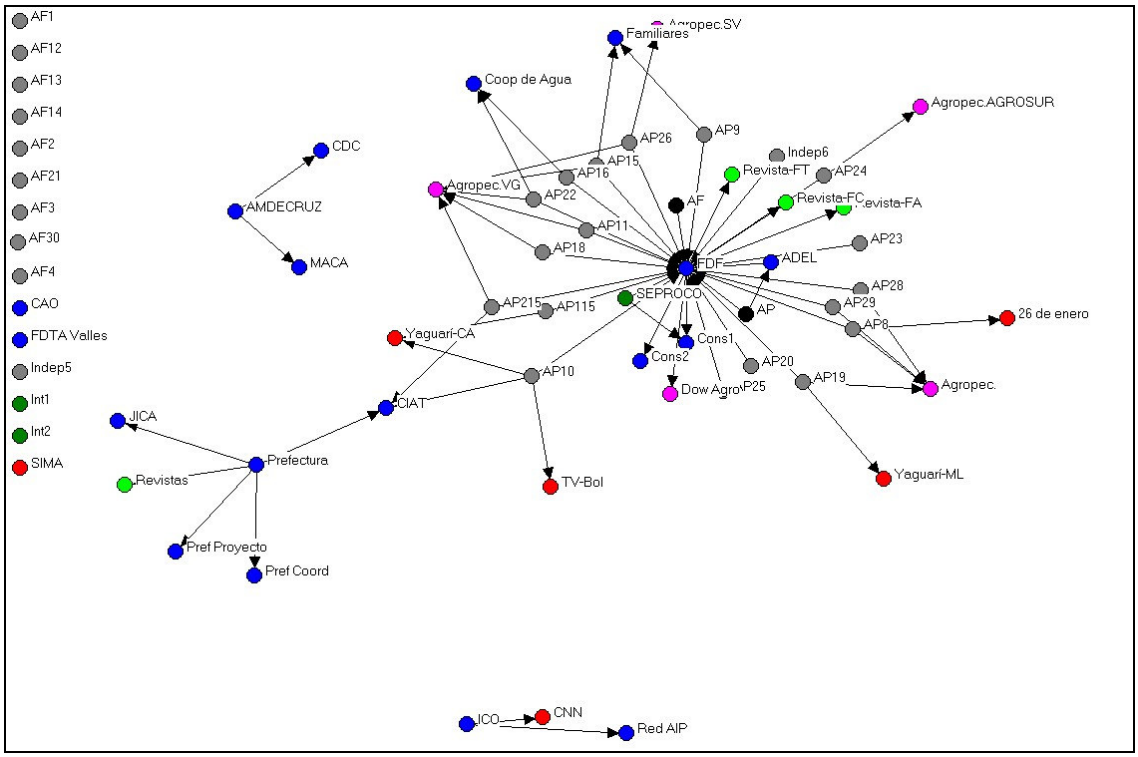
When the network maps were presented to local stakeholders at the field site, representatives of the '*Correo del Agricultor*' and local authorities did not attend. Although strategies to strengthen relationships between different local actors were discussed, this never developed beyond this initial meeting. However, the network mapping and subsequent discussion made the project team aware of a closely bonded core of actors and weak links between many local institutions which was valuable preparation for subsequent project activities.

Discussion

What was useful for the supply chain stakeholders?

The research has proved the first two hypotheses: that drawing network maps helps supply chain stakeholders visualize networks of relationships that are important to them; and, group analysis and discussion of these maps helps stakeholders identify measures to strengthen their networks. Strengthening of supply chains (hypothesis 3) will only occur when there is real motivation and commitment to change from the supply chain actors themselves. Our experience to date shows that sometimes this motivation is missing. Hence, an important research question is the extent to which network mapping and analysis itself can motivate local actors to recognise the importance of network building for themselves.

Figure 8: Peach network map without price information



There was enough interest amongst the project partners in the prototype SNA methodology to develop a simple manual so that the capacities developed from this experience could be more widely shared. One of the first obstacles to this was finding a way to make the software more accessible, in terms of both ease of use and cost, having recognised that the license required to use Ucinet would limit its adoption by institutions with limited resources. A 'Manual for network mapping as a diagnostic tool' (Clark 2006) was written to give step by step guidance for survey design, data collection, creating a database in Excel and formatting the data for input directly into Netdraw, a free visualisation software. This is now being freely distributed.[iii] Follow up of use of the manual will help test the fourth hypothesis that it is possible to simplify this tool and make it accessible to rural institutions.

What was useful for the research team?

Unlike the Colombian experience, the team had no previous experience in any of the project sites and no idea of the complex social relationships existing between stakeholders in each of the supply chains. Not only did the capacity to map these networks help us to quickly identify who the key players were, it also served as a valuable tool to elicit information concerning the nature of their relationships. The project team was comprised of a mix of national and international researchers and the maps gave us credibility when discussing local problems and the need for the supply chain actors to develop strategic alliances that we would not have had otherwise.

As a first attempt to develop capacities to analyse decentralised networks, which was very much a learning-by-doing exercise, the study highlighted some key areas for consideration

in the future. The results and the reaction to them by project partners and local stakeholders also suggest that further research into these areas will yield even more interesting results. While there may be more questions than answers in these early stages, formulating the questions is in itself considerable progress and allow us to be more focussed in future studies to further develop the capacity to use social network analysis as a diagnostic tool in rural development and address the issues discussed below.

What still needs more work?

Sampling

One of the key methodological issues in any social network study is how to define the boundaries of social relationships, a question that is extremely pertinent in discussing supply chains in which key actors are often heterogeneous and geographically dispersed.

The studies presented here relied largely on a reputational approach to identify key actors in the supply chain (Scott 2000), based on recommendations from project partners. Once interviewed, snowballing techniques were used, that is, named actors became potential interviewees, which made us aware of the importance of using a number of different starting points, ideally from different stages in the supply chain. There is still the need to find the correct balance with the positional approach (Scott 2000) and establish a cut-off point to delimit the study. Information sources which cannot be interviewed are still valid and should be included in the maps to demonstrate their influence on the supply chain.

Representation of the supply chain

It is important to interview and map actors from every stage in the chain. RedCampo had great difficulty locating traders and middleman who, even when identified, were extremely reluctant to give interviews. While these actors were rarely named as information sources, the study had hoped for a much more representative sample of this group as mapping the information flows between producers, middlemen and traders has the potential to yield major insights into how information flows through supply chains.

The studies used small samples, particularly of producers and traders, thus calling into question how representative the maps are of the respective supply chains. In this sense, our focus on specific project sites rather than on supply chains in general proved advantageous as even with a small sample size we were able to identify the key players. This finding has led to the hypothesis that SNA has great potential as a diagnostic tool with which to do a rapid appraisal of information flows in order to gain a general, rather than comprehensive, picture of the relationships within supply chains as an element which can help identify potential partnerships (and pitfalls) for development interventions. Further developing mechanisms to analyse feedback from the actors identified will form an important part of future research.

Individuals & institutions

A further methodological point is how to deal with social network data that involves both individuals and institutions. In future studies it may be an idea to differentiate between these two groups by using different shaped nodes in the network map. Nevertheless, the information flows between producers and their organisations are incredibly complex and to really understand communication within producer organisations merits an entire social network study. It is also important to think about the role of vague references, the most

common of which are family, neighbours and technicians. While it may be interesting to look at the influence of these informal sources they can also distort the network and how to deal with this data should be carefully considered when collecting and analysing this data.

Conclusions

The capacity to use SNA to map supply chain information flows, while still in preliminary stages, has already produced some promising results, most notably the potential to use this tool as a diagnostic aid. Further work is under way to validate the method and prove hypothesis four to increase our understanding of how different types of actors can develop their own capacities and adapt it to their own specific needs, their opinions of the value of visualisation maps and most importantly the perceived accuracy of the network relationships according to the key actors identified.

Another element for further research is how the network maps can be used to stimulate participation in project activities. There are still many unanswered questions as to whether the network maps can contribute to a common feeling of identity amongst supply chain actors and facilitate the creation of something akin to communities of practise (Wenger, 1998) in which different actors identify and work towards common goals. Our experience suggests that such changes form part of longer-term objectives, requiring actors to recognise for themselves the importance and potential benefits of communication within the supply chain. For such processes to become an integral part of supply chain relationships requires the internalisation of certain values by the actors involved and while project interventions can prepare the soil and plant the seed, much patience and nurturing is required before this labour will bear fruit.

The ability to map the relationships that link actors together in networks is particularly useful given the increasing complexity of institutional landscapes in which community and producer organisations interact with a constantly changing panorama of governmental, non-governmental and private sector actors, which places serious limitations on the continuity and consolidation of successful experiences.

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Abstract
This case study presents results from field research conducted in Bolivia to demonstrate the potential of Social Network Analysis (SNA) to characterise the network structures of supply chains by identifying key stakeholders and the information flows between them. Network maps from the chilli, coffee and peach supply chains are discussed to demonstrate the versatility of the tool in creating a visual representation of relationships and information flows in supply chains. The case study focuses on the visual impact of network maps as perceived by local stakeholders. It discusses how network mapping can help actors understand their local networks and develop their own skills to both analyse and strengthen these networks in order to support improved planning and implementation of local development initiatives. The methodological process and problems encountered while developing the capacity to apply SNA to rural communities are discussed. This work is part of ongoing action-research to highlight the lessons learned and share the steps taken to adapt and apply this methodology to make social network analysis more widely accessible to rural development practitioners.

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[i] The RedCampo project also known as FIT3, was part of the DFID funded Facilitating Innovative Technologies (FIT) Programme to carry out action research into technology transfer in Bolivia.
[ii] The author would like to acknowledge the contribution of the RedCampo project team Martha Otero, Dora Arévalo, Mirtha Ramirez and Luz Maria Clavijo from the Rural Innovation Institute at CIAT in collecting the data presented in this article and also thank our counterparts José Luis Escobar of FDTA Trópico-Húmedo and Shirley Rojas of FDTA Valles for their assistance with field work.
[iii] The manual is currently only available in Spanish. To request a copy please contact the author.

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Uniting through networks: The art of fostering ICT for development (ICT4D) networks

Joitske Hulsebosch, Bénédicte Marcilly and Loeki Schaeffers

> *In my project I had a problem with connectivity which I raised in one of the network meetings. Someone suggested doing video-recording of best practices. If you have a server and digital videos, you have an interface for the media. It was a tremendous idea to put the videos on a local server.We tried it on a pilot basis and it worked perfectly. We are now trying to upscale this idea.*
> (Network participant in Ghana)

Introduction: capacity building for networks

Within the current focus of development agencies on capacity building, one of the subsets of activities is network development. The expectation is that by engaging in equitable, dynamic, collaborative relationships, independent entities will achieve much more than if they would work alone (Smutylo 2005). Networks create a number of benefits for their members such as access to information and know-how, understanding of needs and political agenda, strengthening of capabilities, pooling of resources, enlarging personal networks, partnerships, testing ground for new ideas, work division, benchmarking, etc. (GTZ 2006).

The interest in the process of networking has been growing during recent years. Creech & Willard (2001) mention four fundamental drivers behind this current interest:

- The emergence of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in 1980s and 1990s has made (global) networking much easier. Global information exchange and learning with people from different parts of the world has now become possible for large parts of the world.
- A ‘sense of urgency’: the growing complexity and inter-relation of major social, economic and environmental problems and the failure of some of the narrow approaches to solve issues such as HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation and poverty alleviation makes multi-stakeholder and widespread learning unavoidable and highly needed.
- A ‘sense of frustration’ among public and academic actors because of the marginalisation of many research endeavours and the lack of impact that research has had on public policy.
- An interest of the public sector and civil society organisations in knowledge management, due to private sector experiments and the impact of knowledge management in the private sector

For the purpose of this paper, we would like to adopt the following definition of a network:

'A network is any group of individuals and or organisations who on a voluntary basis exchange information or goods or implement joint activities and which is organised in such a way that individual autonomy remains intact' (Church et al 2002).

Networks have existed for a long time and are important social capital. What is new though is the conscious effort of development agencies to nurture these networks: the capacity building of networks. Capacity building of networks includes the whole range of activities, from funding and advisory services to supporting and extending networks in their roles and functions. In this paper, we will use the words capacity building and capacity development interchangeably.

ICCO/ECDPM (2004) state that almost all civil society networks are characterized by four types of activities:

- The provision of services to members (e.g. information and training);
- Learning together to raise members' level of understanding (e.g. by organizing exchange visits, workshops and/or meetings);
- Advocacy to influence the public debate or policies;
- Management of the unit to facilitate the network process.

Many networks aim to engage in more than one type of activity; some even in all four. Though the latter is not impossible, it is critical to realise that different activities require different kinds of structures, processes and levels of formalisation: form follows function (Creech 2001); any structure will only permit a network to effectively pursue certain activities, while rendering it less effective in other fields. For instance, an information sharing network requires less degree of formalization than a network aspiring to become a legitimate partner in policy processes. Clearly, a broader range of activities demands more complex management structures. At the same time, one should not one-sidedly focus on structure and formal design, since network activities and relationships are more important than the formal structures. The practice of networking, i.e. the voluntary exchange of information between autonomous participants, is the main objective of any network (UNDP/UNSO 2000).

> *Networking is 2 percent about technology and 98 % about management of relationships.*
> (Creech and Willard 2001)

In a recent workshop about 'Networks as a form of capacity' (Zinke 2005) some critical questions were raised about capacity building for networks: what capacities do networks require in order to function effectively? How do external actors influence networks? There is a sense amongst development practitioners that intervention repertoires have drawn mostly from human resource and organisational development literature and may be inadequate for understanding of and making informed choices about intervention strategies for network development (Bolger and Taschereau 2005). The authors found a considerable amount of descriptive literature as well as guides or guidelines, but fewer reflective and analytical case studies.

This paper will attempt to contribute towards developing network capacity development by sharing and reflecting upon IICD's five years of practical experiences. Even though

Picture 1 TIC Bolivia present itself to peer networks in other countries (2003)

generalizations about networking experiences can sometimes be cumbersome because 'each network evolves under specific conditions' (UNDP/UNSO, 2000), we would like to share some observations on the dynamics of nine 'unique' networks, and IICD's evolving ideas on network capacity building. IICD's networks are unique in the sense that they all focus on the domain of ICT4D, which is a rapidly evolving domain. As a result, there is a great need for knowledge sharing in order to stay up to date of recent developments. Part of the domain knowledge is explicit knowledge, and actors within the ICT4D domain may be relatively more technology-savvy than actors in other development domains. These specificities should be kept in mind while comparing these networks to similar networks active in other fields.

IICD's approach to capacity building for networks

Rationale

The International Institute for Communication and Development - IICD (www.iicd.org) - assists organisations to realise locally owned sustainable development by harnessing the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs). We work in nine countries in Africa, Latin-America and the Caribbean to improve development within the fields of education, health, governance, the environment and livelihood opportunities (especially agriculture) through the use of ICTs.

Box 1. Building blocks of national ICT4D networks

IICD and the network representatives have developed a set of knowledge sharing and communication tools, known as 'building blocks'. These are combined and implemented by each network in various ways to suit local needs and situations. Some building blocks are:

- **Face-to-face meetings -** workshops, seminars, meetings and forums;
- **Content development** - documenting local lessons on the uses of ICTs in development for electronic and hard copy publications;
- **ICT4D website** - locally developed websites highlighting news, research, events, ICT stories and other information;
- **ICT4D newsletter** - a local newsletter – available in print, via e-mail and/or web – depending on local needs;
- **E-discussions** - electronic discussions to share experiences and 'meet' other likeminded people in a cost-effective way;
- **Media, awareness raising and lobbying** - reaching out from the networks to inform and influence policy makers by repackaging and presentation of lessons and content into easy-to-read formats that appeal to non-specialists;
- **Research** - one way to answer questions on the impact and usefulness of ICTs for development is to do practical research around local projects;
- **Cross-country activities -** international exchange workshops, 'peer assist' trajectories and skills development programmes.

When our number of projects began to expand, partners indicated that finding information on the status and impact of local ICT-enabled initiatives was difficult. Without opportunities to learn from other experiences, informed decision-making was problematic. The wheel was being invented over and over again and scarce resources – be it in terms of human, financial or knowledge – were being wasted. Partner organisations identified an urgent need to set up effective platforms where local ICT for development (ICT4D) plans, progress, results and experiences could be discussed and assessed. IICD was interested in facilitating horizontal communication between its partners in a country, to establish a learning channel that would empower projects on the ground to find their own answers to problems, without relying too much on IICD for responses to their question.

> *In Jamaica, many 'ICT4D' buses are driving - but no one knows how many, who's driving those buses, in which directions they are going and whether there are alternative routes - or shortcuts – to be taken.*
>
> Network participant in Jamaica

To this effect, IICD facilitated the development of national ICT4D networks. In 2001, IICD organised a workshop for participants from all of its partner countries. During the workshop, two overall objectives for the networks were formulated:

- To share country-specific information, knowledge, methodologies and lessons learned on ICT-enabled development;
- To raise awareness on ICT4D-related issues and influence policy and development processes, by communicating relevant content to local public, private and civil society policy makers and their advisors.

Furthermore a range of knowledge sharing instruments or tools known as 'building blocks' (see box 1) were identified, based on the underlying idea that each country would select, adapt, mould and combine these according to local needs and situations.

Nine national ICT4D networks

Since 2001, IICD has supported nine ICT4D networks (see Box 2). Some, such as those in Tanzania and Uganda, started as early as 2001, others, such as the network in Ecuador, more recently. Although IICD was wary of local groups formalising their networks too quickly, all networks are now officially registered organisations, a legal prerequisite in order to be able to receive funds. Legal entities vary from NGO to Company Ltd under guarantee. Most have developed a formal governance structure and constitution, which includes a steering or coordinating committee (board) comprising members. The involvement of these governing bodies in steering the network varies. In Jamaica, for instance, the board assumes a strategic function, whereas in Tanzania the steering committee decides on both direction and the detailed activities. The governing bodies are generally elected, though the extent of involving members in such elections varies. In several countries, experiments are done with 'working groups', 'track leaders' and/or 'think-tanks' to involve members more actively in planning and execution of activities.

Box 2. ICT4D networks in nine countries
Bolivia: www.ticbolivia.net
Burkina Faso: www.burkina-ntic.org
Ecuador: www.infodesarrollo.ec
Ghana: www.ginks.org
Jamaica: www.ict4djamaica.org
Mali: www.mali-ntic.com
Tanzania: www.swopnet.or.tz
Uganda: www.i-network.or.ug
Zambia: www.ebrain.org.zm

Box 3 The case of the Ecuadorian ICT4D network - Infodesarrollo.ec
by María Belén Albornoz, Chair of the network

Infodesarrollo.ec started in 2003 in an informal way by bringing together a few organisations working on ICTs as a tool for development. Key in the structure is the secretariat, hosted by one of the member organisations, who has a coordinating role to develop the annual activity plan, and to implement the plan engaging as many members as possible. This stage focuses on exchange of experiences, whereas the dissemination of information in the use of ICTs for development is the main role of the network.

The network started off with an 'envisioning' workshop for interested stakeholders, followed one year later by a member workshop to further develop mission, vision and objectives for the network. The governance structure was also put in place, with a board to work with the secretariat and a president to act as the spokesperson and representative of the network. Membership was formalized in an inter-organizational agreement and criteria for new members were elaborated. For the first time, participation in policy processes was considered as a role for the network and since then, the network has added research, training, sensitisation and organisation of forums to its range of activities. Through these changes, we experienced that more activities ask for more organisation.

This has led the network into a new phase: the development of a sustainability strategy, motivated by its increased participation in ICT4D at national levels, and as a result, increased added value and visibility. The network has been legally registered and processes and mechanisms are being put in place to consolidate the engagement of its members. The network has continuously evolved from its inception, increasingly responding to the need to work together towards a joint vision.

