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A Study about Networks involved in Sustainable Development

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INTRODUCTION

This document is a summary[2] of the results of our research into networks of institutions, especially non governmental organizations (NGOs), carried out following the initiative, and with the support, of the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) .

The topic was chosen owing to the fact that, as is the case with other agencies for development cooperation, supporting the establishment and the operation of institution networks has been an important element of ICCO's policy, due to the advantages and the benefits that such networks were assumed to provide. In fact, both network members and cooperation agencies believed the networks would be a means to improving the quality and efficiency as well as broadening the scale and impact of their activities. The 80's and 90's saw a great number of networking experiences; much funds and other important resources were invested in them.

After several years of accumulated experiences and broadly varying results, the value of networks started to be debated. Many networks had performance problems, their products were few and of varying quality. Some could not face up to these problems any more; little by little, they lost heart and then ceased to exist. At the same time, it was possible to find cases in which the networks maintained a regular rhythm of activities, acquired more members and generated ideas and useful proposals for dealing with specific sets of problems and for the creation of relevant policies.

What started becoming evident was that this instrument, which in theory was so attractive, entailed, when put into practice, a series of problems and difficulties. The agencies started asking themselves about the actuall effectiveness of networks in achieving their objectives, or about their ability to survive when their main financiers withdrew their funds, or about the extent to which they operated in a democratic way, among other things. The networks themselves and their members harboured other doubts, as important as the former, about, for example, the interference of cooperation agencies vis-á-vis spontaneously created networks or the degree of shared responsibility that could, or not, exist between south and north when becoming part of the same network, or the consequences of

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1. The authors would like to thank Maarten Boers and Paul Engel especially, for having propitiated from the beginning the idea of performing this study and for their valuable comments throughout the completion of it. The translation into English was done by Ana Chávez Tafur.
2. Because this is a summary, we have given priority to the presentation of the study's objectives, the analytical framework that guided it and the results in terms of balance and lessons learned. We do not include here many references to special cases or examples, or to the qualitative – quantitative data that we processed, as this is all included in the full version of the study where it sustains our conclusions.

specialisation and the more rigorous selection of the members of a network.

Because of this, networks have started to be viewed more critically by both sides. It is no longer so readily accepted that the best and most efficient way to move forward in certain subjects and activities is by creating a network and giving it the resources it would need to work. But, on the other hand, the issue has become more complicated due to the existence of networks that show some promise.

It is important to emphasize that the emergence and development of networks, as well as the involvement of the agencies with them, has coincided with a period of intense socio-political transformations, which have created important changes in development paradigms and the policies advocated by governments and supranational organizations, as well as in the reactions of social movements and actors. In this context must also be included the debate over cooperation policies of industrialized countries and the redirection of the flow of resources. All of these have greatly influenced networks and their performance.

In view of all this, the promoters of this study decided it would be convenient to have an updated overall view of what was happening in the networking world, especially as many of the questions remained unanswered. In order to achieve this, the researchers were to analyse the experience of several networks in Latin America, some of them already defunct, others still in activity, in order to identify: (i) the criteria which may be used to determine whether the networking experience succeeded or failed, (ii)

the factors that may explain their performance, (iii) the factors that contribute decisively to the self maintenance of the networks and their activities, (iv) the lessons that may be learned about the conditions for a network to be successful, about the kinds of activities for which a network is an adequate instrument and about the more recommendable ways of supporting the creation and development of networks, (v) the ways in which networks are able to support their members in such a way that will prove beneficial to the target groups of such members and (vi) the lessons that may be learned as for planning, monitoring and evaluation systems for the performance of networks specifically.

In order to put these questions into context we used a framework that would allow us a broad view of the networks, not only of their performance and their internal functioning, but one that would take into account the external factors that influence them. A set of 26 networks[3] relating to different aspects of sustainable development were selected. Most of them were supported by ICCO. Networks from two countries, Bolivia and Peru, were selected for more in depth examination[4].

In order for the study to be carried out, we needed the cooperation of network officials and/or directors, as well as that of the persons we chose as key informers. They were all generous with their time as they transmitted to us their experiences and viewpoints about the networks, their problems and their possibilities. We wish to express our thanks to all of them, making it clear at the same time that only we are responsible for the conclusions and interpretations which appear in this report.

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3.   See Appendix 1 of this document.
4.   The following sources of information were mainly used: (i) research projects and essays which dealt with network experiences and conceptualised them; (ii) external evaluation reports of the networks included in this study; (iii) relevant documents produced internally by the networks; (iv) the networks' web pages; (v) collection of data via questionnaires; and (vi) interviews with a wide range of key informers (some of them part of the networks and some not).

AN OVERVIEW OF INSTITUTION NETWORKS

In this section, we present an overview of the different types of development networks. We attempt to go over the «generational» evolution of NGO networks in Latin America, with reference to those about which we gathered information for this project. Following this, we present a summary of the framework which has guided our analysis.

Institution networks are very common phenomena in the development community. This is due not only to the fact that networks provide the social capital of institutions[5] – which means that, generally, those which are part of the network may expand their capacity to achieve certain objectives – but also because they appear as a very versatile instrument which can be used to obtain results with relatively few resources.

The reason for being and the versatility of the networks may be established through the broad range of activities that may be developed through a network. According to Engel[6], these activities are: (i) reciprocal learning; (ii) service provision; (iii) advocacy; (iv) execution of projects; and (v) institutional strengthening.

A different classification, which is based on the benefits obtained from participating in networks – taken from Starkey[7] – goes as follows: (i) exchange of information; (ii) coordinated activities which tend to reduce duplication of work; (iii) linking between areas that would have no other opportunity of making contact with each other; (iv) attention paid to certain topics as a result of the identification of common problems; (v) creation of a critical mass for proposals at different levels; (vi) support for the solution of critical problems; (vii) the meeting of resource providers and those who need those resources in a common space and (viii) encouragement of recognition and identity.

Both authors are in agreement about the importance of «networking» seen as a process which promotes and facilitates: (i) exchanges and interrelations (of information, experiences, resources); reciprocal support for the achievement of certain aims (solving common problems, elaborating proposals); (iii) the development of a common identity and a feeling of belonging which strengthens institutionalism and (iv) the achievement of larger interventions with more repercussions.

This versatility and the apparent cost-efficiency of networks, added to the fact that the working dynamic theoretically expected of them is characterized by a group of desirable traits (sharing resources, promoting connectivity, working in a democratic and decentralized way) have turned them into much utilized instruments. This has lead to networks being organized in different ways (more or less formalized, more or less decentralized, more

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5. The term «social capital» has been used to refer to the «*stocks of social trust, norms and networks that people may use to solve common problems*» (C. Ciriani and L. Frieland, 1997) or *«a group of horizontal associations between people consisting of social networks and the norms associated to them, which have an effect over productivity and the well-being of the community… The social capital facilitates coordination and cooperation»* (World Bank Group, 2000). The social capital is formed by the degree of trust there is among the members of a society, their norms of civic behaviour and their level of associability.

