



# **Networks and Capacity Development**

## **WORKSHOP REPORT**

SEPTEMBER 18, 2008

# INTRODUCTION

Networking is fashionable, but does it work? As part of their intervention strategy, development organisations often support or strengthen networks. We assume that the capacity of a network is greater than the sum of its parts. Networks are therefore considered an effective means to achieve development goals. To explore the practice of networks PSO and ICCO organised an event on “Networks and Capacity Development” on the 18th of September 2008. Interested PSO member organisations were invited to participate.

For host ICCO the event was part of a four-day reflection week on the programmatic approach. Encouraged by PSO, ICCO has been analysing the experiences with the programmatic approach from the perspective of its partner organisations. The ICCO experiences underline the necessity to strengthen the abilities of organisations in working together in a coalition or network.

Many member organisations are working with networks and have indicated that they would like more knowledge on the subject. For this reason PSO organised the event with the aim to initiate an exchange of experiences and to explore the possibility for a learning trajectory on networks and capacity development. The participation of 17 member organisations in the workshop indicates a wide interest in obtaining more information on working with networks.

PSO member organisations working with networks have stressed the need for more knowledge on the subject. This event was organised to exchange experiences and to explore the possibility to organize collective learning activities within the PSO association. The participation of 17 member organisations in the workshop indicates a wide interest in obtaining more information on working with networks.

Members presented a number of case studies of networks to illustrate that the kind of networks they work with vary greatly. The presentations helped participants to reflect on their own practice. During the subsequent discussion participants identified the issues that require further exploration. It is on the basis of these pressing issues that the guiding questions for the Collective Learning Trajectory will be formulated and planned

A detailed programme can be found in Annex 1.

# PROCEEDINGS

The workshop started with a warm welcome for the participants by Hettie Walters from ICCO, while Rob van Poelje from PSO gave a brief introduction to the workshop and its objectives. The facilitator, Tjip de Jong, then invited participants to get to know their neighbours by exchanging expectations for the day.



## Presentations

Five case studies were presented by member organisations:

1. ICCO: Programme Coalition Development - by Roger Henke
2. Both Ends: Drynet - by Eva Schmitz
3. ETC: Prolinnova - by Laurens van Veldhuizen
4. Solidaridad: Soy Coalition - by Jan Maarten Dros
5. ICCO: Youth Security in Central America (PSJ) - by Ralph Sprenkels

NOTE: The case presentations can also be found on the wiki (<http://networksandcapacity.wikispaces.com>).

### Case 1: Programme Coalition Development - by Roger Henke

#### *Purpose*

ICCO started the process of “Programme Coalition Development” in Cambodia with the purpose to achieve strategic collaboration within the theme of democratization and peace building. Realisation that donor behaviour – enforcing dependency on donor agenda’s - is a major determinant in blocking change.

### *Characteristics*

ICCO had a broad portfolio with partner organisations, but no coalitions amongst partners existed. Flexible approach. Collaboration is most important, and in that sense maybe not a network. Try to get the collaboration going while getting the money off the table, at least for the moment. Invited 4 strategically selected people in Cambodia to make a proposal.

### *View on its functioning*

Going step by step, end goal is uncertain and depends on the partner organisations. To achieve ownership the functioning of the kind of proposal committee was crucial, and therefore the right selection of its four members. We were lucky with people we selected, who formulated a plan of action. It is expected that the role of ICCO does not decrease, but increase if ownership takes place, when the knowledge is really demanded. Role of ICCO is active support.

### *Benefits for partner organisations*

The drive is to create real ownership.

## **Case 2: Drynet - by Eva Schmitz**

### *Purpose*

Address dryland degradation and its relation to poverty. Puts it on the political agenda.

### *Characteristics*

International thematic network of 14 civil society organisations in 17 countries. Temporary network. The network was created by three NGO partners in the EU with EU funding. Funding for network activities and for the participating organisations. Steering committee is chosen democratically and is the core group for decision making.

### *View on its functioning*

Coming together face to face is crucial. Everybody is working locally on its own goals, with different levels of ownership in their own setting. Mapping of partners and activities is done in order to strengthen local networks. Both Ends coordinates activities and content, and secures funding. Turns out difficult to secure new funding.

### *Benefits for partner organisations*

Capacity building through training, by exchanging knowledge and by participating in the network and reaching other organisations. "Key element is not being alone in your fight."

## **Case 3: Prolinnova - by Laurens van Veldhuizen**

### *Purpose*

Common interest in changing agricultural research from top-down to bottom-up. Capacity building is central objective.