It is difficult to envisage where Infodesarrollo.ec will be in two or three years time: we are still discovering what capacities we have, and what the expectations of our members are, whilst searching for the most adequate network 'model'. Through pilot activities we expect to develop a set of core activities and ultimately, a clear identity of the kind of network we aspire to be.

All nine networks have established a secretarial office, and have hired staff including a (full- or part-time) remunerated coordinator in charge of the network's day-to-day activities. Some networks have employed an assistant, others a part-time content developer, administrator and/or technical specialist. In Ecuador and Jamaica, the secretariat's office space is hosted by a member for free, in other cases the network has needed to rent office space, adding to fixed overhead costs.
The networks are characterized by large differences in terms of membership. In Ecuador and Bolivia we see organisational membership, Ecuador counts seventeen and Bolivia eighteen members, both with growing interests by other actors to come on board. In the other countries membership is predominantly based on individual participation. However, participant numbers do not necessarily reflect the varying degrees of activity. ToguNet in Mali has a membership of roughly 180 (consisting of 80% individual members and 20% organisations); in Ghana these figures are 230 (89% individuals, 11% organisations). Discussion groups consist of up to 400 subscribers. The networks all have their stronghold in the capital and struggle with reaching out to the various regions within the country. Tanzania is the only country where an independent charter has been established in one of the regions, whereas Bolivia has two regional knowledge-sharing groups linked to the national network. Some networks have developed thematic subgroups, such as in Mali, Ghana, and Jamaica, or thematic nodes such as in Uganda.

Picture 2: Togunet presentation during a workshop in 2003

Several networks have secured co-financing besides IICD, ranging from local contributions in Ecuador and Jamaica (FLACSO, CETID, HEART/NTA, MCST, Cable & Wireless) to international development funding (IDRC, UNESCO, Civil Society Foundation, APC, etc). Ghana, Ecuador and Jamaica have so far been most effective in securing co-funding, with IICD supporting 35%, 60% and 40% respectively of the total network budget projected for 2006. Generally, it has been a challenge to forge public-private partnerships, though in-kind support for certain events and activities has been forthcoming from the private sector. An interesting initiative in Jamaica, the Jamaica Collaborative for Universal Technology Education (J-CUTE), has recently been able to draw in public, private and not-for-profit partners within a longer-term collaborative framework.

Even though the concrete outputs of most networks are impressive (in terms of newsletters, forums, workshops, etc.), it is difficult to measure their intangible effects in terms of changed practices of members, improved quality of services of member organisations and enabling policy environments. Network Progress Reviews (NPRs) have so far been conducted in Bolivia (2004) and in Ghana (2005).

The Bolivia NPR highlighted the need for a methodology to systematize ICT4D experiences. In terms of products and services, members prioritized the website and e-bulletin and expressed the wish to have a local 'ICT Stories' competition. Media and public relations were identified as vehicles for increasing the network's overall visibility. In terms of processes, members indicated a strong need to influence public ICT policies; stressed the importance of organising face-to-face meetings amongst members (through focal groups and regional meetings) as well as a need to partner with other ICT4D actors to strengthen political legitimacy. Exploring co-financing opportunities was also advised (IICD 2004).

The NPR in Ghana collected anecdotal evidence to measure the network's results. Analysis of individual stories showed that through network participation, members have picked up new ideas, tools and working methods; they have been exposed to new knowledge areas (e.g. open source), have built new constructive relationships, and have acquired materials to support them in their daily work. As ICT4D is a relatively new and rapidly developing field, all members saw the added value of network activities in channelling information and bringing actors from various disciplines together. The value of the network in influencing the policy environment was, and still is, much less recognised. (IICD 2005).

IICD's capacity building interventions

In supporting national ICT4D networks, IICD fulfils multiple roles through its team of knowledge sharing officers based in The Hague:

- *Process advisory*: improving the network function by offering advice and feedback to the networks on their development. This may take the form of advice on internal governance structure, membership outreach and engagement strategies;

- *Expert advisory*: IICD provides direct advice on ICT4D issues (e.g. on website development or sustainability planning) or, when necessary, draws in the expertise of third parties, such as consultants;

- *Brokering/'info-mediary'*: connecting North-South as well as South-South knowledge and information. Working with nine ICT4D networks, IICD can support cross-fertilisation of experiences by bringing in and feeding back experiences from other ICT4D networks and activities;

- *Mentoring/Coaching:* IICD often coaches either the network coordinators and/or the networks' board members in the development and implementation of their activities;

- *Grant-management:* supporting the write-up of feasible year plans, approval of grant requests, drafting of contracts, monitoring the disbursal, use of funds and overall progress of activities;

- *Facilitating 'peer assist' trajectories:* promoting South-South learning through supporting exchange visits between networks.

Upon explicit request of local partners, IICD has been acting as a network board member, but does not in principle want to partake in internal decision-making functions to strengthen local ownership and avoid confusion of roles.

Network capacity building: learning by doing

Networking with a purpose

IICD and the networks have jointly identified two overall objectives, related to knowledge sharing and to policy participation. In practice however, all networks have started with knowledge sharing activities. For example, in Uganda the network started in 2002, but only in 2005 did it start engaging in policy activities, when it was invited by the National Planning Authority to facilitate a policy process to integrate ICTs into Poverty Eradication Action Plans. Similarly, it took the Bolivia network a few years to become interested, and a legitimate partner, in the National ICT Strategy process. The initial network interests thus clearly focused on exchanging concrete ICT4D experiences. Having developed such a knowledge base, the two networks could then move to become more involved in horizontal coalition building among public, private and NGO partners in support of advocacy efforts. Other networks are still wrestling to shape their role in policy participation and to find a consistent direction for members' advocacy interests.

Picture 3: The network coordinator of Ghanaian GINKS

Finding the right focus will always be a challenge for networks (SKAT Foundation 2004). Having a clear purpose, i.e. knowledge sharing and policy participation around ICT4D issues, has proven to be a strong concept in our case. In some cases, member organisation's mission alignment with the network's mission has been quite crucial for network growth, as they have become the drivers of the network.

Based on these experiences, in future IICD will pay more attention to identifying organisations with aligned

objectives to the network's objectives for coordination roles, paying less attention to policy participation from the immediate start, and focusing on the most urgent felt need in the start-up phase. Sharing of experiences and joint learning seem the most pertinent activities before a network can participate in policy processes at a national level. Some networks may opt to specialize in one or the other role.

Box 4: The three levels of sustainability

1. Institutional sustainability
Institutional sustainability includes the ability to deal effectively with outreach and membership issues. Additionally, it involves exploring what type of 'network model' best supports the overall network objectives and member dynamics. Generally speaking, network structures seem to be evolving and there is no blueprint for the 'best structure' (also see Box 3, the Infodesarollo.ec case)

2. Political sustainability
Political sustainability entails the network's ability to build strategic alliances and leverage those relationships for change, as well it's capacity to effectively represent a broader constituency. If well managed, the legitimacy of a network should be built in a way that ensures an increasing reputation in the field of ICT4D. For instance, the need to forge alliances with strategic partners in the National ICT Policy Process served in fact as the catalyst for the Bolivia network to open up - in order to gain political legitimacy and build its constituency base. Finding a common cause that 'pressures' the need for striking alliances can be instrumental in building both institutional and political legitimacy.

3. Financial sustainability
Financial sustainability deals with how the network mobilizes resources for its activities and overhead costs. We can make a distinction between local resource mobilization (member fees, fees for services, etc.) and grant seeking (from donor agencies and private companies).

(Schaeffers 2006)

Working towards sustainability of a network

Initially, IICD focused strongly on the financial sustainability of networks; however, additional experiences and reflections have led us to broaden this perspective to include institutional and political sustainability (see box 4). Though sustainability of a network may not always be feasible or desirable, and networks may become obsolete if the network's relevance as perceived by its members no longer exists. Nevertheless, IICD hopes the networks will flourish beyond their initial funding period.

With regard to institutional sustainability the key lesson is to regularly check the level of involvement of members against their needs, interests and motivations, in both formal and informal ways: does the network sufficiently reflect members' interests and therefore, do they feel genuinely committed to the network? An important factor for an effective knowledge sharing network is trust, which encourages members to engage in exchanges and conversations. In the early stages, 'networking' greatly depends on the initiative, craftsmanship and endurance of a core group of a few committed members, often including a coordinating member. We observed that trust then develops within this core group, which is in some cases referred to as the ICT4D 'family'.

The challenge many networks currently face is to attract more active members and open up the core group to new ideas and initiatives; to find a balance between internal exchanges and external perspectives. In some countries, such as Ghana, Burkina, Zambia and Bolivia,

it has proven difficult to move away from a core group of members to distributed leadership within a broader and more representative group. To address these and related issues, a monitoring and evaluation questionnaire focusing on the impact of networks, has been developed and is currently being applied in several countries (Ecuador, Bolivia, Uganda, Ghana and Mali). The outcomes are expected to be instrumental in better gauging and responding to the members' needs, in addition to informal feedback loops.

In terms of political sustainability, experience has demonstrated that having a few highly respected practitioners or ICT4D champions/pioneers can make a difference for the network's reputation. Hence it is essential for a network to identify a number of these people and to engage them in the network activities in one way or the other. This could be in the form of a think tank, as the network in Ghana is piloting, rather than the network's 'regular' activities.

Concerning the mobilisation of resources, IICD supports a substantial part of the networks' overhead costs and set of activities, and will then encourage efforts towards financial sustainability. Networks will typically start with annual grants of about 40.000 Euros. Funding will then increase, based on the phase and concrete development of the network, until it attains more autonomy in resource mobilisation. It has generally proven to be difficult to find additional sources of funding in the early phases of the networks, when networks are still 'finding their feet', developing their knowledge base and seeking to create added value. However, over time, with increased performance, visibility and legitimacy, diversification of funding generally becomes more feasible, as demonstrated by the networks in Jamaica, Ecuador and Uganda. Mali network activities would almost completely come to a halt, if IICD funding were to stop. The lesson is to be flexible, help the network explore co-funding options, but not until it is possible to show tangible value. Communicating support intentions clearly from the beginning is also important, as members then know what kind of support, and in what time frame, the network can rely on. The intensity of support has led some networks to believe that IICD will continue to sustain the networks indefinitely, but the future of our support still has to be worked out.

Our experience in Ecuador has shown that mobilising members' contributions from the start can be an effective means to reduce the network's dependency on external donor funds, as well as strengthening local ownership. In Bolivia, where historically IICD's partner organisations have formed the core of the network, it has proven to be much more difficult to secure alternative sources of funding. The Zambia network is one of few where members pay fees, though many others are currently actively exploring options to do so.

From an early stage, IICD tries to focus the network's attention on sustainability issues. Though the networks have to make their own choices, IICD tries to trigger thinking to help make some critical choices more consciously. This involves amongst others intended levels of overhead costs (e.g. employment of staff), possible cost-recovery strategies (membership fee structures, etc.) or the network structure. In future, IICD will be more cautious in supporting overhead costs for a new network without first exploring the possibility of member contributions. The art for the network capacity builder is to fund 'developmentally': with cautious investments in the beginning, encouraging networks to prioritize their needs, maintain a clear focus and spend funds in a balanced manner.

Financial resources should be available to enable networking throughout the cycle, but should never be the driving force to set up a network.

Supporting network development through multiple means

ICCO/ECDPM (2004) observe that it takes up to five years before a network establishes itself and produces concrete work, which is at odds with donor funding which often diminishes when a network matures. The same report addresses the role of donors and some of the unanswered questions, such as:

- Is it possible and/or desirable for a 'donor' to play several roles at the same time, to be sponsor and participant, to be donor and advisor?
- What instruments have been effective in safeguarding networks from becoming too donor-driven? What can donors do themselves?

IICD has faced some complex dilemmas because of the inherent contradictions in the multiple roles it fulfils. It has also experienced, to a certain degree, confusion about its roles in the various networks. Being an independent advisor implies helping the networks to better achieve *their* goals, without having an individual or organisational stake in the outcome. However, at the same time funder interests must be represented (worth the investment) and accounted for. As a result, IICD faces the tension between supporting the autonomous network building process as well as the pressure to provide results to its own donors. Thus, IICD oscillates between steering to achieve results, and facilitating to ensure local ownership and demand-responsiveness. IICD engages in partner agreements: being a partner implies a horizontal relationship. In practice however, this relationship may end up being perceived as more hierarchical. For instance, during the progress review exercise in Ghana, it surfaced that, because coming from the 'donor', IICD's suggestions for public forum topics were as 'instructions' rather than advice. Building a constructive, open and honest advisory relationship is far more complicated when the advisor holds decision-making power over the funds on which the network is dependent. The sooner the network is therefore capable of having a diverse funding base, the healthier for the advisory relationship.

Picture 4: Infodesarrollo.ec (2003)

Such dilemmas continue to challenge us in our work and no easy fixes are available. In terms of network development, the lesson that can be shared from this experience is that roles and interests should be explicitly expressed, if not altogether separated, in order to avoid unnecessary confusion and to make these dilemmas more transparent and open to discussion. Even so, at this point IICD chooses to continue to combine the various roles, as it is not easy to find other funding agencies for this type of networks. IICD values its close advisory relationship, because it feels it is well positioned to play the information brokering role, providing access to a wealth of experiences, southern views and perspectives on ICT4D.

Stimulating knowledge sharing and learning within the local context

Undeniably, observing network development in nine countries in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean provides IICD insights into cultural differences, their effects on fostering

development and the necessity to adapt networking approaches to the local context. Working within a context of impeding factors such as competition for funds, fundamentally different ways of thinking (between private sector and civil society) or engrained cultural practices provides inherent difficulties to knowledge sharing. Building trust and confidence by 'nurturing' networks and encouraging an open knowledge sharing platform is paramount to the success of networking. One of the lessons is that the building of trust to enable 'real' knowledge sharing does cost time, so one should be patient and invest in relationship and trust building.

Clearly, there are cultural differences between countries which affect networking. Some countries have a more 'individualistic' mentality, whereas others have a more 'collectivist' mentality. Individualism focuses on the degree to which a society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships. A high individualism ranking indicates that individuality and individual rights are dominant within the society. (http://www.geert-hofstede.com). Different countries appreciate the contributions of individuals and organisations in networks differently. For example, Jamaica values the creativity and innovation that individuals bring to the networking process, whereas Bolivia emphasizes the need for organisational membership in order to gain political legitimacy, building its constituency and strengthening sustainability. A recommendation is that one should not 'impose' a preference for either modality, but let the network decide where to put the emphasis.

Picture 5: A planning session with members (Ghana, 2005)

Consequently, networking 'models' vary, from networks functioning as 'communities of practice' to those that strive to provide services to members, or take part in policy processes. For instance, the network in Ghana felt it had been operating rather as a community of practice, driven by individuals passionate about ICT4D. The Jamaican network is considering an overall members' charter that brings together individuals as part of loosely formed thematic communities (e.g. sector-specific groups), with organisational membership that provides the political legitimacy and constituency needed for participation in policy processes. It is believed that individuals will bring creativity and innovation to keep the network going, whereas organisations bring in critical resources for the financial and political sustainability of the network.

An advice taken from Huysman and De Wit (2002) is that rewarding knowledge sharing financially should be done with prudence: when knowledge sharing becomes routine there is no question of extra effort taking place and a reward in itself can actually prove to be counterproductive. Instead of financial incentives, the authors argue that a 'tacit reward system' could be more effective on the long run. In fact, in some IICD-supported networks, such as in Mali, networking champions refused the monetary reward that was offered them by the network to facilitate thematic groups. Their argument to take on a leadership role without monetary compensation was that taking on the responsibility enabled them to get more visibility in their own fields and, for some of them, could even result in paid consultations from other development partners. A recommendation here is to stimulate knowledge sharing 'attitudes' at organizational levels, and negotiate time with

organisations so that individuals learn to perceive knowledge sharing as part of their daily work, rather than an extra task performed outside of regular working hours, as is often the case with individual members. Recently, IICD has actively started promoting this concept internally by incorporating 'knowledge sharing' in its own internal appraisal reviews; the idea is also being promoted in some of the networks.

Working with local capacities

In order to fulfil their two major networking objectives, members need to develop networking skills, policy participation skills, journalistic and systematisation (documenting) skills, effective communication skills, organizational skills, negotiation skills and, for the coordinating committees and networking champions, leadership skills. Many of these capacities are – to a greater or lesser degree – already available in the nine country networks that IICD works with. As such, the collaboration is less about transferring skills from a Netherlands based organization to local organizations, than about identifying already existing capacities and strengthening those. Moreover, it is about complementing and sharing of skills between networking members, as well as mutual learning by all stakeholders involved in the networking process.

IICD fosters the use of exchange visits and peer assist mechanisms between networks from countries with similar issues. For example, a peer assist workshop organised between Bolivia and Ecuador enabled both networks to strengthen their policy participation skills and to learn from their respective experiences. This peer-to-peer networking mechanism provides members with capacities and 'troubleshooting tips' to enhance their networks' performance, and allows partners to assist each other with information networking.

Capacity building is a learning process which benefits both the 'builders' and the participants. It is a mutually reinforcing exercise that involves sharing of skills and expertise needed for networking. It entails respect for values and attitudes inherent to respective countries, for people, organisations and networks all functioning in different ways. Capacity builders therefore have to find and assess the local skills and capacities available and then stimulate their uses for the benefit of the networks. Networks add on to already existing resources, structures and individual and organisational commitments. When skills are not available locally, arrangements can be made with external resource persons, while taking into account that one needs to be careful with 'replicating' external solutions.

Another lesson is that people working to develop and support networking should adopt the appropriate attitude. Taking time to 'listen before talking' is the golden rule (though not always easy) that IICD tries to apply constantly. Sometimes processes and outputs do not always move as we expect them to. However, when we take the time to explore the real reasons behind this, we will often find solid reasons for why things have moved differently. It is therefore not only about active listening, but also about asking the right questions. Sometimes this is difficult to gauge from a distance, since face-to-face interaction is not always possible.

It has been observed that networks that build on existing initiatives and experiences are generally more successful. We would however like to make one cautionary note, based on our networking experience in Ecuador, namely that one should first carefully assess the

stability of existing mechanisms and institutions, clarifying any intellectual property issues, before making investments to develop the network further.

Conclusions

IICD's experiences relate to national, multi-stakeholder networks, operating in the fast innovating area of ICT4D. It is important to keep this in mind in terms of the 'replicability' of some of the lessons for other network capacity developers who may work within a different context.

1. Pay attention to involve organisations in the core of the network whose objectives align with the network objectives;
2. Building a strong knowledge sharing network and trust relationships comes before active policy participation as a network;
3. Thinking about sustainability issues is not limited to resource mobilisation, but includes institutional and political sustainability factors;
4. Network sustainability is increased when respected individuals and practitioners are involved;
5. Build a strong core group, then help the core group to recruit new ideas and fresh leadership;
6. From an early stage onwards, be clear on your support as a network capacity builder, and focus the network's attention on sustainability issues. Help the network to think through some critical choices in terms of its identity;
7. Combining multiple roles as advisor, funder and broker is complex (but not impossible);
8. Fostering the required levels of trust for knowledge sharing takes time and is often underestimated;
9. Capacity building does not mean building from scratch, but working with existing realities, which requires the right 'listening' attitude (contradictory to the expert advisor attitude that may be expected from network capacity builders).

After five years of supporting nine networks with advice, grants and brokering connections across countries, we have gradually changed our practices to incorporate these insights, which is helping us achieve better results both within the organization, but also and more importantly, in the networks.

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Abstract
The International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) has five years of experience building the capacity of multi-stakeholder networks in the field of ICT for Development (ICT4D) in nine countries. The networks engage in knowledge sharing, advocacy and awareness raising activities to a different extent in each country.

The authors draw lessons from practice and through reflection on their experiences with the networks. Yet, despite common goals, each network is unique and therefore develops its own dynamics. In this paper, the authors aim to contribute to the practice area of capacity building for networks by sharing IICD's approach, practical experiences and evolving insights on supporting and 'nurturing' the networks.