6. P. Engel «*Daring to share: Networking Among Non-Government Organizations»* in C. Alders, B. Harverkort and L. van Veldhuizen, *Linking with Farmers: Networking for Low-External-Input and Sustainable Agriculture.* Intermediate Technology Publications, London-England, 1993.

7. P. Starkey *Networks for Development.* The International Forum for Rural Transport and Development (IFRID). London-England, 1998.

or less bureaucratic); if the different types of activities that networks may carry out are added to this mix, we face a rather heterogeneous universe, even when confined to the world of development[8]

This lack of homogeneity makes it difficult to generalise and to establish standardised performance indicators. Moreover, networks are not static: they change following crisis or internal phenomena such as the perception had by members of their achievements and their new needs, the instability of the institutions that integrate them, the deactivation of important promoters, or due to simple «fatigue» of the networks themselves. The situation in which they operate also changes. Think about the effects brought on by neo-liberal reforms, such as the deregulation of the job market, on the space in which trade union organizations and institution networks which specialised in labour related problems used to operate. Finally, some topics wear out or stop being relevant or having priority, while others emerge, displacing the former ones in some cases.

THE EVOLUTION OF NGO NETWORKS IN LATIN AMERICA

One of the oldest networks among those analysed is UNITAS[9] formed by the main NGOs linked to the Catholic church in Bolivia, founded in 1976. It is worth pointing out its name: «institutions for social action», in which terms like promotion, development, training, characteristic of more modern institutions, do not appear. The network was established with the objectives of fighting dictatorships, defending

human rights and supporting popular movements[10]. A few years later ALOP was created, characterised by its multinational membership and its vocation to formulate and discuss proposals that would have regional repercussions. We can speak, therefore, of a «first generation» of networks, with a mainly political focus, which mirrored that of those institutions or NGOs which were active from the seventies to the first half of the eighties.

New themes and a new direction in the approach towards development, brought on by macroeconomic changes and a mainly democratic era, influenced the names and the objectives of networks created in the eighties, also known as the «second generation». In the case of NGOs of the central Andes (especially Peru and Bolivia), the influence of El Nino 1982 – 83 on the way they operated must be mentioned; during this time they were forced to occupy themselves with concrete aspects of farming production and subsistence such as seeds, irrigation, etc. These NGOs which we have distinguished as being of a second generation were characterized by specialisation in their subjects and approach and, in some cases, by their essentially technical profile linked to the implementation of projects, all of which substantially changed the nature of the networks. Some of the new topics included: gender (Coordinadora de la Mujer); agro-ecology (RAE and the no longer existing CAME); rural agro-industry (PRODAR); institutional strengthening and service provision (AIPE and COINCIDE). During a certain number of years there was a strong tendency towards the execution of projects, especially those concerned with rural development, some of which were quite important

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8.   As an example of this heterogeneity, the cases used for this study of networks include networks of NGOs as such, but also projects/programs implemented by institutions, other organisations such as a confederation of agrarian cooperatives, or an association between NGOs and work unions.

9.   For an explanation of all abbreviations, see Appendix 1.

10. This denomination corresponds to an approach of the most progressive sector of the Catholic church in Bolivia for which social action with a more political content was necessary, distinguishing itself in this way from the traditionally predominant assistentialist view.

(PROCADE and Coordinadora Rural). During the nineties the tendency was towards confirming and increasing subject specialisation: small enterprise (COPEME), irrigation and water management (IMAR and IPROGA), agrochemical alternatives as an area of specific development in the framework of agro-ecology (RAA and RAPAL). Also and more recently, several networks became contractors of the state as they obtained fewer resources from international cooperation[11].

 Today we could speak of a «third generation»[12] of networks. They involve relatively new groups (Propuesta Ciudadana, Red Peru) that deal with subjects such as democracy and citizenship, social surveillance, local development and decentralisation, all of them topics which are also rather new in the activities and the agenda of NGOs. In other cases, older networks or those with a different focus/objective (RAPAL, RAAA, Secretariado Rural) are changing their orientation towards having an increasingly political profile and it is foreseeable that, given the situation of social and economic conflict lived in by several countries of the region, they will continue to move in that direction. It is important to point out that networks which deal with women's or gender issues have maintained a comparatively high political profile since the end of the eighties and have a renown capacity as interlocutor in national and international scenes.

It is interesting to observe, based on the former examples, that both networks and NGOs seem to have completed a circle and are again focusing their activities on work of a political kind. We could say, in a sense, that the «third generation» of networks has met the first although, evidently, on a different stage where actors of the civil society have multiplied, new topics such as the management of natural resources, the environment, ethnic, gender and generational issues, the crisis of the neo-liberal economic model and representative democracy, among others, have appeared and have to be tackled taking into account a new articulation of forces, through the presentation of sustained proposals, not just through protest and opposition. This requires new approaches and instruments that will permit an adequate measuring (not just quantitative) of the repercussions of networks[13].

A Framework for the Analysis of NGO Networks

The starting point for this study has been the conceptual framework of NGO networks put forward by Engel[14]. According to this framework, NGO networks are initiatives of these institutions based on sharing (of experience, knowledge, resources of different kinds) and communication with the purpose of generating social synergy that will allow their members to improve the quality and repercussions of their interventions, to move forward in their understanding and elaboration of development models and to have the capacity for presenting and disseminating them in wider (regional,

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11. In certain specific circumstances, some networks obtained contracts from state bodies for the execution of projects about topics related to their specialisation. This, which was seen as an alternative which would complement and enlarge these networks' resources, ended up generally by absorbing the networks' energies and deviating them from their central mission. In these cases, the result was a profound weakening of the networks and their work.

12. Several of them are not included in the sample of surveyed networks. The references were made by key informers mainly in interviews.

13. About this, see F. Eguren, Las ONGs y el Desarrollo Rural. Un Ensayo para la Discusión. *Documento de Trabajo.* CEPES. Lima-Perú, May 2003.

14. P. Engel, 1993.

national) and higher (local, regional, central governments) social levels. This approach presents different hypotheses about how and why networks are constituted and how NGOs benefit from their participation in them.

In order to test these working hypotheses, the analysis of networks was performed through the observation of three principal areas:

1. Pertinence, updating and sustainability of the networks.
2. Added value generated from the different levels and areas of inter-institutional interaction.
3. Organisational design of the networks and different ways of participating in them.

Engel believes that there are four levels of activity or spaces/areas of inter-institutional interaction taking place within networks which may be used for analysis:

•   Service provision: *Advising, training, capacity development, communication, documentation and information,* making use of and boosting existing capacities among members. The organisation of a network generally sustains professional capacity and a certain infrastructure in order to generate services in preferential areas.

•   Mutual learning: Learning through the exchange of experiences, ideas, information and knowledge and joint reflection with the purpose of improving the performance of each one of the participating institutions/persons. The approach and methodology may be different, but the following elements are usually emphasised: *diagnosis, self diagnosis, research, exchange, reflection and systematising.*

•   Advocacy[15]: *Generation of proposals and participation in public debates on development* in order to influence international, national, regional or local development policies. This may be achieved by different means such as the organization of conferences, the publication of articles in specialised magazines, the creation of strategic coalitions with other spaces/areas with common objectives or through the channelling of specialised contributions in terms of changes in norms and legislation.

