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NETWORKS AS MECHANISMS OF COMMUNICATION AND INFLUENCE

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Context

The term Network has become a common usage in the vocabulary of development in contemporary time. Reference to Network and Networking is made in practically every discussion on the theme of development. The frequency of use and its reference seems to connote that Network as a concept and practice may have existed much longer than is actually the case. Nearly 15-20 years of existence in practical terms, Network has come to be identified as a potential mechanism for communication and influence in promoting people-centered development. While the origins of the word come from electronic engineering (and has been common knowledge to engineers), its importation and usage in development field has been of much recent origin. As a result, the word and the concept has been used, misused and even abused. In this paper, it is hoped that the real meaning of the concept and its practical utilization will be elaborated in sufficient detail.

Different meanings have been given to the concept of Network. Some would only treat it as an activity or a process, and, therefore, networking is more important than the network itself. For some others, the outcome or the result of such an activity of networking is a network. A Network comprises of individuals, groups and organisations essentially created to share information and to communicate with each other in a horizontal, non-hierarchical manner. As we will see later in this paper, this simple and straightforward usage of network as a mechanism of communication gets more complicated and elaborated in practice.

History

The evolution of the practice of Network can be traced back to
the mid seventies of this century. Around that period, critical
review of development experiences in the countries of the South
had begun to demonstrate the inadequacy of development paradigms
as well as the means of implementing that development. Top-
down, pre-determined, blue-print approach to development had
begun to be questioned by that time in sectors like education,
health, agriculture, rural development, etc. The practice of
development through systematically designed and created
development administration as identified by the government's
approach in countries of the South had also received critical
appraisal at that time. It was beginning to become clear that
bureaucratically organised development administration machinery
is unable to achieve a long-term purpose of sustainable, people-
centered and participatory development in any society. It is in
this context that an interesting initiatives related to promotion
of participatory research began in mid 70's through the work of
adult educators. This was catalyzed and supported through an
international NGO, International Council for Adult Education
(ICAE) based in Toronto, Canada. In 1976, ICAE began a systematic
process of facilitating the evolution of networks of
Participatory Research in different regions of world. Within a
period of three years, regional networks had begun to take shape
in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. They
were not only titled as Participatory Research Networks but also
began to function like that. They essentially linked
individuals, groups and organisations who were beginning to look
at knowledge and its production in the context of empowerment of

people. Thus informal linkage and communication among like-minded individuals and actors was the sole purpose of these networks in their early years.

Around the same time, concerned with breast-feeding and commercialisation of baby food in several countries of the world, particularly among health practitioners, emerged a global initiative that came to be known as `Nestle Campaign'. The campaign was directed against the use of baby food products by such multinational companies like Nestle but also intended to promote well established and effective practice of breast-feeding for a new born. This process of building that campaign which brought together health practitioners, activists and mothers in a common framework of mutual communication, cutting across national, regional and geographical boundaries was a pioneering accomplishment.

The next important landmark in this history was the creation of an international NGO called IRED (Development Innovations and Network) which carries the phrase Network in its name itself. IRED began to organise grass-roots groups, first in Africa and then in other parts of the world, around the process of networking. Some of its own process of networking was subsequently documented as an interesting approach and practice towards networking as a vehicle for communication and influencing various practitioners and activists in development (IRED, 1989 and 1992). Certain regional NGOs began to be formed in early 1980s which also carried the title `Network'. Asian Community Health Action Network (ACHAN) was founded in early 1980 to link practitioners engaged in community-based, participatory

health care throughout the Asian countries. Over its 15 years' history,- ACHAN has enabled to communicate with like-minded health practitioners and influenced the thinking of others. Third World Network situated in Penang, Malaysia is another example of a regional NGO which focuses on a large number of issues of sustainable development. It has also grown over the last decade as an organisation promoting linkage of individuals and groups. In this early period, some international donor agencies supported the concept of networking. One is that international NGO division of CIDA and another is NOVIB. The international assessment of supporting networks produced by these organisations also demonstrate the relevance and nature of this mechanism (NOVIB, 1992; Hall 1992). Over the last five years, IDRC itself has been engaged in promoting the concept of network in communicating research findings and approaches (IDRC, 1990).

