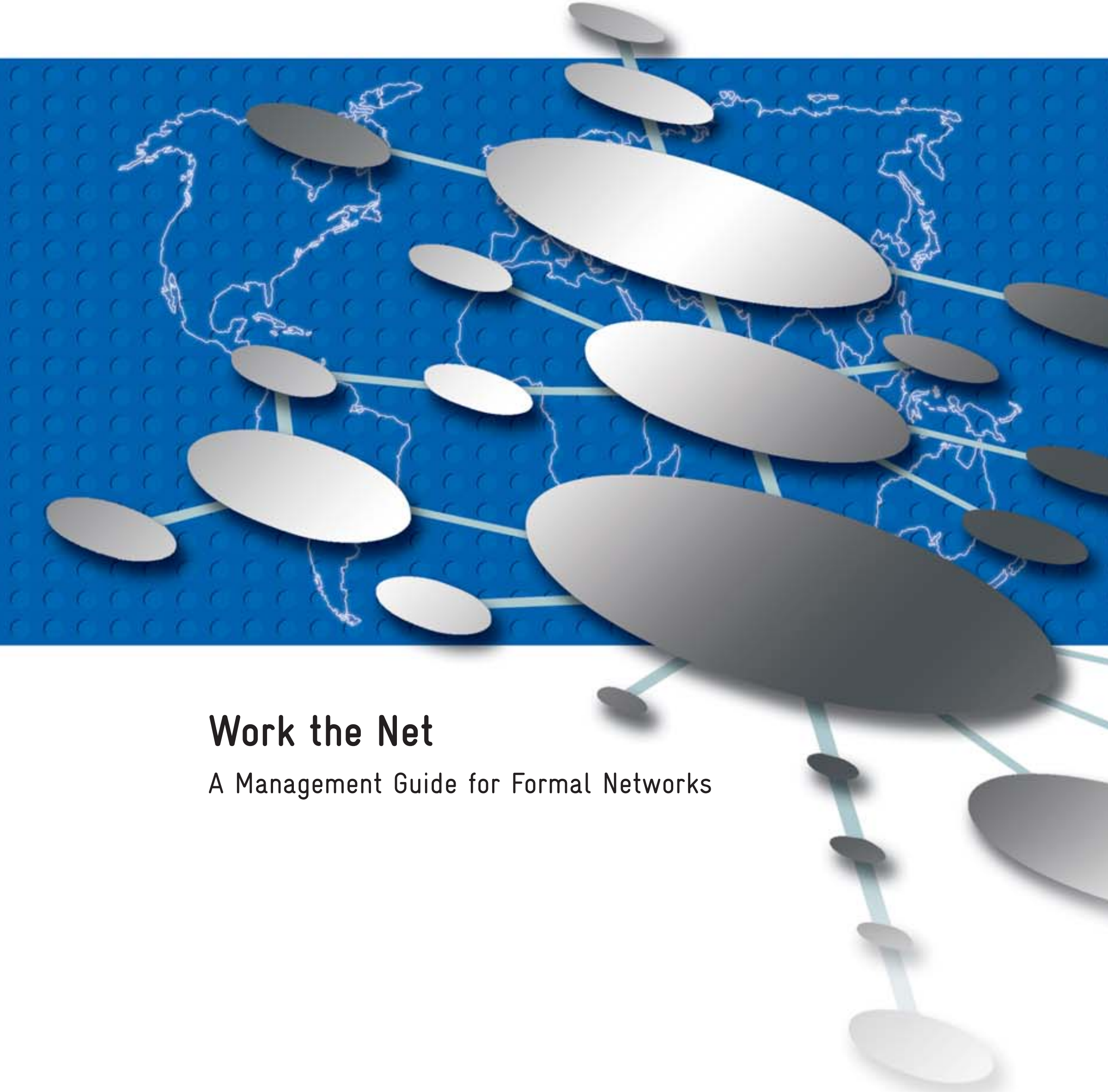

Work the Net

A Management Guide for Formal Networks

gtz

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Directory of Checklists

Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
CHM	Clearing house mechanism
CoP	Community of practice
DAC	Development Co-operation Directorate of the OECD
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
GWP	Global Water Partnership
ICTs	Information and communication technologies
IT	Information technology
IWRM	Integrated water resources management
KM4Dev	Community of international development practitioners interested in knowledge management and knowledge sharing issues and approaches
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
NeRO	Networking and Information/Knowledge Management by Regional Organisations in the Field of Natural Resources Management
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRM	Natural resources management
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SMS	Short message service
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
TOR	Terms of reference
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
VOIP	Voice-over-Internet Protocol

Preface

Networks – powerful mechanisms for sustainable development

Networks are powerful mechanisms for sharing information and knowledge. They also promote communication and coordination to achieve sustainable development. Networks act as effective catalysts for building up relationships and commitment among public and private stakeholders at local, national, regional, and international levels. They help build trustful relationships as a basis for sharing information and knowledge, and serve as mutual learning and capacity-building mechanisms.

Networks are dynamic and bear witness to the fact that the whole is worth more than the sum of all its parts. They serve not only to bring multiple stakeholders together but also to activate the interface between knowledge and action.

The NeRO project

The parties who conceived of the project 'Networking, Information and Knowledge Management by Regional Organizations in the Field of Natural Resources Management' (NeRO) did so out of interest in the multifarious possibilities networks presented. Funded by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), work commenced by exchanging information about how regional development organisations use knowledge management approaches and instruments to share information: this sharing focused on the management of natural resources in the Asian context.

The project proved to be a learning process for all parties involved. A network approach was used to explore *how* information and knowledge are shared successfully among regional development organisations. A careful attempt to share selected information on the *what*, i.e. natural resources management, was part of the process.

As work progressed, a strongly felt need emerged that led the project team to explore the *how* of networking in greater depth. To explore the how, *three studies* were carried out, and the results of these provided the basis for this networking guide. The studies were on

- planning, development and management of clearing house mechanisms;
- involvement of decision-makers in networks; and
- communication, leadership and culture in networks.

This *networking guide* is only one of several products from the NeRO project. It is the result of an intensive process of enquiry and has been written by networking practitioners for networking practitioners.

Background

This guide is based on the firm belief that the challenges the NeRO project participants and other practitioners face in the management of natural resources in Asia can be addressed by sharing experiences and best practices via networks.

Sustainable management of natural resources requires innovation: innovation in thought and strategy. A *sine qua non* for such innovation is pluralistic and dynamic systems that catalyse appropriate actions. In these new ways of collaboration we must consider not only the cross-border dimensions of natural resources but also the role of multiple stakeholders at all levels, as one actor alone cannot address such challenges.

Opinion is gaining ground that networks offer an opportunity to bring together governments, private sector, civil society, NGOs, and international and multilateral organisations. Networks can help coordinate the actions of various stakeholders and can promote informed decision-making by enabling different actors to contribute to solving problems based on their mandates, roles, and strengths.

But can networks really meet such high expectations? Obviously, this depends on the context in which they are working, as well as a number of other factors. However, we are convinced that generally, there is considerable scope for improving the management of existing networks.

This guide was not planned from the inception of the project. Many of us perceived that networks are thought to be the panacea for managing communication aspects of development measures. Our impression was that many a decision to set up networks was made randomly, that little designing or planning was involved and both time and resources were lost.

This is what prompted us to write this guide. We would like to share our insights with practitioners who are considering establishing new networks. Perhaps they can learn from our experiences, both positive and negative, and avoid reinventing the same old wheel!

Acknowledgements
This guide is the result of three years of intensive work involving many people and organisations. First of all we would like to express our thanks to all those who have contributed to the project ‘Networking, Information and Knowledge Management by Regional Organizations in the Field of Natural Resources Management’ (NeRO). In sharing their insights and practical experience, they laid the basis for this guide on networking.

We are particularly grateful to Lucie Lamoureux from Bellanet, who was involved in the first phase of the project and acted as a workshop facilitator, and Layton Montgomery who conducted the study on Communication, Leadership and Culture. Thanks also go to Zbigniew Mikolajuk (ICIMOD), Ujol Sherchan and Prashant Sharma (Mountain Forum), who made valuable contributions to the studies on which this guide is based.

We also thank the various organisations and programmes that were involved in the NeRO project and contributed to this successful process in various ways: the ASEAN Secretariat on behalf of ASEAN, the ASEAN-German Regional Forestry Programme, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and the Mekong River Commission.

Special thanks go to the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) for funding the project. Without its support, this guide would not have been possible.

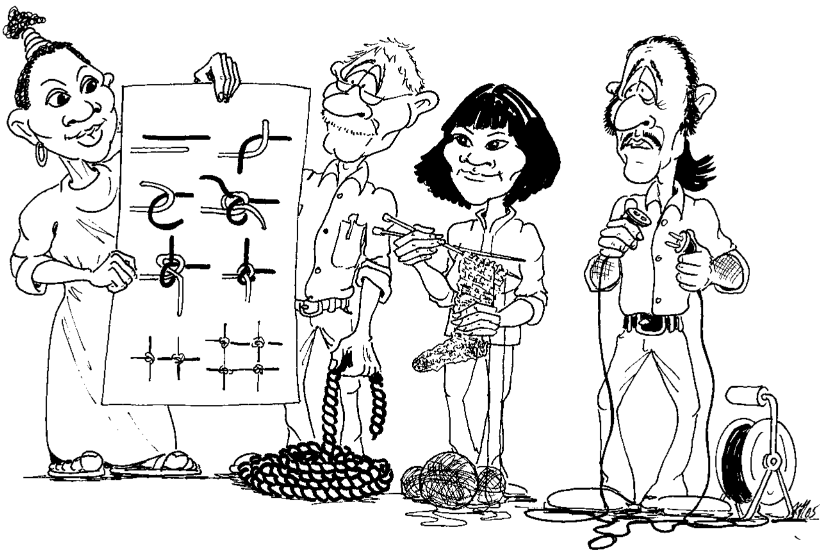
Michael Glueck, Urs Karl Egger, Georg Buchholz, Greta Rana, Sagita Arhidani

1 Introduction

1.1 About this guide

This is a hands-on guide for setting up, managing and using formal networks efficiently and effectively. It focuses on the structural and operational issues of networks and explains the most important aspects in making them work.

The guide addresses networking practitioners, as well as other professionals wishing to establish a network. Hopefully, those involved in established networks will find some useful tips, too.



1.2 How to use it

Every network is unique, and this guide certainly is not meant to be a blueprint for networking. It covers aspects of networking that we think are important, suggests hands-on methods of proceeding, and gives ideas about how to network. We have tried to use a simple and non-technical language in order to reach a wider audience.

The guide has several aids to help you to access the information.

- **Flowchart:** On page 8 and 9 you will find a flowchart showing a typical process for establishing and managing a network. The figures link you to different sections providing specific information.
- **Checklists:** The most important aspects of some sections are summarised in checklists.
- **Cross-references:** Many aspects of networking relate to each other. The guide has cross-references leading to related information.
- **Further resources:** Bearing in mind that the guide is not exhaustive, we have included a section (10) on resources such as books, publications, and websites.

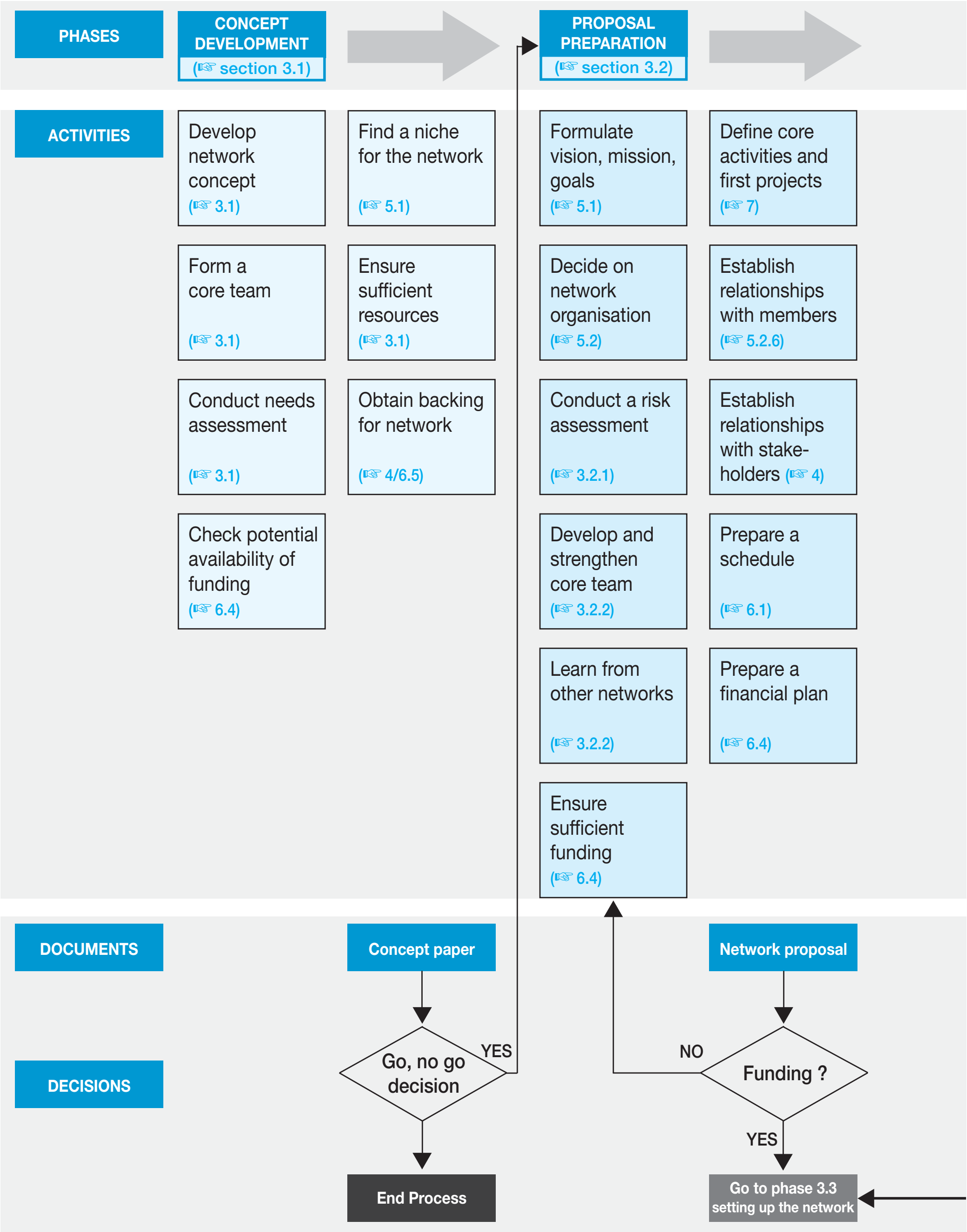
For the sake of illustration and emphasis, we have sometimes cited text directly from other sources. All of them are listed in section 10.1, but we have omitted footnotes and quotation marks in the text to avoid a lengthy, academic style. We sincerely thank all authors whose work has contributed to this guide. Without their work, we could not have gone the distance.

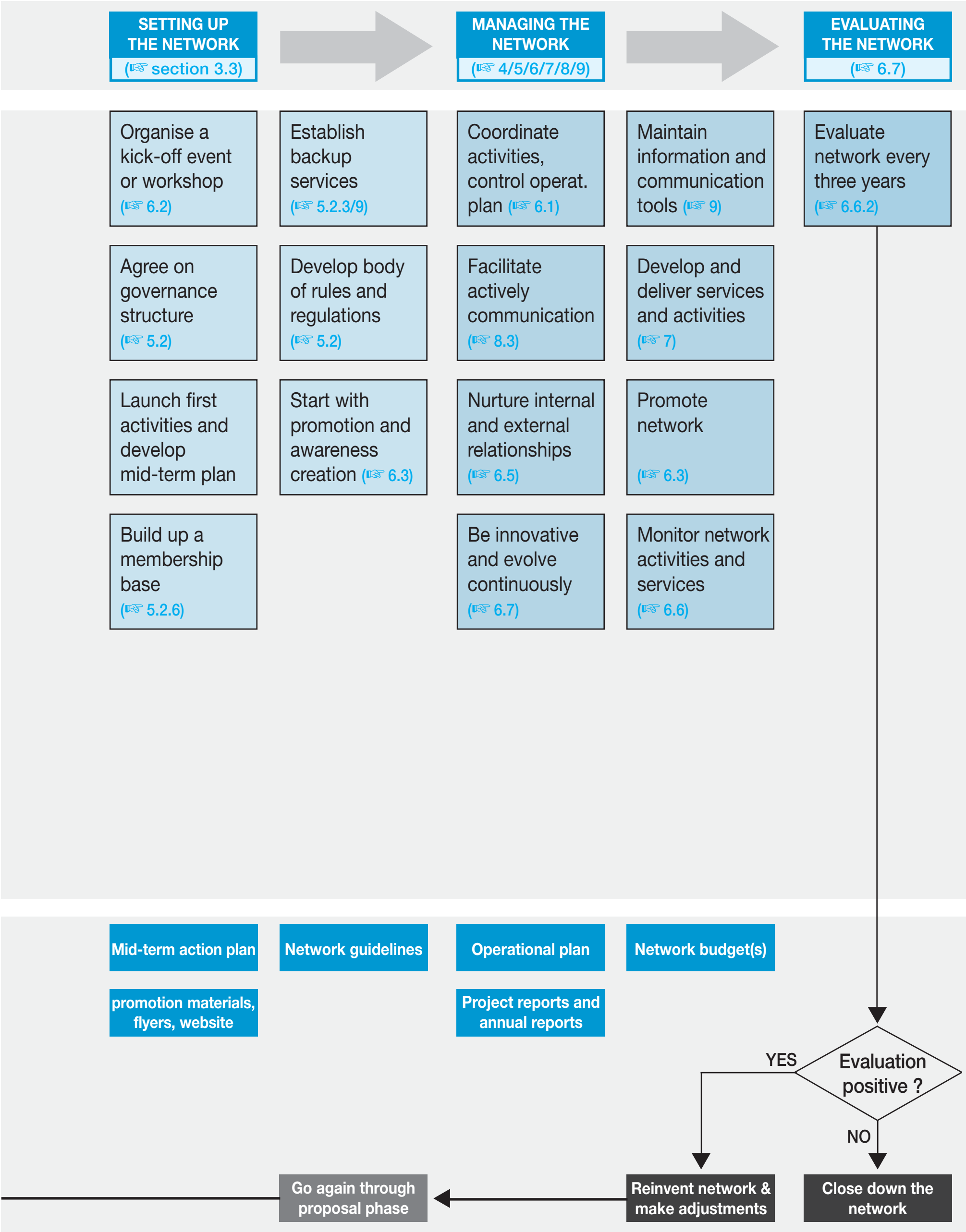
We hope you will find useful tips to help you meet the challenge of networking. Establishing and managing networks requires much more know-how and experience than this guide contains. The advice provided here will require your judgement and skills in project management and communication, and, above all, patience and persistence.

"A fool can learn from his own experience; the wise learn from experience of others"

– Democritus

Flowchart for Establishing and Managing Networks




SETTING UP THE NETWORK
(☞ section 3.3)
MANAGING THE NETWORK
(☞ 4/5/6/7/8/9)
EVALUATING THE NETWORK
(☞ 6.7)
Organise a kick-off event or workshop (☞ 6.2)
Establish backup services (☞ 5.2.3/9)
Coordinate activities, control operat. plan (☞ 6.1)
Maintain information and communication tools (☞ 9)
Evaluate network every three years (☞ 6.6.2)
Agree on governance structure (☞ 5.2)
Develop body of rules and regulations (☞ 5.2)
Facilitate actively communication (☞ 8.3)
Develop and deliver services and activities (☞ 7)
Launch first activities and develop mid-term plan
Start with promotion and awareness creation (☞ 6.3)
Nurture internal and external relationships (☞ 6.5)
Promote network (☞ 6.3)
Build up a membership base (☞ 5.2.6)
Be innovative and evolve continuously (☞ 6.7)
Monitor network activities and services (☞ 6.6)
Mid-term action plan
Network guidelines
Operational plan
Network budget(s)
promotion materials, flyers, website
Project reports and annual reports
Evaluation positive ?
YES
NO
Go again through proposal phase
Reinvent network & make adjustments
Close down the network

2 Network Definitions

Networks can be defined in different ways. This guide focuses on formal networks. This section gives a definition and presents three examples. The differences between networks, institutions, and organisations are also briefly explained.

2.1 Different types of network

The notion of a 'network' has become omnipresent both in development cooperation and in our daily lives. Meanwhile, countless definitions and categories of networks exist and there is no definition that fits all of them. In this guide, three basic categories have been distinguished: social networks, communities of practice, and formal networks. While these definitions do not constitute the ultimate truth, they are useful to work with and often applied in practice. This guide focuses mainly on *formal networks*.