•   Institutional strengthening: It is understood as the *organisation and management of inter-institutional relations and activities.* It includes all those activities which are needed to create and maintain the space for interlocution at a level which is adequate for the networks' purposes. Some important elements of this are the leadership of officials and facilitators, the use of existing human and institutional resources by members of the network, the system for inter-institutional information, the capacity for integrated programming of activities, the roles played by the diverse committees and sub committees which are established and the ratio of financial resources provided by members of the network relative to those provided by sponsors and donors.

After observing the activities developed by NGO networks in our countries, we have added one more area to these four:

•   Project execution: Institutional experiences in which networks are created in order to *receive resources and execute projects on a larger scale* must also be considered. The way this works is usually as follows: a central body is in charge of

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15. There is a tendency among analysed networks to define this area as having «political incidence», understood as advocacy at a higher level. It is a deliberate attempt to influence the people and organisations that make political decisions.

coordinating and managing resources while the execution of the project is the responsibility of all member institutions, each of them in charge of a part or a portion of a global program which will be adhered to by all.

A BALANCE OF LESSONS LEARNED: ELEMENTS THAT MAY INFLUENCE NETWORKS IN A POSITIVE WAY

Research has allowed us to reach a balance of lessons learnt about the factors that may positively influence the types of networks we have analysed, although we believe that several of the conclusions we have reached could also be tested on other networks. As most of the analysed networks are made up of NGOs, our results are obviously biased in that direction. We believe, therefore, that our study may be taken as a contribution to the existing debate about the role played in development by these institutions, thus complementing other recent research and reflection on the subject[16].

We do not believe to have reached particularly novel conclusions and suggestions. The largest contribution of our study may be our systemic approach to the subject, and the revelation of a number of strains and conflicts, as well as key experiences, which provide us with models to follow in the future.

We believe, generally, that due to the different characteristics of these networks, it is not possible to have a radical and definitive appreciation of their importance and prospects for development. We believe that if we take into account the national and regional contexts in Latin America and the new sets of problems which are being engendered, networking presents a series of advantages. In view of the new challenges, however, networks also create difficulties which need to be reassessed and readjusted. To confront them could be part of a proactive strategy of the networks and their members which should include new exchanges with cooperation agencies.

PERTINENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Pertinence: in between Innovation and Scaling Up[17]

Our study shows that there are different ways of perceiving the pertinence of networks, which cannot be considered immutable and permanent in time, but requires periodical processes of revision and critical and participative discussion. We have confirmed that these processes are not very common in networks or, in some cases, they are immersed in the formulating of strategic plans or of other activities of a rather structural – institutional character. If opinions and criticisms about pertinence are not openly expressed, however, there is a risk of creating unmanageable strains for the network.

Independently of the closest referents of pertinence (the socio-political context, the needs and demands of determined social sectors and specific groups, and of the networks' members, the influences of cooperation agencies), we believe pertinence may be renewed and strengthened to the extent that

16. See especially: A. Bebbington, R. Rojas and L. Hinojosa, 2002, *Contributions of the Dutch Co-financing Program to Rural Development and Rural Livelihoods in the Highlands of Peru and Bolivia;* F. Eguren, 2003.

17. «Scaling up» generally indicates the diffusion, adoption and adaptation of approaches, principles and practices, generating effects and repercussions at a much larger scale. See: M. Altieri *Sustainable Agriculture Networking and Extension (SANE)*. Berkeley-EEUU, 1999; P. Engel. *Escalonamiento de Experiencias Agroecológicas Exitosas en América Latina y el Caribe.* Marco de Seguimiento. SANE II. Centro Internacional de Investigación para el Desarrollo (CIID). Chillán-Chile, 2001.

networks are perceived as being, and are developed as, spaces for innovation, experimentation, learning and the generation of proposals, even though the different «ingredients» may be weighted differently in each network.

More specifically, analysed experiences show that a higher level of pertinence depends on the following elements:

a. *The ability for systematising experiences as inputs for the scaling up in different topics and methodological approximations* and, eventually, to influence the approach of development agencies and public policies and investments. In other words, less activism and more generation of knowledge and analysis, contributing in this way to the visibility and coherence of the proposals. This also supposes the end of the dichotomy between technical and political aspects; what needs to be discussed is in what circumstances and under what conditions one or the other must be given priority, or if they must be approached simultaneously.

b. *The development of scaling up strategies* (what to scale up, why, on the basis of what empirical evidence, how to scale up, who to do it with, based on what principles and hypotheses, which factors have a critical influence and which a positive one) as a possible key contribution of networks, instead of the direct execution of extensive projects and programs which used to be justified by an increase in coverage and, as was believed rather mechanically, in repercussions also.

c. *The correspondence between those preferential subjects covered by networks and the ones included in national political agendas and the agendas of cooperation agencies,* as the result of including in networks' agendas matters which are crucial in the contexts in which they operate. This also implies the capacity for «getting ahead» with sets of problems and alternatives which were not approached before.

d. *The openness, availability and capacity to weave alliances with other actors,* in two different aspects, i) new ways of relating to social movements and sectors that eliminate intermediaries, which used to be the normal «positioning» of NGOs[18]; and (ii) team work with entities such as universities and research centres, which may contribute to the quality of processes, in the area of knowledge generation.

e. *The change in structures, participation and management modes in order to consolidate spaces which are more open, democratic and transparent,* and which generate processes and products of such quality that the credibility of the network is insured. It is for this reason that not only the institutionalism of networks is a key subject, but also the investment in qualifying their human resources.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that the disappearance of certain networks must not be understood necessarily as synonymous with failure. The examples we have come across during our research show that, even if a reduction in financial resources proved to be a burden, there were other motives causing a network to stop operating, to take some time off or to turn itself into a different kind of enterprise. A more profound analysis of these and other experiences would be of much use when

18. In this case we understand by «intermediation» the act of speaking, operating and receiving resources in the name of others, assuming that those others (normally grassroots social organisations and local actors) would not have the capacity or the audience to express themselves, or would have little experience managing resources. In countries like Bolivia, this is one of the most difficult matters affecting the relationship between NGOs and grassroots organisations.

reflecting about the operating times of a network, its learning curves, its stagnation or renewal, its death or its conversion into something different, and the factors that really influence these different options.

Sustainability: Searching for New Consensus between Networks and Agencies

Pertinence is a necessary condition for the sustainability of networks but it is not sufficient. Another necessary element is the networks' ability to access the resources that will render possible what they propose to do. We have confirmed the pre-eminence of financing, the dependency of networks on agencies and the strains created by this between them, which have been becoming more acute. We have also identified some of the strategies that have been used to reinforce sustainability (e.g. the sale of services), which do not solve the problem but may be useful for other purposes, such as the generation of a larger added value.