### *Characteristics*

Global Community of Practice promoting local innovation joining 130 organisations in 15 countries. Various donors involved. Extremely decentralised and flexible. Partnership in every country that decides how to work on the common topic. Multistakeholder network with about one third presence of NGOs. Board with 4 representatives of the CoP, 3 external members and 1 member of the support organisations. ETC is secretary, but not a member of the board



### *View on its functioning*

Working together on mainstreaming bottom-up agricultural research. Focus on capacity development of individual people. Training always a combination of exchange of experiences and input from external experts. ETC provides annual backstopping meetings. These meetings are important in addition to electronically provided support. ETC only strengthens on specific points (modest), because too much information goes around to react to everything. Effective communication is important. Challenge lies in maintaining coherence and vision with great diversity of partners in decentralised set-up.

### *Benefits for partner organisations*

Facilitation of learning between countries. Capacity development of staff.

## **Case 4: Soy Coalition - by Jan Maarten Dros**

### *Purpose*

Define minimum rules for production of soy, a standard that everybody commits to.

### *Characteristics*

Solidaridad participates in different networks on soy:

The round table on responsible soy is a Multi Stakeholder Platform that was started in an effort to jointly address problems of pollution, deforestation and lack of employment. The platform is an open (not defined who is member) self-organising international network with around 100 members. The executive board is composed of members from the three constituencies (Producers, NGOs and Industry, Finance and Trade).

The Dutch soy coalition in which 10 organisations participate (5 development organisations and 5 environmental). The coalition works together with many partners, more than 30 in Latin America. In addition to the coalition each organisation has its own network.

### *View on its functioning*

The Brazilian Soy Coalition failed to define a common strategy. Later a Multi Stakeholder Platform (Round Table) was initiated by WWF in Latin America because without cooperation of international companies no solutions are possible. The platform created resistance by local organisations, but 3 of the 4 largest international organisations are represented. Although initially a strategic error not to consult local organisations, the NGOs have learned to appreciate the power of the platform and find ways to provide inputs without participating.

### *Benefits for partner organisations*

Resulted in a criteria document for the production of soy, which is being applied as standard by large producers.

## **Case 5: Youth Security in Central America (PSJ) - by Ralph Sprenkels**

### *Purpose*

Building a programme around youth empowerment in Central America (PSJ). Networks serves strategic articulation of actors, lobby for improvement of policies and development of opportunities for youth self realisation.

### *Characteristics*

Programme with 18 partner organisations in 4 countries. Division of roles and responsibilities with partners in a dynamic fashion. PSJ is consciously inserting itself in Central America in a field of actors and forces in order to promote a joint regional agenda on youth security.

### *View on its functioning*

Role of ICCO and Kerkinactie in the programme is to defend the interest of partner organisations. ICCO sets up the conditions for partners to keep on developing their programmes. The partner organisation

work with many donor agencies and participate in various networks. Local organisations tend to coordinate and network better than INGOs. International NGOs should coordinate to avoid duplication, but distrust exists. We have to be modest, because we only work with a few of the many existing NGOs, which are dependent on external funding and often not accountable at grass root level. An increased overlap between programmes and networks exists. A lesson is to work with existing networks rather than building new ones.

#### *Benefits for partner organisations*

Support in developing programmes on youth empowerment.

## **Group discussion results**

With reference to the presentations of the case studies different aspects of networks were discussed in two sessions:

### **Dilemmas**

- Formal or informal networks?
- The constituency of lobby and advocacy networks?
- Are networks just creating more spaces where the same people meet (old boy networks)?
- Role conflicts (initiator, donor, broker, facilitator, member etc. all at a time?)

### **Principles for the well-functioning of networks:**

- Participants need to get something out of the network.
- A common goal is important.
- Trust and ownership are key
- Not donor driven, but a donor can be initiator.
- Shared results give energy.
- Joint communication strategy is an important instrument.
- Rules of the game must be defined.
- Leadership has to be assigned (but can be rotating)



## **Benefits of networks for participating organisations:**

- Together you are stronger (“alone you can go fast, going together you can go further”).
- Knowledge sharing and sharing of experiences and of different views leads to informed decision making.
- Organisations are stronger towards their constituency if they represent them in networks.
- Possibility to coordinate and streamline strategies.
- Improvement of image, status and position.
- Improvement of quality of progress.

Of course, different types of networks need different principles. All presented networks, for instance are working and have some sort of success, but differ considerably as well. If principles or conditions are defined to broadly they become almost meaningless.