Thus one can see that in its less than 20 years history, the practice of networking as a mechanism for mutual communication and influence has grown. Networks now exist at the local level within a district or a city; they may exist at provincial level, national level, regional and global levels as well. This clearly demonstrates that the practice of network building, networking, sustaining and maintaining networks has been an effective means of promoting the concept of people-centered participatory development. Therefore, in its contemporary context, we need to elaborate the meaning of this mechanism called network. The rationale for network as a tool, as a mechanism of communication and influence arises from the manner in which the various actors of the Civil Society function. As we have seen earlier,

institutions of the State and institutions of the Market are organised very differently for different purposes. They are organised around hierarchies of command, structures, procedures, control mechanism etc. These principles of organizing the work of the State and the Market may be appropriate for the purposes those institutions have. But by their very nature, actors in the Civil Society are diverse, under-organised, occasionally working together, mostly acting alone, and diverse in their purposes, composition, style of functioning and performance. They vary in size, from individual initiatives to informal groups to those organised as voluntary development organisation or NGOs. They encompass diverse constituencies; some work only with the poor; others work among citizens. Some are representative organisations of their members, some others work with local communities. It is this enormous diversity within the actors of the Civil Society which prompt the requirement of alternative ways of communication and working together. Network is one such alternative mechanism. It is a mechanism which allows linkages between individuals, groups and institutions. These linkages can be established without surrendering one's autonomy, without becoming full-time employee or member or subordinate to a larger entity. These linkages essentially assist in communicating, sharing information, finding out about each other.

We also find that many individuals interested in similar pursuits are 'locked' in institutions of the State as well of the Market. As individuals, as citizens, they have enormous interest, commitment and capacity to work towards strengthening Civil Society. But their own institutional affiliations make it many a times impossible for them to relate with others outside their own

institutional context. It is clear that networks can facilitate such linkage building. During the early years of participatory research network in Asia, many academics feeling confined to and frustrated in academic rigidities were able to relate to the network. They were able to learn about participatory research and become its active promoters through this involvement (Tandon, 1986). Therefore, network acts as a mechanism for communication within the actors of the Civil Society, and those individuals who want to work towards strengthening the contributions of Civil Society. It can also become a mechanism for mutual influence through sharing of information, ideas and experiences. Occasionally, these influences can extend to institutions of other sectors (those of the state and/or of the Market). Thus, in a simple way, this mechanism allows for overcoming isolation of individual action and provides access to like-minded experiences, individuals, groups and organisations.

In this real sense, therefore a network needs to be distinguished from other forms of organisations that have become common within the community of development actors in the Civil Society. Firstly, a network should be distinguished from formal membership association or umbrella organisation. In many countries, provinces or sectors, national or regional associations or umbrella organisations have been set up. Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) and Voluntary Action Network India (VANI) are two such examples. These associations may combine some characteristic of network, as we will see later. But in their formal membership structure, they go beyond the limited purpose of network as a mechanism of communication

Likewise, support organisations (SOs) which strengthen the contributions of other actors of the Civil Society, may promote the contribution of networks as well, but themselves they are not network (PRIA, 1990). PRIA itself is an example. Its origins are rooted in the Asian Participatory Research Network set up in 1976. But PRIA as a legally incorporated Support Organisation beginning its life in 1982 is distinct identity. It still promotes the networking among participatory researchers in Asia and elsewhere. But in its support function, as an organisation engaged in training, research and documentation, it has functions over and above those of a network of participatory research. It is useful to distinguish these meanings so that we look at network as a vehicle of communication and influence; and it may result in setting up of national association, umbrella organisation, support institutions or other forms of appropriate mechanism to promote different dimensions of development. Network may, therefore, get transformed into Institutions or network may stimulate the evolution of new institutions, but their identity needs to be separated from those of other forms.

