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Regional Policy Networks:
IFPRI's Experience with Decentralization

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ABSTRACT

Among advocates and practitioners of economic development, networks are all the rage. Networks are an attractive institutional form because they are inexpensive (thanks to today's lower telecommunications costs), egalitarian and inclusive (everyone can be an equal "member"), and hard to criticize (since most networks promise no measurable outputs). Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) like networks in part because they are not governments, and in part because so many NGOs themselves are built around network structures. Even centralized and hierarchical development organizations have become attracted to networks, as an inexpensive way to move closer to their clients and customers.

IFPRI, traditionally a centralized development organization, is now embracing networks as one institutional strategy to achieve "regional decentralization." Since 1999 IFPRI has developed and operated two formal regional networks, in East Africa and South Asia, and additional regional networks have been envisioned for Southern Africa and Central America. IFPRI is also decentralizing some of its work on a bilateral basis within individual countries without reliance on regional networks. This paper conceptualizes, maps out, and assesses IFPRI's various decentralization initiatives.

IFPRI began its history in the 1970s and 1980s as a highly centralized institution, headquartered in Washington, DC, a location conveniently close to key donor and development institutions such as USAID and the World Bank. When donor support for the core CGIAR budget began to slump badly in the 1990s, IFPRI was able to respond with a "2020 Vision" initiative that included more communications efforts to stimulate donor support. Under a second phase of 2020 IFPRI then created a decentralized policy network in East Africa, and by 2002 IFPRI was operating a somewhat less decentralized regional network in South Asia as well, and planning other network activities. As IFPRI moves to decentralize and regionalize its activities, will "regional networks" become the best instrument for achieving these goals?

Networks can be defined as organizations that use flexible and dynamic linkages to connect and reconnect multiple actors into new entities intended to innovate and deliver *non-routine* products or services. In their origin, networks can either be mandated (formal) or emergent (informal). It is widely agreed that emergent or informal networks tend to be the most effective. The basic building blocks of all effective networks are dyadic links of personal trust between pairs of individuals. If formal or mandated networks manage to aggregate and mobilize these vital pre-existing links of personal social capital, they can be highly effective.

Policy networking — whether for research or not — can be difficult to extend into low capacity regions. It is no accident that most studies of successful transnational

policy networking among governments have focused either on the European Union or on trans-Atlantic ties between Europe and the United States. Inadequate or uneven access to modern communications and information technology constrains effective long distance and large-scale policy networking within much of the developing world.

When international policy research organizations attempt to create or sponsor networks in developing countries, they must take care to match network design to local capacity. The weaker the local capacity, the more centralized the network must be at the hub. Only if local capacity is strong will a decentralized network design become appropriate. Hypothetically, we can imagine a typology of five different appropriate network designs matching five different levels of local capacity:

- In regions with *very low capacity*, it may be best not to build a regional network, and to rely instead on **bilateral relationships** with individual countries.
- In regions with *low capacity*, it may be appropriate to begin with a **"hub-and-spoke" network**, with strong guidance from the headquarters hub and little emphasis placed on links between the spokes.
- In regions with *medium capacity*, a **spiderweb network** may be appropriate, with a hub that is still strong, but with greater emphasis placed on links between spokes.
- In regions with *high capacity*, a **traffic-grid network** may work best, with a far less dominant hub at the center and multiple alternative hubs emerging in the region.
- In regions with *very high capacity*, an **Internet model** may be appropriate, with no dominant hubs anywhere, and proliferating connections among all network members.

IFPRI has been learning by trial and error to find a proper match between local capacity and network design. When IFPRI tried to create an ambitious traffic grid network in East Africa, it encountered difficulties due to local capacity deficits. Regional network efforts can struggle in Africa because of very low and uneven capacities among the dozens of countries on the continent, low donor support, and also for political reasons (sub-regional groupings of states are sometimes seen as unwelcome efforts by donors, or by dominant states, to "divide Africa"). Regional and sub-regional institutions in Africa often have large memberships but weak secretariats, little reliable interface with each other, and little proven influence over the actual policies of national governments. These regional institutions reflect the aspirations of many Africans to build greater continental integration, yet regionalization and sub-regionalization efforts in Africa have also been to some extent donor-driven. Institutions and initiatives that aggregate African states give donors a more convenient way to manage assistance programs on the continent. This kind of donor-sponsored regionalization should only be undertaken when it is convenient to Africans as well as donors.