All in all, IICD chooses to combine different roles, of independent advisor, funder and facilitator in stimulating knowledge sharing and learning, while paying due attention to cultural differences in the different local contexts. Building trust and confidence by nurturing networks and encouraging an open knowledge sharing platform is paramount to the network's success. Listening before talking, taking the required time, asking the 'right questions' are simple but golden rules IICD tries to apply to ensure local ownership and to build on existing initiatives and experiences successfully.

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Organisational challenges facing civil society networks in Malawi

Rick James and Chiku Malunga

Introduction

Civil Society networks[1] have become a major player in global development (Miller 2005, Church 2003). Over the last decade, donors have placed greater emphasis on civil society voice in encouraging pro-poor development through their inputs in policy formulation processes and then holding government to account and implementation (Ashman 2005). Civil Society Organisation (CSO) networks have been the prime organisational form for articulating the voice. This paper discusses the findings of a research project carried out among four CSO networks in Malawi with the aim to:

- Understand the development of CSO networks in Malawi over the last four years;
- Assess their contribution to poverty reduction and economic growth issues;
- Assess their current strengths and challenges in articulating civil society voice;
- Make stakeholders aware of the individual, organisational and environmental factors that promote and constrain networks' impact;
- Disseminate this information to other CSO networks and donors in Malawi and beyond.

The research results provide a snapshot of civil society networks in Malawi today, whilst highlighting the critical organisational challenges in 2006. The project did not aim for nor did it achieve an exhaustive impact assessment of all civil society networks in the country. Interviews focussed on three networks: Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN), Land Task Force (LTF) and Civil Society Coalition on Basic Quality Education (CSCQBE). The findings therefore directly relate to these three networks; although they have resonance with other civil society networks in Malawi and globally.

The main elements of the research methodology included:

1. Literature review to provide an overview of current thinking (see references);
2. Semi-structured interviews with up to 25 stakeholders for Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN), Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education (CSCQBE), Land Task Force (LTF), other CSO networks, donors, and government;
3. Analysis of consultancy work with MEJN and Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET);
4. Analysis and write up;
5. Publication and dissemination.

The paper will briefly discuss the development impact of the CSOs before proceeding to discuss the critical organisational capacity issues facing the networks. It closes by

discussing the key strategic choices facing the networks in their attempts to address the identified challenges.

CSO networks' performance in Malawi

Evaluating the impact of advocacy work is notoriously difficult given the variety of variables that influence a situation at any one time. Direct attribution of change to one particular variable, such as the work of a CSO network, is impossible. What is both possible and paramount is to be able to 'plausibly associate' changes with the activities of the network. This short research never intended to rigorously evaluate the impact of the CSO networks, but the findings do highlight stakeholder perceptions of the major areas of achievement (which could be validated later by an indepth study).

The study showed that CSO networks have undoubtedly made a significant and visible difference in terms of representing civil society, in developing relationships with policy-making structures and even in achieving some results in a short period. An alternative voice and opinion to government now exists and is accepted. The magnitude and sustainability of these contributions to the development process, however, is open to debate.

Some government respondents were at best ambivalent about the value of CSO networks – they question the capacity on both an organisational and individual level, which need to be surmounted before they can begin to be truly effective. Further, relationships of trust between a network and its members are often based more on respect for particular individuals than commitment to the organisation or sector as a whole. Moreover, limited expertise of staff meant that CSO networks are seen as stronger in criticising government than in offering practical alternatives. In the words of one government respondent: "*The role of CSOs in engaging with government is taken seriously, but not the CSOs itself*". All in all, CSO networks are not living up to their ascribed role due to their failure to address major and urgent organisational issues. This is a very current and increasing cause of concern for members, boards and donors to CSO networks. These issues need to be analysed and addressed if CSO network performance is to be maintained and developed.

Organisational challenges facing CSO networks

CSO networks in Malawi are facing a number of pressing organisational issues that demand urgent attention in order for the networks to survive. The literature referenced shows that these challenges are common to all CSO networks, and not unique to Malawi. What is different in Malawi is the severity of the challenges and the urgency of action required.

Identity crisis

The most striking finding of the whole research was that almost every respondent highlighted organisational identity as the biggest current challenge facing CSO networks. As CSO networks established secretariats, registered and secured project funding from donors, they found themselves working increasingly independently from

their members. It has reached the stage where the most important question that network leadership and governance needs to answer is: will we remain as an authentic CSO network or become an advocacy NGO with nominal membership?

This challenge has arisen from the process of institutionalisation that CSO networks have followed, as well as from the exigencies of the Malawian context. As network founders became over-stretched by the demands and opportunities of the network, so secretariats were established and coordinators appointed. Networks had no clear legal status at this stage. Initially, member organisations often hosted secretariats but this caused some confusions and tensions. For example, hosts sometimes felt they were over-contributing to the network, while others believed that hosts were taking advantage of network resources to pay their own organisations bills, such as telephones. In some cases hosts were very reluctant to let go of their secretariat function, though most networks have now moved on to set up an independent office.

In theory, network secretariats coordinate their members to carry out the work, but this has rarely worked out in practice in the Malawian cases examined. The far more frequent scenario is for members to give, or for the secretariat to take increasing responsibility for implementing advocacy activities. Although members do often attend network meetings (particularly those members who are easily contactable by phone or e-mail), they fail to implement their action plan commitments once they are back in maelstrom of their own organisations.

Ultimately CSO staff are not paid or appraised on time spent on network activities. The more commitment they give to the network the more their own organisation and their own work suffers. For this reason, network activities are pushed to the background.

While advocacy work may be part of job descriptions in Malawian CSOs, it is rarely part of funded projects. Members still rarely plan network activities into their strategies and proposals. This is partly because management of member CSOs still does not consider advocacy through CSO networks as a strategic priority and often hurriedly develops proposals and budgets without sufficient consultation with staff involved in the CSO networks. Most local CSOs are characterised by short-term, survival-oriented goals that focus on service delivery rather than advocacy. Even international NGO members of networks, who have funded advocacy work, have not been able to participate as much as needed in network activities; often because their work is tied to implementing their own pre-determined plans and budgets. They are not able to flexibly respond to last-minute requests from networks - yet this a critical part of advocacy networks. Local NGO members have fewer staff and less capacity than their international counterparts. The lack of technical capacity has hampered network performance in certain areas: for example, only three people in the LTF are said to really understand the 70 land laws in the country that directly affect their work. When issues are too technical, members do not respond or engage with issues, again leaving it to secretariat staff.

This situation is exacerbated by the donors who prefer to fund one network than ten different partners' time to do this – thereby strengthening the secretariat but weakening members. As a result, secretariats have raised funding independently, rather than being driven by the demands of their members, and have consequently

acquired contractual obligations to deliver outputs – for which member organisations are responsible. This is partially due to members (including board members) being too caught up in the demands of their own organisations to engage in proposal development for the network. Once the secretariat is awarded project funding it gains power in a very resource-dependent context: access to resources is closely correlated to authority. Whilst this access to resources has led to network secretariats becoming sources of contracts for members, secretariat staff rarely has any prior experience with sub-contracting arrangements and the performance management demands this places on them. They are not set up to monitor their members, and awarding contracts to one member instead of another can cause significant internal conflict. Ultimately, with secretariats providing resources to members, rather than vice versa, the network power balance turns upside down, shifting from members to secretariat.

Efforts by secretariats to involve members by sub-contracting have yielded disappointing results. Members have failed to deliver on their contracted commitments in the stipulated time. In one case, involving members delayed the project proposal finalisation by nine months; in another case, members failed in financial accountability and resources were not used for the intended purposes. When some members received resources for international network meetings, they failed to account for the resources.

CSO networks have found it difficult to make the out-sourcing approach work, contracting project work, such as research and monitoring, from the secretariat to members. Secretariats have found that it is much quicker and less risky to hire staff themselves (or contract in consultants or enumerators). This means that, as one respondent said:

> *Instead of secretariats 'engaging' with members, they are shifting more towards 'informing' members.*

Questions concerning the quality of member contact with the community have encouraged secretariats to decentralise and set up their own regional offices and district chapters. The theory is that member NGOs run the local offices and although this works in some cases, it has often led to these being perceived as parallel structures, leading to jealously and internal competition.

By taking on what is in fact the role of its members and by-passing them, CSO networks risk even cannibalising as donors may shift resources from network members to the network secretariat. The bigger secretariats become, the more money and resources are needed. Costs start to rise when the secretariat becomes synonymous with the network and the secretariat begins to become more and more operational, doing more of the work itself. This is where traditional core costs start to take on greater prominence with more staff and equipment being needed (Church, 2003).

In some cases, the network exists more in name than in reality – certainly the spirit and vision of some networks is under threat if not already undermined. According to one donor:

> *The strength of the network has become based on the strength of the secretariat, not the members. This is not what we expected or hoped for. They are contravening their purpose and compromising their vision.*

Relationship and trust are the 'connective tissue' in networks – and once these are gone, the networking element is gone too.

What the 'network model' amongst CSOs exactly comprises is still very unclear. In different capacity building processes over the past few years, each of the CSO networks has highlighted the need to clarify the criteria for membership and the different roles of members/secretariat/board. But none has done anything significant to address this need. The following questions were raised by a strategic meeting of networks in 2004 aimed at improving relations between members, board and secretariat:

- Who owns the network?
- Who implements programmes?
- In what capacity is the coordinator speaking when addressing the press? As an individual, as the secretariat or as the network of members?
- How do members cope with a dual allegiance to the network and their own organisation?

These questions have still not been answered. MEJN set up a task force on membership criteria, but never delivered its recommendations as members of the task force kept changing.

Overall, we see that CSO networks lack clear membership criteria and generally charge no fees – with the exception of CSCQBE, who managed to collect only 50% of its members' fees. This makes membership very fluid and mobile, enabling networks to claim large numbers, of whom only few are really committed. This undermines the ability of the network to claim it is speaking on behalf of civil society. Operating procedures and board policies have not been developed, let alone implemented. Board members are also network members and because of this they sometimes find themselves in a conflict of interest – requesting that the secretariat subcontracts their organisation (and in some cases themselves) for particular pieces of work.

CSO networks in Malawi are currently facing an identity crisis. They need to pause and question who they really want to be and what their focus is. This is the biggest organisational issue they face and failure to address it in the near future could lead to the demise of certain CSO networks in practice, if not in name. As one board chair pointed out: 'The moment we say we can do it on members' behalf we have lost the game.'

Leadership challenges

Another pressing strategic challenge for CSO networks in Malawi today is leadership. In any small organisation in its early years of life, it is difficult to disassociate organisational performance from the performance of the leader. As such, the the performance of the coordinator will be reflected in the performance of the network.

Most of the CSO networks have appointed young, dynamic activists as coordinators, often in the initial stages of network formation where there was goodwill, but no funding nor the security to lure mature CSO leaders from established positions. This 'youth policy' has been good from the perspective of raising the profile and visibility of the advocacy networks.

Often, impossible demands are placed on one person's shoulders, and the coordinator is expected to excel at everything. For example, coordinators are expected to deal with constant media attention, whereby it is often the coordinator's opinion that is solicited. However, high media visibility of an individual can often leave members feeling excluded and can encourage a coordinator to behave more independently. Does the leadership catalyse the energies of the members or absorb them like a sponge?

Few of the CSO coordinators are strong on planning and administration. They tend to react to events, rather than operate proactively as leaders. But membership participation generally does not happen spontaneously. Once a secretariat is established, performance of the network will depend strongly on its leadership, more than the members. The leadership in CSO networks is still highly dependent on a small number of key individuals, which makes them more vulnerable, especially when networks take on more of the implementing function. For example, the departure of the MEJN coordinator led to a visible drop in performance according to donors. Other networks have clearly shown that when a network has a poorly performing coordinator, the performance of the whole network is compromised.

Yet, leadership in CSO networks depends on much more than an individual coordinator. The governance structures of the networks play a key role in the leadership, and nascent organisations need active, engaged boards. The three networks explored here have some very strong board members – a major factor in their survival to date. Some efforts to develop sub-committees to support leadership in certain areas have worked well, in the CSCQBE in particular. Others have been less successful: one CSO network has been on the verge of collapse for the last few years due to a clash between the Chair and the Coordinator, which led to the latter being fired from his post, but reinstated on the 'requirement' of the donor.

When CSO networks steering groups formalise into registered entities, they have to decide how to choose and perpetuate their boards. Many are tempted towards a 'democratic' election process from amongst the membership, though this has often resulted in weak, politicised boards as members have little personal commitment and passion. Further, this leads to a potential conflict of interest between active network member and part of the governance. In most of the networks in Malawi, boards are selected based on their knowledge and experience in certain fields. Some of the networks, however, have opted for a hybrid of these two in order to get the best of both worlds.

Currently some network boards are not giving sufficient direction, not making policy and instead getting too involved in micro-managing non-policy issues (e.g. organising workshops, consultancies, deciding who should go for training). Many board members are busy in senior posts in their own NGOs and consequently are weak in following through. The relatively frequent turnover of board members has caused

delays in activity, as new board members are reluctant to implement changes until they have become better acquainted with the organisation.

All in all, it is clear that CSO networks need strong leadership both within the secretariat as within the board. Weaknesses in either area are proving very inhibiting for CSO networks in Malawi to flourish.

Strategy

CSO networks are expected to play a diversity of roles for their different stakeholders: members, government and donors. This requires a strong guiding strategy – but the research in fact highlighted lack of strategy as a pitfall facing CSO networks in Malawi today.

The media pressures CSO networks to respond and react to every issue. CSO networks are expected to be able to coordinate their members' activities, to unify them in clear advocacy campaigns, to build member capacity and to facilitate member funding. Some of these roles are inextricably linked, such as advocating and building the capacity of members to advocate. Both are key priorities, as CSO network advocacy will be undermined if members have insufficient capacity, technical understanding and even time to contribute.

The capacity building role of networks has in some degree compromised the energy and resources that networks have been able to devote to advocacy, but as one respondent questioned:

> *What is a network to do if members do not have the technical analytical capacity to understand the issues; no advocacy skills or experience?*

Some of the networks have addressed these different demands through strategic planning processes (e.g. MEJN, CISANET, LTF, and soon CSCBQE). In reality however CSO networks have been ambivalent about implementing strategic decisions: reluctance to focus on specific activities and withdraw from others is partially fuelled by lack of time. However necessary capacity building activities are, the more difficult it seems to organise them. Change has also been inhibited by limited commitment to implementation. While on the one hand networks yearn for greater focus, they still want to retain considerable flexibility, especially in response to those activities that are resourced.

Funding

Funding sources and sizes evidently influence how CSO networks behave. Networks look almost exclusively to international funding sources for their support, rather than from members, and only CSCQBE claims to charge membership fees. Consequently, this undermines most CSO networks' sense of accountability to their members.

From 2002-2006 there has been considerable growth in the quantity of funding for CSO networks as well as an increasing diversity of donors. This may be linked to the shift in aid funding towards 'rights-based approaches'. Funding for CSO networks has therefore not been a major problem during this period, and in fact a new concern that CSO networks have been over-funded, causing laxity in accountability and encouraging secretariats to take on an implementing role on behalf of members.

The quality of the funding has also been a major issue. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) initially supported MEJN by coordinating a basket funding approach to support the work of the whole organisation, rather than individual projects. In general however donor coordination has been poor. For example, in one case a new donor stepped in to fund a network, just at the same time when all other donors were withholding funding in order to precipitate a crisis and force the network to address critical issues.

Some of the network funding has been for donor 'self-centred' reasons of administrative simplicity and efficiency. As one respondent noted:

> *We can achieve the same in advocacy and capacity building by focussing on one partner, not 20.*

While it is certainly administratively simpler to fund one organisation instead of 20, in a real sense this diverts support from network members to network secretariats. As a result, advocacy work of individual members remains unfunded and therefore members cannot support the networks themselves with time or money.

Some official donors and even some international NGOs are increasingly looking to CSO advocacy coalitions to become their funding channels. Their – overly simplistic – reasoning is that if a coalition has many members, it can easily serve as a conduit for their funding to a variety of CSOs; this ignores the fact that coalitions fulfil different and often mutually exclusive purposes, and are not always equipped for project management, administration and monitoring. Some Malawian CSO coalitions do not have sufficient self-identity and financial security to say 'no'.

Today, the infatuation with CSO networks appears to be abating. Performance and reporting problems of networks has led to greater realism, and even to scepticism amongst donors. As one major donor in Malawi pointed out:

> *CSO network weaknesses are forcing us to find alternative ways of working… We are funding individual NGOs to do the same things - especially as networks increasingly resemble individual NGOs – what value are they adding?*

As a result, funding for CSO networks has reverted to more short-term tied support. Donors have found that:

> *…3 month project-based funding works better with CSO networks in Malawi in terms of getting things done.*

Yet this also encapsulates the short-term donor approach that has undermined development performance for years.

Challenges: the origins

Why are CSO networks facing such serious pitfalls? Are they inherent to the organisational form of networks? Are they a result of individuals and organisations involved, or are they simply due to adapting to the harsh realities of the Malawian CSO context?

Networks will evolve and adapt to suit their external context, including their membership base, as well as in response to internal dynamics. We need to examine the different influences of four key variables:

- External environment
- Network Members
- Secretariat
- Leadership

External environment
The external environment exerts a very powerful influence on network performance – particularly in resource-poor countries like Malawi. The needs of communities are overwhelming and place very high developmental demands on government and civil society. There is a sparse institutional landscape to respond, with few strong CSOs.

HIV/AIDS and migration
HIV/AIDS is exacerbating the demands on and reducing the capacity of an already very weak sector.

The mobility of the sector obviously causes significant problems for CSO networks. One of the striking findings of the research was the fluidity of the human resource environment. Since conducting this research four years ago, more than 80% of CSO network stakeholders interviewed the first time had left their organisation and (as a result) quit contact with the network. Between 2002 and 2005, of the three CSO networks, every board chair had left the country, every coordinator was new and active members, donors and government staff were largely different. In local CSOs job insecurity is very high and the expanding number of operational international NGOs in Malawi often recruit the best local NGO staff. Government transfers staff between departments and jobs with confusing regularity. Donor staff is often ex-patriate and moves on regularly after their 'tour of duty'. This means the networks have a completely new set of relationships both internally and externally – and are, in effect, completely different networks.

Donor influences
Resources are scarce and CSOs find themselves focusing on individual project funding. Donors however have a preference for 'big' projects, and like to see quick results in rights-based areas such as advocacy. They do not appear to have the time or inclination to invest in the capacity building of network members in advocacy and prefer to just support the network. The International Forum on Capacity Building global survey (IFCB 2001) found that even successful CSO networks were not participating in international development initiatives receiving major donor funding.

In the past, there have been some laudable efforts at encouraging greater donor coordination in their support of CSO networks, though this appears to have largely disintegrated in the past year, as donors' individual agendas have come more to the fore.

Changing policy environment
The policy environment is also changing rapidly. Accountability systems are not well developed and there are only a few societal watchdogs, whilst the work abounds. For instance, while there has been admirable work done by the Anti-Corruption Bureau, it still occurs that government appoints Cabinet Ministers who have been dismissed by previous employers for mismanagement of funds. All in all, there is ample work for CSO networks.

Government support for networks is ambivalent. The official line is increasingly supportive, but on an individual level there is still quite some resistance from government staff.

Politics are personal in Malawi. The focus is on opinion rather than issues. The media penchant for personalising news and the limited number of people it can quote, makes it difficult for coordinators to avoid making statements and being seen as co-opting the network as their personal mouthpiece.

Network members
CSO networks require members to be able to work inter-dependently with each other. But many of the network members, particularly in the young CSO sector in Malawi, are more at the dependent stage of development:

Survival first
For most CSO network members, their own survival is paramount. Local NGOs have very limited 'spare' capacity to support the work of networks as their advocacy work is still rarely funded. They have a wide diversity of interests and therefore pull the network in different directions, but few have the time or money to resource the network. In addition, most CSO members have weak contact with their constituencies – then how can we expect the network to be representative in turn?

