

REPORT

Capacity Development & Networks Event on 25th June 2009 Harvest and deepening of topics about networks

1. Introduction

This report aims to summarize which topics have been discussed and what insights we shared about capacity development and networks. So it isn't meant as minutes or process report of the day. With this event we completed the collective learning trajectory Capacity Development & Networks that started on the 20th of January 2009 with a group of 24 participants out of 15 organizations. With this group we had four meetings in which several aspects about the subject were treated, for about half of the time working in three fixed small groups. The group Network Scouts had in common that they all work with relatively young networks in starting phase, pioneering how to grow up. The group Go Between Millipedes was a mixed group of more or less formal networks dedicated to both policy and practice. And the group Locker consisted of facilitators of formal networks aimed at policy influencing.

2. Presentations of important topics chosen by the small groups

2.1 The Go between Millipedes

The group focuses in its presentation on the subject of ownership and responsibility. You can have formal responsibility and you can feel responsible and these two variables do not go necessarily together. The donor often feels very responsible because of his general knowledge and experience, he has a lot of expertise on his topics, working with it in several countries. In the new country Z he starts to initiate a new project out of his experience and knowledge. It is expected that this high expertise will influence a high impact of the project. When empathizing the Southern perspective there are a number of points to take into account:



- If you – as a Northern donor – only rely on your own knowledge and do not establish a common understanding of what problem has to be solved, we will follow our own way of doing as soon as you have left.
- Connect and collaborate with Southern networks and the Southern way of networking. The South is expert on socializing! Do not rely on your own power, but ask the perspective and the feelings of the Southern stakeholders.
- Value the Southern knowledge and methodologies, often they only need the money and not the expertise of the Northern donor.

The statement of this presentation is: you cannot start a network in the North and then afterwards think about transfer of responsibility and ownership. Start from the beginning together and associate with the Southern way of networking.

2.2 The Locker

The group states three important points: a shared problem, leadership and culture differences. And equal collaboration from the beginning starts with a common idea and commitment of the problem or opportunity. This leads to a shared vision, a shared goal and shared actions. Take care there is space for all participants of the network to share their own experiences. To create ownership you need: the feeling to be connected, working at the same goal and narrative knowledge.

Leadership in a network is important, leadership between the participants of the network and also leadership between the organisations that are behind the participating people. Leadership is needed in administrative support of the network and in the way of inspiring people. Leadership needs to be transparent and facilitating in communication, paying attention to the different needs of the different participant in multi-actor-networks.

There are cultural differences, also when looking at leadership. Participatory leadership is not really accepted e.g. in West Africa, where the common view on leadership is directive and hierarchical. It is important to talk about the different views on leadership. We often forget that we can make the different views explicit and talk about it, this is an intervention that leads over time to develop closer connected views on the same issue. One can also talk about the process of leadership.

Another aspect that influences style of leadership is the structure of the network. A spider-web construction is more likely to evoke hierarchical leadership than a fishnet model which is more based on equal relations.

As to cultural differences several things are important:

- intercultural working means for everybody to take a step back in their cultural habits
- openly discuss the differences, be transparent and explicit.

2.3 The Network Scouts

The group starts with the supposition: The only way development organisations will have any impact is when they operate in networks. Half of the present people agree and about half disagree with this proposition.

Arguments for agreement:

- Life is not linear but systemic, that is why you have to network with other sectors
- You are limited in your possibilities to fund; in networks you can interact more and define more or less a process way of working

Arguments for disagreement:

- Networking is complex. When you can reach your goal without a network don't use a network strategy.
- Networking is a good way, but not the only one.

Indeed, networking is complex, but the problems that need to be solved are ever more complex problems. And that makes it increasingly important to collaborate in alliances and networks. The feature of a network is that it is informally organized, more based on relationships than on contracts. But the question is: are we as donor-organizations – as staff of donor organizations – ready to work with networks and collaborations? It really requires other things than project funding does. What is the influence of our funding role when we participate in networks? In any case it is important to continue to focus on capacity building and strengthening the participants of the network. But the donor role and advisory role can be conflicting roles. At the same time it appears that some participants are more interested in the funds than in the network itself; in which case it can be better to start discussions

without giving much funding. This strategy increases the chance that ownership starts from the beginning.

The Network Scouts started with a supposition and finalized their presentation with the question: 'Should we work to develop networks or should we network to develop work'?