Social networks
Social networks form the basis on which formal networks are built. Social networks are maps of personal, amicable or business relationships consisting of informal individual relations between businessmen or friends, or among members of a larger family. Social networks generally have no deliberately defined purpose. They grow organically and, in most cases, are not actively planned and managed. Social networks play an important part in managing daily private and working lives: they are recreational, and can yield information, rendering assistance in times of need by providing access to other people or resources.

Communities of practice
In this guide, communities of practice are considered to be part of the activities of formal networks.

A community of practice (CoP) is a group of people trusting each other and sharing a common interest in a *specific area of knowledge or competence*. The members of such groups come together voluntarily to share and develop their knowledge, solve common problems and support each other in finding answers.

An example of a community of practice is a group of network managers who meet twice a year and communicate regularly by email to post and answer questions about network management. In this way, the members of the CoP help each other do a better job.

Another example is when some members of a formal network (as defined in the next section) meet regularly and participate actively in an electronic discussion forum to share their experiences on a specific topic related to the overall goals of the network.

These examples show that CoPs are defined by *knowledge and experience* and not by a specific task that has to be completed in a certain period of time. Such a task-focused group would be called a *project team*. People participate in a CoP because they have a real need to know what others know. CoPs are often organised informally, without much administration. A common sense of purpose and the value its members attach to the community hold the group together.

More information about communities of practice and how they are established is provided in section 9.2.

Formal networks

In this guide, formal networks are defined as interrelated groups of several independent institutions or organisations that are established according to a specific design or need. The members of the network share a common vision, objectives and rules, and they carry out a set of common activities, like regular events. A formal network may even have a legal form.

In contrast to communities of practice, formal networks are not only based on the needs of members. Rather, they also have the goal of achieving changes in their own contexts, e.g. the political agenda of countries or regions.

In terms of development cooperation, formal networks consist of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governmental organisations, and development agencies, as well as other national, regional, or international organisations. Staff members who in turn are linked to their social networks represent these organisations in the network. Formal networks may also produce communities of practice about a certain topic or issue that is of interest to the members of the network or others.

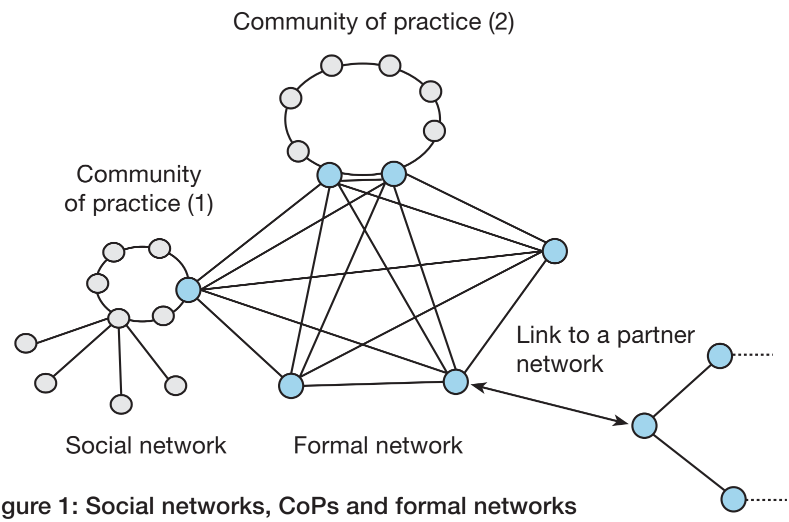


Figure 1: Social networks, CoPs and formal networks

2.2 Examples of formal networks

The following three examples illustrate what a formal network is and what it looks like: the Mountain Forum, the River Network, and Cap-Net.

Example 1: Mountain Forum

The Mountain Forum (http://www.mtnforum.org) is a global network connecting and empowering people, professionals in mountain development, and those interested in mountains throughout the world. The Mountain Forum is a network of five regional networks in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and North America.

The Mountain Forum was established in 1995 through a joint international effort by non-governmental organisations, universities, governments, multilateral agencies, and the private sector. Its secretariat is based in Kathmandu (Nepal).

The Mountain Forum promotes global action towards equitable and ecologically sustainable mountain development. This is achieved through the following: sharing information, giving mutual support, and providing advocacy. In order to attain these objectives, the Mountain Forum uses modern and traditional communications, supports networking and capacity building, and encourages members to be proactive in advocating the sustainable development of mountain areas.

The Mountain Forum's electronic information services include global, regional, and thematic e-mail discussion lists, focused electronic conferencing, a calendar of events, and a rapidly growing on-line library of mountain resources.

The Mountain Forum consists of thousands of people, professionals, and organisations from over 100 countries. Membership of the Mountain Forum is open to individuals and organisations involved in sustainable mountain development and conservation. No fees are charged for membership of the Mountain Forum, nor does a member need full Internet connectivity or e-mail.

Example 2: The River Network

The River Network (http://www.rivernetwork.org) is a North American network supporting grassroots river and watershed conservation groups. Its mission is to help people understand, protect and restore rivers and their watersheds.

The network was founded in 1988 with the conviction that the solutions to river degradation are primarily local and must be created by citizens' action, watershed by watershed. Having started with just a few hundred groups a decade ago, the movement brings together over 4000 organisations today. Nineteen staff members working in three offices across the United States run the network.

The River Network works closely with local watershed protection groups, state river conservation organisations, Native American tribes, schools, organisations and agencies. The network runs a river source information centre, provides publications, training and consultation, offers a grant programme, and provides referrals to other service organisations and networking opportunities.

The partners of the River Network have to pay an annual fee of 100 dollars. For this small contribution they receive a number of services, like a quarterly journal, fundraising alerts, and a 20% discount on the River Network publications. Partners can also attend workshops or receive direct consultation, apply for grants, and contact the River Source Center with a special toll-free number or by email to receive assistance. Last but not least, partners have the possibility to join the national and regional email discussion lists and gain access to the partners section on the website.

Example 3: Cap-Net

Cap-Net (http://www.cap-net.org) is an international network for capacity building in integrated water resources management (IWRM). The network's mission is to enhance human resources development for IWRM by means of establishing or strengthening regional capacity building networks.

Cap-Net was established in 2002 and is a UNDP project, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Global Water Partnership

(GWP) has adopted the Cap-Net project as an Associated Programme and considers it one of its flagship projects. Cap-Net is hosted by the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education in Delft (The Netherlands).

Cap-Net has three major interlinked axes of activities: 1) Networks: support the establishment, facilitate access to information and exchange of experience between regions; 2) Capacity building: analyse capacity building needs, improve capacity building materials, and assist in the development of capacity building strategies; 3) website to disseminate information on training programmes and courses, make training materials available, provide information on national, regional, and global networks.

The Cap-Net network has grown rapidly and now reaches out to organisations and networks involved in IWRM in most countries in the developing world.

2.3 Networks, organisations, and institutions

Formal networks differ from public institutions or companies in several ways. In this guide, they are considered as *systems* linking different people and organisations, thus contributing to coordination and joint action.

In comparison to companies or bureaucracies, the relationships among members of formal networks *are significantly less hierarchical*. Some advocates of networks even claim that networks are characterised by non-hierarchical relationships. In our view, however, this is too optimistic and not consistent with pertaining reality.

Membership is a unique feature of networks. The members of networks participate in them but remain autonomous. They are *providers* of services to other network members and stakeholders of the network. At the same time they are also users of services offered by the network. This *culture of giving and receiving* is at the core of every network.

Networks are also characterised by marked *decentralisation*. Members of networks, in particular members of international ones, are spread throughout the world. Many international networks also have regional sub-networks.

Last but not least, networks are very similar to *living organisms*. Every network is unique to some extent. The history of a network and its members influences its establishment and management. Networks are dynamic and complex systems, and their outcomes are often not what one would have expected. So they are less controllable than an organisation or public institution. There is reciprocal influence between a network and its contextual environment. In other words, the network influences its environment and is also influenced by it.

2.4 Benefits of networks

Networks create a number of benefits for their members and their stakeholders, contributing to the overall vision of more sustainable development. A few benefits often associated with networks are mentioned below.

Benefits for members and stakeholders

- Having access to information and know-how
- Learning from others
- Better understanding of needs and (political) agendas
- Strengthening of capabilities
- Pooling of resources and developing synergies
- Enlarging personal networks
- Catalyst for establishing partnerships
- Testing new ideas and innovative solutions
- Dividing of work and focusing on specific strengths
- Benchmarking with other organisations or institutions

Contributions to the vision of sustainable development

- Improving the information and knowledge base for decision-making through the accumulation of information and knowledge
- Contributing to learning and shorter learning cycles through information and knowledge exchanges

- Connecting sectors, professions, countries, regions, and cultures and contributing in this way to more coordination, coherence and innovation
- More widely accepted responses to complex public sector challenges
- Increased attention for certain topics in the policy agenda
- More balanced policy decisions

Networks may create a number of benefits, but one ought to keep things in perspective – networks are certainly not the panacea for all information and knowledge sharing problems. And the benefits will only result if the network is managed in an effective and efficient way, which hopefully is where this guide will come in handy.

3 Setting up Networks

Setting up and later, managing and developing a network is hard work. More often than not, the amount of work and time spent in establishing a network is completely underestimated. Things often go wrong during the very first step, and lots of networks perish in the first months or year. So you are well advised to reflect carefully whether you would like to set up a network or not.

This section describes the initial steps in establishing a network. First of all, the concept behind the network has to be written down. If you are still convinced at this point that a network is needed, and you have discussed it with possible members, then you should develop a proposal explaining the network in more detail. The next step is to seek funding. Only when sufficient financial resources are available can a network be established.

3.1 Developing the network concept

Every journey starts with an idea. The first step in setting up a network is to formulate the concept and rationale behind it and to examine its plausibility. This step can be called a pre-feasibility study. If you formulate your concept carefully, it will save you time and you will avoid many pitfalls in the long run. Below, we have outlined the most important steps in putting down the initial concept. You do not have to follow the sequence strictly, as many steps overlap with each other.

Consider the demand and work out a rationale

First you need a *concrete notion* of the needs or demand the network is going to address and what the rationale for it is. The motivation for setting it up may come from any number of directions: to improve collaboration, to avoid duplication of efforts, to improve dissemination of information and knowledge, to learn from existing experiences, to achieve a better impact in a specific thematic area, or simply from the need of professionals to do a better job. Try to work towards a network concept that is shared by your core team, and set distinctive objectives and a number of core services and activities. A good test is to explain your concept to somebody who is not directly involved. If he or she understands what you are driving at, your concept will probably be clear enough.

Carry out a needs assessment

Does your concept respond to the *needs of potential members*? Often, an individually perceived need does not match actual demand. So carry out a needs assessment and try to identify the different needs of the network's potential members and stakeholders. Where could your network produce real added value? Talk to friends, colleagues, and experts; carry out short interviews or surveys, or contact potential members and decision-makers informally during conferences or workshops.

Find a specific niche

Once you are sure there is a demand for the network you should carry out a short survey to discover whether your concept *is really unique*. Are other networks already covering the objectives of your planned network? What other organisations are working in similar areas? What are the thematic priorities of the leading national and international organisations and institutions? What do potential members of the network really need? Setting out from the answers to these questions, you may have to adjust your concept. Try to find a specific niche for your network that is not already covered by existing ones. If you cannot find your own niche, you might consider becoming involved in an existing network.

Form a core team

The successful establishment of a new network depends on having a *core team* committed to building it up, and pulling and pushing the whole process forward. Most formal networks have emerged from social networks that already existed. So you may already know a couple of people who would like to join you in setting up the network. Keep the core team small: three to five people. The larger the group, the more difficult and expensive – if travelling is required – coordination will be.

Obtain backing from relevant stakeholders and decision-makers

However, to actually set up a network, you will need much more than the core team's support. You will need support not only from your superior if you are working in an organisation, but also from a wider group of potential *stakeholders* of the network. Important *decision-makers and other key persons* working in the area of your planned network need to 'buy-in'. Get in touch with them, discuss your idea, and see what they think of it.

Ensure sufficient resources for start-up

Setting up a network requires not only support but also *resources*. You have to make sure that you and your core team reserve a part of your time for the network. In addition, you will also need technical competence in the area in which the network is to be active.

Ensure sufficient funding and check availability

Last but not least you have to make an initial estimate of how much funding you need. Try to do this as realistically and honestly as possible; then assess whether you already have enough funding. Perhaps the organisation you are working for is willing to give you a certain amount of time for the network or has other means available. But you should also be on the lookout for other public and private contributors who might be willing to support the network. Browse through their websites, identify their ongoing or planned programmes, and read their strategy papers, so that you get a feeling of the kind of topics in which they might be interested.

Prepare a concept paper

Once you have collected the necessary information, summarise it in a short paper of about three to five pages written in simple language.

Based on the discussions and the work you have carried out so far, it is now time for critical reflection. Take a look at the following 12 questions and see whether you can answer them with a clear YES.

Checklist 1: Review your network concept

❏ Have several people or organisations confirmed that they agree with the goal of your planned network and that they really need it?

❏ Do you have a distinctive network concept and objectives shared by others?

❏ Is there a favourable context to set up your specific network?

❏ Have you checked whether other networks are already covering the thematic area of your network?

❏ Are you a pioneer full of energy and do you have a fully committed core team of about three to five people who are firmly committed to setting up the network?

❏ Do you have the support of your superior?

- ❑ Have you identified a number of stakeholders supporting your concept? Are there allies that could be of strategic value for the network?
- ❑ Have you reserved a reasonable amount of time to set up the network?
- ❑ Do you have the technical competence in your core team in the area in which your network would like to be active?
- ❑ Did you plan realistically for resources?
- ❑ Do you have sufficient funding to establish the network?
- ❑ Do you know whether public or private contributors are willing to support the network?

How many of these questions can you answer with YES? If you cannot answer the majority with a clear YES, you should honestly consider whether setting up this network would really make sense. It might be better to give up the idea and switch over to something else, like a specific project or an informal community of practice.

3.2 Preparation of a proposal

Have you passed the test in section 3.1, and are you still convinced that setting up your network is an excellent idea? If so, then you have already taken the first important step towards establishing a network. However, there is still a long way to go.

The next step will be to prepare a proposal. This will force you to think through your network concept in a systematic way, identify gaps, make decisions, focus your activities and assess the availability of resources. Elaborating the proposal will be an important process in bringing a committed core team together. Last but not least, the proposal will be helpful in communicating the idea, winning over potential supporters of the network, and securing buy-in from potential members, decision-makers, and other stakeholders.

The following section describes the most important elements of a network proposal. Subsequently, crucial aspects of the kind of composition needed to put together a network proposal are explained.

You will also find more detailed information on all aspects of this process in other sections of this guide.

3.2.1 Basic elements

The network proposal should provide short and concise information about all relevant aspects of the network. A good network proposal should consist of no more than 15 pages and include the elements described below.

Executive summary

Most readers of your proposal will not have much time to study it. You have to attract their attention with an *executive summary* of about one page that provides a short overview of the network planned and how it will contribute to the goals of decision-makers. Writing a short text is often more difficult than writing a long one. Take enough time to compose the executive summary. Think it over again and clarify what the real added value of the network is and what other core messages could convince potential contributors, decision-makers and other stakeholders to support your network.

Network concept

In this section of the proposal the concept of the network sketched out in the concept paper has to be presented in more detail. It is this section that will determine whether you will win support for your network or not.

Start with a description of the *challenges* in the areas in which the network will be active. Examples of such challenges are lack of coordination among organisations working in the same thematic area, duplication of work, or repetition of mistakes. Then you should show which potential members and stakeholders the network would target and what their *needs or demand* are.

Based on this analysis, in the *overall goal* describe how the network will contribute to overcoming these challenges and meeting these demands. Next give details of the overall goal with precise *objectives* describing what the network would like to achieve. Be as specific as possible.

Subsequently, this will help you to define the network's *main areas of activity*. Examples could be the following: creating more possibilities for interaction such as email discussion groups for peer assistance, organising conferences to inform a wider audience, sensitising decision-makers, carrying out joint research programmes to tackle unresolved issues, increasing access to technical information and news, creating a better overview of experts working in the field, or grouping together the forces for advocacy to influence policy dialogue.

Networking alone is not enough. In this section you should also present a *few concrete services and projects* the network will launch when it gets going. Finally, show why the network is really a new idea and unique in its area, and explain the added value of the new network as well as the expected outcome and impact.

Core team

To establish a network successfully, a core team of three to five people is crucial. A good core team is necessary because setting up a network involves a great deal of work. During the start-up phase, you will have to tackle many unexpected challenges, and a well-functioning core team will find ways to cope with them.

The competencies of the members of the core team should be complementary and cover the following: project managers and organisers, administrators, communicators, promoters and fundraisers, and technical specialists.

The composition of the core team is also crucial because support for the network will depend on how well recognised and relevant the experience of the core team is. In your network proposal, outline the expertise of your core team members with practical examples of their experience. Even if the proposal is excellent, you will only receive support for the network if decision-makers, stakeholders and potential contributors *trust* the people behind the idea and if they understand their motivation.

Organisation

This section of the network proposal should briefly describe how the organisation, management, and communication in the network will be carried out. The following issues should be covered (☞sections 5 and 6).

- International structure and regional sub-networks (if necessary)
- Organisation chart with chairperson, board, executive secretary
- Location and organisation of secretariat functions
- Legal status of the network
- Division of work and decision-making
- Membership and most important members
- Most important means of internal communication (e.g. meetings, intranet, email) and external communication (e.g. flyers, website, events)
- Promotion of network: most important stakeholders

Schedule

Although most schedules are outdated as soon as they are made, it would be wrong to assume that schedules are not necessary. On the contrary, a schedule is an important means of guiding the core team while getting the network going.

A network proposal should include a realistic schedule. First, identify the most important steps in building up your network and summarise them in about seven *work packages*. Align the work packages to a timeline and consider the critical path. Some activities will have to be carried out before you can start with others. Show the sequence and the dependencies in a diagram and mark the completion of every work package with a milestone so that you can assess the achievements.

Building up networks always takes longer than you expect. Try to develop a *realistic schedule* by calculating the amount of time necessary for each activity taking into consideration long absences of core team members, holidays, deadlines for handing in proposals, or funding phases. A realistic schedule will not only help you to build up the network, but will also show potential contributors, decision-makers, and other stakeholders that you have planned the establishment of the network in a careful way.

The magical number 'Seven'

We suggest the number 'seven' several times in this guide. Basically, this is just a practical hint based on experience and a good rule of thumb for structuring project plans, activities, checklists or presentations.

For a more in-depth explanation of this suggestion see George Miller's classic paper 'The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two', published in 1956. Miller found that most people had difficulty handling more than seven, plus or minus two, information units.

Risk assessment

Setting up a network is a risky endeavour that is all too often unsuccessful. So a network proposal has to reflect its underlying assumptions and consider the risks of setting up a network, such as: the core team disintegrates, funding is insufficient, initial enthusiasm fades away, or a similar network is being established at the same time.

A practical way of assessing the risks of setting up a new network is by carrying out a simple *sensitivity analysis* that includes three scenarios.

- **Best-case scenario:** showing what could be achieved if all opportunities are realised and positive expectations met.
- **Normal case scenario:** describing the expected development of the network under normal circumstances.
- **Worst-case scenario:** showing what could happen if your worst nightmares were to come true: not even basic expectations are met, no funding is available, people neglect their promises, or your idea is stolen by somebody else who is not willing to work with you.

Based on these scenarios, the network proposal should show how you plan to handle the risks.

Funding

Last but not least, the network proposal has to show how you are going to fund it. This financial plan will also serve as a reality check and clarify what is and what is not possible.

First, you have to calculate the *financial resources* required for the network. Typically, every network will need core funding for its secretariat, network infrastructure such as websites or databases, and core services and activities such as regular meetings or workshops. In addition, funding will be required for specific projects or programmes initiated by the network and its members.

Second, the network proposal has to show the *funding sources* and who will contribute how much. The expenses may be covered by in kind contributions of network members, by membership fees, or through support from public contributors or private sponsors.

The funding required and the funding sources should be summarised in a financial plan that shows how the network will fund its services and activities over a period of about five years.

Checklist 2: Basic elements of a network proposal

- ❏ Executive summary
- ❏ Network concept: goal, objectives, activities, and impact
- ❏ Core team
- ❏ Organisation
- ❏ Schedule
- ❏ Risk assessment
- ❏ Funding

3.2.2 Elaboration

Typically, writing down the final network proposal will only be the least time-consuming part of the whole process of elaboration! Much more importance and much greater effort should be given to gathering the necessary information and building up relationships with potential members, supporters, decision-makers, and other stakeholders.

Strengthening the core team

A very important step that should not be neglected is *developing and strengthening the core team* so that you can work in an effective and efficient manner. In the beginning, it is worthwhile to provide enough time and opportunity to socialise and get to know each other. Plan a get-together at a pleasant place over a weekend or arrange for common lunches or dinners. You should also take the time to discuss how you would like to work together and what your expectations and limitations are. The time you take to establish a dynamic core team will be well invested! You will have to rely on the team as a base in the difficult situations you are certainly going to face while setting up the network.