Building relationships
Research on successful CSO networks highlights the importance of pre-existing relationships between CSO members (Ashman 2005), but in Malawi the sector is still so young that these relationships are only developing now. Many CSO members are still at an early stage of development, and few understand the responsibilities that come with being a network member, such as working inter-dependently.
As such, it is too early for CSO networks to really thrive in Malawi, until the capacity of the sector is strengthened, which does not happen overnight.

Balanced leadership
The strength of CSO networks will largely reflect their membership. If they have strong, high performing members with secure funding bases, a CSO network is likely to mirror that. The reverse, however, is also true and perhaps more common.

As secretariats gain strength, members tend to slip back into a common role of sitting back and listening to the leader. On the one hand, the network coordinator is increasingly given the status of the 'boss' and members sit back waiting to be told what to do. On the other hand, international NGO (INGO) members are often frustrated by the last minute, reactive ways of networks. Many INGOs have highly developed and structured planning systems that mean that they are too busy or simply not equipped to support network activities, particularly at the last minute.

Secretariat

Limited capacities
The participation of members is the essence of networking. Facilitation is the core secretariat process. But secretariats tend to have very few staff and it is not uncommon for all responsibility to be dumped on one person's shoulders. Staff often has limited experience and expertise in the process of networking, and in the technical aspects of policy analysis, the network's core business.

Accountability
Yet with donors as opposed to members being the main funding source, secretariat attention focuses on the donor project rather than the participation of members. Accountability is directed to donors, not to members. This becomes a viscous circle: as secretariats detach themselves from the membership, so their structures grow, their costs increase, and their need for donor support increases too, spiralling them out of reach of their members and constituents.

Leadership
CSO networks are very complex organisational forms to manage. They are dependent on the individual coordinator, especially in the first phase of their development. Nascent organisations without secure financing can only attract people initially in a voluntary capacity. But once funding is secured, posts are rarely advertised and young, voluntary incumbent activists will often take on the network coordination role. However, they rarely have the networking aptitude or the management experience to make the core process work effectively.

Strategic choices for CSO networks

While the three networks are at different stages of development, this research has highlighted two core issues that must be addressed to ensure future network impact and even survival for all of them. Boards and secretariats with support from donors need to resolve first, their identity crises and next, the issue of leadership. Once these issues are addressed, the networks can go on to deal with on-going questions of strategy, structure, systems and staffing.

Recommendations to develop network identity
In terms of their identity crisis, CSO networks in Malawi have two choices:

1. Become more independent from their members and operate largely as an 'advocacy NGO' with nominal membership (thereby ceasing to be an 'authentic' network);

2. Re-assert the commitment to being a constituents' network and ensure the network model works better.

Unless there is a deliberate strategic decision, by default the aid system (short-term donor demands and deadlines) and individual interests (of secretariat staff) will push the networks towards option 1, the 'advocacy NGO' route, which is the easier option. Instead of having to build capacity in members, 'networks' can build capacity of their staff in their district branches. Moreover, in the next five years there is likely to be less donor funding for CSO networks, driven by the official aid system push for short-term measurable results and increasing disillusionment with the management and legitimacy of CSO networks.

But is this the direction that network governance and leadership want to take? Will members fight for network identity? Experience suggests that it is likely that members will make noise at AGMs to influence this decision, and then move to concentrate on their own organisational issues.

Even so, maintaining space for member participation is key to network survival and vibrancy. This will be a big challenge, requiring exceptional and concerted leadership commitment and drive, member engagement and enlightened donor support. Recommendations include:

- Developing criteria for membership and contractually agreeing to membership with the network Chair and the member organisation Director. This may mean that CSO networks see their membership numbers fall, but inviting fewer but better quality members could compensate this;
- Encouraging members to provide resources for the network. An effective secretariat is 'owned' by its members, and this means that secretariat resources must come from members, not vice versa. Particularly in a resource-scarce environment, a concerted strategy is needed to ensure that members build network activities into budget lines;
- Having a membership development strategy that involves recruiting, inducting and training new and existing members;
- Keeping members organisations accountable for their conduct in the same way that networks want to hold government accountable;
- Clarifying member, board and secretariat roles and job descriptions. Difficult questions need to be resolved: to what extent can the secretariat stretch its arms without getting board approval? On which issues should the secretariat seek the consent of the board? Who has the mandate to make public statements to the press? When secretariats request for feedback on issues from members and there is no response, secretariats often still feel obliged to say something. But does silence mean consent? How much agreement is needed to release a press statement?

Recommendations to develop network leadership

The second issue of critical importance for CSO networks in Malawi is that of leadership. Given the networks' small size and stage of development, the quality of the coordinator has a large influence on the performance of the network. CSO

networks will continue to drift away from their core purpose if they fail to attract leaders who are committed to networking principles:

1. A relational networker, who has the humility to actively listen to others, build consensus, resolve conflict and facilitate joint action;
2. A manager and planner;
3. An environmental analyst;
4. A persuasive and active advocate.

In the past, coordinators have been appointed based on their ability in the fourth criterion alone. By offering longer-term contracts with funded budgets, CSO networks will be able to attract more mature, experienced people to these positions.

But network leadership rests with much more than an individual. Collective leadership is needed – and active participation by members is the prime means for CSO networks to achieve their purpose. Moreover, supportive boards are critical for any significant change in performance and capacity of CSO networks, and to help form the identity of the organisation. First though, the governance structures of CSO networks need to be developed, clarifying roles and channels of communication between the board and the coordinator.

For reasons of legitimacy, representation from network members on the board is an advantage, with named individuals contributing to continuity. Supplementing the board with outside professionals can bring expertise and critical distance to discussions. A potential conflict of interest clause must be clearly stated within the Constitution and adhered to.

Where possible, board members and further network members should be involved in proposal development processes. The board Chair should be responsible for signing donor contracts to ensure that they fit with the organisational strategy, especially in terms of member involvement, and for monitoring coordinator work and travel plans on a regular basis.

CSO networks must develop their foundational values if they are to achieve their goals. They cannot presume to hold government to account or assist in formulating and implementing government policies, unless the same standards in accountability are applied to their own leaders and members, and their own internal policies are developed. If CSO networks compromise on their core values then they have lost; it is a leadership responsibility to ensure they walk their talk.

Recommendations to develop strategy and structure

CSO networks have to make choices in their responses to stakeholders, and this is amplified by changes in the external environment. For example, once the Land Law is passed by government, the LTF will have to rethink its role. Should it respond to broader food security issues as its donors would like? A strategy change is imminent.

CSO networks in Malawi tend to over-structure while relatively simple, informal structures would be easier to manage. The ideal is to minimise structure in order to promote effective participation of members, fitting the purpose of the network.

Conclusions

CSO networks in Malawi have clearly made a contribution over the last four years to better represent the voice of the poor in policy decisions; they have improved relationships with government and they have had measurable results in government policy development. They have been actively involved in monitoring budget implementation, which can be plausibly associated with better governance. Sustaining these changes remains a challenge and greater credibility amongst government officials needs to be developed, but CSO networks have come a long way.

Networks are inherently unstable organisational forms with strong emotional and ideological forces pulling them towards being more of a people's movement. At the same time there are strong pragmatic forces from the external environment pushing them in the direction of advocacy NGOs with nominal membership and secretariat-managed funding and resources. CSO networks in Malawi are struggling with this and increasingly drifting away from their networking function.

Already members, donors and some board members are increasingly disgruntled with their secretariats. They perceive that the performance of CSO networks is declining. Members are investing less time in the networks and the knowledgeable and committed donors are withdrawing, citing poor performance from the networks. CSO networks themselves have very limited systems for monitoring and evaluating their impact. In some cases, staff appears blissfully ignorant of the performance problems and does not realise the urgency of addressing the organisational issues.

CSO networks will exist as networks only in name and become *de facto* advocacy NGOs if the issue of membership participation is not addressed soon. Whilst this is a realistic and not necessarily negative option, a decision for such a shift of identity should be taken deliberately by the governance and leadership of the organisation, and should not happen inadvertently.

Re-asserting network identity requires significant organisational changes, for instance in terms of developing the leadership and governance of the network secretariats to ensure that they are able to deliver on their core networking process. Member contributions will need to be prioritised and systems set up to motivate, measure and track the most vital resource – the participation and commitment of members. CSO networks have focused on measuring project outputs, rather than on the difficult, but important developmental task of networking and building member capacity and ownership.

Rather than blindly following the institutional forms of others, CSO networks need to think through how they can retain as much dynamism and flexibility as possible, in order to mobilise their constituents and achieve their priority objectives together.

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Abstract
This article summarises the results of an applied research project undertaken by INTRAC. The research project aimed in particular to understand the development of civil society networks in Malawi over the last four years, assess their contribution to poverty reduction and economic growth issues, and appraise their current strengths and challenges in articulating civil society voice.

The paper emphasises that CSO networks need to make strategic choices in the areas of identity and leadership. CSO networks need to decide whether to move towards more independence from their members and operate largely as advocacy NGOs with nominal membership, or to re-assert the commitment to being a network, working more efficiently and effectively in terms of achieving network goals. Lastly, CSO networks will drift away from their core purpose unless they attract leaders who are committed to networking principles.

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[1] A civil society organisation or CSO has a constituency base and does not fall under a government or business organisational form. Whilst NGOs are part of civil society, CSO is a wider term, also encompassing more informal organisations. When CSO networks want to take on an organisational form in Malawi, they often register as NGOs under the trustees act or company limited by guarantee.

*Redes*envolvimento: training and empowering networks for development

Andres Pablo Falconer and Dalberto Adulis

In the development sector, the ideas of the *social network* and the *network organization* have become powerful inspirations and emerging paradigms for NGOs, campaigns, coalitions, movements and a variety of initiatives intended to promote societal change. This seems to be true in the authors' home country, Brazil, as well as elsewhere in both the developed and developing world. Led by accelerated technological advances in the direction of interactive communications, by trends identified in the social and organizational sciences (all broadly encompassed by the terms 'informational' or 'network society), alongside with ideals of participatory, horizontal and multipolar organization, *network* and *development* are concepts that seem to have become paired. Manual Castells (1999) argues that we live in a Network Society 'made up of networks of production, power and experience, which construct a culture of virtuality in the global flows that transcend time and space.' In the words of Wilson-Grau (2006):

> *…in a globalizing world with increasingly effective means of communication, a network offers unique political and organizational potential. Social change networks can influence economic, political and cultural structures and relations in ways that are impossible for individual actors. In these networks, the members are autonomous organizations – usually NGOs or community based organizations – and sometimes individuals.*

New networks emerge on a daily basis, the name is quickly tagged onto initiatives that in an earlier age would have been labelled otherwise – such as federations, umbrella organizations and social movements – and previously existing associative organizations reframe their identity and embrace the ideal of the network. According to Leon (2001):

> *In fact, when one speaks of network in social collectives, it is done in the most diverse way, ranging from those that adopt it like a mere name – imposed by fashion –, to those who embrace it as a new organizational paradigm – without necessarily re-baptizing them with that name.*

Within civil society development organizations, the network is often loosely defined as a horizontal and democratic association of individuals or organizations under common ideals or goals. As Perkin and Court (2005) suggest, networks may be seen as 'structures that link individuals or organizations who share a common interest on a specific issue or a general set of values.'

The promise of the network is generous, combining autonomy, innovation and effectiveness. It is, however, a promise that often falls short. As Mulgan (2004) notes:

> *Networks are extraordinary ways of organizing knowledge, cooperation and exchange. They are far more effective means of sharing learning than hierarchies and generally better at adapting to change. But they remain poor at mobilizing resources, sustaining themselves through hard times, generating surpluses, organizing commitments, or playing games of power.*

In short, at least in Brazil, where network has become a catchword, there is growing interest and multiple examples of network-type initiatives and organizations but, for the most part, experience shows that blindly embracing a new concept, without fully grasping its potential, its implications and its practical challenges may lead to frustrating results.

Could the potential within the concept of the network be unleashed to deliver its full promise? How – if at all – is it possible to train individuals in the art of managing – designing, planning, empowering, facilitating, evaluating – networks? How can the capacity of networks to operate effectively be built? Can this knowledge be disseminated to the broader interested public?

An introduction to *Redes*envolvimento

These were the guiding questions asked by the creators of the *Redes*envolvimento[1] Programme: a capacity-development programme on networks for development proposed and implemented by ABDL (Associação Brasileira para o Desenvolvimento de Lideranças), a Brazilian NGO with the primary focus on leadership for sustainable development. The programme, led by ABDL (www.abdl.org.br), relied on a partnership with another Brazilian NGO, RITS (www.rits.org.br), LEAD International (www.lead.org) and the AVINA Foundation (www.avina.net), an international private foundation agency with a strong interest in the theme of networks.

ABDL's own experience, through its association with the LEAD International network, was centred on the well-established LEAD Fellowship Programme which has identified, trained and connected more than 1700 emerging leaders in sustainable development in more than 70 countries since 1991. The LEAD approach, innovative in its multi-sectoral, interdisciplinary and 'bridging' character, has shown limitless potential by creating linkages between innovative practitioners and professionals, activists for sustainable development. But investment in ten cohorts of LEAD fellows have taught that, unlike it was believed in the more optimistic 1990s, networks do not 'just happen' by giving people an opportunity to connect. And when they do happen, the outcomes are unpredictable and, for the most part, far beyond the control of the inspirers of the network.

*Redes*envolvimento represents a new generation of fellowship experience, focused on the reflexive purpose of learning and sharing the art and science of networks for development. It is targeted both at individuals participating in networks, and at the networks themselves. The programme, launched in early 2005, proposed a one-year

learning process consisting of four five-day training sessions, in full immersion, combined with face-to-face and virtual interaction between training meetings, culminating with an open event offered for the general public.

Recruitment of participants and networks

The recruitment process is one of the most critical elements of the programme because of the influence it confers on the entire training programme. Participants were selected through a competitive process following the public announcement and launch of the programme which was disseminated primarily through a variety of NGO/civil society networks and alternative news media. Consistent with the focus on networks, rather than standalone individual applicants, only group applications were considered. Interested individuals were encouraged to present themselves in groups of two to four persons from a single network.

Networks were invited to nominate individuals with sufficient legitimacy and commitment to feed back into the network. The participating groups were selected based on the strength of the individual applications (i.e., the professional experience, demonstrated commitment to sustainable development, relative influence on social processes etc.), the relevance of the networks, as well as considerations of diversity of issues addressed, and ethnic, age and gender representation. While there was no minimum formal education requirement, in the course of the recruitment phase, it was ensured that applicants were comfortable with a learning environment requiring reading and ample use of abstract concepts. Beyond this, all participants were expected to be connected to the web and familiar with the use of computers. Although these are restrictive access criteria in a country marked by an already high bar of digital access, these are easily justified by the purposes of the programme. Given its specialized nature of the programme, and the fact that participants were expected to pay for their participation, the recruitment of the first edition was deemed a success, with more than one hundred individuals from 27 networks that completing applications. Each participant was asked to pay the equivalent of approximately US$1000, which stands at roughly one fourth of the cost per participant. In practice, most participants secured funding from the networks, their employers, or – most frequently – donors and supporters of their networks.

The 24 chosen participants originated from six networks in fields as diverse as renewable energy, gender and communication, corporate social responsibility, local development, coastal and marine ecosystems, indigenous cultures. The six networks selected for the programme were:

1. AEC (www.cidadaniaempresarial.org.br), *Ação Empresarial pela Cidadania* (Business Action for Citizenship), a network of centres promoting corporate social responsibility in various Brazilian states;
2. COEP (www.coepbrasil.org.br), *Comitê de Entidades no Combate à Fome e pela Vida* (Committee of Entities Against Hunger and For Life), a nationwide network of public and private corporations established to mobilize institutions

to combat hunger and poverty, while fostering full citizenship for all Brazilians;

3. Cyberela (www.cemina.org.br), a project and network comprised of women and community leaders selected, trained and equipped to produce and exchange information with a gender perspective through community radio and the internet;
4. RCA, *Rede de Cooperação Alternativa* (Alternative Cooperation Network), a unique association of indigenous peoples' organizations and 'indigenist organizations;
5. Renove (www.renove.org.br), Renewable Energy Network, whose mission is to encourage the utilization of renewable energies to promote sustainable development;
6. *Rede Marinha-Costeira e Hídrica do Brasil* (Brazilian Marine, Coastal and Water Resources Network), established by the AVINA Foundation, involving 32 leaders with relevant experience in the field.

A seventh group was not a *bona-fide* network, but an inter-institutional learning community between four organizations, organized by proponent, ABDL.

Objectives and content of the training

The programme's three stated goals were: 1) training individual participants in the fields of networks for development, 2) strengthening networks through direct application of experience in the networks in which participants were involved, and 3) disseminating knowledge about networks for development to a broader audience, beyond the participants of the programme. The training curriculum consisted of concepts, skills training, exchanges, presented in a dynamic, participatory, workshop-style environment, with traditional classroom lecturing reduced to a minimum. Contents and activities revolved around four programmatic pillars of a) sustainable development, b) communications and participation, c) social and organizational networks, and d) information and communication technologies.

The four training events took place in total immersion retreats held in isolated locations, in a propitious environment for deep interpersonal exchange and full focus on the learning experience. Interspersed with these were follow-up activities which included reporting back and obtaining input from other network members, developing a 'project' or practical application to be implemented in the networks, as well as additional reading and preparation assignments for upcoming training events. A web-based distance learning tool, Moodle, was used as an environment for collaboration throughout the programme.

In the course of the programme, the notion of networks was deconstructed and tinkered with from a variety of perspectives, from metaphors to analytical concepts to grounded practice. Emphasis was placed in reflecting from participant's own experience and on the relevant issues within the networks they represented. This led to lively, energetic, and sometimes tense events, as the groups attempted to grasp and

apply to their reality the ideas that circulated in the environment. A key element of *Redes*envolvimento consists in establishing the linkage between networks and the application in development work. Therefore, ample time was devoted to explore this field, conceptually as well as from the direct experience of the participants. Thus, the diversity of themes and issues with which the participants were engaged provided a wealth of material for in-depth learning. The connection between concepts such as social capital, social networks and sustainable development became inextricable in the experience of the programme.

The four sessions were entitled 'Networks: leadership and development', 'Communication and participation in networks', 'Participation and facilitation in networks' and 'Monitoring and evaluation of networks'. Typically, each session began with a module intended to step back and recover the previous activities, including reporting back on the inter-session activities. Workshops on the substantive themes of each session, such as participation, sustainable development, communications, systems thinking and evaluation, were typically conducted by invited trainers. In each event following the first session, two networks were invited to present a module sharing their experience on their respective themes (i.e.: water, energy, gender and communication). A 'marketplace' environment of ideas, opportunities and necessities was created, leading to numerous events of collaboration between the participants. Finally, each of the six network groups was required to complete a project, or practical application of their learning, within their network.

The fourth and final training event, held in July, 2006, in the city of São Paulo, was associated with a large, two-day, public conference titled 'Networks for Development', well attended by nearly 300 participants from different regions of Brazil and Latin America. This open event galvanized the growing awareness about the theme, bringing together leading thinkers and practitioners, who shared their ideas in plenaries, panel discussions and workshops designed both for experienced practitioners and interested neophytes in the field, offering a kaleidoscopic view of the theme.[2]

This public event was designed as an integral part of the programme, in part to counterbalance the small-scale nature of the course, and to disseminate the experience of *Redes*envolvimento to a broader audience, making a significant contribution to the debate about networks and their application in development (the third stated goal of the programme). The conference is to be followed by a publication featuring the main presentations, case studies and findings of the *Redes*envolvimento Programme. A second edition of the training programme, as well as other services, such as short courses and an ongoing forum are currently in development.