In Africa today, IFPRI is depending more heavily on bilateral relationships with key focus countries. IFPRI's greatest institutional challenge has always been to bridge

the research-to-policy gap, and the probability of bridging this gap goes up when IFPRI staff are outposted not to a regional network hub but closer to policy makers at the national level. Working at the national level is always risky, because it can require IFPRI staff to make specific policy recommendations and then take at least partial responsibility for the outcome. Yet in the past some of IFPRI's highest payoff work has been accomplished at the national level.

IFPRI has had better luck with regional networking in South Asia, where it created a hub-and-spoke network that proved well suited for several reasons to that region. In South Asia, India's dominating size and a strong donor interest in India have recently made the funding of region-wide policy work more difficult. The hub-and-spoke design of IFPRI's South Asian network has given IFPRI staff at the hub greater options to address this problem by cross-subsidizing activities among spokes.

IFPRI's experience thus tends to confirm the expectation that regional network creation will be especially difficult in low capacity regions. Decentralization is an imperative for IFPRI, and networking is imperative as well, yet it is not always appropriate to decentralize through the creation of ambitious *regional* networks.

1. INTRODUCTION

Among advocates and practitioners of economic development, networks are all the rage. Even some of the world's poorest regions, such as Africa, are now rich with networks. Africa has networks for health policy, education, gender issues, human rights issues, capacity building, environmental protection, science and social science research, and even networks for building more networks.[1] Networks are an attractive institutional form because they are inexpensive (thanks to today's lower telecommunications costs), egalitarian and inclusive (everyone can be an equal "member"), and hard to critique (since most networks promise no measurable outputs). Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) like networks in part because they are not governments, and in part because so many NGOs themselves are built around network structures. Even centralized and hierarchical development organizations have come to like networks, as an inexpensive way to move closer to their clients and customers.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), traditionally a centralized development organization, is now embracing networks as one institutional strategy to achieve "regional decentralization." IFPRI's April 2003 Strategy, "Toward Food and Nutrition Security," spells out this decentralization objective in clear language:

> IFPRI recognizes the benefits of regional decentralization for its work and plans to have a larger proportion of IFPRI staff in Africa and Asia in particular. In addition, IFPRI is increasingly engaged with regional policy and research networks in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the main focal regions of its work. The strategy calls for further regional decentralization of IFPRI in a network context. IFPRI will carefully consider the relative merits of a strong set of research teams at headquarters versus increased distribution in developing country regions (Toward Food and Nutrition Security, April 2003, p. 34).

It is still a bit early to judge IFPRI's success in using of networks to achieve regional decentralization. Since 1999 IFPRI has developed and operated two formal regional networks, in East Africa and South Asia, and additional regional networks have been envisioned for Southern Africa and Central America. IFPRI is also decentralizing some of its work on a bilateral basis within individual countries without reliance on regional networks. Here we attempt to conceptualize and map out these various decentralization initiatives. First, we offer a brief background discussion of the imperative felt by IFPRI to pursue regional decentralization, separating the imperative to decentralize from the accompanying urge to regionalize. Second, we lay out a theoretical understanding of networks and how they operate. Third, we hypothesize appropriate network structures for different developing-country regions based primarily on

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[1] The African Information and Communication Technology Research Network at the LINK Centre, the University of Witswatersrand, promotes information technology in Africa to facilitate networking.

differences in local capacity. Then we review IFPRI's experience to date, particularly in East Africa and South Asia, offering a preliminary test of these hypotheses. We conclude that decentralization is indeed important for IFPRI, but regional policy networks may not always be the most attractive instruments for pursuing decentralization in low capacity regions.

2. DECENTRALIZATION VERSUS REGIONALIZATION

IFPRI is a donor-funded international policy research organization mandated to generate and share new knowledge about food and agricultural policies as a global public good. IFPRI began its history in the 1970s and 1980s as a highly centralized institution, headquartered in Washington, DC, a location conveniently close to key donor and development institutions such as USAID and the World Bank. In its infancy, IFPRI needed to establish credibility in the eyes of these Washington institutions by producing high quality research on policy themes important to donors, employing researchers with academic credentials up to international standards. It was easiest for IFPRI to meet these demanding research quality standards by building a highly centralized headquarters-based research staff, and IFPRI's research reputation was quickly established.