Learn from others

Keep in mind that you are not the first person to set up a new network and try to *learn from others*. The most effective way to learn is to have the core team visit the secretariat or members of other networks. In most cases, they will be very happy to share with you the challenges they have faced, discuss how they have overcome the problems and give their most important advice and other useful information. Other networks may also serve as models for network organisation and help you to find the right structure for your own one. Most networks provide a lot of information on the Internet about their visions, missions, goals, objectives, governance structures, funding sources, and much more. Do not hesitate to use this wealth of information.

Establish relationships with potential members

During the period when the details of the network proposal are being worked out, the core team should begin to establish *relationships with potential members* of the network. These contacts are important as they help you learn more about the needs of potential network members and also about their interest in joining a network. Moreover, potential members are a valuable source of ideas, support for the network and establishing relationships with decision-makers. With these contacts you are laying the foundation for the future membership.

Get in touch with stakeholders and decision-makers

While you are preparing the proposal you should get in touch with *stakeholders and decision-makers* who can support your network, open doors to other people or organisations, or even provide funding for the network. Potentially useful decision-makers and other stakeholders may be found in government administrations, bilateral and multilateral development organisations, NGOs, research institutions, or even in private companies that have an interest in the thematic area of your network. These contacts will help you to sharpen your arguments in the proposal itself and will be door openers for later contacts. Draw a stakeholder map to provide an overview of the different stakeholders and their relationships (☞section 6.5.2).

Understand potential public and private contributors

Perhaps you are fortunate enough to be able to fund the activities of your network by in-kind contributions of the members or by membership fees. Otherwise you will need additional financial support from public and private contributors, for example, from local or regional governments, other governmental organisations, grant making foundations, or private companies.

Try to understand what the *priorities* of potential supporters are and what would be *added value* for them. Keep in mind that they receive numerous requests every day. Therefore, you will have to convince them of the network's benefits. You should try to be flexible, while keeping your concept and principles. Public and private contributors have their own funding system, funding periods, and other requirements. Therefore the *funding proposal has to be tailored* to the different specifications without losing the objectives of the network.

Checklist 3: Elaboration of the network proposal

- ❑ Establish and develop a strong core team.
- ❑ Learn from others.
- ❑ Establish relationships with potential members, decision-makers and other stakeholders.
- ❑ Tailor the proposal to potential public and private contributors as long as it fits the goals of the network.

3.3 Setting up the network

Have you secured sufficient resources to fund the activities of your planned network? Congratulations! That's something worth celebrating with the core team. Now you can begin to implement the ideas you have developed in the network proposal.

Build on the initial enthusiasm

The promise of sufficient resources for establishing the network will give you and your core team a real boost. Do not wait too long with activities and *use this initial enthusiasm and motivation* to start setting up the network right away. Bear in mind that not only you but also potential members, supporters, partners, and other stakeholder will also have high expectations in the beginning. So inform them regularly about progress.

Organise a start-up workshop

A good idea in the setting up of the network is to have a start-up workshop (☞section 6.2) bringing together not only the core team, but also potential members, stakeholders, and supporters. The objectives of this event should be to present your network concept and to establish a network spirit. At the same time, this is a good opportunity to learn more about the expectations of the members, to collect feedback, to get to know what the possible contributions of network members and their roles will be, and to explore ideas. The workshop should also serve to develop a commonly shared vision, mission, and goals.

Communicate, communicate, communicate

An important cornerstone for a successful start-up phase is proactive *communication, communication and again communication*! Contact all the relevant people individually on a regular basis. In particular, in the start-up phase, people are keen to know how it is progressing. Many questions have to be answered, misunderstandings clarified, and expectations moderated. Try to answer emails as soon as you can – if possible in one or two days time. If you do not have the answer immediately, let the enquirer know and inform him or her how soon you can send an answer. As long as you practise reliable and consistent communication, you will soon establish a trusting relationship among network members. Prepare short information products such as flyers or fact sheets.

Start with a few concrete activities

The energy level and the expectations are high during the start-up phase. You should make use of this by *starting early with one or more concrete activities* or small projects to show that the network is actually doing something that meets the needs of its members (☞section 7.1). Even if they are minor ones, these initial activities will also help you to refine the focus and clarify the network concept. And finally, they will help weld together the network community. Here, nothing works better than jointly planned and implemented projects.

In the start-up phase you should also develop a mid-term plan defining the most important areas of action and the programmes the network is going to launch in the next three to five years. Assign clear responsibilities and deadlines to each activity planned.

Becoming operational

Finally you should try to become operational as quickly as possible. The important activities are as follows.

- Agree on a governance structure (☞section 5.2)
  - board, chairperson, committees
  - organise the members

- Establish back-up services
  - agree on the location of the secretariat
  - organise the secretariat
- Develop a body of necessary rules and regulations (☞ section 5.2)
  - register the network legally if required
  - agree on and write down network guidelines
  - settle the copyrights
- Start promoting the network and creating awareness (☞ section 6.3)
  - agree on a logo and develop promotion material such as flyers
  - set up a website
  - develop the membership base

Checklist 4: Setting up the network

- ❑ Make use of the initial enthusiasm.
- ❑ Organise a start-up event or workshop.
- ❑ CCC: Communicate, communicate, and communicate.
- ❑ Start with a few concrete activities.
- ❑ Develop a mid-term action plan.
- ❑ Become operational.

4 Involving Decision-Makers

Formal networks strive to effect change or to achieve an impact in a certain area. Decision-makers in public administrations and politics, development agencies and international organisations, business and civil society will therefore play a crucial role for networks, as they have the decision-making power to influence the political agenda and implementation.

This section describes who the decision-makers are, how they work, what are the incentives and constraints regarding their participation, how they should be approached, and how relationships are maintained.

4.1 Networks and decision-makers

Decision-makers can be found in all kind of organisations and institutions. In order to involve them, you must learn how they work. Sometimes their support staff may be even more important for the network.

4.1.1 Definition of decision-makers

Typically, decision-makers are *persons working in organisations at the executive level* with the authority to make decisions in their area of competence. Examples of decision-makers are Managing Directors, Executive Secretaries, Executive Directors, Secretary Generals or Senior Officials in large organisations.

Depending on their position and function, managers at the *operational level and technical experts* may also act as important decision-makers. They prepare political decisions, suggest topics for action, and, in particular, provide quite a lot of room for manoeuvre during execution of decisions.

4.1.2 Understanding decision-makers

To secure the involvement of decision-makers you have to understand their work environment and their day-to-day operations.

Full agendas
The daily work of decision-makers involves frequent meetings, informal networking, giving comments on political issues, making or delaying decisions, getting support for initiatives, or preserving power. Therefore, it may be difficult to gain access to them and obtain an appointment.

Party to or initiators of power plays
Their status gives decision-makers power and influence. At the same time they are often unable to make decisions independently, as they are embedded in a dense network of relationships and dependencies

and are exposed to power struggles. Their superiors and interest groups try to lever their ideas and influence decision-makers. Decision-makers will be interested in showing the results they have achieved with a view to securing their position.

Filtered information

In general, decision-makers have excellent access to information, an asset that they also use *strategically*: they will forward or hold back information selectively and according to their interests.

In addition, the sources of information for decision makers, such as opponents, interest groups, superiors, or their staff can filter or withhold strategic information. Thus decision-makers often receive *filtered information*. Another way of influencing decision makers is the creation of insecurity about the validity and trustworthiness of information by opponents.

In addition, decision-makers often suffer from *information overload*. As many decision-makers are generalists rather than technical specialists, it is difficult for them to select important information and assess the quality of information. So they have to rely on their technical staff.

4.1.3 Importance of support staff

Support staff, junior staff, and desk officers are important when persuading decision-makers to support networks because they find and filter useful information, give feedback, and prepare speeches and reports. Also, they know the agendas of the decision-makers, their strengths and weaknesses, as well as the best ways to approach them.

Networks should strive to establish good relationships with these valuable entry points to decision-makers and actively include them in their work. Network managers have to be aware that these officers are often overburdened, as they are fully involved in the hectic activities at the decision-maker level.

4.2 Preconditions and incentives

To involve decision-makers in networks, remember it takes two to tango. First, given that they seek to induce policy and strategy changes, networks have to be attractive and interesting for them. Second, the decision-maker needs the network to gain access to information but may have limited resources, such as time and funding, for obtaining the full benefit from participating.

4.2.1 Preconditions

Good management, transparency, and trust are the most important features that make networks attractive for decision-makers.

Good management

Good management is not only important for the network's success; it is also of high priority for decision-makers and their collaborators. They will only participate in networks that are clearly managed professionally and by a committed team (☞ sections 5 and 6).

Transparency

The transparency of networks is an important precondition for convincing decision-makers to be involved. Decision-makers need to be able to quickly grasp the network's vision, mission, and goals. They also want to know how the network is organised, who is involved, who has what influence, and who funds its activities.

Trust

Trust is the basic lubricant for networking and sharing knowledge. Decision-makers will only become involved in networks if they can trust them. So you should strive to establish relationships of trust with decision-makers. A transparent organisation, effective management, and reliable and consistent communications will support this.

An effective way of building up trust is to *involve personalities of widely recognised prestige* who share the network's mission. As Honorary Members or as members of a Committee of Patrons, these personalities will not be actively involved in the day-to-day business of the network, but their reputation and 'intellectual capital' will contribute to the network's prestige.

4.2.2 Incentives

What makes decision-makers participate in networks? First, it is important to understand that there are different degrees of involvement for decision-makers. Second, most decision-makers – or their designated staff – will only get involved in networks if they perceive that they are of personal benefit to them. Third, decision-makers and their staff also need resources, such as time and funding, to participate in networks, for example, by joining email discussion fora or attending conferences.

Different degrees of participation

Decision-makers are involved in networks in various ways. Often, they do not have or take the time for direct involvement in activities. They are also hesitant to expose themselves, as their statements are often interpreted as statements in the name of the organisation they work for, or their comments are associated with a political agenda.

Nevertheless, decision-makers might stay indirectly involved in a network by following email discussions passively, participating in workshops or conferences now and then, or being members of the advisory board. Last but not least, decision-makers may participate in networks through their staff by sending them to network meetings and workshops or by assigning them to participate in discussion groups, provide and retrieve information, facilitate discussions, or even run the network's secretariat.

Benefits from participating in a network

The strongest incentive for decision-makers to devote part of their time to networks or to assign staff to do so is receiving an *added value*. Some decision-makers may participate in networks for altruistic reasons or just out of personal interest, but in general, decision-makers will only join a network if they receive some benefit.

To involve decision-makers, managers or facilitators of networks should strive to identify *common ground* among the objectives of the network and the objectives of the decision-makers, and take overlapping goals as a starting point.

Experienced decision-makers know that building up a network and generating a return on their investment *takes quite some time*. Yet network managers or facilitators should regularly remind decision-makers of this fact and explain why this is so.

The most important benefits networks can provide for decision-makers are obtaining access to information and know-how, increasing one's personal network, and establishing partnerships. Other benefits are also evident although they are often not mentioned.

Obtaining access to information and know-how

One of the strongest incentives for becoming involved in networks is getting access to information, know-how, and new ideas that might be valuable for the work of decision-makers. In this way networks have an important role in collecting, filtering, validating, creating access to, and disseminating good-quality information for decision-makers.

Checklist 5: Information decision-makers are interested in

- ❏ Technical data, information, and know-how
- ❏ Experiences and good practices
- ❏ News, trends, and information about events, workshops, and conferences
- ❏ Information about network members and experts
- ❏ Services of the network
- ❏ Ongoing activities and projects
- ❏ Gaining a feeling about what others do and think

Decision-makers will not retrieve all information in the same way. Technical information will be retrieved mainly through their support staff. Softer information, like gaining a feeling of what others do and think, or gathering new ideas and alternative options for action, will be collected during workshops or conferences.

Enlarging one's personal network

Many decision-makers would like to be involved in networks because this gives them a unique opportunity to meet people and enlarge their personal network. Good relationships among colleagues working within an organisation, as well as with other professionals, friends, and relatives, are among the most valuable resources for effective and efficient work.

In particular, regular meetings or participation in workshops and conferences organised by networks provide excellent opportunities for decision-makers to build up and nurture their personal networks. At the same time, these events provide good occasions for network managers or network members to get in direct touch with decision-makers.

Facilitator for partnerships

Networks are catalysts for building up and maintaining personal networks. They are also a unique and informal way of collaborating or of building up partnerships with other governmental organisations at the local, national, or regional level, with private companies, with NGOs, or with academia. In the network setting decision-makers from government institutions might find a platform for interaction with external parties, such as NGOs, in a more informal way than in structured meetings.

Gaining the power of persuasion

Access to validated information and knowledge through networks empowers decision-makers to work towards achieving their goals. A network can give decision-makers strong arguments for political discussion. If they can say that their opinion is not only their own but also that of all network partners this will give their arguments much more weight and power of persuasion.

A decision-maker is always looking for evidence and *arguments to justify his or her decisions and actions* vis-à-vis the various stakeholders. By participating in networks, decision-makers learn what others are doing, how they are thinking, and what their perceptions are. This helps decision-makers to construct their communication strategies. By citing investments of partner organisations or pointing to standards being developed by a network, they can justify their actions. The effect is well known: many people are more willing to accept something if it has already been accepted by many others.

Being involved while remaining independent

In many networks there is no formal membership or the formal duties and implications of membership are limited. This is an advantage for decision-makers as they can participate in a network while maintaining their independence. Such networks do not threaten the traditional, more hierarchical and structured organisations in which decision-makers often work. However, this independence also means that decisions taken jointly by network members are not binding for decision-makers unless they are written down in a formal agreement.

Testing new and innovative solutions

Networks offer decision-makers an informal platform to discuss new ideas or initiatives. Thus, networks also serve as a testing ground and for carrying out reality checks before decision-makers go public with their ideas.

Email discussion groups or bilateral emails are good ways of obtaining informal feedback from peers in a short time. However, it is better to test more sensitive ideas at informal talks during meetings or workshops, or in closed meetings.

Multipliers of resources

Decision-makers are bound to their organisations and their available, and often scarce, financial and personal resources. Networks can serve as multipliers as they are able to pool resources from different network partners to realise common solutions or launch joint projects or initiatives.

Benchmarking

It is often quite difficult for decision-makers to know how well their organisations are doing, and how efficient and effective their work is. Networks can help decision-makers compare their work with the work of others in an informal way and see how their efforts are perceived. This informal benchmarking gives decision-makers hints about necessary improvements.

Improving prestige
By participating in networks, decision-makers can improve their prestige. This will particularly be the case if a network has a good public reputation.

Personal benefits
Decision-makers may also receive personal benefits not directly related to their jobs by participating in networks. For instance, they may enjoy the attractive environment in which a conference or workshop is being held. Conferences taking place at appealing venues, in particular, are often fully booked. Network meetings and events are also appreciated as a break from the daily routine.

These personal benefits contribute to the motivation not only of decision-makers, but also of all network members. Creating a positive working atmosphere is an important part of networking, and network managers should pay attention to this.

Checklist 6: Benefits decision-makers are looking for

Most important benefits

❑ Getting access to information and know-how

❑ Enlarging personal networks

❑ Facilitator of partnerships

Other benefits

❑ Gaining the power of persuasion

❑ Being involved while remaining independent

❑ Testing new ideas and innovative solutions

❑ Multipliers of resources

❑ Benchmarking with other organisations or institutions

❑ Improved personal prestige

❑ Personal benefits

4.2.3 Resources for participation

Decision-makers not only have to perceive benefits from participating in networks, they also need time and funding to participate in them. Both resources are scarce for decision-makers. They will only participate if this is perceived as a priority over other engagements, which means that they have to be really convinced of the network's benefits.

Depending on the country and status, the organisation's funding of participation may also be a factor limiting the involvement of decision-makers in networks. In some countries, it is still difficult to raise the funds needed to use the Internet or attend meetings, workshops, and conferences. Thus networks may have to cover at least a part of the expenses for the participation of decision-makers.

4.3 Approaching and involving decision-makers

Involving decision-makers in networks requires personal relationships that are based on a good understanding of each other's preferences. Once you have established trusting relationships, they have to be nurtured continuously.

4.3.1 Approaching decision-makers

Involving decision-makers in a network is a strategic choice. Before you approach decision-makers, you have to think about what you want to achieve. Decision-makers may provide funding for your network, act as door openers, give thematic advice, or contribute their name to the network's prestige.

To establish contact with decision-makers merely by sending an email often does not work. They receive many emails every day and have to be very selective in reading and answering them. They will also be reluctant to answer an email sent by somebody they do not know. The best approach is to contact a decision-maker with a *polite and formal letter* and a follow-up phone call.

Decision-makers may also be contacted informally during workshops or conferences. Sometimes it may be appropriate to find a *messenger or an intermediary*, somebody who knows the decision-maker and can act as a door opener. Finally, *support staff* can provide an entry point to decision-makers.

First meeting

Once contact is established and the decision-maker is willing to receive the network, a face-to-face meeting should be held, if possible together with the messenger. At this first meeting, high-level network representatives should be present and *introduce* themselves. They should explain the network's mission, objectives, activities, and services in a concise way.

The first meeting should be used to carefully explore the interests and needs of the decision-maker, put forward convincing arguments for involvement, and demonstrate the network's *added value*.

Finally, you should look at practical types of possible involvement, for example as a member of the board, a committee of patrons or an advisory committee. However, the decision-maker may prefer only his/her desk officers or support staff to participate actively in the network.

Plan a careful follow-up

After the meeting, the follow-up has to be planned carefully. Decide how you would like to involve the decision-maker. Summarise the discussions held briefly, note what has been agreed upon, and suggest the next steps, such as a second meeting or participation in a workshop. Send these brief minutes to the decision-maker together with a polite accompanying letter.

As is so often the case, the first step will be the most difficult one: to involve the first decision-maker in the network will be quite a challenge, but, as soon as several decision-makers are on board, the snowball principle will work, making it easier to involve more decision-makers.

Checklist 7: Establishing relationships with decision-makers

- ❑ Know what kind of contribution to the objectives of the network you want from decision-makers.
- ❑ Establish contact with the decision-maker considering the necessary formal requirements by:
  - – writing a formal letter,
  - – contacting him in an informal way during a workshop or conference,
  - – finding a messenger or a door opener who knows the decision-maker and who is willing to introduce you, or
  - – contacting support staff of the decision-maker who can act as door openers.
- ❑ Arrange the first meeting with the decision-maker.
- ❑ Carefully plan the follow-up.

4.3.2 Maintaining relationships

Relationships with decision-makers have to be *cultivated continuously*, so that decision-makers develop ownership of the mission and activities of the network. Well-managed relationships with decision-makers ensure the necessary institutional and public support, provide access to additional relationships and a broader funding base, and thus help to achieve the network's goals. So it is worthwhile for networks to manage relationships with decision-makers in a systematic and coordinated manner. The following seven principles are essential to maintain relationships.

Understand decision-makers

Maintaining good relationships with decision-makers requires a good understanding of their behaviour, their interests, their needs and priorities, and their availability. Networks should approach decision-makers with the *attitude of a learner*, enter into a dialogue, try to identify their needs, and develop services tailored to real added value for decision-makers. It will often be more appropriate to prepare a short policy note for a decision-maker instead of a lengthy report that might end up collecting dust on the shelves or serving as a doorstopper. Bear in mind that political agendas and alliances change all the time and that you will have to learn continuously.

Include decision-makers in processes

Decision-makers are more likely to feel ownership of a network when they perceive that they are integrated into its decision-making processes and that their ideas and suggestions are appreciated and taken seriously. You should therefore *encourage them to make comments and suggestions*. This may happen in a consultative way by including them in an existing working group or a consultative board, or even by asking them to suggest working groups or other activities for specific topics. Even if decision-makers do not respond – and this may often be the case – they should at least receive the documents and reports.

Successful formal networks bring about change within a sector or region, which may be accompanied by some insecurity for members and beyond. Power relations shift, and some stakeholders may experience a loss or gain in power. These *changes often create fear and resistance*. Only in the best cases are networks able to create a win-win situation so that all parties involved benefit from the changes. By involving decision-makers in these change processes right from the beginning, the likelihood of friction can at least be reduced.

Support staff or desk officers are very important for the involvement of decision-makers. In some situations it might be appropriate to develop a general agreement for collaboration with the decision-maker and to work out the mode of collaboration and concrete steps with the support staff or desk officers afterwards. However, in this case, you have to make sure that the decision-maker is kept up-to-date with short briefings.

Keep it short and simple

Decision-makers are often generalists and do not have in-depth technical knowledge. Technical jargon or lengthy reports should be avoided. Emails, letters, and documents must be written in an appropriate style: a simple and concise language avoiding abbreviations and technical slang making it attractive to read.