Outcomes and results

For participating individuals in the year-long R*edes*envolvimento Programme, the outcomes were substantial, producing changes in the way they understood their work and the issues they promote. Even more significantly, the programme made a contribution to the issues the participating networks chose to address. One network learned, much to their surprise, that their apparently well-designed and adequately-

funded nucleus, or secretariat, was not only far from perfect but, in effect, actually hindered the functionality of the network. In the words of one of its members:

> *…were it not for the programme, we would be in the same position, with a new coordinator and the same mistakes (…); the programme resulted in the restructuring of the network and allowed its perpetuation.*

In the course of the year, another network plunged into a governance crisis which eventually led to the demise of its executive secretary. This situation not only offered an invaluable real-life learning experience to the participants, but the programme was also able to buffer and minimize the adverse impacts of the crisis. According to one participant:

> *…[the programme] offered me great clarity (…) making my contestation even more incisive; theory helped me rethink and gave clarity in the facilitation or the network.*

Less dramatically, but equally intense, one network dealt with the issue of distinguishing itself from the donor from which it originated it, while another sought to institutionalize itself as more than a time-bound project. As one member noted candidly:

> *…when I entered the project, it was not a network; at the time we were told that the group would need to behave as a network… I did not know what that meant.*

In contrast, the longest-established and perhaps most successful network of the group, which was harboured primarily by public corporations, dealt with the challenge of renewal and invigoration in a context of years of excessive institutionalization. Quoting a participant, '[the programme] was an opportunity to break barriers in my work. I felt like a factory worker in development projects.' The ever-present issues of autonomy and power imbalances were most critical for the members of a network combining native indigenous Brazilians and *indigenists* (anthropologists and other specialists in indigenous peoples). In an environment of trust and collaboration, the R*edes*envolvimento Programme resulted in more than a mere learning experience, but addressed key challenges of the participating individuals and networks.

Conclusions

The main recurring issues facing the participants can be summarized in four pairs of dualities:

1. *Structure vs. dynamics*: the permanent tension between the need to establish mechanisms, procedures and configurations to organize a network's functioning, and the volatility and constant renewal of a fluid form that evades structures;

2. *Coordination vs. participation*: all participating networks had some form of coordination or central secretariat created for the purpose of serving the network. Most typically, coordination led to excessive control, lack of participation on the fringes, power disputes, or other dysfunctionalities of coordination mechanisms;
3. *Resources vs. autonomy* which refers to the not always comfortable relationship between the responsibility and interest of donors/investors in the network and the legitimate desire for autonomy of the participants, (although often still welcoming the funds);
4. *Process vs. results*: the difficulty in focusing on delivering tangible results in a type of organization characterized by fluidity, absence of hierarchies and other mechanisms traditionally associated to productivity and outcomes.

The format of the training programme revealed several challenges that differed from those typically faced when working with other audiences such as traditional NGOs or development organizations, primarily due to the nature of the connection between the participants and the networks. While the link between the typical development worker and his/her organization is often of paid employment – albeit flexible – in the case of networks, this relationship cannot be assumed. In cases in which the link is very strong, such as with founders, donors or leaders of the networks, their participation often outweighs that of other individuals. More frequently, when the opposite occurs, the weakness and fragility of the connection between individuals and the networks result in the individual's participation not being legitimized, and their capacity to introduce change being limited. In at least three cases in the course of one year, participants disconnected themselves from the networks, for personal or professional reasons, in what seems to be consistent with the nature of the network organization. Another participant mentioned that he found more space to share his experience acquired in the programme with a network other than the one through which he had participated.

Future editions of *Redes*envolvimento, bearing this first experience in mind, intend to place more emphasis on the coaching and mentoring component for the participating networks, rather than on the development of the capacity of individuals. New services, such as short courses, are to be offered to a broader audience, following this first edition of the programme, making the experience more widely available.

For individual participants, *Redes*envolvimento consisted of a unique learning experience about the practice of development through networks. For the participating networks, the programme was a wakeup call to the challenges and potential of participation, innovation and effectiveness promised by the network paradigm. For the proponents of the programme, it was an exciting new page in capacity building for development.

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Abstract
This case study presents the experience of *Redes*envolvimento, a capacity-building programme for networks for development proposed and implemented in Brazil by ABDL. It introduces the justification and rationale of the programme as well as its main features, and describes the implementation of the first edition, carried out between July, 2005 and July 2006. The authors conclude by exploring the results of the programme among the participating individuals and networks, and presenting the main challenges found in adapting more traditional training models for application in network organizations.

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[1] *Redes*envolvimento, in Portuguese, is a play with words combining *redes* (networks) and *desenvolvimento* (development), loosely translatable as Networks for Development. A different reading of the word reveals *re-desenvolvimento* (re-development).

[2] The conference 'Redes e Desenvolvimento', which took place 19-21 July 2006 was organized jointly by ABDL and SENAC-SP, a large Brazilian nonprofit. Information about the event, including programme, speakers, and audio recordings of the plenary sessions (in Portuguese) is available online at www.redesedesenvolvimento.org.br.

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Harambee: Reinforcing African voices through collaborative processes and technologies

Riff Fullan, Allison Hewlitt and Jacqueline Nnam

Background

The Harambee Project was conceived by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), Bellanet and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and is funded by Connectivity Africa hosted by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Hivos. The Project is designed to support increased capacity among both the project's initiators, and a range of Africa-based networks and communities, to coordinate and facilitate the interactions of their respective constituencies.

The rationale for this focus rests on several observations. First, it is recognized that a networked approach to confronting many of the complex challenges faced in development today is one that offers greater chances for effective impact.[1] Second, such an approach is geared toward creating the conditions for participation by a broader variety of partners with differing perspectives and differing contributions to make. It is the combination of these diversities that promises robust and sustainable outcomes as well as a high degree of shared learning.[2] Finally, it is through collaboration and networking that Africans have the greatest potential to effectively participate in their own development as it unfolds in a globalized environment.[3]

The implementation of Harambee is coordinated by the Uganda-based Bellanet Africa and includes a variety of partners:

- Harambee Coordination Committee made up of representatives APC, Bellanet and UNECA;
- Focus Network Coordinators from APC Africa Women (AAW), Academia Research Network (ARN), African Youth Information Network (AYIN), Constitution & Reform Education Consortium CRECO, and Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET);
- Small grant recipient networks in Africa (to be determined).

The Harambee 'niche'

Within the overall objective of strengthening existing networks and communities in Africa, there are three main areas of intervention upon which the project is based:

- Supporting network coordinators in the design and implementation of network strengthening activities (i.e., providing access to resources, including people, funds and materials) and coaching/mentoring;

- Developing capacities related to network coordination (e.g., offering training workshops, creating safe and comfortable online spaces for shared learning, incorporating action and reflection);
- Identifying and filling gaps in existing training and research-oriented resources on knowledge and information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The road to 2006

From the beginning, there has been a conscious effort to design and implement Harambee in a collaborative fashion. This was evident from the earliest discussions of the seeds of the Harambee idea in a meeting of the Partnership for Information and Communication Techonologies in Africa (PICTA) which took place in Tunis in late 2003; here a number of key players working in ICTs and Knowledge for Development (K4D) discussed the creation of a knowledge sharing consortium to further collaborative development in Africa. This led to subsequent dialogues among three of the principal partners, APC, Bellanet and UNECA with the support of Connectivity Africa, and eventually to the creation of Harambee in September 2005.

The formation of what is the Harambee Project today did not stop there, however. The project was 'pre-launched' in conjunction with two back-to-back workshops held in Addis Ababa in September 2005. The term 'pre-launched' is used because, although a significant portion of funding for the project was in the pipeline, it had not been made immediately available. The intent was to use what had been allocated for the inaugural workshop as a vehicle for promoting the rapid and direct engagement of Focus Network (FN) Coordinators in Harambee Project design and implementation, with a view to promoting a broadly shared ownership in Harambee among Coordination Committee (CC) members and FN Coordinators.

The first workshop was designed for FN Coordinators to:

- Learn more about each others' networks and communities;
- Learn more about, discuss their engagement with, and provide input into specific elements of the Harambee Project;
- Create the foundations for the production of their respective Action Plans (the latter to be submitted to the CC for funding).[4]

The second workshop was the first concrete capacity development activity of Harambee and focused on training the FN Coordinators on face-to-face network facilitation techniques. The opportunity was taken to rather uniquely combine this training with the development of the FN Action Plans. In other words, the content side of the training workshop was the Action Plans each FN needed to produce to submit to Harambee for funding, and they began to produce these through dialogues they facilitated for each other in applied practice of the facilitation techniques they were learning.

The training focused on encouraging participation through the use of 'open' facilitation techniques, such as having chairs arranged in a large circle for plenary discussions, making extensive use of breakout groups and having participants themselves engaged in constructing the agenda for the workshop. The idea behind

such techniques is to reinforce the equality of all participants, and encourage everyone to have a voice, rather than setting up an 'experts speak-participants listen' scenario.

Although the FNs and CC continued to interact after the two back-to-back workshops, the expected further funding for Harambee was not secured until several months later (in the December 2005 - January 2006) period. Thus, the conditions for funding Action Plans began with the 2006 calendar year.

Notable features of Harambee and its implementation
Before reflecting on some of the learning we have experienced so far and looking at expectations of the future of this two-year project, it is worth considering a few of the distinguishing features of Harambee. These include:

- **'Nested network of networks':** The attempt to created a 'nested network of networks' insofar as the project is assisting a small number of discrete Focus Networks to improve their effectiveness in their respective areas of work, while at the same time promoting the FN Coordinators to network with each other and share their experiences as coordinators. The hope is that through this strategy, the conditions will arise for an Africa-based community of experts on the ICT and knowledge-related aspects of facilitating networks to grow out of this seedbed.

- **The openness of the Harambee project:** This is manifest in the striving to avoid specifying all project activities, for example, what kinds of training would be provided to FNs, what kinds of resource materials would be developed, what specific research topics would be pursued, and which activities of the FNs themselves (i.e., those specified in their Action Plans) would be supported by Harambee in advance of bringing the FNs and CC together for the launch and training workshops. The idea behind this was to maximize both the influence and the sense of ownership of all practitioners involved with the project on its implementation and evolution.

- **The 'inter-networking' approach:** This refers to the readiness to seize opportunities to broaden the benefit of Harambee's existence beyond the FNs or other direct recipients of the project. So far there is only one example of this, but it is a powerful one: when the Network Facilitation Training Workshop was organized, it coincided with the timing of the initial meeting of the Global Knowledge Partnership Africa (GKP Africa) at UNECA in Addis Abeba. Recognizing that as a network-in-formation GKP Africa could benefit from such training, the CC invited GKP Africa members to participate and it turned out to be a pivotal meeting for that network to hit the ground running (see The Sustainability Aspect below for further detail).

What are we learning?

The Harambee Coordination Committee has been recently reflecting on what we have learned so far, on what has worked well in the project, on what has not worked so well, and on what we can do to incorporate our learning into ongoing and future

implementation. In addition to what we have gained from our recent dialogues, another mechanism we are using is a Learning and Evaluation Framework aimed at providing, at both the Focus Network and the Coordination Committee levels, the foundation for Harambee project

What has worked for Harambee?

In terms of the positive, we have found that integrating the capacity development aspect of the project with concrete activity planning of the Focus Networks created a high level of enthusiasm and energy. This was achieved through the abovementioned linking of FN Coordinator training with the production of FN Action Plans.

Although it sounds rather mundane, this delivery of the more generic skills-building training by having FN Coordinators practice their newly acquired network facilitation techniques in the act of creating their respective Action Plans had a dramatic reinforcement effect. It served to immediately bring the training alive for the participants because they were not merely going through a series of abstract exercises to acquire new skills, but instead were engaging in dialogues on issues of central importance to them. In other words, what concrete strategies should they employ to strengthen their networks in the course of learning new facilitation skills?

In addition to this 'training-through-action', a further successful element of Harambee implementation so far has been the creation of time and space for FN Coordinators to define their respective challenges and opportunities themselves. This was made possible through the combination of two things: first, not specifying which concrete activities the project would support for each network until each had created and submitted an Action Plan. Second, providing the opportunity and encouragement for FN Coordinators to put serious thought into the network strengthening aspects of their work, as opposed to the issues with which their networks are concerned. This encouraged them to step back from the content preoccupations of the networks and look at processes and tools, in the areas of knowledge and ICTs, that they could put into place to enhance network functioning and thereby enhance network effectiveness.

What else have we found to be useful in Harambee? The establishment of a coordinating team (i.e., the CC) that is both committed and highly collaborative has helped us confront what have been much greater challenges associated with getting the project off the ground than we had originally expected. Part of the challenge has been the engagement from the start of a number of different players with different perspectives: this has necessitated a lot of dialogue around goals, strategies and practice, but it has also helped to create a sense of shared purpose. Without a well-functioning CC this diversity would have been unmanageable.

The CC also keeps in touch, through a combination of an online discussion space (a Dgroup) and frequent teleconference meetings. This is another critical element in renewing the momentum for pursuing a wide variety of ongoing tasks, from the earlier necessity of working through dialogues with and different requirements of different funders, through the articulation of learning and evaluation frameworks, the creation of a Small Grants Fund, the liaison with various FNs, etc.

What has not worked as well for Harambee?
Despite the tremendous amount of enthusiasm displayed and ownership taken by the FN Coordinators and the CC in the formative stages of the project, it has proven difficult to regain momentum generated in our first face-to-face events where project participants first got to know each other, developed a sense of common purpose, and began to work out their own network-strengthening strategies.

In addition to the CC discussion list, which exists as a space for discussions on project governance and administration, there is a Dgroup to support ongoing dialogues among FN Coordinators, CC members and project funders. The goal is for the lists to maintain strong linkages and dialogues during the relatively long periods between face-to-face meetings of Harambee participants. This has worked reasonably well in the CC case, although it is largely due to the regular teleconferences the CC members have as project governors. It has been more difficult to keep the energy up on FN dialogues due in part to unforeseen delays in getting project implementation off the ground, a factor that has taken much of wind out of Harambee sails since the original face-to-face meetings.

How can we learn from our experiences?
The CC has taken a few lessons on board in the course of looking at our experiences so far. These include:

- Build regular reflection exercises into project plans. Although there is a shared feeling that we could be doing more, it is also true that we have been able to make several early course corrections as a result of examining progress on an ongoing basis;
- Develop strategies to maintain momentum. It is crucial that collaborative activities are implemented in transparent and proactive ways. For example, people need to be updated and informed about delays and the reasons for them. Planning joint activities to ensure several project partners can work together on concrete things can also help sustain enthusiasm and mutual respect;
- If you do not know how to plan an event that is truly empowering and engaging, find out how. Sometimes we know the result we want, but we may not be confident that we know just how to set the stage for participation and collective ownership. It is natural to shy away from uncertainty and to go with what is familiar, but very often only a small amount of research and asking around will help in the creation of a truly dynamic and network-building event;
- Invest time and energy in regular communication – this may sound easy, but can be quite difficult when various participants have varying situations related to connectivity, time zones and other responsibilities outside of the project in question. However, there is truly no substitute for frequent communication to support sustained activity.

What challenges does the Harambee Coordination Committee see ahead?

The ICT aspect

Although Harambee is not solely about technology, a key type of capacity development it tries to support is concerned with the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to enhance network effectiveness. As mentioned, project participants use online dialogues to keep in touch, discuss strategies, exchange information, etc. We will also launch the Harambee project website soon, developed using the open source Drupal application. The website will include: descriptive information about the project and the core partners involved in its implementation; access to resources generated in the form of documents, podcasts, etc. through Harambee-sponsored activity; and spaces for collaborative authoring (e.g. wiki) and personal reflection (e.g. blog).[5]

The CC has also experimented with combinations of technologies for synchronous communication. For example, in our meetings, which rely mostly on telephone, we have also used technologies such as Skype voice and chat. The Harambee Coordination wiki is used to capture the minutes of these meetings and to support co-creation of project documentation. So far we have had mixed results using Skype voice because of difficulties with some CC members' Internet connections, so we rely mostly on telephone and occasional chat sessions. We share the active facilitation of both telephone and chat meetings on a rotating basis.

We are also exploring the use of more recent technologies such as podcasting and blogging to share information and to provide access to dialogues for people who may not be able to attend face-to-face events. Although they may not be able to interact with people with specific expertise, people can listen to podcasts that capture key conversations during these events.

The biggest challenge for all of us is developing a strategy to ensure we will deploy technologies that both speak to real needs of Harambee constituencies and can be used without a substantial investment of time, money or energy. The key is to find a combination of technologies that will maximize support for collaboration, both within and between networks.

The resource aspect

Another significant area of challenge for Harambee, and this is related partly to the fact that we are still in the early stages of implementation, is the development of a sound plan for creating resource materials. This is a significant and complementary component to the provision of direct capacity development support through training exercises and through funding of network-strengthening activities. Such resources are intended for Harambee participants and others in Africa and beyond, to find appropriate resources, be it training materials, research papers or other documents, which can assist in strengthening knowledge management or sharing and/or technology appropriation aspects of network capacity.

A central element of a successful strategy, in our view, is finding a way to tap into the collective expertise our existing network of practitioners represents and coupling that with a sound framework for the identification of, and linking with, the myriad other relevant resources available on the Internet. We need to develop a Harambee-specific portal that will help our constituencies access existing expertise and knowledge in ways that do not demand substantial amounts of time, something that in most cases is persistently in short supply.

The learning and evaluation aspect

Another significant challenge with which we are currently grappling is associated with monitoring and evaluating the project, as well as ensuring there is a lasting learning element to it. To assist with this, and in addition to the various mechanisms for communication and sharing information which have already been described, we have developed a Learning and Evaluation Framework with two components, the first to be used primarily by the FN Coordinators, the second by the CC members.

The idea behind both is to have a processes that will guide learning and evaluation without imposing an onerous burden of additional work for project implementers. To the extent that these processes are relatively light and provide direct benefits to those implementers, they will not only be more thoroughly applied, but they will also contribute to deeper and more shared learning among project participants.

Learning with the Focus Networks

An Action Review Cycle is proposed, to learn with and from the activities of the focus networks.

... plan → act → review → theorise → plan …[6]

As part of the 'plan' cycle, the FN coordinator is invited to share his/her thoughts on three aspects of the work being undertaken – the situation, the outcomes and the actions:

1. The salient features of the situation faced by the coordinator (and why they are salient);
2. The outcomes that are desirable (and why they are desirable);
3. The actions that are expected to lead to the outcomes in the situation (and why they will lead to those outcomes).

FN coordinators are encouraged to develop a core set of indicators in consultation with their members. The set of indicators are intended to help them to see how they are doing with respect to their anticipated outcomes but also to report out to others on progress.

The review stage will take place on a pre-arranged date and will focus on the development of a detailed reconstruction of what happened allowing for the emergence of local theories.

Information gathered in the action review cycle will be captured in a wiki that has been set up for each FN Coordinator and viewable by all coordinators. The responsibility for learning and reflection lies jointly in the hands of both the network coordinator and the CC member liaising with the network.

The proposed approach serves many purposes. It will help to:

- Identify what can be, and is being, learned from the implementation of the focus networks' activities by the focus networks themselves;
- Support the development of local theories related to network strengthening;
- Contribute information and resources in the development of network related;
- Identify areas in which additional support is needed and can be provided by the Harambee initiative;
- Strengthen the relationship between members of the coordination committee and the focus network coordinators.

In addition, this approach is expected to:

- Facilitate the process of documentation and evaluation on the part of the focus networks;
- Demonstrate the use and effectiveness of ICTs in support of learning .

Learning with the Coordination Committee

The Action Review Cycle is also being used by the CC to learn and reflect on the Harambee Initiative as a whole. The cycle began at the 'plan' stage when the CC members convened to reflect on the most important features of the Harambee Initiative, the desirable outcomes and the actions that would lead to the outcomes. The committee has also identified a set of indicators to be used to demonstrate progress towards the expected outcomes.