The main conclusion is that, at least today, it is not possible to speak about sustainability of networks without bearing into account external financing and, more precisely, the compromises assumed by northern NGOs in this area. The tangible and intangible resources that a network's partners decide to channel represent a positive indication of their interest and identification with the network, but do not substitute the support of cooperation agencies.

This implies the need for a new openness in the relations between southern and northern NGOs. For this to happen it would be useful to re-establish, in a concrete way, the agenda of preferential subjects in the debate about networks, thus finding new ways of building consensus.

Having said this, we believe that the following are some of the elements to be discussed:

a. *Taking into consideration the great number of existing networks, and the number of positive and negative experiences, it is not convenient to encourage the creation of new networks, especially in countries where they have proliferated.* On the contrary, those with better conditions for pertinence and the best options for the generation of visible added value should be supported. An exception could possibly be made for the creation of networks that introduce new relevant topics in areas of opportunities not yet confronted by other similar institutions.

b. *A larger appropriation of the network is conditioned by the fact that the initiative is clearly in the hands of its members.* Networks created under the stimulus of agencies, whose main motivation continues to be the maintenance of a close and privileged contact with them, or to obtain institutional economic resources, have little chance of prospering with a profile and an agenda of their own that stimulate participation. It is in this sense that we need to reflect on the usefulness and the real objectives of the existing networks[19].

c. *Direct involvement of agencies in the functioning of networks needs to be avoided.* Experience shows, that rather than direct participation, which officials of cooperation agencies find difficult to structure in time and space, it is easier to pose the possibility that agencies use the products of networks, as well as feedback and discussion channels eventually created for this purpose. In any case, if the agencies want to learn from the networks' experiences they

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19. These may be re-cast as having the role of establishing communication between agencies and local organizations, leaving more substantive and methodological work to other existing networks.

will have to establish a system by which to keep the dialogue flowing, which means they need time and a certain kind of capacity and availability.

d. *The network should not be presented as if it were a supra NGO.* Economic resources should be made available for those network initiatives that have good possibilities of generating substantial added value that would not be achievable through individual institutions.

e. *Agencies and networks together should design the most appropriate approaches and methods for the planning monitoring and evaluation of network experiences, including external evaluations.* This requires of new attitudes towards learning in common. On the one hand, networks and NGOs need to be readier to accept mistakes and weaknesses, and to identify and assume alternatives, instead of reacting defensively due to fear of a reduction of financial resources. On the other, the agencies should try to achieve more clarity in their approach to networks. Appropriation of the network by its members should not be confused with financial sustainability, for example. Neither should direct impact of the networks be looked for in the beneficiaries of NGOs, nor in the existing, and limited, strategies that different countries have for the reduction of poverty. It is not reasonable to expect that institutional approaches and practices will be affected in the short run.

Added Value

It becomes obvious from our study that the use of the concept and the dimensions of added value as

an element through which the network's performance may be analysed and measured should be improved, deepened and complemented.

Specialisation

Analysed experience shows a tendency of networks towards trying to cover an excessive number of topics, none of them sufficiently precise, and as big a number of fields of interaction as possible. This goes beyond the change of «denomination» that took place between «first generation» and «third generation» networks.

It has been proven, however, that networks which count with a certain degree of specialisation, be it in the subjects covered by them or in their fields of interaction, have obtained more visible (internally and externally) and durable added value. Also, they have been able to stimulate a more engaged kind of interest and participation, although not necessarily more massive, in their members.

The same assessment that was made years ago about the «everythingness» of NGOs can be made now in the case of networks. The argument presented, according to which specialisation would represent a stimulus towards technicality by certain cooperation agencies interested in showing quantitative repercussions, may be argued against in view of the results obtained by several networks which specialise in activities and proposals with a more political bias, and which have become more visible in certain circles. Which means that in certain way they have «scaled up»[20].

Specialisation has, without question, presented a series of matters for consideration, some of which

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20. This is the case of networks which specialise in alternatives to agrochemicals, or of several networks which have studied themes relevant to the gender issue in more depth.

are related to the kind of structure, membership, participation and management of networks. The argument which says that these networks suffer from verticality and centralism cannot be proved, in view that many of them are, on the contrary, some of the most open and flexible of these institutions.

Finally, the argument that maintains that knowledge is «compartmentalised» and there needs to be, therefore, a more systemic approach to complex matters such as sustainable rural development, does not need integral answers from each of the networks either. The paths to follow may be those of articulation and complementation with other networks and institutions which have, for their own part, specialised in some kind of relevant subject or in some area of interaction.

Emphasising Mutual Learning and Advocacy

Our study has made evident the fact that even though networks declare to have multiple purposes and to be involved in multiple activities, when generated added value is analysed, those that stand out as being by far the most successful are related to mutual learning and advocacy. Other areas such as service provision and institutional strengthening appear to be instrumental to the achievement of results in the first two. The execution of projects and programs, as it was understood in previous decades, is definitely the most critical area for a network in terms of obtaining solid added values[21].

Following our outlining of facts about pertinence and sustainability, and taking into account detected weaknesses, we believe the following activities may be stimulated from within the networks, seeking novel methodologies or making the best of those already in existence:

a. *Analytical systematisations aiming at identifying and disseminating lessons learned, including those factors which lead to success or failure.* Our research has shown us once and again that this is something which really needs to be done, but nobody wants to face. We need to question ourselves about the reasons why up to now experiences with networks have not achieved completely satisfactory results. We believe that in many cases the decision to systematise has been made without having a clear picture of the usefulness of this for networks and their members. Moreover, it has to be admitted that not many networks have performed this activity in a consistent way. There has been a tendency to confuse systematisation with long documents full of platitudes, of little practical usefulness, with merely descriptive technical manuals, or with «institutional reports» which tend to exaggerate what the networks achieve, hiding sometimes any mistakes or limitations.

b. *Show of support for processes of generation and administration of local knowledge that view local people as the main actors of these processes.* Too much attention has been bestowed on NGOs and their projects, emphasising operation mechanisms and a more «technical» profile of development. Furthermore, as has been pointed out in other research[22], little attention has been paid to topics such as rural livelihoods, farming strategies, the construction of equity and inequality in the farming world, new relations

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21. The principal reason for this is that, especially were large amounts of external resources or public resources have been managed (as contractors or executorial bodies of the state), the nature of the network has been distorted little by little, becoming a kind of local agency for the transfer of funds and usually not being sufficiently transparent about it.

22. A. Bebbington, R. Rojas, L. Hinojosa, 2002

between urban areas and rural areas, among others. The consequences of this are that little is known about the knowledge of farmers beyond a restricted view of traditional technologies and practices, and that little is understood of a complex reality which is in the process of being transformed and cannot be perceived through rigid ideological parameters.

In a 2002 seminar[23] in which northern and southern NGOs participated, it was suggested that it is necessary to do research and that existing networks could play a role in this. We believe that networks should not necessarily develop research processes in a direct way, but they should take this into account in order to define their position and their possible articulation with universities and specialised institutions which operate in several countries[24]. It is especially necessary to work towards the dissemination and appropriation of research results and a better use of existing knowledge in order to avoid duplicating efforts, repeating errors and failing to make use of positive experiences[25].