When donor support for the core CGIAR budget then began to slump badly in the 1990s, IFPRI was able to respond with a new strategic thrust that included more communication efforts and a measure of regional decentralization. In 1993, IFPRI's Director General launched the "2020 Vision for Food, Agriculture, and the Environment Initiative," an outreach effort designed to revive donor support by communicating the substance and urgency of international food security and rural poverty challenges in a format and language more readily accessible to non-specialists and non-academics. In a first phase of this 2020 Vision Initiative (1993–96), IFPRI primarily targeted international donors and intergovernmental organizations in the OECD countries, but regional conferences were also organized in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to present 2020 Vision materials more directly to developing country governments. In a second phase of 2020 beginning in 1997, IFPRI began sponsoring still more local work through the creation of regional policy research "Networks" in both East and (initially) West Africa.[2]

Movement at IFPRI toward regional decentralization then intensified in 2002–03, both before and then after the arrival of a new Director General. In South Asia, in January 2002, IFPRI's Markets, Trade, and Institutions Division (MTID) launched a new multidivisional South Asian Initiative (SAI), which included as one of its components a Policy Analysis and Advisory Network for South Asia (PAANSA) to sponsor both country-level and region-wide activities. In Southern Africa, in November 2002, IFPRI signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) to undertake joint research and capacity-strengthening activities in that region. This was expected to be one of several new networking initiatives in Africa to be managed within IFPRI's new Development Strategy and Governance Division (DSGD). In East Africa, the original 2020 Vision

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[2] Robert L. Paarlberg, "External Impact Assessment of IFPRI's 2020 Vision for Food, Agriculture, and the Environment Initiative," Impact Assessment Discussion Paper No. 10 (Washington, DC: IFPRI, June 1999).

East Africa Network was moved into DSGD in 2003, and was substantially recast. In April 2004, DSGD also outposted a Senior Research Fellow as Senior Research Advisor to the Secretariat of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in Pretoria, South Africa, to head a collaboration with NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP). IFPRI also began moving toward regional or local policy research activities in Ethiopia, Central America, and China.

IFPRI is thus deeply into a process of decentralization, often in a regional mode. Yet decentralization and regionalization do not have to go together. It would be possible for IFPRI to regionalize its research focus without any decentralization, simply by reorganizing some of its headquarters research divisions around geographic regions. Remaining centralized at headquarters has seemed unattractive, however, given IFPRI's enlarged role as a capacity-building and policy communications institute. These are activities that seem best undertaken in close contact with local research communities, partnering institutions, and national governments. The traditional capacity-building approach — bringing local researchers to IFPRI headquarters for a period of training and collaboration — may not strengthen local institutions and may do little to bridge local research-to-policy gaps.

Just as it would have been possible to regionalize without decentralization, it might now be possible for IFPRI to decentralize without always regionalizing.[3] IFPRI can outpost research staff to individual client countries, building or making use of policy networks *within* those countries rather than across entire regions or sub-regions. Indeed, some of IFPRI's decentralization efforts are now moving toward this bilateral "focus country" model. Taking this approach does not have to imply an abandonment of all regional gains. In regions with similar political histories, cultures, or ecosystems, policy lessons learned in significant focus countries might be generalized to near neighbors. Conducting policy research in a fully regional fashion may be imperative only in a few areas, such river basin management, labor migration, or commercial trade.

Some geographic regions are becoming undeniably more important than others to IFPRI. As pointed out in IFPRI's 2003 Strategy, broad and deep food insecurity and undernutrition are increasingly concentrated in just two world regions: South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. This geographic concentration of hunger problems argues strongly for a more local or regional focus that pays special attention to distinct conditions in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Regional or local decentralization also makes increasing sense for IFPRI because so many other partner and donor organizations are themselves outposting staff to regions and to focus countries. As more policy research partnerships and funding sources move out to the field, IFPRI's research staff can less-well afford to remain desk-bound at

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[3] The issue of governmental decentralization is usefully considered on the World Bank's Decentralization website: http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/decentralization/index.htm.

headquarters. Outposting is a way to remain close to donors and partners, not just clients and customers.

Having agreed that IFPRI should decentralize, at times in a regional mode, we must still ask if "regional networks" are the best institutional instrument for achieving these goals. As a research organization, IFPRI must engage in a wide range of demanding activities. The policy research "cycle" at IFPRI can be understood to include at least nine different steps, each of which makes a different set of demands on the institution:

- Priority setting,
- project initiation and design,
- fundraising,
- budget allocation,
- data gathering,
- data analysis and write up,
- final review for quality,
- publication, and
- extension of published results to the intended policy audience.