Purposes

The purposes of networking, of building and sustaining a network can be defined in the above framework. Four distinct purposes are identified here. The _first_ purpose is mobilising energy and resources. It is obvious that new ideas, designs and perspectives require new ways of relating with each other. The 'cutting edge' issues in development get facilitated and communicated in more informal and non-hierarchical manner. Since new ideas entail critique of and departure from the established

modes of functioning, existing institutional frameworks tend to curtail such possibilities. But networks are effective mechanisms for mobilising energies and resources around newer issues and ideas. For example, a lot of methodological innovation in the practice of participatory research became possible as those networks were able to mobilise new energies and resources. Likewise, institutionalized framework of functioning in the State and the Market tends to reduce the possibility of mobilising additional resources and energy around a new issue. Through a network, individuals working in institutions of the State and the Market can also get mobilized to connect with others around a common cause. We can see that such issues as violence against women, rights of child labour, environmental protection and regeneration, peace and human rights, democracy and freedom are able to mobilise individuals and groups throughout societies and networks can promote linkages across them. Thus, whenever new issues or concerns in a society require mobilising energies and resources of individuals and groups to commit themselves to work on those issues, networking can be an important tool.

The **second** overall purpose of network is to communicate. Widespread experience shows that top-down, hierarchical, procedurally rigid organisational form inhibits free flow of experiences and ideas. This is where network as a form, as a mechanism, is most appropriate. It provides for freeflow of experiences, ideas and views across individuals and groups linked within the network. Communication can be initiated by anyone and received by anyone. Internet, the new electronic communication

innovation, is in fact a classic example of this. Those who have something to share, put it out on the Internet. Those who are interested to receive, can do so. Communication can also be more directed towards certain actors within the network. Communication can be focused on issues around which the network has been built (like child labour, violence against women, female literacy, etc.). Communication is perhaps the most overarching and crucial purpose of any network. Numerous examples of networks among agricultural researchers exist where communication of research findings is the prime purpose. International Literacy Task Force set up to promote global awareness on the issues of literacy around the International Literacy Year 1990 was another classic example of communication promoted by the International Council for Adult Education and its regional affiliates like Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, (ASPBAE). Literacy Task Force brought together diverse actors within the non-governmental community from all over the world to work towards promoting deeper awareness of and support for the issue of literacy throughout the world. Its essential purpose was communication. In the early years, ACHAN itself was a vehicle to communicate the experiences of alternative practices in people-centered community-based health care in different countries of the Asia-Pacific region. In those days, community-based, health for all was a new idea and required promotion among health practitioners which was facilitated through the communication mechanism of ACHAN.

The _third_ overarching purpose of network is to promote coordination and linkage building. Obviously linkage building requires bringing together, in some way, like-minded individuals,

groups and institutions. Coordination is not with a view to coordinate activities of those individuals or groups but to facilitate more systematic communication, sharing of information, experience and ideas. Promoting linkage-building in itself is a purpose of network. Network tends to seek out individuals and groups working in diverse, unknown sittings and links them with each other. The purpose of coordination is to promote linkage-building.

The IRED (Development Innovations and Network) is an example of a mechanism of networking being used to promote linkages for sharing practical tools in grassroots development. The development support service of IRED is essentially set up to promote such linkages and to coordinate the process of communication, process of linkage-building. At the level of promotion of voluntary action and creation of shared perspectives on the roles and challenges of voluntary action, UPVAN is another example. Set-up in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India, U.P Voluntary Action Network (UPVAN) brings together individuals and groups working on diverse issues of development through voluntary development organisation. The essential purpose of UPVAN is to share information on issues that affect the voluntary sector as a whole, to create opportunities of mutual learning and sharing, and to promote voluntary action within the state. Similarly, linkage building can be set up around a particular theme. In Bangladesh four years ago, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) was set up as a network of several large and medium development NGOs, individual actors and others within the donor community, multilateral, bilateral system and government

concerned with basic education and literacy in Bangladesh. Over the four years, CAMPE has truly become a network promoting linkages, which have now extended to media, cultural groups, citizens at large to commit themselves, to work towards promotion of basic education and literacy in Bangladesh today. Later, CAMPE acquired a more formal organisational structure as well which over the last two years has allowed it to engage in concrete programme implementation. However, as a network promoting linkages of individuals, groups and organisations concerned with and interested in basic education and literacy in Bangladesh, it has played an important coordinating role viz-a-viz such a communication challenge.