Moreover, even though it is true that NGOs have performed better in developing participative processes with rural populations than the state and other institutions, it is time to start using these processes, not just to «plan development»[26], but to contribute to the rescue,

systematisation and diffusion of local knowledge, including in these activities those who are usually the most excluded and whom others seldom listen to: women, young people, the very poor. To give them their support in providing these intangible resources with their due value may be a contribution of networks to the recognition of the worth of other resources of the rural population[27].

c. *Diffusion of validated and systematised experiences oriented towards their scaling up,* taking into account socio-political, cultural, economic and organisational variables. This will allow, among other things, to question existing systems of extension and transfer of technology, or education and professional training, and present alternatives, or produce synergies and multi-actor strategies in local spaces.

d. *Development of strategic alliances,* including methods and instruments for the monitoring and overseeing of public policies, even though one of the main problems identified is that, even when there is a strong will to act in this area, capacities at different levels must be strengthened.

The former does not mean that networks must aim towards mutual learning and towards advocacy at the same time. That should be the result of a sustained decision by each network. In any case, other different activities, such as capacity

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23. Seminar Rural Development in the Highlands of Peru and Bolivia. CLAVE s.r.l., 2002
24. This is the case of Bolivia's Program for Strategic Investigation (PIEB in Spanish) which is financed mainly by Dutch cooperation agencies.
25. This subject is linked to the poor training of the technical and professional personnel working in NGOs, and the limited interest they show, in many cases, in bringing their knowledge up to date. Institutions are also responsible, however, as not enough incentives, tangible or intangible, are offered.
26. See the experiences of NGOs from Bolivia in the implementation of a Law of Popular Participation with participative planning; and the experience of Peruvian NGOs at the «mesas de concertacion» (consensus-building committees).
27. About this, see proposals which were prepared several years ago and are becoming especially pertinent in context. An example: P. Engel, M. L. Salomon. *Facilitando la Innovación para el Desarrollo*, *Caja de Recursos RAAKS*; KIT, ICCO, RIMISP. Santiago, Chile, 1997.

development and training, access to and management of information, and others more in the line of service provision and institutional strengthening, must be seen as systematic and coherent support for the two areas which have roused the most interest and prospects within the networks.

Strengthened Institutions and New Critical Mass

Analysed experiences show that those entities which do not possess minimal conditions for institutional stability constitute a very slippery «base» for the construction and consolidation of a network. Networks cannot be the «lifeguards» of institutions that probably have very little reason for being. Potential members of a network must comply, therefore, with a number of minimal conditions. That must be the starting point for reasonable strengthening processes which will have the generation of added value as their purpose.

Another topic which has emerged is the fact that a network's added value may be considered only in terms of the improvement of its members, be it in terms of the quality and repercussions of their interventions, of the understanding and construction of development paradigms, or the capacity to propose and disseminate them. This is, without a doubt, the sine qua non condition for the creation of networks. A base which has also been used as reference in the framework of this study.

As the project developed, however, we noted that an eventual re-actualisation of the pertinence of networks also depends nowadays on the possibility of creating and strengthening a critical mass of institutions of different nature, and even people, which act as a team, as networks. Some added value can only be the result of collective action. This appears to be the case of networks with the explicit purpose of having a bearing on policies and that, furthermore, may be related to or are trying to form a connection with wider social movements.

This obviously implies that added value must be read and measured using different indicators, but the opportunity had by a network that performs in this way must not be discarded; especially in view of the challenges posed by the existing socio-political and economic contexts in Latin America.

STRUCTURE, PARTICIPATION AND MANAGEMENT

Topics related to structure, participation and management cannot be separated from the characterisation of networks in terms of their pertinence, sustainability, purposes and projected added value. If there is not enough definition and consensus about this, clear orientations will be lacking in network government and management organisations, and in the ways in which their members contribute and participate.

Small and Flexible Structures

One of the first things to be confirmed by our research is that «the priority of processes and activities over structures»[28], as a characteristic element of networks, must be considered historically, in most cases, as resulting from their evolution rather than as a starting point.

Even though some networks still have a complex organization which includes a large personnel, different directive and executive areas and several

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28.   P. Starkey, 1998

infrastructures[29], in the last years we have seen a tendency towards the «lightening» of structures. Positive effects of a light structure seem to be larger in networks which started with the kind of organization which *favours the flow of information, knowledge exchange and mutual learning in favour of the network's processes and products, over the conception of the «network as an apparatus»;* and in those in which the demands of their members for more participation have resulted in the resizing of the central nucleus. The effect has been smaller in networks where these processes have been taken on as a negative consequence of a progressive reduction of resources. Without the internal conviction that change is necessary, this is usually slow and full of conflict, and has limited results.

We do not mean to suggest that there is only one model of «light structure». Some networks have opted, successfully until now, for rotating the headquarters of the executive secretariat or central coordination every now and then, using the installed capacity of one of their members, and contributing at the same time to the strengthening of its institutionalism. In other networks, the minimal necessary equipment has been identified, based on specialised professional profiles linked to the networks' topics of interest and/or their areas of interaction. Some punctually hire external consultants. Less frequent are the cases in which «stage» mechanisms are generated through which valuable human resources from member institutions are commandeered to provide certain services ad hoc, for a certain period, while receiving some kind of remuneration for them. Finally, some networks function with only one coordinator, a facilitator and a very small administrative team.

Form the perspective of network «appropriation», the most promising situations seem to be those in which, even with the presence of a coordinating team, there is a tendency to involve members in management directly and to promote change. This contributes to: (i) the realisation that the structure is not immutable, but can be modified quickly according to demand; (ii) the aim to obtain better quality human resources, rather than more of them, for the network to function; (iii) stimulate the kind of institutional strengthening that will benefit, at the same time, both the network as a group and its members, via the participation and responsibility of the latter in some of the managerial activities; (iv) change the logic of budgets reducing personnel and increasing incentives for certain services and products; and (v) employ the better trained, capable and creative human resources among those working in member institutions, and acknowledge their contributions, instead of just hiring external consultants and advisers.

Importance of Communication Strategies

We have found that, even when networks refer constantly to communication, they have an excessively general and instrumental view of it, and even confuse it with the «media» employed. At times they have adopted recommendations from external evaluators as to the «modernisation» of communication without asking themselves if such modernisation was really convenient, bearing in mind the network's characteristics, or if the change was feasible.

In most cases, the process has been as follows: multiple meetings and gatherings have led to large parcels of documents being sent and to attempts to give priority to electronic communications and conferences. There is no evidence that this change has brought about more effective contact and

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29.   For example, multiple offices, documentation and information centre, rooms for events, and others.

exchange between partners. Just like before very few spent time reading the excessive numbers of printed words, today very few manage not just «to find out about something that happened», but to appropriate generated information[30]. The opportunities for «stages», in which staff of an institution devotes time to visiting a partner organisation in order to learn from its experiences, have not generally been made good use of, confusing them with visits from the coordinators and specialists to other members.