As an example, one salient feature of the CC's situation is the diversity – in terms of the areas of expertise and focus – within the set of FNs. This is an important feature to consider because of the constraints that it creates: their lack of commonality requires additional energy and new thinking in order to create the conditions necessary for them to work together more closely and provide mutual support. As a result, one of the initiative's outcomes is a platform or space for mutual learning among, but not limited to, the CC and FN coordinators. The CC expects a number of actions to lead to those outcomes including active facilitation on behalf of the CC, documentation that captures what the networks are doing, and learning and creating value.

As part of the Action Review Cycle, a review by the members of the CC is planned for the next face-to-face event schedule for October 2006. The review is also geared towards learning utilisation. The CC will explicitly address what has been learned based on the situation faced, the outcomes pursued and the actions that were planned. Opportunities and approaches to make use of new insights will be pursued.

The sustainability aspect

A third kind of challenge, and this is perhaps the greatest for us, is to find effective ways of promoting the organic development of network strengthening activities that

transcend the project itself. In other words, how can we implement Harambee in a way that supports a continuation of the kind of capacity development the project is trying to foster? Harambee is only a two-year project, but the challenge is to put in place the necessary foundation for Harambee-like capacity development to be continuously available to networks in Africa, and furthermore to a broader constituency than the immediate project partners.

One way in which we hope to see this occur is through the development of a network of people and organizations with expertise and interest in the kind of knowledge or ICT-related capacity development work with which Harambee is concerned. Where would such a network come from? The seeds might be sown through the CC members, FNs, donors and Small Grant recipients of the project interacting with - and learning from - each other in various ways. This in turn would lead to the existence of a core group to keep such interactions going.

A second thread to be followed in the development of this network is the identification of other potential partners on the African continent and beyond through the research Harambee will directly support.

Further, in the course of participation in various events – and inviting others to participate in Harambee-related events – representatives of Harambee are likely to create new linkages that will come to fruition over the next few years. This is the 'inter-networking' approach we referred to earlier. In the example of the training Harambee provided to members of the emergent GKP Africa network, it was by chance that their inaugural meeting was happening around the same time and in the same place as the Network Facilitation Training Workshop for Harambee FNs. The CC members felt that, even though GKP Africa was not at all involved with Harambee, they should be invited to participate. There was room to accommodate additional participants in the training and we recognized that here was an African network that could benefit from this training,

Two unforeseen and positive outcomes resulted from this openness to having others benefit directly from our work, even when this occurred in such a manner that did not require any additional resources. First, a substantial amount of enthusiasm was generated among GKP Africa members, and a shared commitment developed among them to begin concrete planning for joint activities within their own network. Second, the idea of GKP Africa and Harambee having further contact of mutual benefit was sparked on both sides.

Thus, a potential additional contributor to the pool of expertise Harambee hopes to foster was identified almost as a side-effect of our open approach to looking for linkages outside the circle of direct project partners. We believe this is not only in the spirit of Harambee (i.e, the promotion of broadly shared ownership wherever possible), but it is a growing trend of networking initiatives. Early examples of this includes the coming together of diverse anti-globalization groups, where organizations that did not work together on an ongoing basis previously, chose to collaborate and develop a common agenda around a specific set of issues, and were highly effective in doing so. Could this be a trend we will see in the development community as well?

Conclusion

As this case study illustrates, the Harambee project is an ambitious one, and one that takes a somewhat risky approach to encouraging the development of a sustainable pool of expertise on knowledge and ICTs for development. It does this by taking its own advice to heart: a powerful way for Africans to have greater control over and a greater impact on the development challenges confronting them is to work in a networked fashion. Thus, Harambee is trying to do this by linking the support for individual African networks whilst promoting networking amongst its coordinators, who in turn play a facilitating role within their respective networks and who want to increase their capacities to do so.

Whether or not we reach our lofty goal of having a network of African knowledge and ICT practitioners who carry on beyond the project itself, we are actively using a variety of technologies and processes to ensure that a significant value added of implementing Harambee is the ongoing shared learning among individual and institutional participants. This, in itself, should have a lasting effect on participating networks. Similarly, through what we have called 'inter-networking', we can benefit from and provide benefit to African networks that are not part of the immediate Harambee family. We are looking forward to the road ahead.

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Abstract
In the course of their various activities, the Harambee Project proponents recognized that processes supporting collaboration and partnership are critical to enhancing the participation of Africans in their own development. There is both an immediate and strong need in Africa for capacity development in the design of processes that assist in the creation, use and sharing of knowledge, and in the use of ICTs to support such engagement. Harambee assists its proponents and partners in supporting specific networks and communities in Africa by increasing their respective capacities to facilitate and coordinate such groups. Through the implementation of focus network pilot activities, provision of channels for knowledge sharing, a small grant facility and the development of research and training materials, Harambee is increasing the capacity of network coordinators and ultimately the effectiveness of the networks themselves.

This case study provides a brief background of Harambee and presents its approach to development through strengthening networks. It also presents some of the key lessons learned as well as what it sees as the major challenges that lie ahead.

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[1] A strong argument for this case is made by Conklin (2006). See also Mansell (2002).
[2] An interesting discussion of the potential benefits associated with employing inputs from a diversity of actors can be found in Surowiecki (2005).
[3] As Mansell and Wehn (1998: 10) put it: "The generation and application of knowledge depends upon much more than access to a global information infrastructure. If developing countries are to experience 'empowerment through knowledge' they will need to build new partnerships and focus on capacity building."
[4] The Action Plans developed by each focus network will outline their respective strategies for developing network capacity in priority areas, with support from, the Harambee project.
[5] See http://www.harambeeafrica.net
[6] http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/reflques.html

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Partner-driven agricultural research-for-development networks in West Africa: the case of ROCARIZ

L.T. Narteh, M. Winslow, O. Youm and S. O. Keya

Introduction

Many consider agricultural development as essential to broadly combat poverty and hunger and to improve livelihoods in rural sub-Saharan Africa. Research is an important stimulant to such development, because it can develop insight into more productive and sustainable ways of feeding growing populations while increasing farm incomes.

However, in West Africa, research programs have limited resources for funding well-rounded national agricultural research systems (NARS). To overcome this critical-mass problem, these nations have joined in a range of topically-focused regional networks to share their knowledge and expertise.

The evolution and experiences of these networks provide an important learning opportunity in knowledge sharing and capacity building for international agricultural development. This paper reviews some of the strategic learning gained by the West and Central Africa Rice Research and Development Network – generally referred to by its French acronym ROCARIZ (Reséau Ouest et Centre Africain du Riz) which has been assisted since its inception by the Africa Rice Center, WARDA.

Beyond the Green Revolution paradigm

Many crop improvement networks around the world were created from the momentum of the Green Revolution, which had enormous impact on wheat and rice production outside of Africa during the 1960s-70s. The Green Revolution demonstrated a simple and clear model that worked – under certain conditions. A few improved crop varieties could be bred for high grain yield and broad adaptation as long as the necessary inputs could be supplied to ameliorate and homogenize the production system, e.g. water, fertilizer, pesticide, and machinery/labour for intensive land preparation and weed control.

However, global development priorities shifted during the past two decades. The world placed increasing emphasis on alleviating hunger and poverty in marginal rain-fed production environments where the poor live. International agricultural research institutions and networks sought to apply the same Green Revolution methods to these areas, but with disappointing results. Varietal adoption and impact in the marginal rain-fed areas was disappointingly low despite decades of breeding and network technology-transfer effort. Limited impact contributed to eroding donor support for the networks.

It became clear that a new paradigm was needed to raise crop improvement under rain-fed conditions in marginal lands, in order to deal with the greater diversity and adversity of such agro-ecosystems and the poverty of the land users, especially in view of their limited access to inputs such as fertilizer, water, etc.) and to global markets. The need to think beyond the Green Revolution box became clear.

Constrained knowledge flows limit learning

Why were centres and networks slow to recognize the need for a different approach to serve poverty-stricken farmers on marginal rain-fed lands in Africa? Constrained knowledge flows were probably a major reason. Many assumed *a priori* that the Green Revolution formula would succeed, and therefore did not consider other possible approaches. Broader consultations with stakeholders were needed to more realistically analyze the situation, but mechanisms were not in place to achieve this.

Without such new approaches, network trials proceeded along the Green Revolution model, testing breeding lines using high-input management practices. Training opportunities on the techniques for conducting these trials were confined to gaining a predefined Green Revolution skills set rather than learning how to develop new approaches suitable to rain-fed conditions. Field visits were often confined to research stations and researcher-managed trials, with little contact with farmers. Like the NARS, farmers and consumers had little or no involvement in network planning, implementation, governance or review. A 'we know better' attitude prevailed.

This problem has become increasingly recognized both by the networks and by the international centres over the past decade, and as a result they have been reforming their processes to increase (inter-disciplinary) knowledge sharing, client and stakeholder participation, and greater breadth of partnerships. Researchers have been learning to customize their approaches to better meet the diverse needs and circumstances of the rural poor living in variable rain-fed environments. ROCARIZ and WARDA were early leaders and innovators in this reform process, so their experiences will be the focus of this paper.

Origin of ROCARIZ: a Task Force approach

The roots of ROCARIZ can be traced to 1991 under a different name and structure known as WARDA Task Forces. Task Forces in turn stemmed from WARDA's unique structure. Unlike other agricultural research centres that were created by the international community, WARDA was established by the region itself. Currently WARDA continues to be overseen by a Council of Ministers constituted from its 17 member nations. This locally owned structure fosters a stakeholder-centred approach.

Since its creation in 1970 WARDA underwent several reorganizations. In 1990 it took over responsibility for rice in West Africa within the CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research) system of 15 international centres. WARDA captured the opportunity of this new mandate to reinvigorate its relationship with partners through the Task Force approach, providing substantial funding and technical support for the operations of Task Forces. NARS contributed the majority of staff time and facilities. Task Force priorities were determined in annual meetings of both NARS and WARDA staff.

This participative approach established a culture of equality and teamwork between WARDA and NARS that was conducive to knowledge sharing. Partners were able to think anew about ways to overcome the constraints that had been limiting the impact of development activities in their region. Today the network operates five Task Forces addressing different constraints and rice-growing environments.

The Task Force approach continued successfully through the remainder of the 1990s. Experience led to a consolidation of some Task Forces to reduce complexity and improve knowledge flows. Meanwhile, a parallel rice network serving Francophone countries emerged under the umbrella of the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF). In April 2000 the two networks formally merged into ROCARIZ to streamline efforts, reduce overlapping meetings and increase research capacity in the region.

An intensive and broadly participative stakeholder meeting to elaborate a five-year plan for the new network preceded this merger. ROCARIZ inherited and continued the Task Force mode of operation while adding a full-time coordinator, a formal steering committee and a stakeholder's consultation group following the CORAF model. These inclusive start-up steps ensured strong buy-in from network partners.

ROCARIZ also initiated a biennial Regional Rice Research Review, also known as the '4R'. The 4R provides a platform for sharing formal knowledge as well as informal exchanges of ideas with peers from across the region.

Increasing knowledge sharing and improving capacity building: the ROCARIZ networking approach

Task Forces create joint ownership of the agenda

As described above, the Task Force mechanism created joint NARS-WARDA ownership of the agenda, prompting both parties to become proactive and creative in engineering a shared agenda rather than the owner-recipient model of technology transfer that prevailed previously.

Financial incentives reward increased knowledge sharing

Financial incentives included competitive funding through the Task Force mechanism's Small Grants Scheme. Task forces that were the most successful in attracting funds were those that exhibited the strongest teamwork and most creative and exciting ideas. In 2002, with support from the European Union, USAID and the CGIAR donors that fund WARDA's core budget, ROCARIZ distributed US$390,000 in small research grants to 98 scientists from 17 countries.

ROCARIZ also funds short term (2-6 week) and long term (2 year) visiting scientist assignments at WARDA so that NARS research results can be written and published. These assignments are usually awarded to the authors of the best papers contributed to the 4R conferences, creating another incentive for network members to share knowledge more effectively.

Learning-by-doing motivates personal capacity development
Instead of regimented training courses, the Task Force approach engaged NARS scientists as equal partners in all aspects of the research-for-development cycle: idea generation, priority-setting, fundraising, work planning, building collaborative teams, project execution, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Scientists found themselves motivated, empowered and accountable for project delivery, with rewards for success or consequences for failure (such as reduced chances of follow-up funding via Task Forces).

ROCARIZ also organizes monitoring tours to network research sites. This process trains scientists in monitoring and evaluation skills while also providing motivation to the owners of the work under review to do the best job possible.

Peer expectations, recognition and appreciation replace isolation and inertia
The proceedings of the 4R event are carefully reviewed and the best are published. Awards are granted for best papers presented, delivering much-appreciated recognition for NARS scientists that most effectively share knowledge. This contrasts with the isolation scientists experienced before the network existed, labouring in remote research stations with very limited communications infrastructure.

Peer expectations of performance within Task Forces likewise motivate teamwork. Accountability is ensured through annual reviews of Task Force progress by both by the Network Coordinator and the Steering Committee.

Spirit of mutual assistance overcomes pride, reticence and 'not-invented-here syndrome'
Past reluctance to share knowledge was often due to the national pride of newly-established African nations, and their desire to meet all their needs internally. ROCARIZ has changed this culture to one where partners are expected to help each other, since all have strengths to share, and weaknesses that others can help them with. For example, through ROCARIZ a scientist from Chad has recently been sent to Burkina Faso to study for a higher degree, while at the same time scientists from Burkina Faso were sent to Ghana to learn about participatory approaches to test and disseminate new rice varieties.

Achievements

The more open and interactive style of ROCARIZ is believed to have played a major role in the achievements of the network.

Breaking with conventional technology-transfer breeding methods, the Rice Breeding Task Force chose to adopt farmer-participatory methods in its testing and dissemination of germplasm. This method resulted in quick and widespread release of a new, more rugged rice varietal type for variable rain-fed environments, known as NERICA germplasm. NERICA arose from crosses between different rice species, and conventional testing approaches would not have effectively examined how farmers, consumers and markets would react to its novel performance and culinary traits.

Many networks have no capacity for impact assessment, but ROCARIZ was able to identify the need and implement a solution. The Economics Task Force trained more than 42 West African scientists in impact assessment methodology. This enhanced capacity is being utilized by the African Development Bank to carry out *ex-ante* impact studies to accelerate the dissemination of NERICA germplasm in 7 pilot countries.

In a vote of confidence from peers on the other side of the African continent, WARDA has been asked by the Association for the Strengthening of Agricultural Research in East and Central Africa (ASARECA) to help it plan and launch a sister East and Central Africa Rice Research Network (ECARRN) based on lessons learned from the ROCARIZ model of participative and interactive network management.

Future challenges

The reinvigorated ROCARIZ will continue to face daunting challenges. Despite a series of positive reviews, international donor support for networks appears to be on the decline, mainly for reasons unrelated to the network's performance. There is a degree of donor fatigue at having provided support for several decades without a sustainable alternative having emerged, including funding by countries in the region themselves.

By gaining buy-in from a wider range of stakeholders and partners, the ROCARIZ approach may help address this problem. Sustainable funding should follow if the network generates impacts that are recognized and valued by beneficiaries. ROCARIZ will continue to be closely aligned with NARS partners, helping them increase their capacities for effective action to reduce hunger and poverty in West Africa.

In closing

By building knowledge-sharing mechanisms as an organic part of the network structure, and creating opportunities and incentives for teamwork and scientific professionalism, the ROCARIZ approach has sharply upgraded the capacities and effectiveness of national rice researchers in West Africa. These gains have been noted and praised by outsiders, for instance in a recent review of the network by USAID (Clarke 2004) and by the CGIAR (Eicher 2003). A recent Centre-Commissioned External Review by WARDA also commented favourably (WARDA 2005).

We hope the ROCARIZ case will serve as a useful example for others interested in reforming networks to become more participatory and engaging, more adaptive and analytical in their approaches, and broader in their partnerships and vision.

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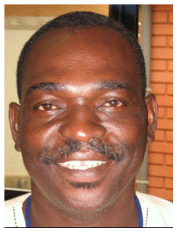
Abstract

Agricultural research feeds the knowledge base that underpins food security and rural employment across sub-Saharan Africa. However, in West Africa, many national agricultural research programs (NARS) are small and have insufficient resources to carry out well-rounded, in-depth research programs. Since the crops, cropping systems and food needs of these countries have much in common, there is a clear opportunity for sharing knowledge and capacities for mutual benefit through networks.

However, conventional crop-based networks in sub-Saharan Africa were mainly mechanisms for centralized dissemination and testing of technologies, an approach that treated NARS as dependent recipients of research outputs generated by international centres. This paper describes the mechanisms employed by ROCARIZ, the West and Central Africa Rice Research and Development Network to overcome that tradition.

ROCARIZ broke the mold by structuring itself around multi-country, issue-driven 'task forces' that decentralize the international research agenda to NARS. The task force mechanism puts NARS in the lead in all aspects of the research cycle including idea generation, priority-setting, fundraising, work planning, building collaboration and teams, project execution, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. By creating opportunities and incentives for teamwork and scientific professionalism, the ROCARIZ approach generates pride and enthusiasm amongst its members while developing their technical capacities and knowledge sharing skills and behaviours.

Authors



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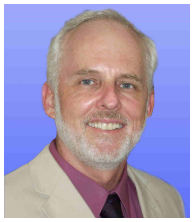

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Dr. Shellemiah O. Keya has since 2004 served as Assistant Director General (Research and Development) for the Africa Rice Centre (WARDA). He had previously served as Board Chair or Board Member for more than 30 different research institutions. Dr Keya was the Executive Secretary to the CGIAR Technical Advisory Committee from 1996 to 2000, and to its successor body the Interim Science Council from 2001 to 2003. Before joining the CGIAR, he was Vice-Chancellor of Moi University, Kenya (1988- 1994). Dr Keya is a recipient of the African Academy of Sciences/Ciba-Geigy Gold Medal, and the Soka Gakkai Awards of Highest Honour.

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Dreams and realities…
Capacity building for networking in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector

Ndala Duma and Peter J. Bury

In this contribution, Ndala and Peter talk about their experiences with capacity building for networking on resource centre development in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector. The dialogue was held occasionally using voice Skype, but mostly text Skype, for documentation purposes.

A bit of background: capacity building for networking within the Resource Centre Development programme (RCD)
The Resource Centre Development (RCD) programme is a process-oriented multi-year initiative seeking to develop networks of national level resource centres in the Water Sanitation and Hygiene sector. Under the guidance of the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, about 18 partners in 14 countries are currently involved in RCD processes. The overarching objective of the programme is to offer sector stakeholders better access to - and support better use of - available information and knowledge.

As these RCD processes are in fact learning processes, the RCD programme also promotes learning and sharing through networking among the participating organizations and individuals. Over the years, a wide variety of learning and sharing opportunities have been developed, tested and offered, including:

- Face-to-face meetings
- Trainings
- Joint participation in international sector events
- Junior Professionals exchange programmes
- One-on-one support visits
- Electronic (inter)active learning and sharing, including websites / portal development; email; teleconferences (including tools like Skype); discussion platforms (e.g. Yahoo!Groups and Googlegroups) and extranets.

Chat between Ndala and Peter created on 19 June 2006

Subject: capacity building for networking

Peter: 12:24:49

Ndala, do you feel that the Resource Centre Development (RCD) programme provided any capacity building on networking? If so, what specifically?

Ndala: 12:27:13

Yes, I feel that way, even though that was not done overtly. I can give examples as from when I started in July 2004. What has been outstanding for me is the ability to bring different people together, people who are involved in the process; an example would be the RCD Training of Facilitators (ToF), which took place in November 2004.

Peter: 12:34:05

What type of capacity was built there? Any examples?

Ndala: 12:36:41

Meeting people who are also facilitators of the Resource Centre Development process in their respective countries was useful. We all gave presentations on the RCD process in our own countries. That helped us to understand better what the other people are doing, what their challenges are and how they were trying to overcome them. This was also a chance to share ideas on what was working, in the different Resource Centres, and we learned from each other.