Lastly, networks are also created to influence public policy. These networks can be set up such that shared analysis and vision among various actors of the Civil Society becomes the basis to influence a particular public policy. In the contemporary context, a public policy may be made by a local, regional or national government, or a bilateral or a multinational agency or other actors (like MNCs) at the national or global levels which shape the framing of important public policy issues. Voluntary Action Network India (VANI) was set up as a network seven years ago in 1988, essentially to bring together like-minded and concerned, larders of voluntary action in India, to promote voluntarism and to protect voluntary action from state harassment. In its first four years, VANI remained an informal network of those brought together by the commitment of like-mended individuals, numbering 20 in the beginning Through shared analysis and common vision, it was able to engag in influencing a number of public policy issues in that period

particularly those relating to Income Tax Amendment, Foreign Contribution Regulation Act and the relations of foreign donors to the voluntary action in the country. Through continuing efforts, VANI was subsequently able to influence the Government of India to elaborate a Policy Statement on Voluntary Organisations which has since been done in the beginning of 1994. Two years ago, VANI did acquire a more formal character as a membership association but its early function as a network and its continuing role in networking with even those who are not its members, presents a new example of influencing public policy. On all issues of public policy that are important to voluntary action, VANI has been able to effectively network with other actors of Civil Society even if they are not its members. For example, on issues of secularism, VANI was able to link up with media, trade union organisations, women's groups, academia, student movement and other socio-political formations. On the issue of influencing public policy in relation to the impact of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) on the poor in the country, it has been able to effectively link up with academic institutions, media and other national and international networks.

A more recent example of influencing public policy can be seen around the question of the Social Summit. Through the initiative of International Council for Adult Education and the South American Peace Commission, an early meeting in April 1993 brought together 20 international/regional networks and associations of NGOs to Chile where a People's Alliance for Social Development (PASD) was created. PASD is a loose and informational network

of like-minded organisations throughout the world concerned with the agenda of the Social Summit and wants to influence it from the perspective of the Civil Society. During these two years People's Alliance for Social Development has been able to mobilise more than 700 NGOs, (local, national, regional and international), has been able to conduct several regional meetings, has been able to participate in the official prepcoms process, has been able to convene a special dialogue with key national governments has been able to promote the theme of poverty eradication as an essential issue of social development through the media all over the world. A parallel initiative linked with PASD was convening of a meeting of 20 Social Leaders from around the world in August 1994 by Synergos Institute in New York. The social leaders drawn from diverse sector of the Civil Society, brought together individuals who had some important experiences and contributions to make theme of Social Summit. The analysis, vision and recommendations of the meeting of social leaders has been fed into the prepcoms and utilized since for wider dissemination and influence. This demonstrates an example of a network bringing together individuals, groups and organisations around a common theme for a purpose of influencing the agenda and the recommendations of public policy formulation at the global level.

Obviously many networks combine several purposes. Many networks start with one purpose and grow slowly, expanding to include additional purposes. The outlining of above purposes is to highlight the diverse ways in which networks can contribute to promotion of people-centered development through the strengthening of the Civil Society.

Forms

Network essentially take three distinct forms. These forms are
not mutually exclusive but they can be distinctively identified
and utilised. The _first_ one looks at networks as loosely
organised relationships. This is the form which is more
common description of network among researchers, practitioners,
development actors etc. In this form, linkages across
individuals, groups and organisations are informal; association
with each other within the network essentially depends on the
motivation, energy and initiative of the individual actors;
there are no formal membership criteria, forms or procedures of
joining in or joining out. The broad purpose of such a network
seems to be the overarching inspiration to motivate individuals,
groups and organisations to remain in touch with each other.
This form is most appropriate for mobilising energy and
communication. In this form, sharing of information, experiences
and ideas is left to the individual initiatives and not necessary
coordinated in any significant area.

The _second_ form that a network takes is where they become
associations. Associations are slightly more formal relations
with individuals, groups and organisations as members of the
network. The definition of membership in terms of criteria,
procedure for joining as member or remaining outside, the rights
and privilege, duties and responsibilities of members can be
variously defined. The criteria of membership depend great deal
on the purposes on the network itself. As mentioned earlier
CAMPE, VANI, ACHAN are all examples of networks which gradually
became associations over a period of time. One of the

characteristics of an association is that its leadership and decision-taking structure depends on the membership; unlike in the loosely organised networks where individual initiative, commitment, resources, capacity and contribution determine, leadership and decision making processes. A network as an Association is able to perform the functions of coordination and influencing public policy much better than a loosely organised mechanism. An association also has a longer more defined life based on the continuing assessment of relevance of the purposes and functions of the association.