We can assert, based on these experiences, that *light structures must be accompanied by more and more efficient communication strategies (not just mechanisms and media)* which can really be used for the better flowing of exchanges and feedback, both of which are indispensable within a network. Each network must identify what is most convenient and it must avoid depending on just one mechanism for the sake of making savings in operative costs. Communication is not an accessory process; it is an important stimulant of a network's life.

Adjustment of Decision Making Processes

During the nineties networks «institutionalised» their functioning and also, therefore, their decision making processes. The prevailing tendencies have been: (i) to call periodic collective meetings or assemblies in which strategic decisions are made, which corresponded many times with the formulation and evaluation of strategic and/or three year plans; (ii) to elect in an assembly and set up a relatively small directive committee or board of directors; (iii) to delegate operative decisions to a coordinating body or an executive secretariat; and (iv) to delegate responsibility for activities in certain

interaction areas or subject areas to working groups, subcommittees or other similar divisions.

Results show a more formal functioning, which does not lead mechanically to more democratic, open or efficient processes. In several cases, beyond the tradition of massive assemblies, decisions continue to be vertical and personalised, sustained by historic leaderships which have little inclination towards giving up spaces or favouring generational turnovers. In other cases, the «network as apparatus» model appears to be too rigid as it holds on to the representativeness and the category of its members as the only empowering criteria for the decision making processes. Generally, the strains generated by the latter seem to be influenced directly by the way the network is perceived in terms of power spaces (with political partisan shades also, in the past) and opportunities for access to economic resources. It is a matter of attitude and conception of the networking space, therefore, which cannot be modified «by decree» but can be made explicit and discussed as a critical factor in the life of a network.

In view of examined experiences and in order to establish which elements aid in facilitating a more democratic functioning of the network, we can assert that the following are useful factors for the readjustment of decision making processes: (i) *understanding the network not as a power apparatus* in the traditional sense, but as the formerly described space in terms of innovation, experimentation, learning and the capacity for generating proposals; (ii) *the distribution of different types of responsibilities across several levels of the network,* giving priority to those where members can contribute more (working groups, subject groups, local committees and others); (iii) *the employment of transparent and consensual methods for the assignment of resources and incentives;*

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30.   This information does not invalidate the fact that we are convinced that the massive use of the internet does not only lower costs, but also creates the conditions for easy and immediate communication. Many networks and, especially, many members are not prepared for this «jump».

and (iv) *the separation between the bodies that make strategic decisions from those that make decisions about the use given to* the network's resources. It is important to point out that all of this is already being put into practice by some networks.

Decentralisation as Territorial Social Capital

It has been ascertained that both internal and external factors influence the processes of network decentralisation. The Latin American context, for example, in which countries, governments and public institutions have been centralised to a high degree, is a factor which has to be taken into account, especially if the network is hoping to have a bearing on public policies. On the other hand, centralising attitudes have taken root «in the heads of citizens», whether they are NGO officials or specialists, social organisation leaders, academics, researchers or intellectuals. It is possible to be rationally in favour of decentralisation while behaving in a way that goes against the idea. There is also an argument which states that before decentralising it is necessary to solve network administration problems and face the slow process of the members' institutional strengthening, especially the provincial ones. Finally, there is the belief that the costs of decentralisation would make the networks' budget more expensive[31].

It is because of all of this that there is little evidence of progress in terms of decentralisation in most networks and that this process tends to be associated with the multiplication of offices and/or the institutionalisation of representative centres of the network in the territory, and even with the creation of departmental networks. This means that,

in the end, a structural vision has prevailed. However, some promising experiences have been detected; they do not constitute an only recipe but provide some guidelines.

The path followed by networks that view decentralisation as the consolidation of a *social capital* in the territory is especially interesting. What stands out in this kind of decentralisation is the principle of a community of interests and commitments around topics which are rather specialised, the development of local capacities, their dissemination and the use made of them. Those involved are NGO experts, researchers, farmers, local leaders, public institution officials, among others. A rotating focal point that functions as a facilitator may exist; it may have no institutional backing due to the fact that its election depends on the identification of the person or body «with the common cause» and the degree of confidence it generates. This arrangement becomes more interesting when mechanisms are explored (research, systematisation, technical assistance, local forums, among others) for establishing a connection between local initiatives, which are more pragmatic in character, and the networks' denunciation and proposal generation activities, in different areas.

Other attempts which present an interesting challenge, and which have been observed more commonly in multinational rather than national networks, are those which are characterised by thematic and territorial decentralisation. Among the first case can be found several groups that work on different topics or sub-topics which interest the network, based on a certain specialisation or the motivation to learn more about them. In the second

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31. Those who agree with this idea have pointed out a contradiction in the agencies insofar as their interest in decentralisation, as an option for achieving more democratisation, participation and efficiency in the network, does not go hand in hand with the doling out of enough economic resources to finance these processes. The agencies, on the other hand, argue that no clear proposals have been designed and that the results have generally not been what was expected.

group, as we pointed out before, the aim is to try to rotate responsibilities and opportunities through the location of temporary headquarters.

These cases also suffer from some weaknesses but they are the best examples of how to achieve network decentralisation, to the extent that: (i) the difficulties they have faced until now have not limited the networks' lifespan, on the contrary, they have boosted it; (ii) an appropriation and a personal commitment by the members is aimed for. This has important consequences in terms of participation and the decision making processes; (iii) they are consistent with the existence of a light structure; (iv) they are looking for, and are still in the process of finding, communication mechanisms which will permit contact to be established not just between the networks' centre and their poles, but also between the different poles in a direct way; and (v) the cost of achieving all this is relatively low since it is shared by all members to the extent that they contribute precious intangible resources, such as accumulated knowledge, time, commitment, installed institutional capacity, among others. There have been some cases in which decentralised bodies have started creating their own alliances locally, obtaining funding and co-financing the networks' activities.

Identified lessons, on the other hand, produce doubts on the viability of «supernetworks» or «third tier networks». Although on principle these declare to take into account decentralised spaces, in reality they search for a larger level of opportunities in centralisation. Experiences of the nineties and the ones seen today in some countries seem to be based on «unsuccessful» elements such as: (i) the use of the concept of representativeness to secure and organise more systematically a part of the civil society in which NGOs meet; (ii) corporative and unionist postures, mainly aiming to defend members' interests against institutions such as the State and cooperation agencies; (iii) the enormous difficulty of administrating such complex spaces; and (iv) the little interest shown by potential members in participating in other networking experiences, which imply certain

institutional costs, without clarity about the type of added value they would contribute to generate.

Qualified, Responsible and Committed Participation

Our research has allowed us to confirm the existence of two simultaneous and apparently contradictory phenomena: a weak and discontinuous active participation in networks, and the multiplication of networking spaces. Members seem to have decided that «it is better to be than not to be», without calculating the costs of participating in a common enterprise or the harm they cause others when they limit their participation to a few essentially formal moments. Networks seem to prefer having a great number of members, even if they are nearly inactive; they see this as a sign of pertinence and continuity. In some cases the cohabitation of a small active group which acts as leader, and all the rest, has come to be accepted as normal.