3 Discussion with Fulco van Deventer and Rudolf Scheffer

3.1 Playing and gaming

In this last question the word network is used both as an entity and as a verb. And this points exactly to the contradiction in talking about networks that causes a lot of confusion. A network starts with networking and as soon as the network becomes more structured and organized it stops to be a network and starts to be a more or less fixed organization. Fulco van Deventer (Cordaid) illustrates this natural development of a network with the metaphor of children who are playing. They come together and from the beginning their playing unfolds. Then they start to divide roles, make rules etc. And at a certain point they are not playing anymore but gaming! Behaving according to fixed borders, roles and rules and often with the aim to win. The freedom of just playing is lost. When the game is over, you can go back and start playing again. Playing is the level where you develop new paradigms.

This contradiction makes Fulco stating that Networks don't exist. As soon as networking emerges in a network, networking starts to die and the network is growing towards a fixed organisation. And we keep on talking about networks, so the confusion is ongoing. What we need is a work definition of a network. Fulco gave the following work definition on the first day of the leaning trajectory on the 20th of January: Networks are emergent phenomena that occur when organizations or individuals begin to embrace a collaborative process, engage in joint decision making and begin to act as a coherent entity. (Milward and Provan, 2003). We cannot control networks, they exist where issues are complex and the routine of blueprints doesn't work. In that situation we need a networking approach and as a donor we have problems with it because we are not allowed to play. Our structures and rules hinder us to play. We are on the playing ground (the field of the network) and it becomes a game: 'who is in, who is out, strategy,



lobbying for a law, goal, structure' and you easily go into gaming. The point is how to govern playing systems?

That is about asking questions like

- Why am I here today? What is in it for me? (Everyone is there only voluntary and free)
- Are we innocent as a child and able to change roles, like playing children do?
- What are the conditions and context to sit together, to have time, to feel safety?
- Who legitimates the playing system and will take responsibility for the impact?

3.2 Different aspects of networks

Another point that seems to be contradictory is the *diversity* of a network. You need diversity in a network to create new views, so you have to engage with the one's you do not engage normally. Diversity is both the network's beauty and chance to grow, share qualities in order to create better results as well as a source of conflict. It makes it necessary to bring in good conditions of communication and flexibility and flowing.

Rudolf Scheffer (Oxfam Novib) stresses that from the start North and South have to go together in developing a Network. This implicates that you need *time*, time to create a space to emerge, to sit

together, analyse, look at differences in power, styles of democracy, seeking nuances etc. Allow diversity and conflicts and negotiations. Make explicit that money is an issue.

The *form* of a network is another point. We always assume that form follows function. And that should be true, but at the same time you see that the form (chosen or emerging) also influences, and probably even determines the content, style and culture. This are things to take into account in the beginning phase of a network.

What can happen when the network is grown up is that it starts to live its own life, *independent* of their contributors. The risk is that the network may develop into an independent organizations. In order for a network to maintain effective lineage to its members, its governance system should be worked out at some point in time.

Fulco adds that there is a difference between *movements* and networks. Movements can bubble, freeze, unfreeze, move, change. With networks rules and boundaries are coming in. Networks develop embodied in political and historical *power relations*. More consciousness to see through power relations and break them is needed.

According to Rudolf *communication* of a network is a different topic altogether. Sometimes face-to-face communication is too expensive because the network is too large. The network functions mainly virtual and there are sometimes regional meetings with members deputed to a global meeting. In communication you need newsletters and a website. The language is a point. Often you need not only English but also French and Spanish. And what about Arabic and Chinese, do we think about that? The communication style differs depending on the sector (private, ngo) you are communicating with. As a donor you must invest in communication, it is expensive and vital at the same time.

3.3 Monitoring and evaluation

It is interesting to ask the participants at regular basis: ‘Why are you a member?’ to check if they are still motivated. At the same time to ask the members that are lost ‘Why are you no member anymore?’. Or the one’s that never were member: ‘Why are you not a member of the network?’ This gives a lot of information about both about the (mis)connection of the network and the (potential) members.

For evaluation it works well to use an external evaluator who presents his findings to the network. As a donor you must be there at that moment and watch the dynamics. The satisfaction of the members with the network is not predictable and you have to be careful with interpreting the outcomes of an evaluation. Spend time, with the secretary of the network, but also with the members. Chat, phone, skype, be in contact!

3.4 Participate in the board

There are different ideas about participating in the board of a network. IICD states that they let go their position in steering the network because they prefer to present the advisory role. Oxfam Novib underlines this point of view and adds that they yet sometimes take position in the board. SOMO points that as a donor you have to be in the governance because of the money and your responsibility for this.