The third form a network has been a time-bound one, around a particular theme or event or issue or concern. When the networks of participatory research were promoted in mid seventies, it was not clear what shape they will take in future. After a period of nearly 12 years, by 1988, most networks of participatory research in different regions disappeared as networks; and the ideas of participatory research had been diffused and spread throughout the world. In fact, the practice of participatory research became an integral part of many local, regional, national and international NGOs, and other actors of the Civil Society. Participatory research also entered the academic institutions, curriculum and programmes. But the initial purpose of networking seemed to had been served by the gradual disappearance of the identity of those networks by late 1980s. In another sense a network can be created in a time-bound fashion around a particular issue. The network set up around the theme of forest policy and the rights of forest-dwellers in India in early 1980's lasted a couples of years, once it was

successful in resisting any negative impact of the proposed policy. changes. It outlived its purpose and its actors went ahead with their ongoing work. Likewise, when the Union Carbide Plant in Bhopal (India) killed more than 3000 people overnight of December 3, 1984, several national and international networks came together first to identify the causes of that disaster and then to share information and strategies to help the people affected by the gas disaster. Subsequent networking included building linkages in United States, where the mother plant of Union Carbide producing MIC existed. Through the joint initiative of PRIA, Highlander Centre in Tennessee and regional networks of Participatory Research in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe and North America brought together a variety of new information which was utilized to strengthen the cause of the diseased and the affected due to Bhopal gas disaster. Such networks have a time-bound life, limited purpose, focused around a particular issue and then tend to dissolve after a period of time. These networks rarely become associations with formal membership or organisations engaged in programme implementation.

Clearly various networks go through different forms throughout their history and may change forms as their purposes get more elaborated and modified. Networks also may combined forms as we have seen in some examples earlier.

Problematiques

There are several generic problematiques that the experience of networking, building and sustaining network has thrown up. These problematiques are generic to all kinds of networks and each network deals with them in its own specialised way. They

are listed here with a view to alert those engaged in promoting
and understanding networks in future to address these
problematiques in their own special and appropriate way.

The first problematique revolve around the theme of involvement
vs responsibility. As the process of building linkages in a
network proceeds, individuals, groups and organisations do gain
some value by association, by involvement. But this involvement
many a times is limited to seeking other's experiences and ideas
as opposed to sharing one's own. So involvement may be a one-way
process where individuals within the network gain from others,
but do not contribute. Thus energy and resources needed to
sustain the network by the two-way process of involvement and
contribution may not materialize. We have this experience in
the regional networks of participatory research. While Asian,
African and Latin American networks were able to generate both
involvement and responsibility towards contribution, the same
was not true in Europe. For a variety of reasons, European
network could not sustain itself because contribution
responsibility could not be sustained by some of the members of
the network. A similar challenge had arisen in the history of
VANI in India. In the earlier years, VANI was sustained through
contribution from those who were involved (Singh,1994). These
material resources slowly began to disappear and while many
individuals continued to remain involved, attend meeting and
receive information, they were unwilling to take the
responsibility for the continuation of VANI by providing
resources and energies needed. That task got limited to one or
two individuals. So this balance of involvement and

responsibility among those involved within a network needs to be somehow promoted. The more diversely shared the responsibility, the more sustaining can be the network; but sharing such responsibility is in itself a challenge.