The four types of networks that we distinguished are:

- Lobby and advocacy network
- Knowledge and information sharing network
- Social change network
- Operational / implementation network

## **Learning questions**

In the afternoon the learning needs for working with networks were discussed, first per organization and then in small groups with other organizations. The most important learning needs were thematically grouped. At the end of the day the participants got the opportunity to describe additional dilemmas and questions individually (see annex 2). The results of this inventory have been added in the below overview.

### **The roles of a Northern donor NGO in Networks.**

- Who determines and what the role of northern organisations is?
- How to deal with multiple roles as donor, advisor, facilitator, auditor etc.?
- How to ensure that a donor does not automatically has a leading role within networks?
- What are acceptable exit strategies?
- Ownership and identity.

### **Leadership, passion and power in Networks**

- Different leaders for different kind of networks?
- How to stimulate leadership within network?
- Leadership – network dynamics: how to find an internal balance of power?
- Do you as donor support a network organisation formed by government or the state?

### **Results and Impact**

- How to do a cost-benefit analysis of networks?
- How to measure the development impact of network organisations?
- How does the work of network organisations directly benefit the end user?

### **Managing Networks**

- Who initiates a network? Who are the owners? How to keep a network alive (sustainability)? How to create ownership and leadership?
- How to monitor networks? How to stimulate good communication flows?
- How to work with informal networks? Diversity within networks, e.g. NGOs, companies,

universities, etc. Criteria for selecting (new) members?

- How to map different types of networks? How do you choose a network organisation among many others?

### **Capacity Development**

- How do you develop organisational capacity in networks? Or are HRD and ID sufficient?
- Capacity Development: How to do OD in a network? Learning within the network. Capacity development needed for sustainability of the network.

### **Identified topics for the ICCO Community of Practice<sup>1</sup>**

- Deductive and theoretical
- Analyse our experiences with associative forms
- Develop the “headings” for the analysis
- Develop case studies, and practice theory on networks
- Context specificity of network development

The topics raised in the groups and the questionnaire show a need to arrive at practical lessons with the intention to get a better grip on one’s own interventions with networks. The main questions are how-questions: How to manage, lead or facilitate a network? How to gain support? How to achieve results? And with the realisation that how you do things depend on your position: What is our role?

In addition it is apparent that more clarity is asked for: What kind of networks are there and how do these function?

Capacity development is only mentioned a few times as a separate subject. More importance is given to the benefits of the network, both in a sense of benefitting the development of the participating organisations as seen as impact for the target group.



<sup>1</sup> In an internal Community of Practice ICCO is analysing their experiences with programmatic approach together with their partner organisations. The CoP is included in the Learning and working trajectory that ICCO has presented to PSO.  
*Networks and Capacity Development – a workshop report*

# Conclusions and Follow-up

One objective for organising the workshop was to get a better idea of the questions that concern the various member organisations working with networks. Many topics for further discussion were mentioned in the workshop providing ample material for the learning trajectory.

A second objective was to give participants an idea of the variety in networks. The case studies offered interesting examples for most participants to reflect upon. Due to the limited time, however, the case studies could not be analysed in depth. This was considered a pity; even so, participants indicated that the presentations have given them many new insights.

In subsequent workshops more time will be dedicated to exchange of experiences and discussion.

One important observation confirmed by several participants is that an exchange of experiences is less productive if the variation in the networks discussed is large (comparing apples and oranges). Therefore, the follow up will be organised in smaller groups according to the interests of the participants.

Other suggestions made by participants for the CLT were to design a short and light trajectory, to provide a clear focus for more in depth discussion, to offer a theoretical framework providing a definition of networks. It was suggested to include peer-to-peer review mechanisms and to evaluate network practice with partners as part of the learning trajectory.

## Collective Learning Trajectory

Taking into account the results and suggestions of the workshop the first meeting of a collective learning trajectory will include a theoretical background on networks.

This meeting should also be the start of further discussion in smaller groups. PSO will suggest a practical division in smaller groups according to the purpose of a networks (like: social change networks, knowledge exchange networks and programme management networks).

## Wiki

An interactive webpage (wikispaces) has already been set up on which the presentations of the workshop are shared with the participants. The page also provides a list of documents for further reading, and can be used for future discussions.