Peter: 12:38:08

Did the networking only take place at the workshop or did it continue afterwards? If yes, with whom did you network and on what?

Ndala: 12:39:47

To be more specific on the type of capacity built, I'd say it was the capacity for us to understand that we were actually running networks in our own countries, no matter how differently the Resource Centres were structured. I think most of it only took place during the workshop, and not afterwards, and it's one of the weaknesses in the Resource Centre Development programme. Do you sometimes also feel that the "people to people" facilitation is driven only by IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, and that bilateral networking is not happening sufficiently?

Peter: 12:45:29

Yes, I also have that feeling. And I wonder if it is very different in other networks. Do you have any idea why there is little or no exchange between Resource Centre Development members (outside IRC)? Is there no need? Do others not offer anything interesting? Is it a technical/communications problem? Is it cultural? Is it a lack of time? Or... something else ;-)

Ndala: 12:48:37

An issue could be resources. Most organisations do not accommodate networking, in terms of time and probably financial resources.

Peter: 12:49:57

So you feel the Water Research Commission (WRC) is not giving you time to do this? Or it doesn't appreciate if you spend time on this?

Ndala: 12:53:54

I think there will be more exchange if people see a common direction, and maybe at the end of these interactions we don't leave with so much of a common purpose or vision, but tend to focus more on our own country processes.

Peter: 12:54:00

Did you ever interact with other Resource Centre Development people outside joint events (like workshops, international events, etc)? Try to speak for yourself: do you see any common direction between what WIN-SA (Water Information Network, South Africa) does and other RCD initiatives elsewhere?

Ndala: 12:55:41

Not on any organised events, but the communication has remained strong with some, and I have shared some documents with other upon request.

Peter: 12:56:08

Sounds interesting: what kind of documents with whom?

Ndala: 12:58:19

The Water Information Network (WIN) Business Plan has been shared on the RCD 18 Yahoo group, and the travel report on the Tanzania workshop.

Peter: 12:59:38

That's true and that was great! But did you ever have bilateral contact with anyone? In Pakistan, in India, elsewhere? With whom would you like to set up this regional collaboration (which region) and what type of collaboration (on what?)?

Ndala: 13:04:17

We have started talking with the Institute of Water and Sanitation Development (IWSD), Zimbabwe, (although they are not part of RCD, but we heard about them through the network). This will be in the Southern African region, and we would like to focus on capacity building for knowledge sharing in the region. It's still tentative for now but talks are going on. In your view, Peter, what are the most effective ways for capacity building for networking in the RCD programme?

Peter: 13:07:54

Well... I'm not sure, probably by showing examples and inviting Resource Centre Development community members to join in. Also, by continuing to encourage RCD community members to experiment with bilateral contacts (outside IRC) on anything related to RCD in-country.

Ndala: 13:09:27

I think the workshops are effective and so is concrete support like setting up web-portals, etc.

Peter: 13:09:30

For example: you read somewhere another RCD member developed a water sector Yellow Pages and would like to get a copy to see how it looks and then if you like the idea, get in touch and talk to them on how they actually developed them.

Ndala: 13:10:15

The thing is I don't read that much about what others are doing.

Peter: 13:10:28

Ok... workshops: so are you saying that is the best networking way? Is once a year enough? What about the cost aspect of it? Bringing people from all over the world together for a few days in not cheap!

Ndala: 13:11:08

Workshops are the best yes, but they do need to be complemented.

Peter: 13:11:16

Ok... so you don't read, what about talking? Chatting? Workshops to be complemented: how and by what?

Ndala: 13:11:39

I think twice a year would be more useful... thinking about the one I just missed.

Peter: 13:11:47

Twice a year! Who pays???? South Africa is rich, and IRC has bit of money, but many other partners don't!

Ndala: 13:12:53

I talk a lot... and I would probably find it useful, more teleconferences maybe, but then we need those common issues before we dedicate time to such.

Peter: 13:14:14

I agree, so... do you see any interesting common issues? I mean, what issues are you currently interested in? (regarding WIN-SA work of course, not world cup soccer ;-))

Ndala: 13:14:48

Well, resources are an issue, that is why the workshops need to be complemented by sharing of documents and files that is not too cumbersome. We're very interested in documenting: what works and what doesn't work.

Peter: 13:15:30

What are other common issues that interest you?

Ndala: 13:16:10

Common issues to me right now is anyone trying to strengthen regional collaboration in Southern Africa for better knowledge sharing and for capacity building in the Water Sanitation sector. I'm also interested in how people are using portals and how they measure impact of the products and services they offer.

Peter: 13:16:29

So, how important is networking for you in your work?

Ndala: 13:18:49

Networking is very important for my work, because running a network like WIN means working with and interacting with different people on a daily basis. We also work in a vibrant sector with different things happening sometimes all at once and one needs to always keep the

finger on the pulse… Do you think networking is promoted overtly in the Resource Centre Development programme?

Peter: 13:20:15

Yes, the RCD programme has explicitly tried to promote networking among partners: (1) by bringing them together in workshops and inviting them (not necessarily always all) to international events (2) by setting up a Yahoo!Group / Googlegroup and trying to facilitate exchange by email; (3) by supporting partners in setting up their websites and advertising (probably not enough) all these websites, including IRC's, to all Resource Centre Development partners. The RCD programme explicitly formulated a RCD Learning & Sharing component with specific – but limited – resources allocated to materialise things like regional workshops, training of facilitators, email-discussion groups, producing the RCD practical guides and facilitator notes (available on the RCD extranet to all partners).

Peter: 13:21:02

But what capacities for networking are missing in the RCD programme, do you think?

Ndala: 13:23:30

I think we need a clear map of who's doing what so that we know where to go for different issues that we might want to raise. We also need a quick channel like email instead of a channel that will ask us to log on separately as I find that too time consuming.

Peter: 13:25:35

I think that one weakness is that the programme has not managed to start up real networking among Resource Centre Development partners that are not dependant on involving IRC. So there is little RCD partners to RCD partner (non-IRC) interaction. How could we move away from mainly IRC driven in RCD networking?

Ndala: 13:29:31

The focus should be on building regional collaboration, where we get together as RCs based on common goals and the IRC can partner with us in the realisation of those goals.

Peter: 13:32:50

Do you feel that one-on-one visits are still necessary once a network (and trust among members) is well established?

Ndala: 13:35:05

One-on-one visits are always necessary in a relationship of support, because things always change anyway. The nature of the support also evolves quite a lot. A network partner can't stay away once trust is already established, however the number of visits might decrease, as there is more reliance on email, and other communication channels. What about you, are you finding one-on-one visits useful?

Peter: 13:38:27

One-on-one visits are crucial in terms of deepening the partnership, meeting more people than only the main contact people, and keeping a finger on the pulse of local realities (what is feasible, what not, what are new developments, etc.). In terms of purely networking (understood here as regular exchange of ideas, answers, experiences,

documents etc.) I feel that once partners know each other and trust each other, face-to-face meetings are not absolutely necessary anymore. I think we should, more than we do up to now, jointly think better and prepare better.

Peter: 13:40:50

So, what is a striking lesson to you in Resource Centre Development?

Ndala: 13:44:14

The most striking lesson is that there is no uniqueness and therefore no formula to do it best, but we all fit in the concept to our different situations and contexts, sometimes it fits like a glove, and sometimes it doesn't, but it's okay because we do what works in our relevant contexts anyway.

Peter: 13:45:14

If you were a magician, what would you do to build more capacity for networking?

Ndala: 13:46:31

It's a good thing I'm not a magician, because it actually doesn't need magic, but a common value adding purpose and then it works out very well! Do you personally think networking needs an element of magic? Do give some ideas on this if you agree.

Peter: 13:47:00

The magic probably lies in the enthusiasm of people and the capacity of transferring that to others, including person-to-person voice contact, so using the phone and Skype more, rather than only email.

About the authors

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A magic lantern for the grassroots

Jhumpa Ghosh and TK Omana

Our story takes place over a period of just a few months and describes how two newcomers to the art of video making were introduced to the basics and used it to enrich their work with local communities. Jhumpa Ghosh runs a non-government organisation (NGO) called Change Initiatives in Kolkata in West Bengal and is a specialist in the development of information content for sharing with women's networks. Ms T.K. Omana is the Director of an NGO called RASTA in the Wayanad district of Kerala and works with local rural communities, predominantly tribal women, to improve their lives. The two of us first met in December 2005 under the leaden grey skies of Chatham in England. The occasion was an inception meeting to launch a one-year pilot project, Telesupport, aimed at helping farmers to find solutions to local problems in agriculture and natural resources management.

Telesupport is an initiative supported by the European Union-India Economic Cross Cultural programme and focuses on facilitating the exchange of knowledge between farmers, community groups, research institutes and intermediary organizations. Web-based tools are used to store information and to allow stakeholders to communicate with each other; a range of other media complements these tools. A core element of this knowledge management system is a range of improved practices in agriculture and natural resources management, which have been tried and tested by farmers in their own localities. Needs assessments are carried out at the project sites to identify constraints and information gaps and to match the demand and supply of improved practices. These practices are documented in an interactive on-line database that allows the technologies or methodologies they describe to be continually updated to incorporate user feedback. The database is decentralized to allow local ownership and member organizations to submit their practices and maintain their own website on the system.

A key feature of the Telesupport approach is to use the most appropriate means of communication to deliver the desired messages and to make the relevant information available both on- and off-line. The information stored in the database is mainly textual but improved practices can be illustrated with visual images and audio. Video is of particular interest to us because of the immediacy of the visual image and the flexibility of this form of communication. In our situation, video can be used to document the experiences of local communities; if the communities themselves do this documentation, it can help to empower them by sharing their message and knowledge. The technology is especially useful in areas with low literacy rates. In addition, video can be utilized to make short clips to illustrate how improved practices are carried out. However, video making is a specialist skill that requires time and substantial financial resources. We wish to explore whether the use of video in Telesupport is likely to add significant value to what we are trying to achieve. We are interested in finding out if it is practical for non-specialists to produce high quality video films and how much continuing support is needed from specialists in this field.

A learning experience in Pastapur

The Deccan Development Society (DDS) has developed strong expertise in working with women's groups to help them express themselves through the medium of video. Thus DDS, led by Director P.V. Satheesh, was the natural organization to share these skills with other project partners. The training workshop, coordinated by Satheesh, began with a discussion on the Telesupport project and community filmmaking. The key question was how video would be used in the initiative and an expectation check was done with the participants.

The technical aspects of the course were covered thoroughly in spite of the short time available. Participants were introduced to the basics required for filmmaking, such as how the video camera works and how to handle it, how to record shots and take meaningful pictures. The basics of shots and composition were described, as well as framing, different angles and their meaning, the importance of headroom, nose room and walking room while recording. Lastly, the principles of editing and the use of the computer and proprietary software packages for editing were covered. Practice sessions followed all sections, providing participants with hands-on experience with telling a story through shots, scenes and sequences.

Subhra Saikat Ray, an agricultural graduate working for Change Initiatives, said it was an enriching experience at Pastapur. He said the duration of the workshop was an advantage; the first seven days were on shooting and the last three days were on editing. The period for editing provided a learning experience, as participants were better able to appreciate their weaknesses during the shooting period. The training session gave him the confidence to capture good practices more effectively and helped him realize that videos are an effective way to document research work.

Pushpa's story

Pushpa, a tribal woman aged 26, had her first experience of traveling a long distance from her homeland in Wayanad district. She had never even been on a train before. Initially she was scared and quite worried about the long journey to Pastapur, in the Medak District of Andhra Pradesh, and about the training programme. The area where she lives is cool and humid and she would be spending ten days in a totally new environment that is hot and dry. She did not know any other language other than Malayalam and her own local dialect. So throughout the ten days of the video training workshop, one of her fellow participants from RASTA, Ms. Jithya, did the translation for her, enthusiastically making use of the translation unit and the headphones, which she had just seen on television.

Pushpa was homesick for the first day, as this her first time away from home. Gradually, this feeling disappeared due to the down-home atmosphere and the hospitality shown by the Pastapur villagers and the members of the host organization DDS. Satheesh and his co- workers had shown special care and attention towards her and she came to feel much more comfortable. Moreover, among the DDS community filmmakers, there were village women who, like her, were illiterate. When she saw these women were leaders of the filmmaking unit, she gained self-confidence. And she was also able to make a strong contribution to the practical sessions making

stories related to agriculture, as she has been working in the fields since her childhood. Since she was not familiar with computers, the editing part of the programme was difficult for her. Consequently, the trainers involved her primarily in the filmmaking, confident as they were that she could make interesting videos to reach grassroots levels.

As with Pushpa, Celine of RASTA stated that her confidence in making short films dramatically increased within the ten days of the programme. Celine commented that on the very first day of the training programme she was nervous even just handling the camera, but by the end of the training, she felt as though her dreams had come true.

Following the training, it was harvesting season in Kerala. This provided an opportunity to start making a video and the filming began after only two weeks. With the help of the other participants from Kerala who had attended the video training, Pushpa shot a film in her own village community. The film focused mainly on paddy harvesting and paddy preservation techniques. People in Pushpa's community, especially the elders and even her own peer members, were very proud when they saw her handling the video camera. As a result, she was in high spirits and was pleased to have engaged in this new activity.

Sharing our knowledge in Coochbehar

Coochbehar lies in the foothills of the Himalayas, about 706 kilometres from Kolkata, the principal city of the Indian state of West Bengal and the base for the Telesupport project in West Bengal. The Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (UBKV), or North Bengal Agricultural University, is located in Coochbehar. The university is the hub for five Krishi Vikas Kendras (KVK) of North Bengal. Sponsored by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, the apex agricultural research agency of the Indian government, the mandate of KVKs is to foster closer relationship with farmers and to ensure that agricultural innovations are effectively promoted.

Shubra Saikat Ray of Change Initiatives and Biswajit Talukdar of the UBKV used the knowledge they gained at Pastapur to train five members of the KVKs with different disciplinary backgrounds in the field of agriculture and fisheries. Jhumpa also joined the group and there was a useful mix of agricultural and ICT expertise that facilitated effective documentation of good practices. The main outcome of the training was a video showing a farmer husbanding a neem tree: a leaf is plucked and taken to the research station; next, a technician in the laboratory extracts sap from the plant and prepares a suitable biopesticide formulation, pours it into a sprayer, and hands it over to the farmer for spraying on an eggplant field. The camera rolls on to show more uses of neem, for example, oil, soap, room cleaner, shampoo and many others.

The films, though lacking the finesse of experienced hands, were loaded with enthusiasm, and they hold the seeds for refined work in the future. The UBKVs have a substantial collection of good practices – and now dispose of excellent video equipment to document them. Moreover, the presence of Biswajit in the UBKV will also facilitate some good filmmaking in the future, especially as the university is our

partner for Telesupport in North Bengal. In fact, two professors have already expressed a desire to learn how to make videos.

Learning milestones

Our experiences so far have shown that, given suitable initial training by experts, non-specialists can make videos that communicate information effectively and in an appealing and accessible way. Illiterate tribal women from remote villages and those with a more formal education in agriculture and ICT can learn together and learn from each other. Basic video making skills can then be passed on to others, providing access to stories untold by the established media. The stories are conveyed in the local language, so farmers understand them. Apart from the online form of data storage, the videos can be stored offline at village Knowledge Centers, and replicated on CD. This is important where connectivity is a problem. The main limitation, apart from the cost of the equipment, is the complexity of the editing process, which is time-consuming and requires special software.

The video shots are uploaded in the database and can be viewed by farmers elsewhere in village Telecentres, equipped with computers and Internet connectivity, so that farmers can access the video files online. The videos are prepared in English as well as in the relevant local language, therefore allowing both the international (Telesupport) and Indian network of NGOs and KVKs to share and exchange good practices. These videos can contribute to farmers' knowledge and are an excellent way of communicating good practice to farmers in other regions.

The first video, on the benefits of azolla and how to grow it in an artificial pond, has already been uploaded on the online Telesupport database. This video is just under three minutes in length and is 4 megabytes in size. In addition to the videos on neem and rice harvesting and storage, several others are in preparation and will be used to illustrate good practices. We are confident that they will provide a helpful contribution to our aim of providing local solutions to the problems of farming communities.

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Abstract
This story describes how two newcomers to the art of video making were introduced to the basics and used it to enrich their work with local communities in India. Vidoes are used to illustrate good practices, providing a helpful contribution to providing local solutions to the problems of farming communities.

About the authors

Jhumpa Ghosh works on development issues in West Bengal. Her particular area of interest is community media, particularly in assimilating traditional forms of communication such as oral discourse and print with ICTs. She is the director of Nabanna, a project that empowered women through ICTs. Nabanna won the Gender & ICT Award 2003 from the Association of Women's Network Supporting Programme and the Global Knowledge Partnership.

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T.K. Omana is a social worker from Wayanad, one of the most underdeveloped districts of Kerala in south India. She works for the empowerment of rural women, indigenous communities and farmers of the region. She set up the RASTA organisation in 1984. RASTA works on natural resources management, livelihood issues and knowledge management at the grass roots level, with ICT through community-based groups. She was among 1000 women selected worldwide for the nomination of the Nobel peace prize in 2005.

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KM4Dev Community Notes

In this section of the Journal, KM4Dev members revisit and reflect on past mailing list discussions. In this Issue, Lucie Lamoureux, Programme Associate at Bellanet International, looks back on discussion threads that focused on knowledge sharing capacity development. This specific Community Notes was also developed as an entry in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Renewal Project[11].

Developing capacity for the use of knowledge sharing approaches and techniques

Lucie Lamoureux

Introduction

More and more development organisations are formulating knowledge management (KM) strategies and an integral part of most KM strategies includes the building of their employees' knowledge sharing (KS) skills. KS skills can be developed through more formal training, or through informal means, such as through exchanges with other members of the organisation, or networks. Knowledge sharing implies a change in people's behaviours and organisations need to take into account that their staff may not necessarily have the competencies to do so, just as organizations may not have the supportive environment for KS. They also need to look at reinforcing or supporting the skills that are already there, and at reducing impediments for knowledge sharing such as the organisational culture or time constraints.

This Community Notes examines both the formal and informal ways of developing capacity for the use of various knowledge sharing techniques, based on the experiences of KM4Dev members and their organisations. There is, of course, no magic solution that applies to all, but some of the approaches described below have been very effective in specific organisational cases. Both formal and informal KS capacity development approaches are highlighted by examples from some of these international development practical applications.

Formal knowledge sharing capacity development

Various methods are used for formal capacity development. Some of the options include hiring trainers or facilitators to provide in-house capacity development, sending staff out to training courses or workshops, and providing access to e-learning courses or self-directed learning modules. All of these options are worthwhile, although a mix and match approach can be considered, depending on available time and budget.

A few organisations have provided basic introductory sessions to staff on KM by bringing in well-known KM experts, such as Larry Prusak and Tom Davenport. Others have focused more on KS skills development workshops in using specific techniques, such as facilitation (face-to-face and online), peer assists, after-action reviews and storytelling.

The latter are most effective when it is clear to staff that developing these practical skills will support and benefit their daily work, and that improved knowledge or experience sharing will be valuable to both individual and organisation. The Consultative Groups on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) are two examples of organisations that developed in-house workshops - with the assistance of external resource people - in order to develop their staff's capacity in facilitation techniques and using peer assists and after action reviews. A KM4Dev learning event held at the World Bank in 2004 also sought to develop specific skills in KS competencies.

Self-directed knowledge sharing skills development can also compliment other formal methods. Several knowledge sharing toolkits have been elaborated by development organizations, the latest by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI)[12]. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and its partners created a fully integrated learning module on building *Electronic Communities and Networks*.[13] This module looks at the approaches, methods and tools, which help build groups and communities, enhance communication and stimulate active participation.