Facilitate conversations actively

Smooth communication in networks and email discussion groups needs skilled, active and caring facilitation (☞section 8.3). Otherwise, discussions are likely to become unstructured, repetitive and confusing, or they may even stop altogether. Even if decision-makers do not actively contribute to email discussion groups, they may follow the discussions passively, and the way discussions are facilitated will influence their impression of the network.

Contact decision-makers regularly

To maintain a trustful relationship, you should meet decision-makers face-to-face about once or twice a year. Otherwise the relationship will tend to fade and sooner or later come to an end. These regular contacts with decision-makers may be very time-consuming for network managers, but they are indispensable.

Meetings with decision-makers are more successful if they are prepared professionally in advance (☞section 6.2). Collect the necessary information, formulate in writing the objectives you would like to achieve, and note down the issues that have to be addressed. Take all information materials with you and stick to a strict time schedule. If you have a clear idea in advance of how the meeting will proceed, it is more likely that you will achieve what you want.

In between meetings, regular information such as electronic or paper newsletters or occasional emails will help to keep decision-makers up to date with the network.

Allow plenty of time and space for socialising

A relationship will be more lasting if it not only has a technical but also a personal connotation. Networks should therefore establish and nurture *personal relationships* with decision-makers. Enough time and space during meetings, workshops, or conferences for informal socialising and gathering is essential. Good occasions for socialising are a joint lunch or dinner or splitting up longer meetings and workshops over a two-day period so that participants have the opportunity to meet informally in the evening. Decision-makers also appreciate thank-you letters, birthday cards, words of thanks at conferences, or being mentioned in the annual report.

Create private spaces

To maintain and cultivate relationships with and among decision-makers, facilitators or managers of networks may also create *private* spaces for two reasons: to share and develop potentially sensitive ideas and to learn from mistakes or failures. This has nothing to do with conspiracy but is a practical way to cope with the environment in which decision-makers are living. They have to be very careful about what they say and weigh every statement. Like small seedlings, new ideas also have to be protected sometimes if they are to blossom.

In most cases, *new ideas and innovative initiatives* are not developed from scratch but follow a typical process. First, the new ideas are mentioned casually in informal discussions. If the ideas produce a positive response a core group of interested people will hold closed meetings and formulate the initial strategies. The next step will be the formation of alliances with partners and supporters. Then, only when the alliance carries sufficient weight will the idea be announced publicly. Networks can play an important role in this process by creating private spaces in which decision-makers can share their ideas or develop new ones in a confidential way without being cited the next day.

Another reason for creating protected spaces for decision-makers is the need to *learn from failures and mistakes:* a valuable source for new insights. For this, however, cultural aspects have to be considered (☞section 8.4). Most people do not like to share their negative experiences. In some cultures admitting mistakes means losing face and may have drastic consequences. In other cultures people rarely feel responsible for any failures. In addition, in particular, decision-makers will be reluctant to share failures or mistakes in public due to their status.

Checklist 8: Maintaining relationships with decision-makers

- ❑ Understand decision-makers.
- ❑ Include decision-makers in processes.
- ❑ Keep it short and simple (KISS).
- ❑ Facilitate conversations actively.
- ❑ Contact decision-makers regularly.
- ❑ Allow plenty of time for socialising.
- ❑ Create private spaces.

5 Network Governance

Both the strategic framework and governance structure provide the network with a clear focus and direction. This section describes the most important elements in the strategic framework of a formal network. Furthermore, the governance structure is described in detail: i.e. the degree of regionalisation, the organisational chart, the secretariat, legal issues, and membership.

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5.1 Strategic framework

Every network needs a strategic framework to guide it, bring all members in tune with each other, and hold the network together over time. The strategic framework consists of the vision, the mission, the goals, and the objectives.

Vision

The vision of the network describes the shared hopes, dreams, and images of the network members about the ideal *state of a situation or the world in general*.

Examples

The vision of the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development (IFRTD) is “improved accessibility and mobility for poor communities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America”.

The vision of the network Streams of Knowledge is a “dynamic movement of resource centres working towards a clean and healthy world by 2025”.

The Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) “has a vision of a world of equal opportunities where all people are able to have access to and use knowledge and information to improve their lives”.

Mission

The mission statement describes in short *what the network would like to contribute* so that the vision comes true.

Examples

The mission of the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development (IFRTD) is to “facilitate and promote the successful application of improved policies, planning frameworks, financing mechanisms and technologies.”

The mission of the network Streams of Knowledge is “to mobilise a critical mass of water and sanitation-focused organisations in accelerating equitable improvements in water supply and sanitation.”

> The mission of the Global Knowledge Partnership is “to promote broad access to - and effective use of - knowledge and information as tools of equitable sustainable development. It aims to share information, experiences and resources to realise the potential of information and communication technologies (ICT) to improve lives, reduce poverty and empower people”.

Goals

Under goals, the network describes in more detail what kind of impact, long term-changes, and effects the network would like to achieve. Do not formulate too many goals. A maximum of about five to seven goals is a good rule of thumb and will give the network a focused profile.

> **Examples**
>
> - The awareness of integrated watershed management has been increased and watersheds are managed in a more sustainable way.
> - Fishing is carried out in a more sustainable way and fishing resources are protected.
> - The income of inhabitants in mountain areas has increased with professional production and marketing of handicrafts.

Objectives

Based on the network’s goals you have to derive specific operational objectives defining what kind of outcome or direct benefit the network would like to achieve.

Make a clear distinction between the objectives (what you want to achieve) and the activities (what you are actually doing). Clearly formulated objectives will also help you to monitor and evaluate the network systematically. For the logical framework connecting activities, outputs, objectives/outcome, and impacts, also see section 6.6.1 on results-based monitoring.

Examples – Objectives and activities	
Objective/outcome	**Activities**
1. All network partners have access to high quality information.	The network builds up a powerful web portal. The network organises annual conferences.
2. Sustainable development of mountain regions is the main topic of the next world conference on sustainability.	The network participates actively in the working group for the preparation of the world conference. The network publishes a public call for action.
3. Standards for sustainable fishing are effective.	Several network partners start a common research project for the formulation of standards. The network members participate in an international working group for the establishment of standards.

Position the network

While you were formulating the network idea and the proposal, you already gained some insights into similar networks or organisations, and you identified where your network would like to have an impact. It is very important that the positioning of the network is *as specific as possible.*

For the formulation of your mission and the goals, it may be necessary to analyse the *context* again. What kind of information and knowledge is really needed? What is already available and what are other networks doing? Where is there lack of knowledge?

The network's members should also identify thematic areas in which they have particular *strengths* in comparison to other organisations or networks. The interface of specific strengths and demand for them will finally determine the specific area in which the network will be active. A network that tries to do everything is not doing anything right.

Yet this rule of thumb can trap networks in paradoxes. To be effective they have to focus on a specific area, but from the outset network partners bring in a whole *variety of interests*. In addition, decision-makers, stakeholders or contributors may try to push the network to embrace wider thematic areas or to take up other issues. Some may even attempt to hijack networks for their own goals. Networks can also fall victim to a wrong understanding of sustainable, integrated, and comprehensive approaches, thereby losing their clear focus and setting objectives that are too broad to attain in a meaningful, demonstrable way.

To find the right focus will always be a challenge for networks. A practical way of achieving a better focus is to write a *negative list* of activities that the network is *not* going to do. There is also a simple test to show whether a network is focused enough: If the network idea can be explained in a few simple sentences, even to an outsider, it is focused enough.

5.2 Governance structure

The governance structure is the backbone of the network, as it determines the network's basic organisational elements. There is no set blueprint for this and the governance structure has to follow the strategic framework of the network: structure follows strategy!

Formal international networks require systems of governance that consider the difficulties of international collaboration: the members of a network are often scattered all over the world, the distances to travel for face-to-face meetings are long and meetings are therefore expensive, time zones hinder communication, and different cultures with diverse working styles come together. Under such circumstances, a clear, transparent, and simple governance structure is advisable.

5.2.1 Regionalisation

Larger formal and international networks are spread over several countries and regions, or are global. When you set up the network you will have to decide what the optimum degree of centralisation or decentralisation is.

There are two basic options:

- A *centrally organised network* with a strong secretariat. Linkages between the secretariat and the members are very strong, but the linkages between individual members are not so strong.
- A *decentralised network* with regional sub-networks that together form the global network. The linkages within and between the regional networks are strong, whereas the secretariat acts mainly as facilitator among the regional networks.

Between these two basic options there are many hybrid forms of network.

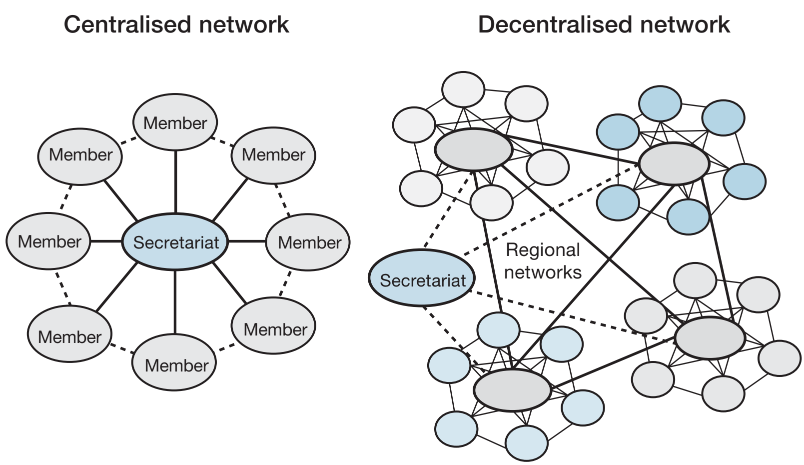


Figure 2: Centralised and decentralised networks

If you set up a network you should consider that the more organised *decentralised and regionalised* networks are, the closer they are to the needs in their region. Whereas in international networks, one or two languages mainly dominate the decentralised structure, regional networks allow for more diversity, as they can communicate and provide services in *local languages*. Experience shows that many potential members are excluded if only a couple of international languages are used in the network (☞ section 8.4.1).

Regionalisation is also an *advantage for fundraising* (☞section 6.4.3). If your network is positioned at regional level too, you will be closer to potential public and private contributors. In addition, bilateral and multilateral development organisations are increasingly channelling their funds directly to Southern countries. Therefore, regional networks will have better access to such funding than global ones.

5.2.2 Organisation chart

An organisation chart shows the most important structural elements of a network. Typically, a network has several organisational elements with different functions.

Organisational element	Function
Board or Steering Committee led by a Chairperson	Strategic guidance of the network, control of operational work
Advisory Committee	Gives advice to the network, for example, technical support or practical tips
Committee of Patrons or Honorary Members	Improves the prestige of the network
Secretariat	Coordination of the network and its administration
Members or regional networks	Operational tasks and implementation

These are typical organisational elements and they may vary according to local practices, preferences of the members, and goals of the network. The best method of finding an *appropriate structure for your network* is by holding a workshop with the core group or with all members. A good way to achieve a sustainable solution is to assess the various alternatives first and make a decision based on this analysis.

Many international networks have a *board or steering committee* consisting of representatives of the most important members or of the regional sub-networks. The functions of the board are to give strategic guidance and approve financial plans, reports, and operational programmes. A chairperson with a representative and strategic role leads the board.

Networks are often tempted to enlarge the board, aiming for a very broad representation and looking for strong connections with the most important stakeholders. It should be borne in mind, however, that the result of a big board is often that consensus is more difficult to achieve, dates that are possible for joint meetings are rare, and travel costs for board meetings are very high. Also, far too often, just a few of the board members actually participate in the meetings. This devalues the board and frustrates the participants of the meetings. Therefore, it is advisable to keep the board small.

There are two other options for including technical experts or well-reputed persons. Some networks have some kind of *technical advisory committee or resource persons* supporting the network in technical matters.

In order to stay in touch with a circle of important stakeholders, a *committee of patrons or honorary members*, consisting of persons with a good reputation who support the idea of the network, can be established. This committee has no executive function. Membership of this committee enables members to show their support for the network and contribute to its prestige. They may act as door openers to gain access to other organisations or to find funding.

5.2.3 Secretariat

The secretariat has a central role in networks, in particular in larger international ones, and it is the focal point that links the strands of the network together. The main role of the network secretariat is that of a *moderator and facilitator*, striving to delegate as many tasks as possible to network members, encouraging them to be active and giving support only when needed.

Usually, the secretariat is headed by an *Executive Director, Executive Secretary, or a Managing Director*. This is a crucial role in the network and its success or failure will depend a great deal upon his or her skills. The Executive Secretary should have a thorough understanding of the network's thematic area, the technical aspects of the modes of communication applied, and the main languages used. It is also important that he or she is a good moderator who listens and shares, and who has a good sense of when to intervene and when to hold back and allow others to interact.

In addition to moderation of the network, the network secretariat carries out a number of other activities, and these include the following:

- coordination of network projects
- updating operational plans
- monitoring of planned and ongoing projects
- coordination of network promotion
- developing, providing and maintaining the website
- preparing board meetings
- book-keeping of the network
- making sure that the most important relationships with the stakeholders of the networks are maintained

The network secretariat should be *kept small*, with a minimum of staff. There are three reasons for this: costs can be kept within certain limits; funds for administration are hard to secure as they are often meant to be met from overheads; and a small secretariat makes governance easier. If the secretariat is too active, it will crowd out other network members. In a network, the members should bear the overall responsibility for its activities, not the secretariat. This is the basic idea of a network!

5.2.4 Legal status

As soon as a network starts to collect membership fees or to raise funds, its legal status becomes an issue. Funding is only provided to legally registered organisations.

There are two basic solutions to this:

- The network can be hosted by a member that acts as the legal representative.
- The network is registered legally.

Hosting by one or several of the members is widespread and represents a simple and pragmatic way to deal with legal registration. Proposals for projects and programmes are handed in by the members in the name of the network. However, the disadvantages of hosting must not be overlooked. The organisation hosting the network could begin to play too important a role in the network, disturbing the balance among its members. Problems may occur if the host organisation changes its strategy or gets into difficulties. Finally, the network might lose valuable information resources such as databases or the website if they are owned by the host organisation.

The other option, *legal registration*, is more demanding, as the network has to undergo the whole procedure of legal registration. Depending on the law of the country of registration, the legal slot will be that of a non-profit organisation, a foundation, or an association.

Before you register your network, it pays to carefully assess *where the most important public and private contributors of your network* are located and what their geographical priorities are. Networks situated in countries or regions that are not in the focus of potential contributors will have difficulties receiving funding. For this reason some networks facing this challenge have registered themselves in more than one country.

5.2.5 Network guidelines

Every network needs guidelines governing its work as a whole and the collaboration of its members: guiding principles laying down ethical values and principles; operational guidelines governing the day-to-day work; and guidelines governing rules of ownership and copyright. Depending upon the size of the network and the needs of its members, the scope of the guidelines may vary.

Guiding principles

In the guiding principles, basic ethical values and principles of collaboration among members and work with other partners are written down. While there are certain universal principles, each network will have its own specific principles that are shared by its members. Hence, guiding principles should be developed jointly, for example, during an establishment workshop.

Examples

- Members maintain their own identity and autonomy.
- Equal rights for all members
- No discrimination among members on the basis of gender, race, age, or language
- Transparency and accountability
- Responsiveness and efficiency

Operational guidelines

Operational guidelines determine how the network is organised: its governance structure, membership, and the most important processes and structures.

Checklist 9: Basic elements of operational guidelines

- Governance structure (☞section 5.2)
  - board, managing director, secretariat, committees
  - responsibilities
  - rules for election and re-election
- Membership (☞section 5.2.6)
  - criteria for membership
  - rights and obligations of members
  - membership contributions or fees
  - division of work among members

- Decision processes and rules for decision-making
- Organisation of meetings (☞sections 6.2).
- Reimbursements
- Ownership of network products and copyrights
- Rules for conflict resolution

Ownership and copyright

Through networks, a lot of information is collected, and information products such as publications, websites, or databases with technical information and expert directories are produced. The network can even develop special standards, specifications – or give rise to innovations.

Who owns these information products and who has copyright? These are crucial questions that should be addressed from the very inception of the network. If members use these products, standards, or innovations for their own purposes without consulting other members, disputes will arise; therefore, clear rules of ownership and copyright should be established.

Ownership of *information products* and *copyrights* should be agreed upon from the very beginning. In particular, the following questions ought to be answered.

- Who owns network publications? Are reproductions allowed? If so, under what preconditions?
- Who owns the website(s), the related databases, and other databases of the network? How may the information they provide be used?
- Who should have access to the information provided on the website?
- What happens to the website, databases, secretariat library if the network is dissolved?
- Who owns other products created by the network, for example, software, toolkits, maps, specifications, or patents?
- Who owns the network's logo and corporate identity?

The answers to these questions should be that, in general, all information, products, or standards produced on behalf of or in the name of the network are *freely accessible* to all network members, and if possible to all stakeholders. Open access to information should be the basic mission of networks!

In the case of copyrights, you must take the regulations of public contributors into account. Some governments or government institutions follow the principle that 'public money produces public goods'. Other contributors may have specific regulations that have to be taken into consideration as well. So it is possible that publicly funded publications remain the contributor's property. These issues are more important than you think, and the experience of some networks shows that it is worthwhile clarifying them in advance.

5.2.6 Membership

The members are the heart of any network. Success and failure depend on their motivation and their commitment to it.

Who is a member?

A crucial question to be answered when you set up a network is who are to be the members of the network: individuals, organisations, other networks, or a combination of all three?

- In formal networks the majority of members will normally come from *organisations* represented by one or more of their staff members.
- Formal networks may also have *individuals* as members like technical resource persons or important decision-makers.
- Last but not least, it could make sense to form alliances with other *networks* and to include them as members.

Formal or informal membership

In many networks, membership status is quite loosely defined. As long as members do not have to pay a fee or fulfil other formal requirements, membership status is not too important.

However, formal membership has many *advantages*. Every potential member has to make a clear decision about joining the network or not. Formal membership encourages active participation in the network and the commitment to share information. Finally, the network's members and its secretariat know who is actually taking part in it. This facilitates coordination and collaboration.

A formal membership can take the shape of a signature on a membership form, or in the case of an organisation, a memorandum of understanding between the member and the network.

Many networks have different *types of membership*:

- ***regular or voting members*** who have the right to participate in decision-making processes and a right to vote and elect board members
- ***associated members*** who take part in the activities of a network but have no right to vote
- ***informal members*** who subscribe to a discussion list and receive the newsletter
- ***honorary members*** who have especially contributed to the success of the network

Number of members

A question many networks face concerns the number of members. How many members should a network have? There is no set answer to this question.

In the beginning the network should not overstretch itself and the number of members should be *kept small*. This will ease collaboration and enable a dynamic start.

Afterwards, every network has to consider the pros and cons of its size. A network with numerous members has a wide outreach. With too many members, however, the familiarity that creates trust and commitment could be lost. If a network is too closed, its impact may be restricted and many may be excluded from the knowledge and information that the network generates.

One possibility is to have different types of membership, as described above. In the end, however, every network has to find its own balance between openness and restriction, by taking into account its governance mechanisms and executive structure.

Criteria for membership

Networks should set up clear criteria for different types of membership. Some of these criteria are given below:

- reputation of the potential member
- contribution a member can make to the network, viz. information and knowledge, social network, or funding
- capacity (time and funding) to participate in the network
- track record in the thematic area of the network
- duration of involvement in the thematic area of the network

Rules for members

In order to regulate membership in a network, it is advisable to have rules covering the following points:

- duties and responsibilities of members
- rights of every member, for example, voting and election rights or participation in decision-making processes, access to information, etc.
- membership fees (☞ section 6.4.2)
- rules for sanctions on or exclusion of members in case of conflict, insulting behaviour, betrayal, and other unacceptable behaviour

Varying commitment of members

The general rule for every network should be that all members *not only receive information from the network but also contribute* to its activities. This is a difficult goal to attain and the reality in most networks – as well as in communities of practice or electronic communities – is that some members will always be less active than others.

A simple model that demonstrates the commitment of members and can be applied to many different networks and communities distinguishes three layers. In the middle, there is the *core team*, often the group that has set up the network and feels responsible for its fate. The next circle comprises *members* who are involved in the network's activities in an operational and more passive way. The *lurkers* 'lurk' in the outer circles. Most of the time, *lurkers* are not directly involved in network activities but will rather tend to observe what the network is doing.

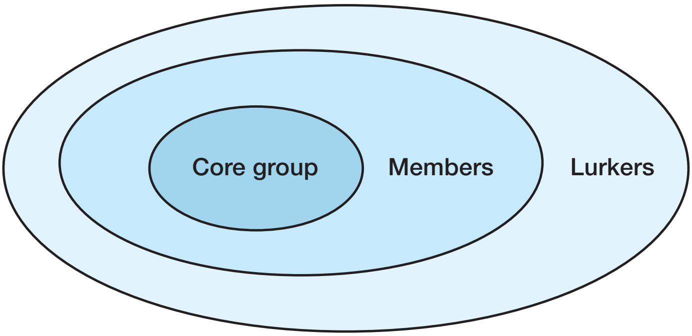


Figure 3: Core group, members, and lurkers

Although it is not acceptable for a member to always be a *lurker*, it should be accepted that there are different levels of commitment and that there may be reasons for what appears to be 'lurking'. A member may be more passive because of lack of resources, difficulties in understanding the language, or lack of interest in current activities. At a later stage, however, that same member may become more involved and make valuable contributions. Experience also shows that *lurkers* can serve as important connectors to other networks or organisations.