The second problematique relates to coordination vs control. As has been mentioned earlier, the purpose of coordination in a network is to ensure the promotion of communication across linkages. The idea of coordination is not to control the activities of those who are part of the network. By definition, those who associate with the network remain autonomous. There is a very fine line between coordination and control. The Task Force on Literacy promoted by ICAE was an excellent example of coordinating communication across various actors of the Civil Society. The Task Force succeeded in stimulating interest on the theme of basic education and literacy worldwide and it was effective in achieving its purpose of making the International Literacy Year more responsive towards the commitments for literacy. However, the women's network of ICAE, promoted around the same time, slowly began to function more in a controlling way as it began to demand of its members, specific actions in respect to gender issues. The sensitization, stimulation and sharing roles slowly got transformed into controlling role. A similar tension is currently being experienced in CAMPE, Bangladesh. Many of its network members are very large NGOs like BRAC and Proshika which run thousands of basic education schools and literacy centers throughout Bangladesh. CAMPE is attempting to coordinate various initiatives in the area of basic and popular education such that a more concerted attempt to

influence public policy could be made. But several of its members view the coordination function as if it is to control their activity and this dilemma continues to haunt the leadership of CAMPE at this juncture. The key issue is to engage in coordination without attempting to control the priorities, activities or functioning of individual members. In that sense, coordination has to be carried out in an educational and learning way, and not in a controlling and manipulating way.

The third element of problematique relates to the linkage between the person and of the institution. As has been mentioned earlier networks have enormous potential to enlist individuals, even if they operate in rather stifling and restricting institutional framework. They are able to mobilise individual interest, commitment and resources around issues being addressed by the network. Yet, at the same time, resources for continuing and ongoing communication may require institutional support. As many networks try to balance between involvement of the individual and those of the institution, they find themselves in this problematique. Essentially, ideas, experiences and energies are brought together by individuals within the network. Yet, they require institutional support, backing and commitment to play their roles. In early years of the formation of VANI, it was supposed that individuals as leaders of Voluntary Action sharing a common vision could associate with each other. Yet, there was an expectation that these individuals will be back by their institutions in terms of resources, time energy etc. This continued to be a dilemma because VANI was seen as a gathering individuals while institutions were supposed to back them up.

In the case of Participatory Research Networks, the Asian situation is somewhat different from the Latin American. In the former, individual researchers and academics because part of the network very actively and deliberately because academic institutions in Asia were not responsive or linked to the grassroot development process. In Latin America, during the late 1970's and early 1980's, much of that region was under the control of Military Dictatorships and as a result many NGOs had academics actively involved in them already. Thus Latin American Participatory Research Network promoted relationships across institutions, particularly those working within the development sector as NGOs. This automatically brought them in contact with the academics. At the current moment at the global level, CIVICUS as a World Alliance of Citizen Participation is facing similar dilemma. In its broad theme, CIVICUS promotes the role of citizen initiating their own destiny individually and collectively. Therefore, in its linkage building process, it attempts to draw in individuals who have demonstrated their commitment to promote citizen participation in diverse situations. Yet, in its formal membership requirement, CIVICUS is asking for membership fees and, therefore, attracting institutions which have the resources to make such a contribution. Clearly, this is an important problematique and cannot be resolved in either or fashion. It is important to keep in mind there are some tensions associated with person vs institution dilemma.

The fourth problematique is _information vs action._ It is clear
that information is to be shared in order to promote some further
action. Networks do not share information for the sake of sharing
information. There is a larger purpose behind sharing of
information, as defined by the network. For example, then
information shared around Bhopal gas disaster within India and
with counterparts in United States, was expected to result in
actions to alleviate the situation of the affected and to
influence public policy, both in India and the US. Likewise,
during the networking of Participatory Research, it was hoped
that information sharing would be utilized for further action in
the practice of Participatory Research. This sometimes has
happened; many times it did not happen. But one of the outcomes
in the case of Participatory Research Networks was solidarity
action -Solidarity Action with those who are harassed or
intimidated - the practitioners who believe in people-centered
education and development. Thus Participatory Research networks
took important initiatives in solidarity action when several of
its active members in Latin America, Africa and Asia were
illegally detained.

In some cases, the purpose of information is to develop
programmatic action. IRED networking purpose is to promote a
more appropriate grassroot programming among its members.
Whether information shared in the network results in that action
at all is very hard to say. Therefore, some networks try to
include action as part of its agenda. Sharing of information is
based on the assumption that follow-up action will be undertaken
by those involved in the network. This is particularly so in

relation to influencing public policy. Pesticide Action Network (PAN) is one such example which promotes information on hazardous consequences of chemical pesticides but expects its members to take particular action within their local area, with the media with other actors in order to resist the promotion of chemical pesticides throughout the world. This is a very difficult problematique where the choice of the balance between information and action expectations from members of the network can only be situated in a particular context. However, mere sharing of information can serve the purpose of network as happened in the case of Participatory Research networks. But simultaneous expectations for consequent action by members of the network can also be legitimately ensured.