In order to judge how such activities might be enhanced through regional networking, we begin by asking in theory what the benefits of different kinds of policy networks might be.

3. POLICY NETWORKS IN THEORY

Systematic studies of networks abound (the academic field of *social* network analysis is more than 70 years old), yet studies of policy research networks are scarce. Most studies of formal and informal network structures continue to focus on social communities or on business firms, rather than on policy research institutions such as IFPRI (Monge and Contractor 2003). International policy networks are now widely studied (Heclo 1978; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Peterson 2003), yet among these only a few engage primarily in policy research, as opposed to advocacy. Wolfgang Reinicke lists six different functions that international policy networks can perform and only one of these involves policy research.[4] Reinicke points to the CGIAR as a leading example of an international policy network designed to develop and disseminate knowledge,[5] yet the CG produces far more knowledge about science than about policy. Among the CGIAR centers, only IFPRI is primarily tasked with generating and disseminating policy research.

Whatever their function, and whether global or not, networks differ significantly from other organizational forms. Miles and Snow (1986) posit that three earlier organizational forms dominated most of the 20th century: traditional "functional" organizations built around specialization and central coordination (e.g., assembly line manufacturing); then "multidivisional" organizations featuring centralized resource allocation and performance evaluation, but with divisional autonomy and less rigid specialization (a form pioneered by General Motors in the 1940s); and then finally "matrix" organizations (popular in the 1960s and 1970s) that sought to combine the best of both the functional and divisional models. "Network" organizations did not begin to emerge as a dominant form in the Western business world until the 1990s. Networks can be defined as organizations that use flexible and dynamic linkages to connect and reconnect multiple actors into new entities intended to innovate and deliver *non-routine* products or services. Networks are best suited to tasks that require flexibility and innovation, versus routine production and the delivery of standardized products or services.

Network organizations can be value-enhancing in several ways. By linking previously disconnected actors together, they help create the trusting relationships ("social capital") needed for effective human cooperation. In addition to building or aggregating social capital, networks can also reduce the transactions costs of cooperation

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[4] These six are "shaping the policy agenda; facilitating the process of negotiation and setting international standards; helping to develop and disseminate knowledge [this comes closest to IFPRI's traditional mission]; helping to create and deepen international markets; providing mechanisms for implementing global agreements; and building trust [something missing here, as well as closing quote marks] the social capital (Reinicke et al. 2000).

[5] The other two knowledge-developing GPP networks cited in the Reinicke study were the Roll Back Malaria (RBM) initiative and the Urban Management Programme (UMP).

by linking previously disconnected actors together. Because networks can facilitate cooperation by mobilizing trust and reducing transactions costs, they are potentially useful in supporting the production of public goods and the protection of common pool resources. In the specific area of research and learning, network organizations can help create "critical mass" by adding new members to an endeavor at low marginal cost, then accelerating the spread of good ideas through a "contagion effect" among linked members.[6]

In their origin, networks can either be mandated (formal) or emergent (informal). It is widely agreed that emergent or informal networks tend to be the most effective. Studies of formal or mandated networks show that such entities seldom add significantly to organizational success (Monge and Contractor 2003, p. 9), and they add the least if they are set up at cross-purposes with pre-existing informal networks. In contrast to informal networks which evolve from the bottom up in a compositional manner, mandated networks tend to be created from the top-down and can thus be burdened with too much hierarchy. The CGIAR, as an alliance of donors in support of 15 autonomous international agricultural research centers, can actually be classified as an informal network, since it has no secretariat of its own (secretariat and technical support are provided through the World Bank and the FAO) and no independent legal status (Reinicke et al. 2000). The basic building blocks of all effective networks are dyadic links of personal trust between pairs of individuals. If formal or mandated networks manage to aggregate or mobilize these vital pre-existing links of personal social capital, they can be highly effective (Burt 1995). Networks with multiple functions can, of course, be formal and informal at the same time ("heterarchical" rather than hierarchical). In such networks, some functions will be managed within a formal and hierarchical structure (e.g., financial management), while other functions will be entrusted to emergent linkages among members.