Rotation of responsibilities

The different levels of involvement in a network, stronger and weaker partners, active and passive members, may lead to power struggles among members. In particular, the secretariat and core group possess more power than other members. While this cannot be avoided, it should be made transparent and discussed if necessary.

One way to reduce the influence and power of the secretariat or some network members is to rotate the duties and responsibilities. Some networks practise rotation successfully. Others fail because it is too difficult to hand over responsibilities. Rotating the secretariat is often too ambitious. What is more realistic is the rotation of certain tasks like the organisation of an annual workshop or conference, facilitation of online communities, or representation on the board.

Checklist 10: Building up and maintaining membership

- ❑ Define types of membership: official, associated, informal, or honorary members.
- ❑ Determine the number of members.
- ❑ Define criteria for membership.
- ❑ Define the membership rules.
- ❑ Accept varying levels of commitment.
- ❑ Try to rotate some duties and responsibilities among network members.

6 Managing the Network

Networks will only achieve good results if they are committed to professional management. Effective management is not complicated. Rather, it has a lot to do with quite simple practices.

This section describes the core topics of management such as planning, organising effective meetings, network promotion, funding the network, nurturing relationships, monitoring and evaluation, and continuous evolution and innovation.

6.1 Operational plan

Networks need an *operational plan* that breaks down its vision, mission, and goals into operational objectives, services and activities, and projects, and also includes responsibilities and a schedule. This operational plan will help you keep an overview, and it is also an important part of the monitoring system.

When you set up the operational plan *avoid typical pitfalls*. Objectives (what will be achieved in a certain time?), activities (what are we going to do to achieve the objectives?) and outputs (what will the results of the activities be?) should not be confused with one another (also see section 6.6.1). For each activity, a responsible partner should be designated and a due date fixed.

Set your objectives, outcomes and activities in a *realistic and achievable way*. Keep in mind the overall goal of the network, reflect which activities could contribute most to the goal, and select a few essential activities on which to focus. Concentrate your efforts and do not dissipate your energy in too many activities.

The operational plan should be *updated regularly* and completely revised in collaboration with all network members each year.

6.2 Meetings

Too many meetings are badly prepared and conducted. This leads to lengthy meetings, unsatisfactory results, and finally to even more meetings. You are well advised to prepare network meetings as carefully as possible. Often, participants have to fly in from all over the world, and you should do everything possible to achieve a maximum output of the meetings.

The most important points for preparing and executing meetings are summarised in the Checklist 11.

Checklist 11: Organisation of meetings

- **Preparing for the meeting**
  - Announce the date of the meeting well in advance.
  - Collect possible discussion points from participants.
  - Draft a meeting agenda in advance showing how much time is available for each topic.
  - Prepare the documents in good time so that everybody can read them before the meeting.
- **Conducting the meeting**
  - Guide the meeting, explain the procedures, and summarise discussions.
  - Keep to the schedule.
  - Plan the follow-up to decisions taken by defining tasks, responsibilities, and deadlines.
  - Agree on a date for the next meeting(s).
- **Follow-up**
  - Send the documents and presentations to everybody.
  - Write the minutes of every meeting, including tasks, deadlines, and responsibilities. Send the minutes to every participant no later than two weeks after the meeting.
  - Regularly review the task list.

Meetings and workshops are much more efficient and satisfying if you use various *working techniques*, such as the metaplan technique, brainstorming, peer assist, after-action review, fish bowl, world cafe or open space. Familiarise yourself with these techniques by consulting one of the many toolboxes available on the Internet, reading a book on workshop methods, or attending a training workshop (☞ section 10.1). A few of these techniques are briefly described here.

Checklist 12: Techniques for meetings and workshops	
Technique	**Description**
Metaplan technique	The Metaplan is a technique for collecting, visualising, and analysing ideas and information in a participatory manner during meetings and workshops. The participants have to write their information inputs or ideas in readable handwriting on cards. Different coloured cards may be used for different questions. The cards are collected afterwards and pasted on large pin-boards. This enables everybody to read the cards, which can then be grouped, placed in relation to each other, or connected with lines to show relationships.
Brainstorming	Brainstorming is an organised approach to producing and collecting ideas. Brainstorming can be done either individually or in a group. In brainstorming sessions in groups the participants are encouraged to share their ideas freely with one another (There are no bad ideas!). The key to brainstorming is not to interrupt the thought process with discussion. The collection and the analysis are strictly separated. The metaplan technique can be used for subsequent analysis.
Peer assist	Peer assist is a structured process based on mutual respect. A team of people who are working on a project or activity call a meeting or workshop to seek feedback and insights from people from other teams. First, they introduce the background to their project and their capabilities. They then express their specific needs and explore, in collaboration with their peers, new solutions or possible ways to cope with problems. (Also see the description of peer reviews, another technique, in section 7.4)
After-action review	An after-action review is a structured discussion to enable one to learn from recently completed activities or projects. In this discussion the stakeholders involved participate. They learn by asking what happened, why it happened, what went well, what needs improvement, and what lessons can be learned from the experience. The spirit of an after-action review is one of openness and learning and is not about problem-fixing or criticism. Feedback should be constructive and positive contributions recognised.

Fish bowl	The fish bowl is a special way to structure discussions. Questions for discussion are prepared and considered one at a time. Fish-bowl participants are assigned to either a listening or a discussion group. The two discrete groups are positioned so that the listening group is seated around the discussion group. The first discussion group has a certain amount of time to discuss one question. During the active discussion, the listening group takes notes and prepares comments. The groups then swap positions, and the listening group provides rebuttals or further examination of the issues discussed and any further issues not discussed previously.
World café	The World café is a method of providing a diverse group of people with an opportunity to share information and insights into complex issues. World cafés can either be conducted online or in a public space. This method is suitable for large groups of people. A number of questions are prepared and documented on a number of tables. Either a tablecloth (which can be written on) or large note pads are provided at each table. Groups are initially assigned to a table and then given a set amount of time to respond to the questions. People are invited to talk in small, intimate groups about topics of interest. They are then asked to rotate to another table and to add to the responses made by previous groups. When the final rotation has occurred, a plenary session is held to create a sense of connection with the wider group. This offers the whole group an opportunity to connect the overall themes or questions presented and talk about the possibility for further action.
Open space	Open space is a method of organising meetings, workshops, and conferences. With the support of a moderator the participants organise themselves and establish and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions. Open Space is a proven and effective method of developing strategies to deal with conflicts, to induce change, or to include diverse opinions. The method works in groups of 5 to 1,000 people and may last one to three days.

6.3 Promotion

All over the world, thousands of organisations and institutions, NGOs, and networks are vying for attention. At the same time, many people are suffering from an overload of information and knowledge that it is hardly manageable anymore. Some knowledge management professionals are even convinced that 'attention management' should replace knowledge management so that only the content that commands attention will be perceived and acted upon. You have to respond to this situation through professional and targeted promotion of your network.

Develop a promotion strategy

To promote your network you must develop a promotion strategy defining the principal stakeholders of the network, identifying their interests, formulating the messages you would like to convey, and showing how you will actually promote the network.

For the promotion strategy, *focus groups* – the members, decision-makers, and stakeholders – should be listed in a table. For each focus group the information needs and appropriate promotion tools should be defined.

Provide targeted information products

Develop information products that are targeted to the demands of different focus groups. Avoid sending all the information to everybody and thus contributing to information overload. Members, for example, like to receive technical information and news about the network. Decision-makers prefer short information leaflets summarising interesting success stories. Supporters of the network are interested in the annual report, the financial figures, and outputs achieved. Try to economise by using the same data for different information products.

Networks often lack hard facts or statistical data that could be used for promotion. Frequently, there is no direct correlation between their services and projects and the impact. A systematic monitoring system (☞section 6.6) will help you to collect not only basic information and data about the networks' services and projects, but also success stories describing practical illustrative examples on a regular basis. Experience has shown that storytelling can be a very effective means of promotion (☞ section 9.2).

Brand activities, publications, and projects

A very effective way of communicating the network's activities is by giving its brand to projects, activities, and publications of members with the network name and logo. Not only is this an added value for the members, as they can show their stakeholders that they are working in a coordinated way and in partnership, but it also adds to the prestige of the network. It is advisable, however, to develop basic branding rules among network members, defining the type, scope, and quality of activities, projects, and publications required permitting them to use the brand.

Working with the media

Through media like television, radio broadcasting, and newspapers, large audiences can be reached. That's why they are an effective means of promoting the network, raising public awareness, and also mobilising decision-makers.

The example of the Asian Tsunami disaster in December 2004 shows how important the media can be in mobilising the public. In a short time, the whole world was informed about the event and the shocking pictures resulted in one of the highest volumes of charitable donations ever received for a disaster. However, the flipside of the coin is that gaining attention for regular networking activities or raising awareness for 'silent catastrophes' is quite difficult.

To achieve good media coverage, networks have to establish *professional public relations*. The basis for this is a well presented and maintained website, attractive information material about the network and its activities, and carefully prepared press releases. In addition, networks need to build up and nurture close relationships with media professionals.

Effective ways of arousing media interest are *invitations to field visits, excursions, workshops, or conferences*. Sometimes it is also possible to bring journalists into projects to produce reports. Journalists can help *place articles* or even a series of articles in renowned newspapers and journals. This is a particularly effective way of reaching decision-makers.

Good coverage of a network and its activities in newspapers, on television, or on the radio not only promotes the network, but also becomes an incentive for *decision-makers* to participate in events organised by the network, as they can show their commitment to the public in this manner. Experienced conference visitors know that attendance increases sharply as soon as television or radio broadcasting units switch on their floodlights and microphones.

Promotion is a continuous task for all members

Promotion is not something you carry out once or twice a year. Rather, *it is a continuous activity of all network members and, in particular, of the network secretariat*. Networks should make use of every opportunity to show what they are doing and make sure their achievements are visible. There are a lot of ways of doing this: an electronic newsletter, the website, mailings, or stands at conferences.

Checklist 13: Promotion of the network

- ❏ Develop a promotion strategy.
- ❏ Know your focus groups.
- ❏ Provide targeted information products.
- ❏ Include promotion of the network in all activities.
- ❏ Brand activities, publications, and projects.
- ❏ Work with the media.
- ❏ Promotion is a continuous task for all members.

6.4 Funding

Networking involves costs and requires funding. Reliable funding is crucial for the long-term success of networks.

6.4.1 Financial needs

Networks have various financial needs. First of all, the network has *running costs* for basic infrastructure such as the secretariat and website. Networks are well advised to keep these running costs as low as possible.

Networking involves *meetings, workshops, and conferences* as well. These face-to-face meetings are, in general, quite expensive, particularly the travelling costs of participants. It may be necessary for the network to fund the participation of its members if they cannot cover the costs themselves. As workshops or conferences are quite expensive, additional funding is often required.

Last but not least, most of the funding will be required for *projects or even whole programmes* that have been initiated by the network.

6.4.2 Types of funding

How can the financial needs of networks be covered? Networks are well advised to fund their services and projects from different sources. This will make them more independent and will contribute to the network's financial sustainability.

In-kind contributions

In many networks, at least some services and activities are in-kind contributions by the network's members. Organisations belonging to the network allocate some of their staff's time to facilitating an online community, they maintain and host the website of the network for free or they offer their facilities for workshops. Such in-kind contributions are an effective way to fund some of the network's activities. Often, it will be easier to receive some in-kind contributions than to raise funds.

Membership fees

A network is a common undertaking of its members and it is obvious that they could also contribute to funding the network. In general, members receive benefits from the network. Why should they get them for free?

Economic studies have shown that most people value a product more if it has a price, so it might make sense to charge a membership fee.

So far, many networks have renounced membership fees because the financial resources of their members are limited, particularly in developing countries. Even so, a membership fee should not be ruled out and could contribute to the regular core funding of the network. Why not start with a small membership fee? You should at least think about it.

Funding from public and private sources

Many networks also need additional funding from *public sources* like public authorities, governmental organisations, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, and from *private sources* like grant-making foundations or private companies, which also sometimes provide funding to networks.

In order to receive funding from public and private contributors, the network's goals have to *match with their strategies*. Grant-making foundations increasingly follow a clear strategy, and companies will often only support a network if its services and projects fit into their strategy.

Many public and private contributors are more interested in funding *projects or programmes* than in running costs like those of the secretariat. This is also one of the reasons why private companies are reluctant to support networks. Through their support, they seek to acquire the profile of socially responsible entrepreneurs and hence prefer projects that are easy and simple to publicise. The activities of networks are often too abstract for them. Nevertheless, if you have good contacts in the private sector, use them to secure funding.

Selling services

Some networks sell their services to other organisations or networks, for example, the hosting and facilitation of online conferences. If you have the opportunity to sell your services you should do so as this will contribute to your network's funding. Notwithstanding, networks will never be powerful mechanisms for selling services. There is also a danger that selling services will distract from the network's core services.

Decentralised funding

Instead of funding network services and projects through a central budget, some networks use a completely decentralised funding structure. With this arrangement, every partner contributes services to the network and also finds funding for networking activities. However, decentralised funding will only work if the network partners are strong organisations with sufficient funding or fundraising know-how.

Reimbursements

An issue closely related to membership fees is reimbursement for members' services to the network as a whole and for their participation in meetings, workshops, or conferences. For network members in developing countries, participation in network events is often very expensive. How should networks deal with this problem?

International networks sometimes have to cope with the fact that salaries and living costs vary a lot among the countries involved. Daily allowances paid to participants in workshops and conferences may even be higher than their salaries. Hence, reimbursements can create a strong incentive to participate in workshops and conferences, and this is not always for the good of the network.

There is no perfect solution to this problem, and every network has to find its own way of funding its members' participation in meetings, workshops, and conferences. Suggestions for dealing with this situation are as follows.

- All participants should receive the same allowances, although this might create an unwanted incentive. In this case, the network secretariat has to raise funding for the participation of members.
- All participants have to find funding themselves. Experience shows that many participants find ways of funding their participation if they are really interested in the conference or the workshop and if they can expect concrete personal benefits from their work.
- A combined model could be applied whereby the network funds participation of members from poorer countries while those from richer countries fund themselves.

- The secretariat organises a competition. Interested participants write a paper and the authors of the best papers receive funding to participate.

Multifarious funding structure

Experience has shown that the funding structure of many networks is very complex. Public and private contributors to the network have quite different requirements and formats for funding arrangements. Funding networks often consists of a *mix of funding* types, and network budgets are made up of different blends of core, project and programme funding. Decentralised funding is combined with core funding for the secretariat, and the duration of these funding types usually varies.

This variety leads to a certain financial robustness of networks. One important advantage is that they *do not depend on support from a single source*, a situation that ought to be avoided whenever possible.

On a less positive note, this complexity makes fundraising and network management difficult. These difficulties should not be an excuse for lack of transparency or excessive administration, and the members of the network should strive for *consolidated accounting*, giving a clear overview of where funding is coming from, how the money is spent, and who is getting how much.

6.4.3 Fundraising

Successful fundraising is crucial to every network. Fundraising is an art unto itself and it would be beyond the scope of this guide to discuss it here in detail. Below a few important elements for fundraising.

Checklist 14: Fundraising essentials

- ❑ Make yourself familiar with fundraising techniques by reading a fundraising guide or by attending a fundraising training course (☞ section 10.1).
- ❑ Develop a *clear vision, mission, and goals for* the network that you can communicate easily so that potential public and private contributors understand what you are doing.
- ❑ Know the *strategies of potential contributors* and what motivates them to fund networks.
- ❑ *Fundraising is friend-raising*, so try and establish close relationships with potential contributors.
- ❑ Be active and patient. Building up relationships until you receive funding *takes time*. Sometimes you will have to wait a year or longer.
- ❑ Once relationships have been built up, *nurture them* continuously by sending regular information about the network, for example, the annual reports.
- ❑ *Include supporters* of the network in the board.

6.5 Balancing the network

In a network, many different members and organisations or public institutions are involved, and they come from various cultural areas. They all have specific interests, different modes of communicating and working, and diverse histories.

How can trustful relationships inside the network and externally with the network's stakeholders be established, given such diversity? It is a balancing act that has to be mastered by the network manager, the secretariat, and the members themselves.

6.5.1 Caring for internal relationships

The relationships among members are the arteries constituting the network, and they should be cared for attentively.

Know your members

A network can only care for its members if they are known to each other. So you need at least a membership list or a *members' section* on a website where they can register and provide information about themselves. An example of a membership profile is presented below.

Example - member profile

Name ....

First name .... Title ....

Function / job title

....

Organisation / company

....

Email address ....

Postal address ....

....

....

.... ZIP-Code.....................................

City.. Country ....

Phone number ....

Website ....

Organisation type

- ❏ Government
- ❏ Private-sector
- ❏ NGO
- ❏ Training institute
- ❏ Academic and research
- ❏ Student
- ❏ Individual consultant
- ❏ Other

Areas of expertise

- ❏ ....
- ❏ ....
- ❏ ....

In addition, the members should have the possibility to change their personal password or selecting other services like an electronic newsletter or an electronic discussion forum.

Nurture the relationships

Once you know your members, your relationship with them has to be nurtured *continuously*. This can be done in a number of ways.

- Involve members actively in joint projects.
- Send monthly or quarterly electronic newsletters providing them with the most important news.
- Organise opportunities to meet face-to-face at least once a year.
- Invite members on an annual basis to give feedback about their needs in an electronic survey.

Create win-win situations

In every network, there will be those who participate for altruistic reasons and others who do so just out of interest. In most cases, however, people will join the network out of self-interest. Most people like to receive some *benefit or added value*. If people do not benefit from the network, they will sooner or later lose interest in it.

Keeping the interest of members in mind, the network has to strive from the beginning to instil a *culture of giving and receiving*. This will promote a win-win-situation, which is so important in keeping the network together. There has to be a balance between giving and receiving. If some only receive while others only give the latter will begin to feel exploited and withdraw from the network. Even if the win-win-situation becomes the rule for collaboration, in reality there will always be some who benefit more than others, which is okay as long as a certain balance is kept.

Control competition among members

Balance among members can be jeopardised by power plays. A member may even try to push the network in a certain direction and hijack it for his/her own purposes or even sabotage the network, e.g. by spreading negative or false information.

These power plays cannot be avoided. Networking practitioners can control them in the following ways.

- Define rules, responsibilities, and decisions clearly.
- Be precise about the goal and objectives of the network.
- Keep good relationships and close contact with members.
- Be proactive in terms of communication and management.
- Set down a clear code of conduct for members.

Stay realistic

In many cases, members are very enthusiastic when networks are set up. Big promises are often made at the end of planning meetings and workshops. People are frequently enthusiastic about what they will contribute, but when reality takes over, enthusiasm crumbles. What is happening? It is not that members are acting in bad faith, they are just too optimistic, unrealistic, and, in some cases, not quite honest about the time they are able devote to the network. In all planning exercises, you should be aware of this *planning illusion* and check carefully with everybody whether their promises are realistic.

6.5.2 Caring for external relationships

Networks have to care actively for their external relationships. The important people for the network are not only decision-makers (☞ section 4), but also all other stakeholders.

Know your stakeholders

First of all, you need to know who the most important external stakeholders are. Compile a list or draw a map of the network's principal stakeholders working in the same or similar thematic area and update this list regularly:

- Research institutes, formal networks, and other international organisations
- Public administrations and politicians
- Public and private funding sources
- Civil society organisations and NGOs
- Media: press, television, radio

A useful tool for getting a visual overview of all relevant stakeholders is a *stakeholder map* showing the stakeholders and their relationships to each other (see figure 4). Put the network in the middle and group the stakeholders around the network according to importance. With the weight of the line between the stakeholders you can show the importance of the relationship. The stakeholder map can also help you identify indirect relationships. Maybe you do not have a direct link to a decision-maker, but a good relationship with a research institute that maintains a close relationship with this decision-maker.