Fourth problematique deals with the question of _focus vs inclusion._ Certain networks tend to focus very precisely and draw in only those who are interested in that precise theme. PAN is one such example. The network in India around Forest Policy during 1982-83 was one such example. These draw only those who are specifically interested in that particular issue in a particular manner. On the other hand, the networks of participatory research were much more inclusive. They included those who were practitioners or academics or researchers or trainers or educators. As a result, it was able to disseminate these ideas and experiences much more widely. It could influence the so-called "unconverted." A very focused network only relates among the "converted" and does not get out its ideas and experiences to the "unconverted."

Third World Network is far more inclusive and produces information on a wide variety of issues which may be of interest to many. Likewise, VANI as a national network of voluntary action is much more inclusive and it draws voluntary actors which who may be involved in a variety of programmes and activities. This is the choice that every network has to make and has to depend on its overall purpose ; but this problematique influences the form it takes and the manner in which it is conducted.

The last problematique can be defined as the one between process and structures. As discussed earlier, networking is a process, an activity . It is a verb, communicating a dynamic process. It is sharing, it is disseminating. Yet, all the processes (like building relationships, linkages, sharing information, communicating) have to be situated within a minimal structure. This is a challenge where certain amount of minimal structure becomes necessary for the continuity and accomplishment of the purposes of the network. Yet, its essential processual nature has to be maintained and the structure has to be that it does not curtail the evolution of those processes. Many a times, networks require material resource, funds for communications, for linkage building. This requirement of material resources necessitates a minimal structure. Thus, there are pressures towards the institutionalisation of many networks. But those have to be critically assessed in the light of their requirement. As mentioned earlier, it is possible that in the early stages a network is essentially a process-oriented mechanism, but slowly evolves a structure appropriate to changes in purposes and may become institutionalised at a later stage to accomplish yet other purposes.

Challenges

The foregoing analysis clearly indicates the enormous challenges that face the functioning of Networks. These challenges need to be addressed in a manner that help strengthen the contribution of networks as mechanisms of communication and influence. Some of the key challenges facing networks are :

a.   ## Cross-Cultural Effectiveness

As networks build linkages across individuals and groups that cut across perspectives and experiences, many issues of multi-culturism emerge in their functioning. As a simple level, there is the challenge of language itself. As mechanism of communication, language is key to the effectiveness of a network. So, in which language to communicate ? Imagine this difficulty in India with so many different languages ! Or, Asian networking challenge in terms of diversity of languages! At a more complex level, modes and styles of communication also get affected by symbols, norms, values and moves which vary a great deal across cultures. South Asian and ASEAN NGO activists find it rather difficult to communicate with each other. Thus, a major challenge in effective networking is to create effective ways of cross-cultural communication - within a network.

b.   ## Global Context and Local Relevance

The local action at grass-roots is increasingly affected by global, macro context. This is well known and acknowledged.

But the challenge is to bring the two experiences and perspectives together within a network. The local practice is always specific, micro, concrete, immediate and tangible. The global context is broad, macro, abstract, long-term and invisible. Bridging the gap and spanning the two perspectives, ways, approaches and experiences is a tough challenge in a network. And yet, it is precisely this difficulty which gives networks their most vibrant and characteristic flavour.

c.   Leadership

Networks require new forms and types of leadership which can address these problematiques creatively. As a horizontal, non-hierarchical mechanism, leadership of a network has to be communicative, inspirational, inclusive, consensual and participatory (Naisbitt, 1985). These are enormous capacities, not easily to find in ordinary people. Extraordinary leadership capacities are need to sustain a network. The dominant models of leadership actually promote controlling, paternalistic and regulatory styles of leadership. Yet, networks need the leadership to emerge, sustain and grow. Without initiative, push, energy and leadership of action and ideas, no network can be effective. The challenge for networks is to find, nurture and promote such leadership within themselves.

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