# ANNEX 1

## Programme

- 9.00 You are welcome to acclimatize and have coffee or tea
- 9.30 With whom are you here? Share your expectations
- 9 45 Welcome and introduction to the day
- 10.15 Two presentations and discussion in small groups (handout 1)
- Coffee and tea
- 11.30 Three presentations and discussion in small groups (handout 1)
- Lunch break
- 14.00 Outcomes of the small group discussions
- 14.20 Working with colleagues: What difficulties do we encounter when working with networks (handout 2)?
- Coffee and tea
- 15.30 Inventory of theme's and questions about Networks and Capacity Development
- 15.50 Review of the day and preview to the outline of a collective learning trajectory
- 16.10 Individual evaluation of the day. Sharing your experiences
- 16.30 Informal meeting while having a drink

## ANNEX 2

### Topics for learning about networks

The following topics were mentioned on the individual sheets of the group work in the afternoon and in the questionnaire:

- Management, organising, operating network.
- Interested in the set-up and keeping a network alive.
- Learn about managing and monitoring networks.
- Ownership and leadership.
- Quality of interventions.
- How depended are networks on external funding?
- Sustainability (not only financial) of networks.
- Identity.
- Question of the role of the northern NGOs.
- How to avoid having a leading role as donor or initiator?
- Who initiates?
- Complexity of our multiple role in supporting networks (financier, facilitator, advisor, broker, etc.).
- Responsibility in networks.
- How to get the best results from the networks for the beneficiaries?
- How does the work of network organisations directly benefit the end user?
- Impact of network at target group level versus impact through work of individual partner organisations.
- Network impact analysis (and evaluation in general).
- Cost effectiveness networks.
- Effective alliances between national and international networks
- What do we mean with networks? Define the word network.
- Choice of type of network for effective intervention.
- How to address communication and cultural bottlenecks?
- Multiculturality.
- Question of the internal network communication techniques and methods.
- How to do OD in a network?
- Capacity development needed for sustainability of the network.
- Learning within the network
- How to stimulate South-South exchange?

# ANNEX 3

## List of participants

Naam	Organisatie
Aarnoudse, A. (Arja)	PSO
Allertz, P. (Paul)	IKV Pax Christi
Boersma, A. (Amis)	Free Voice
Boersma, J. (Jaap)	Tear
Brouwer, H	ICCO
Burgsteden, W. van (Willem)	ETC Foundation
Dros, J.M. (Jan Maarten)	SOLIDARIDAD
Egging, P. (Peter)	ICCO
Ehlen, V. (Veronique)	MCNV
Faber, K. (Koen)	PSO
Ferrari, F. (Florence)	ICCO
Henke, R. (Roger)	ICCO
Henrichs, N. (Noortje)	IKV Pax Christi
Herlaar, M. (Martin)	Tear
Jong, de (Tjip), Facilitator	Kessels & Smit
Keur, D.V. van der (Dorine Virginia)	ICCO
Klijs, K. (Kees)	ICCO
Klundert, A. van de (Arnold)	WASTE
Koop, G. (Gijs)	ICCO
Leslie, E. (Emma)	ICCO
Llatas, (Magali)	Both Ends
Maasen, K. (Kristel)	Center Interbilim
Marcilly, B. (Bénédicte)	IICD
Marijn, M. (Martijn)	Educaids
Mol, M. (Maartje)	HIVOS
Neb, S. (Sinthay)	ICCO
Neevel, B.W. (Bertus Willem)	ICCO
Ochoa, L. (Libardo)	ICCO
Ommen, M. van (Marinka)	NIZA
Ommeren, T. van (Trudy)	ICCO
Otte, D.J. (Dirk Jan)	Dorcass
Oudwater, N. (Nicolienne)	ETC ecoculture
Poelje, R. van (Rob)	PSO
Pronk, H. (Hester)	ICCO
Reinders, J (Jo)	WFP
Roelands, (Chiel)	ICCO
Ruijter, J. de (Jessica)	Stichting VSO-Nederland
Ruter, D. (Dorine)	ETC Foundation
Schmitz, E. (Eva)	Both Ends
Schneemann, J.M.P. (Jochem, Maartje, Pieter)	ICCO
Senders, A. (Angelica)	ICCO
Smulders, E. (Eva)	ICCO
Sprengels, R.W.F.G. (Ralph Willem-Friso Gerard)	ICCO
Tarawally, B. (Babah)	Free Voice
Veldhuizen, L. van (Laurens)	ETC Foundation
Verboom, J.J. (Jan Jacob)	ICCO
Verduijn, S. (Sander)	Stichting Woord en Daad
Verhagen, J. (Jacqueline)	PSO
Vreede, V. de (Verle)	WASTE
Wal, C. van der (Caroline)	Stichting VSO-Nederland
Walters, H. (Hettie)	ICCO