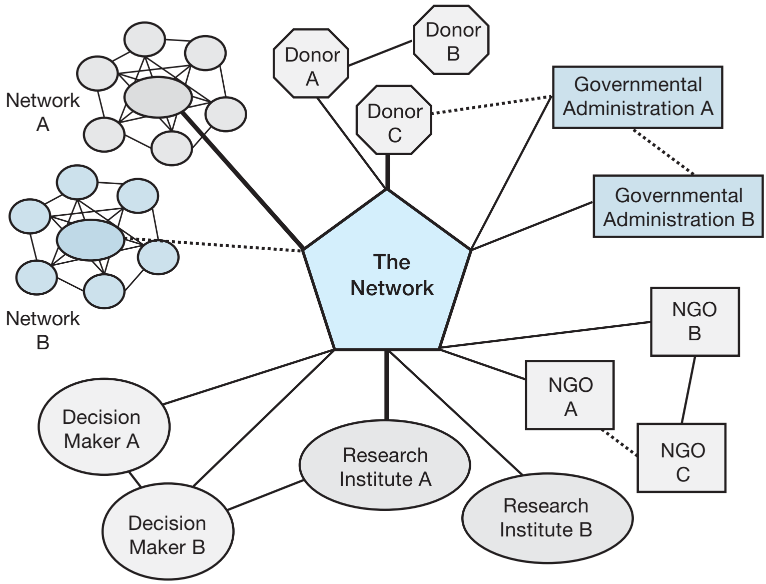


Figure 4: Example of a stakeholder map

Mind mapping software is very useful for drawing stakeholder maps (☞ section 10.1) You can use this software for other purposes as well, viz. structuring your thoughts, a SWOT-analysis (☞ section 6.6.2), or collecting ideas.

Caring for your stakeholders

Once you know your most important stakeholders, you have to actively nurture good relationships with them. Some ways to do so are, providing them with information on a regular basis, inviting them to events and workshops and to join in on email discussions. Continuously monitor the needs of your stakeholders, e.g. through regular workshops, hearings, or surveys. The needs of your stakeholders may change over time and your network has to respond and care for new demands proactively.

Establish strategic partnerships

One group of stakeholders presents an opportunity and a threat at the same time: organisations, research institutes and networks operating in the same or similar thematic areas.

On the one hand these organisations might be direct *competitors* for funding and could monopolise interesting topics. Even if they are competitors you have to keep in touch with them, know what they are doing, and know what their plans for the future are.

On the other hand these other organisations might also become *strategic partners* of the network so that you can:

- demarcate the core activities of each partner;
- carry out joint activities such as organising workshops or larger conferences; and
- issue joint declarations to raise awareness about certain topics.

In the case of a strategic partnership, a memorandum of understanding (MOU), an agreement defining your collaboration, can help govern the relationship of partners. An MOU can also be of advantage in fundraising, as you can show the potential contributors that you are well connected to other partners.

Checklist 15: Balancing relationships

- ❏ Know the members of the network.
- ❏ Continuously nurture relationships with members.
- ❏ Create win-win situations.
- ❏ Control competition among members.
- ❏ Stay realistic.
- ❏ Know the networks' most important stakeholders.
- ❏ Care for your stakeholders.
- ❏ Establish strategic partnerships.

6.6 Monitoring and evaluation

Networks have to give an account of the results they have achieved to their members, stakeholders and supporters on a regular basis. At the same time, the secretariat or the management of the network and its members need a monitoring system to govern the services provided by the network as well as the planned and ongoing projects or programmes.

GTZ or the DAC recommend a 'results-based monitoring system'. In addition, networks have to carry out more comprehensive evaluations of their work from time to time.

6.6.1 Results-based monitoring

In order to manage a network in an efficient and effective manner and to check whether the objectives of the network have been achieved, a results-based monitoring system should be established. An example is given below (☞ section 10.1).

Through the monitoring system, all the networks' services and projects and the results achieved are observed continuously. The monitoring system will help the network secretariat and its members to keep the results in mind at all times and steer the network services and projects accordingly.

Results-based monitoring comprises all sequential elements of an intervention: the inputs, the activities leading to outputs, and the outcomes and impacts realised. The table and figure 5 below give an overview of how these terms are defined and how they relate to each other.

Element	Definition	Example	Means of verification
Inputs	The financial, human, and material resources used by the network	Funding, time, information and know-how	Financial budgets, time allocation, operational plans
Activities	Actions taken or work performed through which inputs are mobilised to produce specific outputs	Writing a manual, setting up a database, email discussions with summaries, preparation of a workshop	Operational plans, feedback forms
Outputs	Products and services that result from the network's activities	Manual, database, workshop, number of publications on the website available for downloading, policy briefs	Web statistics, publication statistics, annual report
Outcome	The expected or already achieved effects in the short term and medium term relative to the *network's objectives*	e.g. for a network with the objective of reducing soil erosion in Asia: "Soil erosion in Asian countries has been reduced to x per cent."	Anecdotal evidence, stories of successes and failures, systematic collection of feedback, statistics, surveys, case studies
Impact	Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term *changes and effects produced by the network*, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended	e.g. the fertility of the soil has been increased by x per cent. Farmers are healthier because they use less chemical substances.	Collection of anecdotal evidence, comprehensive evaluations, studies and research projects

For daily management of the network, continuous and systematic monitoring of *inputs, activities, and outputs* is indispensable. Even if the means of verification are relatively easy to trace, collecting all the information needed requires discipline.

However, what is more interesting is whether the network has actually made a contribution to its objectives and achieved a real *outcome*. This is the kind of information of interest to decision-makers and other stakeholders. Outcomes can be measured by systematic collection of stories of success (or failure), case study research, collection of feedback, statistics, systematic interviews, and other means. For interviewees connected to the Internet, online surveys are an effective and simple means of gathering feedback. A number of online tools are available, and they are both cheap and simple to use (☞ section 10.1).

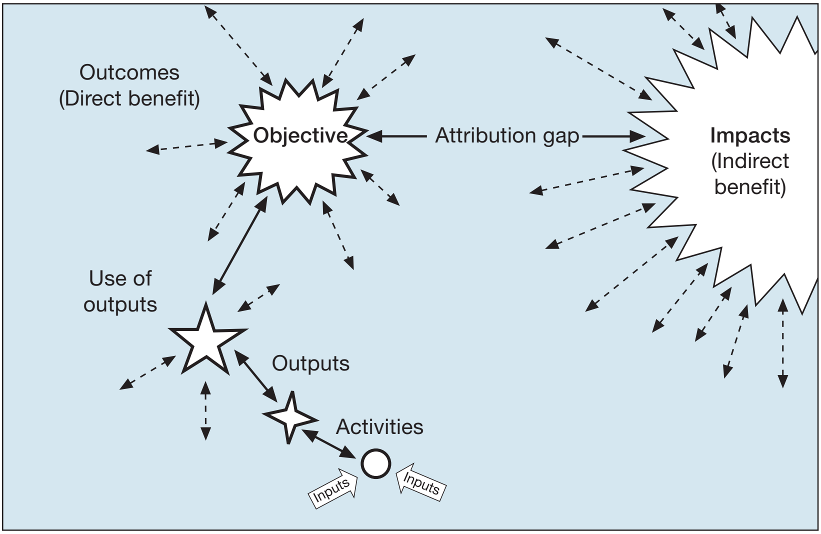


Figure 5: Elements of a results-based monitoring system (source: GTZ, 2004)

In conclusion, all activities have an impact: positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term changes and effects, whether directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. Measuring the impacts of networks will need more resources and in many cases it will only be possible to trace the impacts through comprehensive studies and evaluations.

A practical way of identifying and documenting impacts is to be vigilant and continuously record likely impacts, e.g. through systematic collection of observations by network members or of stories.

6.6.2 Regular evaluation

From time to time every network needs an evaluation: a comprehensive and systematic review of its organisation, its services and projects, and an assessment of whether its objectives have been achieved. Evaluations ensure accountability vis-à-vis the network members and stakeholders, and contribute to the learning process. Normally, evaluation of the network will be required *about every three to five years*.

In the evaluation, the following questions will be addressed.

- ***Relevance***: Is the network's mission consistent with the needs of its members and stakeholders?
- ***Significance***: Does the network generate broad-based sector-wise or regional impacts?
- ***Efficiency***: How economically does the network produce outputs?
- ***Effectiveness***: To what extent have the objectives of the network been achieved, taking their relative importance into account?
- ***Sustainability***: Have the network outputs led to sustainable outcomes and impacts? Will there be sufficient funding for the network in future?
- ***Network organisation and communication***: How do the board, the management and the secretariat function? How do communication and collaboration among the members work?

Evaluations may be carried out by the network secretariat or the members themselves. While it may be useful to give the responsibility to an *external consultant* who can take an unbiased look at the network and facilitate the whole evaluation process, it is also extremely valuable to conduct a more informal peer assessment, where other network managers evaluate you.

Methods of evaluation

Various methods can be used for the evaluation, collection of information, and formulation of future strategies:

- ***surveys*** (electronic or paper-based) among network members, decision-makers, and other stakeholders
- ***interviews*** with the network manager, network members, and stakeholders
- ***workshops*** with members and stakeholders of the network (☞ section 6.2)
- ***document analysis***, e.g. of operational plans, reports, and other monitoring documents

SWOT-Analysis

SWOT-Analysis is a practical way of analysing the network and identifying its future directions, past and present strengths, and weaknesses, as well as future threats and opportunities.

	In the past and present	**In the future**
Positive	Strengths	Opportunities
Negative	Weaknesses	Threats

Ideally, the SWOT-analysis is carried out in a *participatory* way to include network members and the most important stakeholders. Network evaluations should not only consist of an analysis by an external consultant, but also *include all members and, if possible, stakeholders.* In this way, all members have the opportunity to learn from the past and to refresh or adjust their vision of the future.

6.7 Evolution and innovation

Networks should be viewed as dynamic systems that continuously evolve. New networks should *start small* and *take time to mature* to the point at which they really function effectively, and this requires patience on the part of members, stakeholders and supporters. Often it takes no less than three years for a network to begin to function well.

Once established, networks are exposed to a *continuously changing context*. What may be the right thing to do today could be obsolete by tomorrow. Networks have to constantly adjust to changing circumstances and needs. This may be quite challenging, but only those networks that are able to adapt to the changing environment and demands are able to ensure their long-term viability.

Ideally, networks regenerate themselves in an *evolutionary way*. With *incremental innovations*, they can continually adjust and improve their structure and contents, the activities and services. A perceptive mindset is essential for this. Regular feedback from members, decision-makers, and stakeholders will help you decide what has to be done. You yourself will be able to detect everyday possibilities for improvement. Systematic monitoring will also give you guidance (☞ sections 6.6.1).

A practical way to innovate is through a *regular tidying up*. The economist Joseph Schumpeter called this ‘creative destruction’, because stopping certain activities will create room for new activities and innovation. Each year, the secretariat should systematically review the portfolio of services and activities along with the members, and decide which of the services and activities they want to continue and which should be discontinued. In many networks, a lot of activities are undertaken and when time or funding become scarce they are only partly carried out. Stop these activities and focus your investment on the most important and requested ones!

However, incremental innovation is not enough. Networks will only thrive and remain dynamic if they have the ability to *launch new ideas and projects*. This will require more energy than that required by incremental innovation. A good starting point for new ideas is the regular evaluation that takes place every three to five years (☞ section 6.6.2) Develop these ideas strategically by asking the following question: What should the network do today in order to be successful *in future?* This will help to keep abreast of changes.

To enrich discussion, *invite an external expert* who is not directly linked to the network or the cultural context and who can think ‘outside the box’. Such a person can offer independent views on relevant issues. Another way of collecting new ideas is by inviting stakeholders of your network or of others for peer assist (☞ section 6.2).

Depending on the type and mission of the network, it might be necessary to determine for *how long the network will create value*, or what criteria should be used to decide when it should close. Networks are dynamic systems, and it might happen that their objectives are achieved or other networks become more successful. In this event one should avoid continuing just for the sake of it, as it will then be better to close down and direct your energies to new initiatives!

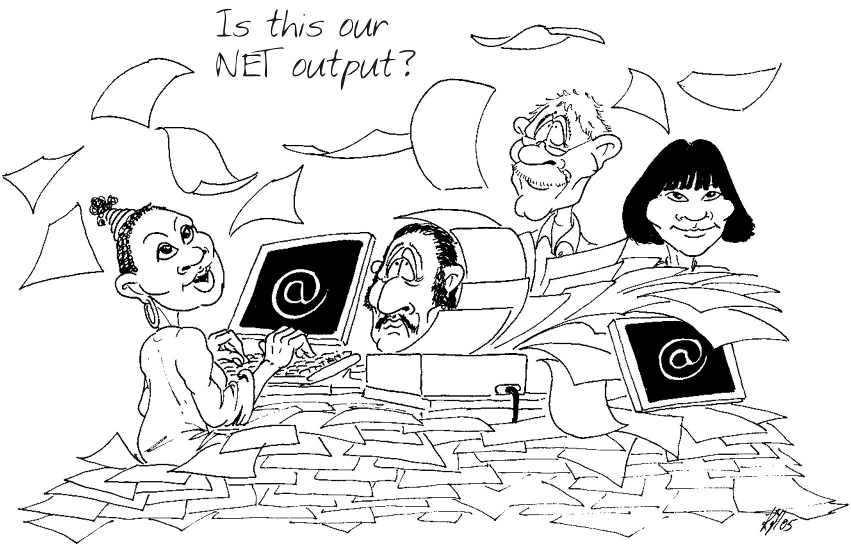
Checklist 16: Evolution and innovation

- ❏ Develop the network in an evolutionary way with incremental innovations.
- ❏ Tidy up network activities and plans regularly.
- ❏ Launch new activities and projects regularly in a strategic way.
- ❏ Invite external experts or other networks to give their views.
- ❏ Create a common notion of how long the network will remain valuable.

7 Network Services and Projects

Networks should not only deliver services based on the demands of their members and stakeholders, but also initiate projects or programmes to increase their outcome and impact.

In this section, you will see that it is advisable to start off with services or small projects once the network has been set up. Established networks have to focus on a number of core services and conduct specific projects or programmes. To ensure the quality of activities and services, a quality management system is essential.



7.1 Start with quick wins

During the start-up phase you should initiate activities, deliver some services or even carry out small projects. Focus in the beginning on a few services or projects that can be launched quickly and do not absorb too many resources. Do not wait too long, do something and talk about it! Examples of initial services or projects are the following.

- Set up an electronic workspace with an email discussion list via which you can send regular information about the network's progress.
- Prepare a short position paper on a pertinent topic and send it to potential supporters of the network.
- Upscale an ongoing project of a network partner and give it the network's brand name.
- Present a paper at a conference or workshop, introducing the network at the same time.
- Try to organise a conference session about the network.

Providing services and carrying out small projects in the initial phase will give you several advantages.

- You can show members and stakeholders that the network is not only a 'talk shop' but also a 'work shop'.
- Potential public and private contributors will be more interested in an active network.
- You can raise the awareness of potential members and stakeholders.
- You will get early feedback on people's interests.
- The members weld together into a network community.

7.2 Core services

Successful networks provide a number of continuous or regular core services based on the demands of their members and stakeholders. These services help keep the network alive for its members and stakeholders. Examples of these core services can be as follows:

- Websites with regular updates on information
- Regular information exchanges through an email discussion forum
- Quarterly electronic newsletters informing subscribed members about ongoing activities, network members, and other relevant information
- Quarterly policy briefs for decision-makers
- Query and answer services responding to questions from members and stakeholders
- Regular electronic conferences discussing relevant issues
- Online chats with experts on selected topics
- Annual workshops or conferences

Several issues have to be considered when providing core services. First of all, these services should respond to the *real demands* of members or stakeholders and should add value. Regular policy briefs will save decision-makers time. The demands differ among networks, and they need to be assessed regularly through (electronic) surveys or interviews.

Some services should *take place regularly*, for example, a quarterly electronic newsletter or an annual conference held in the same month each year. This establishes a reliable time structure for all members.

The core services of a network should also have a *rhythm* corresponding to the preferences of its members. If members have the impression that nothing is happening, they will withdraw their attention or forget about the network. On the other hand, if there are too many activities they will feel overburdened. This is seen with email discussion lists. If you receive too many emails on the list you cannot read all of them, will become frustrated, and delete the emails. Conversely, if you receive very few emails your attention will diminish. You have to find the right balance, keeping a base flow of information.

7.3 Projects and programmes

In addition to the core services, networks should launch projects or programmes with the objective of achieving a planned outcome and sustainable impact in the sector or region in which the network is active. Another advantage of projects and programmes is that they can lead to a more diverse and secure funding base (☞ section 6.4)

Through *projects* networks aim to achieve specific objectives. In order to launch these projects you might have to write proposals for additional funding. Some networks bundle projects into *programmes* and submit programme proposals.

Three examples of network projects are briefly described below.

Objectives	Activities	Outputs
Development agencies acknowledge that the theme of the network is one of the core topics of public aid.	Preparation of a declaration by members of the network. Preparation of material for a booth and flyers.	Public declaration. Booth at an international conference. Official cocktails at the conference where the declaration is presented.
Stakeholders and decision-makers in a certain sector are provided with consolidated information.	Establishment of an electronic information platform: structute, design, layout and contents.	The electronic information platform is online and is being used.
More evidence is available about how to improve the situation in a certain thematic area.	Research activities are carried out, viz. case studies, pilot projects, or literature analyses.	A final report summarising the results of the research and giving recommendations for further action.

Developing and implementing joint projects and programmes are essential tasks for every network. The network and its members can show their *competence and innovative spirit* in their thematic area through these means. In addition, projects and programmes that are jointly planned and implemented will bind the network members together. At the same time, carrying out joint projects is one of the most effective methods of mutual *capacity building and learning*.

It is of utmost importance to *assign clear responsibilities* for raising or allocating funds and implementing projects or programs. If the network has its own legal form it can submit the proposal itself. If this is not the case, one or more members should submit the proposal together and make sure it has the brand mark of a network proposal. Once funding is received one *network member* should take the lead. Implementation of projects can be *outsourced to consultants* who will implement them on behalf of the network.

7.4 Quality assurance

Ultimately, the survival of every network depends upon the quality of its activities and services. Hence, networks need to establish a *system ensuring high-quality activities and services*.

First, the reputation of the network and the quality of its activities and services depends on the *quality of the work delivered by its members*. Many organisations adopt certified quality management systems to ensure their work is efficient and effective. By encouraging members to adopt quality management systems, networks can contribute to the overall quality of activities.

Second, the reputation of the network depends upon the quality of its core *services, projects, and programmes*. In most cases, it is too complicated and expensive to introduce a certified quality management system into a whole network, and other appropriate ways have to be found to ensure quality. Systematic monitoring and regular evaluations are the first step in quality control (☞ section 6.6).

Peer reviews

Peer reviews are a practical way of monitoring the quality of projects and programmes. A peer review is an assessment of the work of network members by other members. These so-called peers should perceive themselves as being at the same hierarchical level and give recommendations in a helpful and collegial way.

The table below outlines the purpose and benefits of peer reviews.

Peer reviews	
Purpose	***Benefits***
Self-regulation within the network	They acknowledge professional expertise. They allow feedback on performance. They provide a 'safe' environment to admit mistakes in.
Ongoing education	Helps network members identify their strengths and areas needing improvement.
Awareness creation for standards and quality of performance	Encourages information sharing. Promotes a professional approach. Helps organise information.
Improvement of collaboration	Recognises network members as resources providing different perspectives. Creates trust and an attitude of mutual support. Contributes to the performance of a network.

The following *rules* have to be considered in carrying out peer reviews.

- Always have a moderator, use structured processes, and stick to the process chosen.
- Be cooperative, supportive, and non-judgmental in your responses and feedback, and remember that people will do the best they can with the resources they have.
- Be as honest as you can – you do not have to look competent in front of the group. It is vital to learn from mistakes.
- Declare any conflicts of interest.
- You are in control – choose your own process, take what you want and leave the rest.
- Be alert to and respect differences in culture, gender, and professional orientation that may show up through differing opinions, points of view, or ways of working.

8 Communication

The relationships among members and stakeholders are the network's arteries. Communication is the lifeblood running through these arteries that keeps the network alive and active. A good communication flow is vital for all networks and deserves the utmost attention of the secretariat and members.

This section describes the core elements of a communication strategy, the most important principles for communication, and the significance of skilled facilitation. Communication is strongly affected by cultural aspects, which may need specific attention. In addition, capacities for effective communication cannot be taken for granted, and capacity building for communication should be one of the network's core tasks.

8.1 Communication strategy

Communication in networks is a given in one way or another, and you might have the impression that everything is all right. However, conflicts may arise, some people may not receive the information they should, you may receive no feedback, or the network's stakeholders may not understand what you are doing. Then, you might realise that the network's communication system should have been planned more carefully.

Accordingly, you should develop a strategy demonstrating how your network's communication is organised: *internally* among members and *externally* with stakeholders.

The communication strategy should be in line with your network's goals and encompass the following:

- definitions of focus groups
  - a roster of the different people and roles *within* the network: board, secretariat, members, etc.
  - an overview of *stakeholders*, such as professionals interested in the activities of the network, contributors, media, research institutes, supporting organisations, etc.
- the *ways and means* the network will use to communicate with each focus group (☞section 9).
- *how* targeted information and communication products and services are developed and used
  - *frequency* of communication
  - efficient communication, e.g. through multi-purpose usage of information
  - the *persons responsible* for ensuring smooth communication flows

8.2 Principles of communication

Communication flows within the network and with its stakeholders will be smoother if a few basic principles are considered.