4. World café

1 Host: Sjef Ernes (Aqua4all)

How do you incorporate M&E into a network? That is, checks and balances ensure purpose, structure and participants are congruent. This particularly includes measuring processes within the network and its ‘health’, and is less about measuring results.

Final one-liner: Are results less important than the health of a network? The answer of the members may differ from the answer of the beneficiaries! M&E will help structured networks in adjustment of goals and improved interaction of the members.



2. Host: Gerard Wieffer (PSO)

How do you handle the tension between transparency (information sharing in a network) and confidentiality (keeping information to yourself)?

Final one-liner: It depends on the purpose of the network and your role/position in the network. The tension is recognizable. Make the tension explicit and then start a discussion how to handle it.

3 Host: Koen Faber (PSO)

How do you define leadership and what is a favourable environment for the emergence and development of leadership?

Final one-liner: Be transparent about your own leadership role; do not confuse leadership and management.

4 Host: Wilma Rozenga (ICCO)

How can you combine your own (donor) ideas for a network and the use of money with the development of a network from the bottom-up (need driven)? Are there good examples of this?

Final one-liner: A network can be really need-driven when you listen well at all levels (head, hart and feet) and you give attention to M&E including the target group.

5 Host: Rudolf Scheffer (Oxfam Novib)

How do you define an exit strategy and should you really have one? If you leave the network, what effect does that have on its sustainability?

Final one-liner: If the network becomes sustainable it is the end of the network. Take care: a network is not a program!

6 Host: Esther Rozendal (PSO)

How do you step into an existing network where you especially want to tackle the advisory role within the network?

Final one-liner: Ask questions, find out what is the clear demand and be aware of what is your valuable expertise.

5. Sjef Ernes about No nonsense networks

Interesting about Aqua for All (Sjef is general manager of this organization) is that networking is its core business as a Not-for-profit business in drinking water with public private partnerships. They have chosen not to repeat or take over what others do, but only put added value to what others do.

Networks are always temporally: it works, it reaches its goal, it becomes to be an organization and the network stops. Networks are smart temporary coalitions, bringing together partners that want to achieve a common goal and that each want to achieve their own goal! Most networks start with an idea during a drink, spontaneous, informal and ends almost institutional.

We need network as smart strategic solutions because our globe is a village; we need solutions for upscaling and joining power without merging! A network offers scale, power, opportunities for smaller

participants to collaborate with bigger ones without the risk to disappear (merger). Public Private Partnerships exist because you can not merge public and private, whereas governments succeeding to work with networks are successful.

A special kind of networks are the lobbying network; they are highly invisible, very much personalized and informal, you even don't know who is in it.

Networks are virtual organizations but nevertheless

- not for free, not without obligations (contributing money, knowledge, power)
- identified by SMART objectives
- modern governance, triggered by signals from the network.

Networks need:

- **organization** (structure, people, tasks and responsibilities, roles, finance, intervention possibilities)
- **control** (result management, financial management, risk management, quality management)
This has to do with M&E as a measurement of development. Are all members are satisfied and are the beneficiaries satisfied?
Quality of the network is important. Quality assurance is done by the network itself. When one member of the network spoils the image of the network, it damages the network.
- **trust** (competence, goodwill, integrity)
This has to do with the expectation that all the members act like you according to a hidden code of conduct. If I work hard, you work hard; if I take risk, you take a risk; if I share information, you share information.
80% of network failure is due to lack of trust! And trust you can manage: ask for it , talk about it, manage it by intuition.
- **Pressure** (of the market, of making business)
Networks that don't feel pressure don't function! The most important pressure is the pressure of the individual members. When you as a member are satisfied, when you are getting what you want, when you achieve your goal, when you are enjoying the possibility of upscaling.
Try to formulate targets, e.g. define a target on knowledge sharing or on participation rates.
When a member doesn't contribute to the joint objective, the network as a collective has to kick him out.

How to govern networking? When am I a successful networker? How can I be accountable for my own quality?

- When I have smart targets. For ourselves: Aqua for All is a good networker when it supported programs to access to save drinking water to 2 million people (MDG 7).
- When I defined a way of working. What is a good indicator of a smart coalition? Is the coalition complete, do we miss some partner?
- Leverage in finance. Match in financial constructions with very transparent indicators.



Statement: Networks are not for free; they should be governed business like with clear objectives and clear targets. This statement opens the discussion about how to define businesslike thinking? It has something to do with cost effectiveness, with being result oriented, with setting goals and knowing when you finished them. Numbers and outcomes are important. When are you satisfied, when have you reached what you wanted. How can you improve tomorrow? Be critical on your efforts and your success!