Informal knowledge sharing capacity development

Another aspect of capacity development is through 'learning by doing', or in various informal means. In any organisational setting, it is important to recognise the ways that knowledge is shared already, for example through meetings, seminars, or even informal chats at the coffee machine or water cooler.

Informal capacity development involves supporting KS skills but without using a didactic or classic instructional approach. For example, knowledge fairs or knowledge weeks reinforce knowledge sharing, giving the space for staff to talk about their work and activities, and to share their experiences and challenges with one another (and in some cases, with external people). The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the World Bank and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have all experimented with some type of knowledge fair. At the grassroots level, some Latin American groups have done the same.[4]

KS capacity can also be developed in meetings or workshops by providing participants with practical experience in using KS techniques (for example, by conducting real-life peer assists and telling stories in a workshop setting). Learning by doing is a very effective way to gain a better understanding of what KS is all about. Afterwards, people can take what they have learned in workshops and apply it in their own work contexts. Four CGIAR centres have used different techniques within their annual general meetings, with the explicit goal of building their staff's KS capacities by 'doing'. [4]

Similarly, staff capacity can be built through participation in communities of practice or thematic networks. By sharing their experiences in these informal settings, participants learn from each other and can develop common solutions.

Mentoring and/or coaching is another way to develop knowledge sharing skills and encouraging learning. Mentoring brings together more experienced individuals with younger or less experienced staff. Sida (the Swedish development agency) uses mentoring effectively in mixed age field mission teams.

Time is required for all of these approaches, so an organizational context, which recognizes and provides time for these activities is essential to success. Adding 'something else' on top of existing workloads rarely bears fruit.

KM4Dev discussions on capacity development

There have been three separate KM4Dev mailing list discussions on this specific topic (in August 2002, September 2004 and February 2006). Interestingly enough for the members of the FAQ Renewal Project, there was an attempt to re-launch a dialogue on capacity development in June 2006 but only one person responded to the query. This lead the FAQ Renewal Project team to wonder if members had a sixth sense about what is a pressing need for their input, rather than a more contrived one.

The February 2006 discussion was on KM online courses that are specifically related to international development. The resources suggested in the thread can be found in the 'Links & Web Based Articles' section of the FAQ entry[5]. The conclusion is that such a course does not currently exist. One participant suggested that the KM4Dev community should think of developing an online action-learning course on KM. This idea has sparked interest in a few members and Simone Staiger of the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) lead a discussion on the topic at the July 2006 KM4Dev workshop in Brighton. A wiki space was created for the group's purposes[6]. One member was concerned that we should be wary of 'reinventing the wheel', since there is a lot of material already out there. He also suggested to develop a 'blended learning course', i.e. both online and face-to-face, instead of only the former. A section was created on the KM4Dev website where people can post their useful PowerPoint training slides[7]. Another contributor noted that in order to have a quality product, you need both content process experts and format experts (including educational experts).

This lead to a discussion around other learning-oriented consolidated efforts, such as the FAQ, the *Knowledge Management for Development Journal*, and the new Knowledge Expeditions project[8]. The latter seeks to move away from tool-centered learning and more into self-organizing 'learning alliances'. A member strongly supports such initiatives and would like to see:

> *The proposed KM-course - in a view to building KM competencies - would best valorise these parts of the Journal that present consolidated insights, summaries, compilations, syntheses. This would keep these contributions alive!*

He also suggested that 'Learning in KM' could as well be conceived in an analogy to a 'collegial coaching', driven by the needs of someone. For example, instead of collecting

(and compiling) asynchronous contributions, we could hold a teleconference or a chat and members of the community could subscribe and attend.

But one person felt that 'KM training does pose some potential problems, or at least confusions' because we are discussing both training development practitioners, as well as the training of ourselves, 'the KM specialist'. He advanced that:

> *The key to mainstreaming KM practices and approaches will be to integrate KM into the work, process and mindset of development professionals. This in fact may NOT lead to many specific KM courses - except for folk like the members of this list.*

He thought that KM tools and practices (such as Communities of Practice, After Action Reviews and peer to peer exchanges) should be gently integrated into the way work gets done, without calling attention to the 'KM lingo'. He also argued that providing training may be necessary but is hardly sufficient and that other actions (for example, policy, regulatory and human resources) are often needed to provide an 'enabling environment' to make these approaches acceptable to the larger community.

In 2004, a member of the community enquired about KM training or certification programs and one academic institution had been suggested, but the member found the $8000 price tag a bit high. Another participant argued that in order to make KM capacity building sustainable - especially in developing countries - there should be subsidies available and that organizations should be the ones footing the bills, not individuals, as is often the case.

Back in 2002, a KM4Dev member asked for ideas in developing an internal workshop, which aimed at building KM and communications skills of participants through the sharing of their own knowledge, skills and experience. Suggestions included using KS techniques such as storytelling/narrative ('which is how most important communication actually happens in organisations and elsewhere') and peer assists within the workshop structure helps participants to understand the value of KM while doing it.

Capacity development examples in application

Here are specific examples of KM4Dev members' practical applications of KS capacity development in their organisations and networks.

CIDA's KM Secretariat developed a learning package on collaboration and knowledge sharing for all CIDA staff. Part of this package was a toolkit[9] containing their ten favourite techniques for better knowledge sharing, workshops on using peer assist and after action review (co-organised with Nancy Dixon and Bellanet) and a storytelling workshop with Steve Denning.

CGIAR's KS project developed an approach that involved incorporating KS principles and techniques into important CG centre events. The idea is that by creating opportunities for centre management and staff to experiment with these KS techniques, the project can demonstrate their value as means of facilitating organisational change and research collaboration. The project worked through four pilot initiatives, carried out at CIAT, the

Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT) and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI). The project also carried out complementary activities, including a training course in facilitation skills (in collaboration with CGIAR's Institutional Learning and Change Initiative) and the development of an online KS toolkit.[10]

SDC organized a 'Dare to Share Fair' on its premises in Berne on 30-31 March 2004. Around 200 SDC staff and partners from more than 30 countries came together to share the ways they learn from experience. The SDC building was transformed into a colourful market place. Market stalls, workshops and short presentations provided ideal opportunities for lively discussions and getting to know each other. The event's theme was 'managing knowledge and skills for development' and underlined the fact that learning from experience is a must and should be a daily routine. [11]

One member, Sebastiao Ferreira, trained facilitators for 'social learning experiences', to help groups and organisations make their knowledge explicit. In 2004, as part of a Knowledge Fair for Latin American groups, he organized brief training sessions with development professionals, sent them off 'to practice', and then offered them support in tackling their practical problems. The Seminar part of the Fair looked at the challenges of supporting social learning initiatives: methodological and cognitive, networking, advocacy, funding, etc. As Sebastiao noted:

> *Over the course of 3 days, 46 people were trained and they are now identifying group learning experiences. I'll deliver a second workshop to them, more focused on expressing knowledge and in searching for partners in constructing learning networks.*

A second Knowledge Fair is being organized for a group in El Salvador in October 2006.

The Centre for Reflective Community Practice of MIT in Boston also trained facilitators in using a reflective methodology to help groups in Latin America to retrieve their knowledge[12]. They are currently evaluating their experience and will have elements of a model by the end of 2006.

There exist many more examples of capacity development in using KS approaches and techniques in development. Hopefully, Community Notes readers can use these and other examples as inspiration to propose formal or informal capacity development tailored to their own environments.

The following members of the KM4Dev community are key contacts on developing KS capacity: Stephanie Colton, Steve Denning, Urs Karl Egger, Sebastiao Ferreira, Manuel Flury, Allison Hewlitt, Erik Johnson, Lucie Lamoureux, Geoff Parcell, Tony Prior, John D. Smith, Simone Staiger, Marc Steinlin and Nancy White.

About the author

Lucie Lamoureux is a Programme Associate with Bellanet International. She has been involved in KM4Dev since its inception in 2000 and acting as lead facilitator since December 2002.
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Endnotes

[1] With a grant from Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), a team of four community members undertook a project aimed at updating and reviving the FAQ section of the Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) community website. See FAQtory: http://www.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/FAQ_Index

[2] See http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Publications/Tools_KM.html

[3] See http://www.imarkgroup.org/moduledescrC_en.asp

[4] See Examples in Application, p. 4-5

[5] See http://www.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Developing_capacity_for_the_use_of_knowledge_sharing_approaches_and_techniques%3F#Further_Information

[6] See http://www.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/KM_in_Development_Course

[7] See http://www.km4dev.org/index.php/articles/c206

[8] See http://www.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Knowledge_Expeditions

[9] See http://www.km4dev.org/index.php?module=uploads&func=download&fileId=10

[10] See http://www.ks-cgiar.org/toolbox

[11] See http://www.daretoshare.ch

[12] See article in KM4D Journal, Vol.1, No.3, http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/viewFile/44/115

Buchholz, G. and S. Arhidani. 2006. Book Review: 'Trust in knowledge management systems in organizations.'
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www.km4dev.org/journal

Book Review

'Trust in knowledge management systems in organizations'

Georg Buchholz and Sagita Arhidani

Maija-Leena Huotari and Mirja Livonen (2004) *Trust in knowledge management systems in organizations*. Idea Group Publishing © 2004 (296 pages) ISBN: 1591402204

In their book, the editors Maija-Leena Huotari and Mirja Livonen address a highly relevant issue to networking and knowledge management: trust. In four sections, various papers dealing with different aspects of trust are presented:

Section I: Trust in performing;
Section II: Trust in online communities;
Section III: Citizens' trust in institutions; and
Section IV: Towards trust models.

In chapters 1, 2, and 3, trust is mainly discussed at the organizational level, whereas chapters 4, 5, and 8 consider trust at the level of networks or online communities. Chapters 6 and 7 investigate the significance of trust at the intersection of individual and organizational levels where individuals interact with organizations or institutions. Chapters 9 and 10 examine trust in the global economy and in society. Chapter 11 focuses on trust in information systems. Systems, in this book, are considered from the social or the socio-technological perspective.

According to the authors, social capital will prove to be the most important asset in the future. Trust is considered as an essential prerequisite to enhance knowledge and information sharing behaviours and knowledge creation. It is based on expectations and interactions and manifested in people's behavioural patterns.

The authors highlight the crucial role of trust in turning personal knowledge into organizational knowledge, and emphasize that trust must be incorporated in the management of knowledge-based activities of organizations and their stakeholders. They believe that building trust-based partnerships with other organizations will be the major managerial challenge in the globalized economy because organizations rely increasingly on each other. Collaboration and trust are considered as mutually dependent. Collaboration presupposes trust, but people who do not trust each other are not inclined to collaborate.

The book deals in great length with the scientific theories behind the concept of trust and trust building, which is described as a three-stage model. The first stage is control in the absence of trust. At this stage, one must take into account the possibility of

opportunism and lack of competence, and move on with small steps and little risk, or even use control to manage the risks. The second stage is assessing trustworthiness and developing tolerance levels of trust. At this stage, one obtains more knowledge and experience for setting trust tolerance levels, and finds out under which conditions trust works. However, at the same time, when some scope of trust has been allowed, the option of reverting to control, if it is needed, is still possible. At the third stage, the tolerance level for misunderstandings or miscommunication are increased based on trust built in the previous stages.

Trust management is perceived as essential for the future. Nowadays, managers are overwhelmed by information and they have difficulties assessing which sources they can trust. Therefore, building trust becomes an essential management activity, which consists of four elements: (1) building one vision and one company; (2) showing confidence in people's abilities; (3) establishing familiarity and dialogue; and (4) recognizing contributions.

The book further explores the concepts of trust management in a company. The authors state that errors and mistakes often occur in management's choices, so the company must ensure managers can trust that these occasions will be dealt from the point of view of learning, but not that of automatic punishment.

Trust building according to the authors also happens during unintentional encounters. Some of the following behavioural traits that help people to earn trust from each other in unintentional encounters are anticipation, friendliness, facilitation and predictability.

While the book predominantly addresses trust from a scientific point of view, it also provides practical suggestions and checklists for network managers who are concerned about trust. After the theoretical Section I, the book covers several empirical studies related to trust, such as geographically distributed networks (such as multi-institutional R&D organizations), trust in e-commerce, and trust of citizens in governments. Some of the studies do not directly address knowledge sharing and networking for development. However, they reveal a number of interesting insights.

The studies establish, for example, that active participation in networks may be seen as a system of initiations and responses. Initiations involve trust, because they 'make one's preferences public' (which may incur risk). Each initiation strengthens participants' perceptions that trust is reasonable and incurs more initiations. According to the empirical studies, initiations were categorized as 'getting together', 'work-process', 'work-content', 'work-technical', 'needing-contact', and 'fun-talk' emphasizing the importance of face-to-face meetings in the trust building process.

In the final section, a model for trust is presented, in which trust is always created in a dynamic way. Trust is either increasing or decreasing, and cannot be treated as a static entity in a relationship. In addition, trust is very fragile: building it up can take a long time, but breaking it down may occur in a second.

Reflections

The book provides a fascinating collection of papers about trust, a poorly understood but essential component for networking, knowledge sharing, and capacity building. The structure of the various sections with contributions from different authors constitutes both a strength and a weakness, as the thread of the book is somewhat missing. The language is academic and sometimes difficult to understand, and not a good choice for bedside reading. However, you will find gems of information and interesting facts.

We very much appreciated the summaries of each chapter in the preface of the book, enabling a quick overview of the issue. However, to truly appreciate the multidimensional phenomenon of trust and its many facets, you will have to read the whole book. The volume definitely caught our attention to the issue of trust within networking and makes a convincing plea for incorporating trust generation measures in the managerial tasks of an organization or network. Being an academic book that is based on scientific findings, each chapter provides discussions and conclusions that make very useful reference to its content in addition to each abstract.

Taking into consideration that the authors are from various countries – Finland, UK, Italy and the USA – and some of them have yet to meet face-to-face, the book itself is a demonstration of how to put trust to the test when collaborating across geographical distances and disciplinary boundaries, via social and technological information networks. Overall, the book is a very valuable addition for libraries of organizations working in knowledge sharing and networking, but might be a little bit too heavy for your personal library.

About the authors

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Letter to the Editors

'Understanding the role of culture in knowledge sharing: making the invisible visible'

Helen Gould

Belated congratulations to the *Knowledge Management for Development Journal* for profiling the issue of Culture (Understanding the role of culture in knowledge sharing - making the invisible visible, Journal 1(3):2-4 2005).

Creative Exchange is a specialist network and knowledge manager addressing culture and development and therefore in the unenviable position of promoting two fields which are not best valued or visible. We contributed to the cultural debate with our publication, 'Culture: hidden development' which suggested the 'Levels' model as a way of describing the relationship between culture and development. Subsequently, the model was raised and discussed on several platforms, and was very helpfully propagated by Dr Rob Vincent in his Findings Paper: 'What do we do with culture?'(Vincent, 2004). So I thought it would be useful to explain where it came from and share some thoughts on the challenges in developing a cultural approach to knowledge management.

Briefly, the 'Levels' model evolved from our DFID-funded research, 'Routemapping culture and development', which worked with 5 UK-based international development agencies to explore how and why culture was being employed in development and what impact it was having. To share some statistics which highlight the degree of invisibility of culture, as raised in the Journal, in these five agencies alone, we found 350 culturally based projects in 40 countries over just two years, with a conservatively estimated cost base of £30 million. So culture is widely used in development but we found that its contribution to development projects is not often evaluated or recognised.

During interviews in the UK, country offices, among field workers and beneficiaries, it became apparent to my research colleague, Mary Marsh, that there were many different understandings of culture, and this lack of a common understanding about culture may be partly responsible for the invisibility - there was no common reference point. But Marsh noted that the concepts of culture were all interrelated and fell broadly into four 'Levels':

Culture as context: factors specific to local life: beliefs, value systems, history, geography, social hierarchies, gender, faiths, and concepts of time;

Culture as content: languages, practices, objects, traditions, clothing, and heritage;

Culture as method: the medium or cultural forms that projects will use to engage/communicate with communities e.g. drama, dance, proverbs, song, music, video, radio or television; and

Culture as expression: the creative/artistic elements of culture that offer a platform for our beliefs, values, attitudes, feelings and ways of viewing the world - these often connect to communication strategies.

Culture at all of these levels tended to be used either as a tool - pre-determined and message-driven - or as a method of participatory cultural engagement.

The subsequent response has indicated that people find that the 'Levels' help them to easily conceptualise their work in cultural terms, though we acknowledge it is not the only way of so doing. As a case in point, Creative Exchange has recently been developing a research and networking project on Culture and HIV/AIDS ('HIV/AIDS: the creative challenge'). The Levels model has been helping practitioners and policymakers in workshops to understand how HIV/AIDS strategies and programmes can become more locally sensitive and engaging by working within local cultures, rather than just delivering messages telling people to abstain and be faithful.

Which brings me onto the question posed in the Journal: What do we mean by the cultural dimension of knowledge sharing for development? We have recently prepared a Findings Paper reporting progress with our HIV project. Within that we pointed out that culture has been referred to as 'webs of significance' (Gorringe 2004). A cultural approach, we argue:

> *… sets out to systematically engage with these 'webs of significance'; it takes account the cultural context in which communities and groups exist; it negotiates with local social hierarchies and living patterns; and it draws on local forms of communication and expression to engage people.*

In other words: A cultural approach hinges on a *process* which tries to understand a community's sense of itself and tries to engage with that community, respectfully, at its own level.

Why is a cultural approach valid? Culture and knowledge are sometimes synonymous in meaning 'ways of living, being and understanding the world' - social hierarchies, living patterns and forms of communication are as much part of the local knowledge base as local cultural life. Culture adds a further dimension in that it is creative, expressive, tapping into the emotive and spiritual life of community. It is interesting that 'Creativity' in the brain has been described as playing a mediating role between lower (instinctive) and upper (reasoning) brain functions. Knowledge can be ascribed to the upper brain whereas creativity is something much more instinctive and affective.

So working with and respecting local forms of knowledge (indigenous health knowledge, for example), and drawing on local cultures and forms of expression, should create programmes which engage, inspire and affect people. If you want to act on human development, what a powerful combination! It was this kind of approach which was partially credited with reducing HIV infection rates in Uganda in the early years of their prevention programme. The Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), has argued that the benefits of a cultural approach stem from revitalising local cultural forms of expression and channels of communication, building solidarity and empowerment within the community, and encouraging self-reflection; and making public health knowledge more accessible and sustainable (Somma/Bodiang 2004). So there is a sense that working with culture can strengthen opportunities for knowledge management.

A specific challenge arises from the fact that culture does not appear to be valued by the development sector in its knowledge management systems. As an illustration, none of the INGOs we worked with on 'Routemapping' had cultural keywords in their databases, so none was collecting data on their cultural projects - all data was sourced through organisational memory and personal data gathering. As another example, it appears that very little data is collected on cultural issues when undertaking poverty analysis. Since cultural issues (such as ethnic identity, social hierarchies, faiths) have a bearing on exclusion and poverty, it makes sense to gather cultural data to expose trends in poverty which have cultural causes. In relation to HIV/AIDS, it appears the only impact which appeared to be valid in development communications projects using culture was a change in behaviour. Cultural projects have often shown a wider array of impacts which are not captured, such as changes in: 'knowledge, skills, awareness, attitudes, beliefs, emotions and interpersonal relationships', but these were not valid impacts.

It would seem then, that knowledge management processes need to become more inclusive of the cultural dimension. But the development sector is not capturing or managing cultural knowledge because it is not sufficiently aware of (or does not prioritise) the role of culture in development. Here we hit the problem of invisibility which was central to the Journal's theme. But it is hard to change this because insufficient evidence of the impact of culture on human development is flowing from knowledge management. So invisibility and the lack of a cultural dimension to knowledge management are a self-perpetuating problem.

So I would close by posing a further question to knowledge managers in the development sector: what can we do about cultural invisibility in our own agencies? And what simple and practical measures can be taken to ensure knowledge management systems start to accommodate a cultural dimension? Ideas welcome...

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About the author

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