CCC: Communicate, communicate, communicate

The first principle is the three Cs: communicate, communicate, and communicate. Remember that communication is the lifeblood of the network: nobody will know the network exists if you do not actively communicate its functions and objectives, and people will not respond if they do not know what progress is being made or if they are not contacted in an appropriate way. If conflicts occur, they will not be resolved without communication. Be proactive in your communication, seek out your contact, and take the first step to get in touch with other people. Be responsive and answer in time if you are contacted. For instance, emails should be answered in one or two days' time.

Face-to-face communication remains important

Although a number of electronic tools are available for communication such as the telephone, email, or videoconferences, these tools cannot replace face-to-face communication, which remains important because of its synchronous nature and the importance of non-verbal communication like the tone of the voice or body language.

Face-to-face meetings are often required when somebody is not familiar with a foreign language, as non-verbal communication can help to get the message across. Be aware that misunderstandings and most conflicts can be more effectively solved through face-to-face communication.

Face-to-face meetings should therefore take place to the extent possible, regardless of what other modes of communication are used.

State rules for communication

Rules facilitate interaction among people and reduce transaction costs. Members should therefore agree upon the *rules for communication* and *designate authority* to handle the same. Examples for such rules might be the following.

- Everybody should have an equal chance to give his or her opinion.
- Insulting statements should be prohibited.
- Acceptable and non-acceptable content, e.g. commercial promotion, should be defined.
- Emails should be answered within 48 hours.

However, care must be taken in this regard, as too much regulation or standardisation can stifle or limit effective sharing of information.

Ensure crisp and informative communication

Communication in a network should be *crisp and to the point* - and not boring or rambling. Applying this principle requires care, and consideration should be given to the nature or purpose of the communication, the language abilities of the members in the medium of communication, and the analytical abilities of individuals or groups. In any case, communication should be informative and comprehensive.

Assess the optimal frequency of communication

You should assess the optimal frequency of communication to ensure a smooth communication flow. The optimal frequency of communication depends on many different factors: the communication mode(s), the nature of the content, the role of members, or the importance of certain individuals. Face-to-face communication among members of a network and with the most important stakeholder should take place at least once or twice a year. The core group may even have to meet more frequently. In addition, weekly or at least monthly email contacts should take place, in order to keep the network's momentum. In email discussion groups, there may even be exchanges every day.

Accept dissenting voices

In a network, dissenting voices should be accepted. The network should have ample room for dissenting voices and not impose conformity on its members. This can be achieved by encouraging a culture of accountability for views held and information exchanged.

In a network, an atmosphere of censorship should be avoided at all costs, although the communication rules should clearly state what is acceptable or unacceptable in terms of tone and content.

Avoid a sense of hierarchy

No matter how many known ‘innovation gurus’ or individuals are in the network, a sense of hierarchy should be avoided in its communications. Proactive steps should be taken to ensure that network members with lower social or professional standing feel comfortable sharing information. Among other possibilities, this may involve separate discussions, breakout sessions, or meetings for these members.

People share their information and knowledge with others in different ways. Some share it proactively without being asked, and others keep information to themselves and hoard it like treasure. Often this happens not in bad faith but out of a personal or cultural habit. In some cultures, for example, people may withhold information if they feel it can be used to maintain some sort of relative advantage over others (☞ section 8.4).

Foster a culture of giving and receiving

Every network should foster a culture of proactive information and knowledge sharing where members receive and give information and advice. Giving and receiving has to be balanced, otherwise generous members will gradually stop providing information. Creating this culture is crucial to the network’s success and to enriching its members with knowledge. An information and knowledge sharing culture has to be nurtured explicitly among network members. In some cases, it may even make sense to lay down some rules for sharing information.

Checklist 17: Principles of communication

- ❏ CCC – communicate, communicate, and communicate
- ❏ Face-to-face communication remains important.
- ❏ Lay down rules for communication.
- ❏ Encourage crisp and informative communication.
- ❏ Assess optimal frequency of communication.
- ❏ Accept dissenting voices.

- ❏ Avoid an atmosphere of censorship.
- ❏ Avoid a sense of hierarchy.
- ❏ Foster a culture of giving and receiving.

8.3 Need for facilitation

As soon as seven or more people are involved in communicating, careful facilitation is necessary to ensure effective and efficient communication flows. In formal networks, facilitation is required on certain specific occasions:

- facilitation of general communication flows related to all activities of the network throughout the year
- facilitation of face-to-face meetings, workshops, and conferences
- facilitation of electronic discussion forums and online chats

A skilled facilitator should be appointed on each occasion. Facilitation is a competency that requires *careful training*, and proper facilitation of communication flows needs a lot of experience. A good facilitator listens and shares, knows when to intervene and when to hold back and allow others to interact, is capable of dealing with conflicts, and is sensitive to members' personalities in order to handle communication among a variety of individuals.

The continuous facilitation of general communication flows in the network and with stakeholders is up to the secretariat, and the success of the network will depend on this facilitation. A good network facilitator will, from time to time, send a newsletter to all members and stakeholders, and regularly and systematically contact the most important key persons in the network. An experienced network facilitator will also be sensitive to sudden changes in the tone of communications or be aware of silent network members.

Sometimes, network facilitators also have to be *persistent* if people do not respond. The excuse "I sent them an email and they don't answer. So what can I do?" is certainly not the right attitude. Often there are good reasons behind failures to respond. An experienced facilitator will actively try to find out what they are.

Very similar principles apply for all of the aforementioned occasions during which facilitation is necessary. They are summarised in the checklist below.

Checklist 18: Essentials of facilitation

Facilitation in general

- ❑ Clarify the background and context of the discussion.
- ❑ Ensure there is proper understanding and clarify misunderstandings.
- ❑ Look for concrete and practical examples illustrating the discussion.
- ❑ Caution people who do more than their fair share of talking and activate silent participants.
- ❑ Summarise discussions and try to distil essential issues.
- ❑ Stimulate discussion by asking questions.
- ❑ Address different opinions and positions by making differences transparent.
- ❑ Try to settle potential conflicts.
- ❑ Remind people about the rules of conversation.
- ❑ Address or clarify the feelings of participants in the discussion.
- ❑ Raise awareness for cultural, social, religious, or political differences and promote understanding.

Facilitation of face-to-face meetings, workshops, or conferences

- ❑ Visualise the discussions.
- ❑ Admit people to the floor.
- ❑ Carefully caution people who talk too much.
- ❑ Give feedback to the participants.
- ❑ Ensure good time management.
- ❑ Carry out a review of the workshop.

8.4 Cultural aspects

In international formal networks spanning several countries or even continents, cultural aspects considerably influence communication as well as the management of the network in general. All network members, in particular network managers, need to be aware of what issues are sensitive or controversial within or between cultures included in the network, and they need to know how to deal with them appropriately (☞ resources section 10.1).

8.4.1 Language

Language is one of the biggest constraints for communication in international networks, and it poses a challenge is far too often underestimated. Basically, it is very important for everyone to understand the languages used. This not only means understanding the actual working language of the network, it also means understanding different cultural usages of the same language.

In many networks, however, this is not possible. As international networks cover different countries and regions, the largest common denominator is chosen and everybody might feel equally uncomfortable. The language chosen in most cases is English, in some regions French or Spanish. Only too often it is forgotten that these languages are not the mother tongue of many members.

The results may be little understanding at all or lots of misunderstandings. People who are not very fluent in the network language will be hesitant about entering into discussions and will have difficulties in expressing their opinion clearly. They will also avoid writing letters or emails, as they are not willing to risk losing face in public. Those who are not able to speak the network language are excluded from the network.

There is no simple way of dealing with the language problem. A couple of measures could be useful.

- ***A multi-lingual network facilitator***: The network facilitator has to be aware of the language problem and needs to contribute to mutual understanding. Ideally, the facilitator should be fluent in several languages.

- *Regional or local sub-networks*: International networks can set up regional or local sub-networks in regional and local languages. The network secretariat has to ensure in collaboration with regional networks that basic documents are translated into the respective languages.
- *A website with different languages*: Information on the website could be provided in several languages. For instance, an electronic information platform in Asia was set up in the English language. Visits to this platform only increased considerably when information was also provided in national languages. However, the translation of all the contents on a website might be too expensive for some networks. This problem can be dealt with if the network uses all its connections to find a regional partner who has the necessary resources and is willing to translate the texts.
- *Email discussion groups in local languages*: If international networks want to have an impact at national and local levels, they will have to introduce email discussion groups in local languages.

8.4.2 Other challenging aspects

The various cultures represented in international networks enrich their content, contribute to a comprehensive and integrated view of the world, and make the network a more fascinating one. There are, however, complex sides of culture that have to be dealt with as well. It would be naïve to ignore them.

Seniority and power distance

One aspect that varies among cultures is seniority and power distance. In Western corporations, for example, hierarchy has become flatter in recent years, and the primacy of senior staff or senior officials has been reduced. There is even the tendency for younger managers to rank higher than senior staff.

Yet, in more hierarchical organisations like government bureaucracies and bilateral and multilateral organisations, as well as in some countries, *seniority* is still very important. Older people should never be openly criticised and, in particular, teachers and professors enjoy a prestige that has to be respected.

A similar issue is *power distance*, and this varies among cultures. In countries like Switzerland or Sweden, ministers ride on public transport and it is possible to come across a member of the government in a public space. In these countries, the power distance is minimal and people who have a lot of power can be contacted quite easily.

In other countries, however, there are clear demarcations between different social classes. Powerful people do not appear much in public and ordinary people have great difficulty getting in touch with them. This can even mean that people from one social class do not talk or work with people from another social class.

Network managers and members have to be aware of, and be able to deal with, seniority and power distance, and they have to respect cultural differences. One way to establish contact with senior officials is to find a *door opener or messenger* who supports the network and can help. To discuss new ideas or learn from failures, the creation of *private* spaces, such as separate meetings during conferences or workshops, might also be one way of coping with the situation (☞ section 4.3.2).

Racism and feelings of superiority

Networking practitioners also have to be aware that they might be exposed to explicit or subliminal *racism or social discrimination* that could affect their work considerably. The consequences of this could be that somebody neglects or disrespects members of a network, or even refuses to collaborate.

Some international networks have had the experience that the *self-perception* of some countries relative to others does not facilitate collaboration and exchange in networks at the same level. In addition, some countries consider the issues discussed in the network to be irrelevant to them.

Handling problems of racism, social discrimination, or an overly self-confident perception is very difficult, as beliefs and perceived values are involved. Network managers and facilitators have to deal with them in a very careful and considerate way. They should try to keep communication channels open, and rely on facts. Sometimes it helps to involve a neutral outsider as a facilitator. In serious conflicts, it is advisable to involve a skilled external mediator.

Culture as an excuse
A situation that change managers and consultants frequently face is when people tell them that suggested improvements or changes are not possible or do not work because they are *not appropriate to the specific context and to cultural habits*. Yet, experienced change managers and consultants know that this is all too often an *excuse to avoid any change* altogether. Change always goes along with resistance, as people have to modify their routines and their familiar work patterns. In this situation, they find it quite comfortable to hide behind the 'cultural curtain'.

Networking practitioners are therefore well advised not to be blinded by these excuses. Cultural habits and traditions deserve a lot of respect and are very important. However, they should not be accepted as an excuse to avoid changes that will have to take place sooner or later anyway.

8.5 Capacity building for communication

In everyday life, we communicate all the time, and we might have the feeling that we know how to communicate. However, the reality in many networks tells a different tale. Effective communication has to be carefully trained. In particular, the use of the new information and communication technologies requires training and capacity building.

Network staff
First of all, the network manager, the staff of the secretariat, and the facilitators of email discussion forums or workshops need training on the following:

- how to select the right communication tools
- how to use the various communication tools
- how to facilitate discussions
- how to facilitate email discussion forums and online chats
- how to settle conflicts

Network members

Communication training must be provided to network members as well. In particular this applies to the use of electronic information and communication technologies. Training for network members could include the following:

- how to write concise emails
- how to upload text, PDF-files, or links to a website
- how to participate in email discussion forums and online chats
- how to make a good presentation with presentation software
- how to bring forward a statement in a group so that people listen
- how to give an effective public speech
- how to facilitate a working group at a workshop

For some networks or network members, it may be too expensive or too time consuming to organise or attend training courses. Still, there are a variety of possibilities for training the staff of the secretariat or other network members. Training will always require some resources. In the end, however, lack of training will be much more costly.

Create and seize opportunities to train network members as given in the following examples.

- The network secretariat or members could write and publish *simple and hands-on manuals and guidelines*.
- Ideally, websites are set up in a manner requiring no further explanations on how to navigate them. *Help sections* on the website will assist less experienced visitors.
- The network secretariat could *organise training courses* for network members. With these courses, basic knowledge can be provided.
- The network secretariat could *encourage members to attend courses* by selecting interesting courses and informing network members about them.
- *Online courses* are often cheaper than face-to-face courses, so during an interim period, they can be offered on almost every topic.

- A very effective way of providing training is to *combine it with events* that would take place anyway. At workshops, new methods could be introduced by a facilitator and tested during the workshop. During conferences, training sessions could complement the agenda.
- *Peer groups* are very effective for training: groups of people who would like to improve their communication skills and who meet regularly face-to-face or online. In peer groups, the members have a chance to exchange experiences with others, support each other, and give feedback.
- Communication skills can also be improved through *coaching* by an external professional. The members of the secretariat, in particular, might benefit from working with an external coach.

9 Tools for Sharing Information and Knowledge

Nowadays, various tools support the sharing of communication and information in networks. More and more new information and communication technologies are being used. However, traditional means such as meetings and workshops will remain important.

This section briefly describes the most important electronic and non-electronic tools and means of communication, their advantages, and their disadvantages. Section 9.3 gives a few recommendations about how the most appropriate tools are chosen.

9.1 Electronic tools

Telephone

The telephone and, in particular, mobile telephone technology facilitates frequent interaction. Phone calls are an effective way of communicating once a relationship is established. They are useful for quick and urgent information, to discuss sensitive issues that could be misunderstood if written by email, or to talk about confidential matters. For very short messages and reminders, SMS (short message service) or text messaging are also used increasingly.

Nowadays, the new *'Voice-over-Internet Protocol' (VOIP)* technology provides an opportunity to make telephone calls over the Internet at little cost, thereby revolutionising telecommunication. With services like Skype (http://www.skype.com) free telephone calls are possible, and expensive long-distance calls no longer hinder frequent communication among network members.

Phone conferences are an effective and cheap alternative to face-to-face meetings. However, there should not be too many participants. When more than five to seven participants attend a phone conference, coordination becomes difficult. What is valid for face-to-face meetings holds even more for phone conferences. Careful preparation and facilitation is crucial.

Emails

Emails have become a widespread means of communicating and have even begun to replace postal communications. Emails provide excellent possibilities of cheap and rapid interaction, disseminating information, or collecting feedback. Email does have problems, however. For instance, senior officials or decision-makers may be reluctant to use emails as their statements are written down and can be forwarded very quickly to a wide audience. Another disadvantage of emails is their perceived anonymity, as well as the increasingly informal language. People are generally hesitant to answer emails if they do not know the sender.

In addition to these problems, people have increasing difficulties handling the growing number of emails they receive every day. Spam – emails for promotion – flooding inboxes aggravates this problem.

For smooth email correspondence, the following *basic rules of good email correspondence* should be considered:

- Emails should have short and informative subject lines.
- The text should be short and well structured.
- Do not address too many different topics in one email; it is better to write two emails.
- Never write insulting statements in emails and be aware that emails can be forwarded easily.
- Settling conflicts by email normally does not work; face-to-face meetings are necessary.
- Include an email signature with your address and phone numbers.
- Answer your emails in 48 hours. If you do not know the answer or if you do not have the time to respond, inform the sender and give an indication of when you will answer.

Electronic newsletters

Electronic newsletters are an effective way of *regularly informing the network's members and stakeholders* about ongoing activities, interesting events, or other relevant information.

Electronic newsletters should not be longer than two to three pages when printed. The section of each topic addressed should not be longer than 10 lines. Include web links with contact details showing where more information is available. Every electronic newsletter should have a disclaimer and instructions about how to unsubscribe.

The outreach of newsletters has decreased because of the ever-growing flood of spam emails. This has led to the use of spam filters, and electronic newsletters often get stuck. Many spam filters can be adjusted so that newsletters are not filtered out, but many Internet users do not apply this facility. The increasing number of electronic newsletters has also reduced their outreach and many are no longer read. Despite these problems, if well edited and attractive to read, electronic newsletters remain an effective way to deliver regular information to a wide group of people.

Email discussion groups

Many networks also use email discussion groups to communicate with their members. Emails are sent to a server that distributes the messages to all subscribed members. In this way everybody involved in the network can follow the discussions. A disadvantage of email discussion groups is that they often generate numerous emails that are not read. Skilled facilitation of email discussion groups ensuring discussions of high quality can solve this dilemma.

In email discussion groups it is quite common for only a few people to participate actively. The remaining members – also called lurkers– – participate passively by reading the contributions. Nevertheless, these lurkers have an important role to play as they provide information, for example in face-to-face meetings, about recent insights. Some may also become active participants as soon as they are familiar with the community participating in the discussion group.

Decision-makers are often lurkers in email discussion groups. They do not participate actively in discussions but delegate their support staff to do so. One of the reasons for this is that government officials, in particular, are reluctant to participate in electronic discussion fora since their postings are archived and visible. Nevertheless, some of them do follow email discussions passively and keep up-to date in this way. The impact of this passive lurking should not be underestimated.

Online chats

Another way of sharing information and experiences is online chats. Network members communicate with each other *in real time* on the network website in a virtual 'chat room'. When several members participate in an online chat they have to be prepared, and the conversation has to be facilitated carefully, otherwise the result will be confusion. In international networks, the time differences need to be considered.

Online chats can be an effective way of *getting in touch with experts* and of interviewing them without incurring high costs. A network can invite an expert to respond to members' questions on a specific topic.

The advantage of online chats in comparison to phone conferences is that *everything is written down*. The minutes are actually recorded in the process. However, many people are not used to chatting online.

Websites

Websites are an effective way of delivering information to a large audience. Access to the Internet is growing rapidly – in developing countries as well – and the number of Internet users is growing worldwide. Nevertheless, networks should be aware that Internet access is still not available in many places, or if it is available it is very slow.

What is valid for print publications is also true for websites: information must be provided in an *attractive way*. The website must have a *simple structure*, and texts have to be written in a concise way. Networks can help their specific focus group to find information by structuring the websites properly: with pages designed for decision-makers, sponsors and contributors, professionals, experts, or the media.

Websites must be *updated regularly*, and planning for the resources to do this is absolutely necessary. An outdated website is worse than no website at all. Thus website managers are well advised to keep the information up to date and to send reminders to other members responsible for updating information. Websites have become the 'business cards' of networks and should be cared for accordingly.

Clearing house mechanisms

Clearing house mechanisms (CHM) are approaches for sharing information and often referred to in natural resources management jargon (☞ section 10.1). CHM used for the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements like the Convention on Biodiversity are tools for collecting, validating, storing, and disseminating data and information in an effective and efficient way. A CHM facilitates the sharing of knowledge and ideas among the parties involved.

Clearing house mechanisms consist of a *central information hub* that facilitates information exchange among national focal points and sub-national nodes (see figure 6). The central information hub maintains the platform to ensure transparency, provide faster access to information and data, and reduce duplication. The *national focal points* are responsible for producing, delivering, and maintaining data while retaining full responsibility and ownership of the information provided.

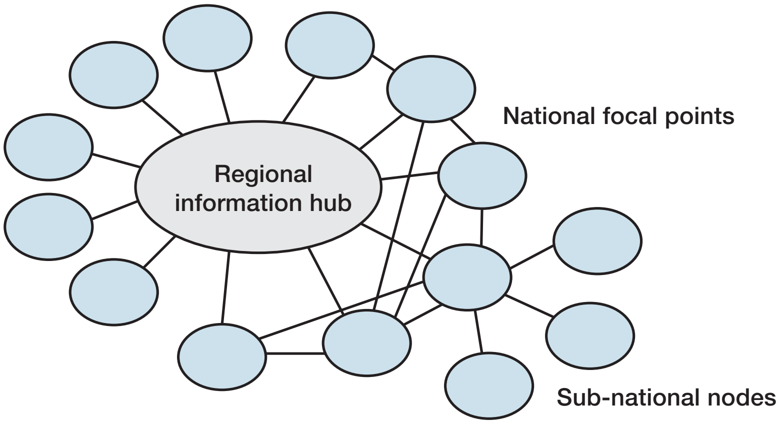


Figure 6: Information hub and focal points of a CHM

Clearing house mechanisms have a few *common characteristics*:

- CHM create *access to consolidated data and information* and enable the users to contact the sources of information directly. CHM provide sophisticated search, query, and retrieval methods.
- The organisation of CHM is *decentralised*. The various CHM nodes provide information, and the central information hub is primarily responsible for facilitation, coordination and quality control.
- The focal points are responsible for producing and maintaining the data and information while *retaining full responsibility and ownership*.
- CHM have *common standards for structuring data and information*. This facilitates the creation of effective search mechanisms and allows comparison and analysis of data and information.
- CHM bring together various organisations with a common objective and, in this way, facilitate networking. CHM also enable decision-makers to make well-informed decisions by collecting and consolidating information.