We can assert, based on analysed experiences, that the principal factors which determine the possibilities, not so much of a larger participation in massive terms, but of a participation that is sufficiently committed to the network as a fundamental condition of its success, are:

a. *A clear definition of purposes, subject areas and network spaces of interaction* is a sine qua non condition for the formulation, in a clear and shared manner, of participation criteria and mechanisms. Added to this,

   i) *the establishment of criteria for the selection of a necessary profile for members, in a transparent and explicit way* (criteria that must be revised every so often), and

   ii) *the definition of leaving criteria, linked to performance indicators, for network members* (if the rules of the game are clear it should not be too difficult to dispense with certain

members when their participation does not correspond to what was agreed)

b. *Members, especially NGOs, need to identify and give priority to a limited number of networks.* An NGO's participation in dozens of networking spaces is not an indicator of its capacity for articulation, but of a weakness in strategic leadership. It is obvious that in order to do this, certain opportunistic attitudes about what it means to participate in networks have to be abandoned.

c. *As networks are not unions, the acceptance of new members does not need to depend on criteria of representativeness.* A network's eventual representativeness does not depend on the number and type of its members, but rather on the quality and pertinence of the processes it promotes and the products it generates. In view of this, it is possible to promote the participation of persons, not just institutions. The participation of employees who are not usually very active in networks should also be stimulated; younger workers, field technicians, those responsible for regional offices, among others, avoiding in this way the fact that only directors participate continuously.

d. *Networks need to be more open.* Now they consist mainly of NGOs. By accepting other members, such as universities, research centres, professional associations, training centres, groups of entrepreneurs, among others, new energies and ideas may be secured. It is possible that a mixed space would be successful in networks that occupy themselves with reciprocal learning and advocacy.

In view of previous experiences and the tendencies which have been detected in our research, the admission of grassroots organisations as members is advisable only when NGOs and these institutions reflect previously about the new conditions affecting their relationships and their expectations, and reach some basic agreements. We must not forget that

social movements generally have their own way of arranging things, and they do not necessarily benefit from joining a network of NGOs. Success will be more probable when specific working agreements are established. Another option is the creation of networks of producer organisations, which have started to be developed in some countries. There is as yet little accumulated experience in this area.

We do not mean to say that all networks should accept all kinds of members. In the case of historically NGO only networks, this would imply the need to revolutionise their basic assumptions and mechanisms, probably generating much strain by this rather than a new productiveness based on the recent heterogeneity. It cannot be considered as an imposition of the agencies either. It is the networks themselves and their members who must deliberate upon the extent to which their reason for being, their pertinence and sustainability may benefit from further openness. The association between decentralisation and renewal of the networks seems to offer an interesting field of opportunities in terms of creating multi-actoral synergies at a local level.

e. *The differentiation between a network's «hard nucleus», formed by its most active participants, and a menagerie of «supporters».* This allows for approximations, responsibilities and activities to be diversified and set according to their priority, while maintaining an important number of contacts, without developing the same expectations in terms of their participation and contributions. This option poses some practical questions, however, about subjects such as access to communication and information, rights to be chosen, rights to compete for, among others.

Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PME): Learning-focused Processes

During the last few years, most networks have formulated strategic plans, three-year plans and yearly

operative plans, have carried out some kind of follow-up and have been submitted to external evaluations. Even though this institutionalisation process has been promoted by the agencies, it is also true that several networks have started to give more importance to these instruments, making them more complex and dedicating much time to PME activities.

The support of external consultants in the completion of these tasks has not always gone hand in hand with an adequate participation. This entails a situation where during implementation there may be substantial differences between ambitious planning and the types of processes and products in fact obtained. All these efforts do not generally produce strong results in terms of a substantial improvement in the management and performance of the networks. Instead of becoming more agile and performing better, networks sometimes become more bureaucratic.

Analysed experiences show that those factors which may have positive repercussions on management begin by radically simplifying these processes, making them more participative and flexible in time while adapting them to the network's characteristics. Some paths to follow may be:

a.   *Participative formulation of a simple strategic framework* for the clear definition of: (i) the network's pertinence in a certain context and historical moment; (ii) the network's main purposes and its preferential areas of interaction in terms of the generation of added value; (iii) the network's specialisation subjects; and (iv) the network's means of financial sustainability, including not just the contributions of agencies, but also calculating the tangible and intangible contributions of members, as well as other eventual sources of their own which can generate resources. The more precisely the area in which

a network may reasonably operate is delimited, the more clarity in its PME instruments.

b.   *Participative formulation of referential three-year plans* should include, in addition to the basic strategic framework: (i) members' demands and their concrete contributions in terms of assuming responsibilities, in addition to tangible and intangible resources; (ii) the main objectives; (iii) an outline of the principal activities; (iv) the main products; and (v) a minimal group of relevant performance indicators. A plan which is too «closed» would be useless. This does not mean that each member is free do as it pleases, but that after drawing up of a few and fundamental referents, a margin of liberty, creativity and innovation should be allowed.

c.   *The setting up of an incentive fund*[32]. Several options are available which may even be complementary. The first one to be defined is the possibility of competing for resources for the carrying out of most network initiatives. The second option, that some resources be used as prizes for the performance of participating members. In both cases a different image of the network is presented (simple membership or attendance do not guarantee automatic access to resources), as well as the development of members' abilities for the presentation of proposals and the attainment of quality processes and products. Administrating these resources aids the networks to attain maturity and stimulates their development (convocation, selection and follow up mechanisms based on transparency), as well as the development of performance criteria and indicators and added value for the whole network and for its members.

d.   *The relationship with agencies based not on a specific program or project, but on the granting of*

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32.   The idea of an incentive fund is presented here because of its implications in the PFE system and the type of participation of the network members. It is not just an administrative instrument.

resources, as budgetary support with reference to the strategic framework and the three-year plan, stating explicitly which are the networks' members' tangible and intangible contributions. The distribution of resource advances should not be established a priori every year, but should be made according to the quantity and quality of approved initiatives. The placement of the rest of the funds should be done according to performance indicators established for the network in the three-year period.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Taking into account the difficulties encountered when evaluating networks, we can assert that there needs to be further discussion about the subject in order to identify, compare and analyse the different approaches employed until now[33]. The authors of this study based their research on a conceptual and methodological framework which has been tested in several circumstances[34]. It is under these parameters that some elements have been identified which may, in our opinion, contribute to a better approximation to networks. This is a position which, of course, may be debated. These elements are:

a.   *To get over the tendency of considering networks as «big NGOs»,* through approaches and with instruments that allow us to take into account for analysis three different aspects: (i) pertinence and sustainability; (ii) added value in the different areas of interaction; and (iii)structure, participation and management. This implies focusing on added value, as opposed

to rigid compliance with logical frameworks and plans. It also implies a thorough development of a small and verifiable (qualitatively and quantitatively) range of indicators. Those used until now have often proven to be relatively weak and not always relevant.

b.   *To create small evaluation teams which include external observers as well as members of the network* sharing responsibilities. This will work only if there is a predisposition to learn from mistakes and limitations, and to search for alternatives. Network members who participate in evaluations should comply with these characteristics; they should not be chosen in terms of their representativeness or hierarchical position within the network.

c.   *To use a wide and diversified set of instruments* such as: revision of documents, participative observation in network events and activities, opinion polls directed to members as well as agencies, interviews with key informers, organisation of workshops, among others. This means there should be few but thorough evaluations which would take place during different discontinuous moments of a rather long period of time.

d.   *To focus evaluation not just on the identification and analysis of critical factors but also of «successful» factors,* aiming towards a systematisation of the global experience that will lead to the generation of lessons learnt and to present proposals for adjustment which are reasonable, sufficiently sustained and are agreed upon. Evaluation is considered, when carried out in this way, as part of the networks' and agencies' learning process.

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33.   For a more in depth discussion of the matter, see: A. Bernard, 1996; *IDRC Networks: An Ethnographic Perspective.* IDRC Evaluation Unit, Corporate Affairs and Initiative Division.

34.   P. Engels, T. Pinzás and R. M. Balcázar, 1997, Informe Final Evaluación del Secretariado Rural Perú-Bolivia; P. Engel, T. Pinzás y C. Ranaboldo, 1999, Informe Final de la Evaluación de la Coordinadora Rural; C. Ranaboldo and M. Gonzáles, Informe Final de la Evaluación del GLARP, 1999; C. Ranaboldo and M. Montoya. Informe Final de Evaluación de RAPAL, 2000. In all cases the evaluation was done adapting the framework presented by P. Engel in 1993.

APPENDIX 1

Selection Criteria and Networks Included in our Study

SELECTION CRITERIA

The selection of networks for the study depended on a combination of pragmatic criteria as a first approximation that would allow us, in a relatively short time and without incurring major expenses, to have an initial overview. These criteria were:

a. Circumscribe topics of interest to sustainable development, with a stronger emphasis on work in rural areas with a less favoured population (peasants, indigenous people, women, handicapped people, young people).

b. Have network evaluation documents which were accessible and had been produced during the last 10 years.

c. Count with a substantial number of networks in the countries where the consultants resided. In several cases the consultants knew most of the networks already. With regard to this matter we should point out that in Peru and especially in Bolivia, during the last 10 years, there was a large concentration of external sources of cooperation and, therefore, a stronger stimulus for the creation of networks. This, however, did not limit the identification of networks distributed in several countries of Latin America.

d. Consider networks that worked with ICCO although, in some cases, they also relied on other financial sources.

Concerning the networks' topics of interest, the criteria were the following:

a. Rural development understood in a wide sense (emergency programs, micro-regional planning, decentralisation, space management and local development; transformation and access to productive resources and markets; agro-ecosystem and differentiated commodities programs; productive projects; development of technologies).

b. Agro-ecology (ecological use and management of water, land and the environment; irrigation management; ecological agriculture; the use of alternatives to agrochemicals).

c. Consideration of the gender dimension as an approach that aspires to be transversal in its plans, programs and projects, especially rurally. There are other networks, however, which put more emphasis on women's participation as citizens and their political participation in terms of achieving influence at a macro level.

d. Human rights and equity, from the wide perspective of citizens' rights and from different sectors of the civil society: young Christians and people with disabilities, for example.

e. Strategic alliances between different sectors of the civil society (NGOs, farmers' unions, grassroots economic organisations, popular

organisations, research and training entities, and others) and, in some cases, public institutions and cooperation agencies. These strategic alliances are designed as an instrument for boosting members' capacities (e.g. reciprocal learning), and also in terms of elaborating proposals and coordinating them in different areas. The idea that networks need to inter-relate more is becoming popular in some cases.

The different topics interrelate in various ways, especially when dealing with rural development and agro-ecology. The main difference between networks that occupy themselves with rural development instead of agro-ecology is that this second dimension does not have priority in all its fields of action, but is rather a referential approach that may or may not be applied.

We have noticed the presence of networks that deal with multiple subjects grouped together round a methodology or development tools (e.g. reciprocal learning, strategic alliances…) or a higher dimension of development (e.g. sustainable development, agro-ecology). In these cases, there is a tendency towards handling different subjects in «sets» within the networks; or towards defining different subjects to be developed during a given period of time (e.g. during a semester). In other cases, networks are more specific when defining their subjects (e.g. the use of alternatives to agrochemicals, irrigation management).

In most analysed networks the issue of gender was approached transversally, rather than as a subject in its own right (except in those networks were gender is the principal topic, obviously). The intercultural approach is less evident, although it may be found in some rural networks.

Finally, we would like to point out that several networks include, implicitly or explicitly, the «political incidence» matter, not just as a purpose, an end, an objective or a strategic line, but as a topic «in itself».

Networks Included in the Study

Based on the former criteria we selected and analysed 26 networks. Seventeen are national and 9 multinational.

NATIONAL NETWORKS

Bolivia

1. AIPE (Asociación de Instituciones de Promoción y Educación)
2. COORDINADORA DE LA MUJER
3. PROCADE (Programa Campesino Alternativo de Desarrollo)
4. UNITAS (Unión Nacional de Instituciones para el Trabajo de Acción Social)

Brasil

1. PTA (Rede Projetos de Tecnologias Alternativas)

Peru

1. CAME (Consejo Andino de Manejo Ecológico)
2. COINCIDE (Coordinación Intercentros de Investigación, Desarrollo y Educación)
3. COORDINADORA NACIONAL DE DERECHOS HUMANOS
4. COORDINADORA RURAL
5. COPEME (Confederación de Organizaciones Privadas de Promoción al Desarrollo de la Pequeña y Micro-Empresa)
6. IMAR (Instituto para el Manejo del Agua de Riego)
7. IPROGA (Instituto de Promoción para la Gestión del Agua)
8. PROPUESTA CIUDADANA
9. RAAA (Red de Acción en Alternativas al Uso de Agroquímicos)
10. RAE (Red de Agricultura Ecológica)
11. RED DE LA MUJER RURAL

El Salvador

1. CONFRAS (Confederación de la Reforma Agraria Salvadoreña)

PLURINATIONAL NETWORKS

1. ALOP (Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción)
2. CLACJ (Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Asociaciones Cristianas de Jóvenes)
3. CLADES (Consorcio Latinoamericano de Agroecología y Desarrollo)
4. GLARP (Grupo Latinoamericano de Rehabilitación Profesional)
5. OCR (Oficina de Coordinación Regional)
6. PRODAR (Programa de Desarrollo de Agroindustria Rural para América Latina)
7. RAPAL (Red de Acción en Plaguicidas y sus Alternativas para América Latina)
8. SECRETARIADO RURAL
   SIMAS (Servicio de Información Mesoamericano)