- The success of a CHM depends on the *common view* of all involved organisations that sharing data and information creates *added value*.

The *success* of CHM depends on a few crucial points:

- CHM have to be based on *formal agreements* defining the provision, use, and maintenance of data and information.
- The focal points have to be *included* in establishing the CHM and formal agreements have to be concluded *at the inception*.
- The data and information provided by the CHM should meet the *needs of the users* that have to be identified prior to the establishment of a CHM. If the needs change over time, the data and information provided have to be adjusted.
- CHM require *sufficient resources* and a *dedicated content manager*.

9.2 Face-to-face or combined ways and tools

Face-to-face contacts remain an essential core activity of networks. By blending them with new information and communication technologies their effectiveness can be improved.

Print publications

Print publications are a format widely used by networks to provide information about their activities. Print publications enjoy a high degree of credibility, but the abundance of publications has led to a situation in which some are no longer being read. Many people do not have the time to read lengthy reports. So print publications should be written in a concise and understandable manner, technical language and abbreviations must be avoided, and the text should be illustrated with examples, graphs, and pictures.

There are a wide variety of print publications: books, reports, fact sheets, brochures, leaflets, policy-briefs, flyers, newsletters, and manuals and guidelines. The choice of publication format should depend on the target group. Scientists or experts prefer a book or report that is reasonably detailed. However, decision-makers prefer short documents, brochures, policy-briefs or newsletters that give them quick snippets of information. A good size for these documents is two pages. Longer reports should always contain an executive summary highlighting the most important messages in the publication.

Finally, in many cases providing electronic versions of publications, e.g. as PDF files that are available for downloading from a network's website, is very useful. This way of disseminating is quite cheap, and those interested can download the publications at any time.

Practical examples and stories

In many situations, hard facts or statistical data about organisations and networks are lacking. Such information is useful for promoting an idea or underpinning an argument. In particular, it is difficult to show the impact of networks and what they have achieved, as there is often no direct correlation between a network's activities and the outcomes and impacts achieved. A practical way of overcoming this problem and convincing decision-makers of a network's usefulness is by telling success stories.

Storytelling is not only an effective way of convincing decision-makers; it is also useful for sharing practical insights and examples among members. Networks should collect success stories, write them down, and use them in their communications (☞ section 10.1).

Communities of practice

Another effective way of sharing information and knowledge on *one or several* specific topics in formal networks is through communities of practice (CoP). As defined in section 2.1, a community of practice refers to a group of people with a common interest in a specific area of knowledge or competence and who are willing to work and learn together over a period of time to develop and share their knowledge, practice, and expertise.

Exchange among CoP members takes place at meetings and workshops, in electronic discussion platforms and team spaces, or, ideally, in both: face-to-face and electronic.

Benefits

CoPs are a valuable way of knowledge sharing and learning in formal networks for the following reasons.

- They ensure the access of members to relevant information and knowledge on specific topics.
- They contribute to the learning and capacity building of members.
- They help to improve the quality of the information and knowledge that is available on the network.
- They improve effectiveness by connecting peers.
- They increase the potential for innovation.

Points to consider before a CoP is launched

Before a community of practice is launched, the following questions should be addressed.

- What is the primary purpose of the CoP?
- Which members or stakeholders of the network would be interested in participating in the CoP?
- Do you have a core group of members with sufficient resources to actively participate in the CoP?
- Is there a skilful and knowledgeable person willing to act as the facilitator of the CoP?

Familiarise yourself with CoPs by consulting the many resources that are available or by attending a training course (☞ section 10.1).

How to start a CoP?

There are a number of things you should consider when starting a CoP to increase the chances of success. You can avoid many pitfalls by taking the following Do's and Don'ts into account.

Checklist 19: Do's and Don'ts for establishing CoPs

Do's

- Ensure that members have time to participate.
- Ensure sufficient resources for the electronic workspace, workshops, and facilitation or other activities.
- Use the technologies that are most appropriate for your group.
- Build the capacities of members so that they are able to use the electronic platform.
- Promote skilled facilitation that will sustain momentum, encourage participation, and promote the community's identity and build up trust in it.
- Create a code of conduct to avoid bad behaviour and help build up trust.
- Communicate the purpose and value of CoP through stories or anecdotes.
- Summarise the discussions from time to time and try to develop tangible outputs.
- Hold face-to-face meetings and initiate community events in addition to online discussion.

Don'ts

- Try to enforce a CoP when there are no committed members or interest in the topic.
- Start by setting up an electronic team space and then try to encourage members afterwards (This is the "build it and they will share knowledge" fallacy!).
- Have facilitation that is directive, controlling, or overbearing.
- Expect immediate results – CoPs need time to grow.
- Succumb to over-formalising or over-structuring, which may kill the CoP.
- 'Regulate' participation – people will participate only if they see the value.

Workshops and conferences

The organisation of workshops and conferences is a core activity of most networks and is used to convene a large number of participants. Most workshops and conferences have a hidden agenda.

In general, the official goal is to address a specific topic or theme with presentations, case studies, working groups, and (panel) discussions. However, most workshops and conferences have a hidden agenda that is often more important than the official one. They are an excellent means of liaising with other network members and stakeholders to share ideas and to discuss ongoing projects in separate meetings. In addition, workshops and conferences are an effective way for networks to present their ideas to stakeholders and to involve them in the discussions.

Conferences mainly serve as a means to obtain an overview on certain topics or to raise the awareness of a wider audience. For in-depth discussions and intensive interaction stand-alone workshops with a small circle of participants are more effective.

What is true for meetings should also be considered in the organisation of workshops and conferences. They must be *carefully planned and organised*. The best results are achieved if different, innovative methods of interaction are used (☞ section 6.2). Provide enough free time and space for socialising and informal contacts in the workshop or conference programme so that valuable spin-offs are produced.

Events

Events like concerts, art exhibitions, or different types of live performance are an effective means of raising the awareness of stakeholders and the public at large. Events are often not only used to convey a (political) message, but also to rally support for certain topics or for fundraising. Organising these events provides you with the opportunity to invite important decision-makers and raise their awareness of the network.

Field trips

Field trips and excursions provide the means of exploring practical examples of good practices or problems with network members, interested stakeholders, and decision-makers. Direct contact transmits a lot of information in a short time and makes participants aware of what should be done or avoided. Field trips can produce quicker results than lengthy discussions or reports.

Media

Networks should take advantage of the media not only to promote the network (☞ section 6.3) and raise public awareness but also to *share and disseminate information* among a wide audience.

Radio broadcasting has proved to be an excellent information delivery mechanism, particularly in areas without Internet access. *Community radios* play an important role in reaching out to the grass roots (☞ section 10.1). Community radios respond to the needs of the community they serve, and they contribute to its development in a progressive manner by promoting social change. They promote democratisation of communication by facilitating community participation in communication. This participation may vary according to the context in which the radio is operating in.

There are successful examples of international networks communicating though community radios, for example, the pilot project of the Mountain Forum and Sagarmatha Radio in Nepal.

9.3 How to choose the right tools

The variety of communication tools sometimes makes it difficult to choose the right one. A number of issues have to be considered in selecting appropriate communication tools.

People think, share, learn, and *communicate in different* ways. Some prefer ‘traditional’ means of communication such as face-to-face contacts or writing letters so that statements can be prepared carefully. Others favour the new communication techniques such as phone calls or sending emails.

In spite of the new information and communication techniques *face-to-face contacts remain important*. Face-to-face contacts are essential for establishing trusting relationships, settling conflicts, discussing complex topics, or exploring questions in more depth.

Special conditions in *developing countries* have to be considered while selecting communication tools. Many people are still not too familiar with the new information and communication technologies and the less hierarchical style of interaction by email, and this applies, in particular, to senior staff and decision-makers. So they are reluctant to use new communication technologies. Ironically, it is often only higher-ranking officials who have direct access to the Internet, and this limits the effectiveness of junior staff. Last but not least, access to the Internet can still be slow, unreliable, or simply too expensive. Some developing countries are catching up quickly, but rural areas in particular often lag behind.

Costs become an issue for participation in international workshops and conferences. Attendance is still too expensive for many people. Fortunately, it is usually possible to find financial support for those genuinely interested in attending.

The appropriate means and tools for communication depend upon the *objective and the nature of the relationship*. When it comes to exploring a topic in depth or developing complex projects, workshops are indispensable. Rapid feedback and ideas can be collected easily by email or in email discussion groups. To establish a new relationship, a formal letter is more appropriate than an email. Once a relationship is established, an informal phone call or an email will be faster and easier. However, dissension or conflicts are preferably settled in face-to-face meetings.

All these considerations suggest that there is no golden rule governing which of these tools should be used. A *mix of tools* is the best way to communicate in a network, and the best tool can be chosen to fit specific objectives and situations.

Checklist 20: Selection criteria for communication tools

- ❑ Consider that people think, share, learn, and communicate in different ways.
- ❑ Have regular face-to-face contacts with core members and key stakeholders.
- ❑ Consider that access to the Internet is still slow and expensive in many developing countries, and provide alternatives.
- ❑ Provide cheaper tools and ways of communication than international workshops or conferences.
- ❑ Choose the appropriate tools for communication according to the objective and the nature of the relationship.
- ❑ Use a mix of tools for general information and communication.

Checklist 21: Ways and tools for communication

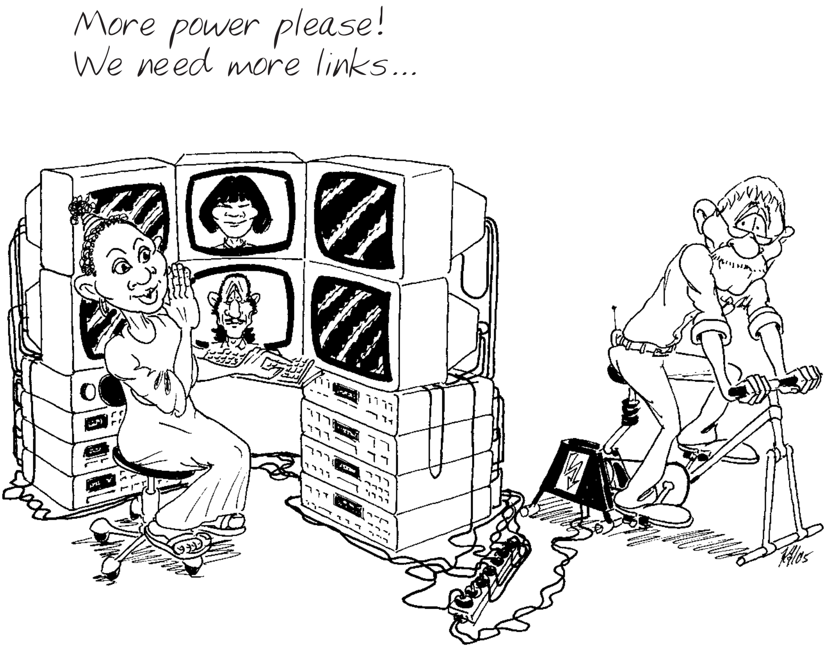
Way or tool	Objective	Prerequisites	Costs
Electronic information and communication tools			
Telephone, VOIP	For follow-up, information briefs, to clarify personal or confidential issues	Access to telephone or VOIP	Quite low if local or VOIP
Phone conferences	In particular coordination of projects	Access to telephone	Moderate
Emails	Information briefs, queries, maintaining relationships	Access to the Internet	Low
Electronic newsletters	Information briefs on news and events	Access to the Internet, a good editor	Quite low
Email discussion groups	Discussing topics, collecting ideas, receiving feedback and support from peers	Access to the Internet, a skilled facilitator, resources for the facilitator	Quite low
Online chats	Real time discussion and exchange on certain topics	Access to the Internet and a virtual chat room	Low
Websites	General information, dissemination of publications, yellow pages, chat rooms, discussion lists, etc.	Budget for establishment and maintenance, access to the Internet, editing and regular updates	High
Clearing house mechanisms	Collection, validation, storage and dissemination of information to implement multilateral environmental agreements	Sufficient funding for participatory development, good project management skills, good IT infrastructure	Very high

Way or tool	Objective	Prerequisites	Costs
Face-to-face or combined tools and ways of information and communication			
Print publications	In-depth information about certain topics	Good writing skills, editing, distribution channels	High
Practical Examples and stories	To illustrate messages and to convince people	Storytelling skills, if written editing skills	Low, moderate if written
Communities of practice	Sharing of information, knowledge and practice, and learning together in a specific area of knowledge or competence	Very good facilitation skills; sufficient resources for fcilitation and participation	Emails quite low, workshops expensive
Workshops and conferences	For presentations, formal and informal discussions, building up and maintaining relationships	Good organisation and facilitation skills	Very high
Events	To raise the attention of the wider public	Good organisation skills	Very high
Field trips	To visualise problems, to create ownership	Good organisation skills	Very High
Media	To raise the attention of a wider public and decision-makers, dissemination and sharing of information, in particular also with grassroots	Experience in handling and using media	Moderate

10 Resources for Networking

This section lists selected resources for networking, such as useful books, publications, toolkits and websites. The resources are sorted according to topics and *listed in alphabetical order.*

For setting up, managing, or evaluating a network, you might need the support of an external consultant. In section 10.2, a checklist is provided containing the most important elements of the *TOR for an external consultant*.



10.1 Publications and websites

Clearing house mechanisms

A guide for planning, developing and managing clearing house mechanisms, as well as the source-code of a CHM, is available for downloading on the following website:
http://forest-chm.aseansec.org

Communities of practice

Publications
Wenger, Etienne; Mc Dermott, Richard; Synder, William M. (2002) 'Cultivating Communities of Practice – A Guide to Managing Knowledge'. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press

Website
For a community of practice on communities of practice, go to:
http://www.cpsquare.org/

Community radios

An overview of community radios is provided by the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC).
http://www.amarc.org

Fundraising

Websites
For an overview of resources for fundraising, see the website of the Non Profit Resource Centre:
http://www.not-for-profit.org/

The Resource Alliance is an international network working to build the capacities of non-profit organisations for mobilising funds and local resources for their causes:
http://www.resource-alliance.org/

Publications
A general hands-on guide for fundraising is:

Mutz, John; Murray, Katherine (2000): 'Fundraising for Dummies'. Foster City (Canada): IDG Books Worldwide

A fundraising guide for the Asian context in particular is:

Quebral, Mayan G. (2002) 'The Fund Raiser's Guide to Fund Raising.' The Philippines: Venture for Fundraising.
http://www.venture-asia.org

Information and communication technologies (ICTs)

A collection of relevant resources for computer and Internet training for development and social change is provided by ItrainOnline.
http://www.itrainonline.org

Knowledge management

Publications
Collison, Chris; Parcell, Geoff (2004) 'Learning to Fly – Practical Knowledge Management from Leading and Learning Organisations'. Chichester: Capstone

Davenport, Thomas H.; Prusak, Laurence (2000) 'Working Knowledge – How Organisations Manage What They Know'. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press

Websites
For a community of practice on knowledge sharing and knowledge management in development cooperation, go to KM4Dev:
http://www.km4dev.org

Bellanet is an international resource centre supporting collaboration in the development community:
http://www.bellanet.org

Management

Publications
A book describing what effective management is in a simple and practical way:

Malik, Fredmund (2003) 'Managing Performing Living – Effective Management for a New Era'. München: DVA

Networking always goes along with changes. A useful book with many tips is:

Doppler, Klaus; Lauterburg, Christoph (2000) 'Managing Corporate Change'. Berlin: Springer

For a book addressing intercultural cooperation in a comprehensive way, see:

Hofstede, Gert Jan; Hofstede Geert (2004) 'Cultures and Organizations – Software of the Mind'. New York: McGraw-Hill

Websites
A lot of resources for non-profit organisations are available at:
http://www.not-for-profit.org/

Mind Maps

Drawing mind maps is a very effective way of structuring your thoughts, drawing stakeholder maps or even planning projects. For a description of mind mapping, go to:
http://www.jcu.edu.au/studying/services/studyskills/mindmap/index.html

FreeMind is an open source mind mapping software available for free:
http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Main_Page

Commercial mind mapping software is provided, for example, by:
http://www.mindjet.com or http://www.mindgenius.com.au/

Monitoring / Evaluation

For a general overview of the GTZ evaluation system, take a look at:
http://www.gtz.de/en/leistungsangebote/6332.htm

The terminology used by GTZ is explained in detail in:

GTZ (2004) 'The World of Words at GTZ', Eschborn: GTZ.
Available for download at:
http://www.gtz.de/glossar/

For an overview of key terms related to results-based monitoring and evaluation, see:

OECD/DAC (2002) 'Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management'. Paris: OECD

The glossary is available for download on the website of the OECD:
http://www.oecd.org/dac/

Networks

Publications

A study of the participation of decision-makers in networks for knowledge sharing is available for download on the website of the KM4Dev community.
http://www.km4dev.org

Creech, Heather; Williard, Terry (2001) 'Strategic Intentions: Managing Knowledge Networks for Sustainable Development'. Winnipeg: International Institute for Sustainable Development

Website

The International Institute for Sustainable Development has special webpages on networks:
http://www.iisd.org/networks/

Online workspaces

Several bilateral and multilateral agencies have set up the online working space Dgroups for groups and communities interested in international development. Dgroups provides electronic workspaces with email discussion lists, a resource section for documents, a members' section, and a calendar. For all members and partners of Dgroups and their projects, this service is free at:
http://www.dgroups.org

The Internet service provider Yahoo offers online working spaces for free. The saving space is limited, and you have to copy with commercials:
http://groups.yahoo.com/

Google Groups is a free Internet service for online communities:
http://groups.google.com/

A toolkit for online communities is provided by Full Circle Associates:
http://www.fullcirc.com/community/communitymanual.htm

Open Space

The open space method has its own website:
http://www.openspaceworld.org/

Toolkits for knowledge sharing

A good overview on knowledge sharing tools, meetings, and methods is given in a guide published by the Canadian International Development Agency. The guide is available for download on the website of the KM4Dev community:
http://www.km4dev.org

A useful toolbox with knowledge sharing tools, tips, and techniques is provided by the National Electronic Library for Health:
http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/default.asp

Storytelling

Publications

Denning, Stephen (2001) 'The Springboard – How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations'. Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2001

Websites

A lot of storytelling resources are available on Steve Denning's website:
http://www.stevedenning.com

SparkNow, an organisation promoting storytelling and helping people move towards positive and sustainable futures, offers various case studies and publications on its website:
http://spark.spanner.org/

Surveys online

One of the many Internet based tools for carrying out surveys is SurveyMonkey:
http://www.surveymonkey.com

For a list of other online tools for carrying out surveys, go to:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/Pricing.asp

Voice-over-Internet Protocol (VOIP)

One of the many providers of free telephone services over the Internet is Skype. Download the software for free, plug in your microphone and headset and you can call everybody using Skype free of charge, although external calls are charged:
http://www.skype.com

10.2 Checklist TOR for external consultants

Checklist 22: Terms of reference for an external consultant

1. Background
Give a general description of the background of the network, the project or the programme. Explain why an external consultant is needed.

2. General task
Describe the general task the consultant has to contribute to.

Examples

- ❑ business plan for the network
- ❑ new strategy for the network
- ❑ design and operation of network, website, or face-to-face events

3. Specific tasks
Describe the specific tasks the consultant has to fulfil.

Examples

- ❑ Conduct market study as input to the business plan.
- ❑ Test demand and expectations of present and potential members.
- ❑ Analyse needed composition and strategic aspects of members.
- ❑ Identify and prepare information management plan and means of communication.
- ❑ Define strategic and operational components of the network.
- ❑ Design and operationalise website.
- ❑ Design promotion and incentive schemes for the network.

4. Method
Describe the methods the consultant should use.

Examples

- ❑ Document analysis
- ❑ Phone conferences
- ❑ Interviews
- ❑ Facilitation
- ❑ Workshops

5. Timeframe

Describe the single tasks and the time necessary for each task.

Example

Task	Time	Cooperation
Preparation of questionnaire	1 day	Project officer, expert for human resources development
Conducting interviews	3 days	Regional coordinator, liaison officer
Compilation and analysis	1 day	
Writing of final report	3 days	Programme coordinator
Total	**8 days**	

6. Deliverables

Describe what the consultant has to deliver.

Examples

- Final report of 30 pages summarising the strategy
- Fully operational website

7. Schedule

The schedule should give a chronological overview of the tasks to be carried out and highlight the milestones.

Example

Start of mandate	January 20
Interviews conducted	February 12
Milestone: workshop	March 3-5
End of mandate	June 30

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