It is useful to distinguish between the power of a network and the location of power within a network. Powerful networks will include those able to attract human and financial capital away from competing organizations. In the developing world, if human and financial capital is not abundant, competition for human resources among nascent networks and other institutions can be intense, and even problematic. Efforts by donors to use financial capital to mandate the creation of new networks can trigger unfortunate bidding wars over scarce human capital. In societies where the local pool of trained human capital is still shallow, donor investments to build more human capital might logically precede or at least accompany investments to create still more mandated networks.

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[6] On the other hand, there is a "Law of N-Squared" in network theory which posits that mandatory networking can just as easily increase transactions costs, because the number of potential links in any network organization increases geometrically with each added network member, soon exceeding the communications capacity of most members. This helps explain why the larger the network, the more likely it is to fall under the Iron Law of Oligarchy, an assertion that every organization will eventually tend to fall under the effective control of only a few people (Monge and Contractor 2003).

Competitive power dynamics can also emerge within a network. The exchanges that take place within networks are typically positive for all, yet often more positive for some than for others. It is generally posited that the greatest gains from exchange within any network will reside in the hands of those that provide links to others in the network who are not themselves directly connected. Being a link between others not directly connected confers brokering power within a network (Burt 1995, p. 48), a "betweeness" advantage maximized when a member has large numbers of diverse links to other members. The opposite condition is to be trapped in a clique with just a small number of links, and all to fellow clique members. In highly centralized networks, brokering power tends to reside at a single center hub linked to all other members by spokes, with the members at the ends of those spokes poorly connected to each other.

In addition to brokering advantages, resource advantages can also be a source of power within a network. The network members that possess more useful information, more social capital, or more human and financial capital will naturally enjoy a position of advantage when initiating exchanges (Monge and Contractor 2003, p. 24). These resource advantages will then typically evolve into a positional "betweeness" advantage as well, once the less well-endowed network members begin seeking exclusive dyadic links to the resource-rich member. If networks are populated by members with dramatically unequal resources, those who are resource rich can tend to become hubs sooner or later. Network organizations made up of unequally endowed members can display so much hierarchy as to no longer constitute a genuine network. When working in developing countries where human and financial resources are not yet abundant, relatively well-endowed organizations such as IFPRI can find it a challenge to mandate the creation of genuinely equitable, non-centralized networks.

Policy networking — whether for research or not — has been difficult to extend into low capacity regions. It is no accident that most studies of successful transnational policy networking among governments have focused either on the European Union (Peterson 2003) or on trans-Atlantic ties between Europe and the United States (Slaughter 1997). Slaughter's powerful and recently popularized vision of states disaggregating into sub-governmental units (courts, regulatory agencies, legislatures) and then networking at this disaggregated level across borders, is a vision that applies well enough between the U.S. and the EU, or between the U.S. and Canada, but one that works far less well among the low capacity and more centralized governmental units found in developing Asia or Africa.[7] Developing-country governments find it more difficult to participate in transnational policy networking because contain fewer individual judges, regulators, or legislators with both the capacity and the autonomy needed to engage deeply with counterparts across borders. When transnational networking takes place among government officials from developing regions, it more often takes place formally rather than informally, and usually at a higher (ministerial or even presidential) level. IFPRI has been able to find sub-ministerial intergovernmental

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[7] Slaughter's 2004 book-length discussion of intergovernmental networks — in her three select areas of information sharing, enforcement, and regulatory harmonization — is dominated by examples from Europe and North America (Slaughter 2004).

network partners among some large developing countries, such as China and India, and in some river basin regions where transgovernmental ties tend to form of necessity, but smoothly functioning international policy networks among lower level government officials are frequently unavailable in the developing world.[8]

Inadequate or uneven access to modern communications and information technology constrains effective long distance and large-scale policy networking within much of the developing world. Donors and international NGO representatives can find it relatively easy to network with each other in developing-country regions, given their ready access to vehicles, mobile telephones, email, and the Internet, yet local government officials and even some university-based researchers will lack access to these facilitating technologies in very poor countries. Internet-based social science research networks within low capacity regions in the developing world, such as the Global Development Network (GDN), are struggling against these digital divide realities.[9]

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[8] It is to be hoped that the continued spread of up-to-date telecommunications systems into the developing world will speed the growth of effective cross-border policy networking. Yet reduced telecommunications costs have not always conferred an advantage to longer range versus shorter-range networks. The introduction of the telephone in the early 20th century actually centralized many business networks, by facilitating the construction of high-rise buildings containing concentrated office clusters on multiple floors linked by phone (Pool et al. 1977). Modern communications technologies such as e-mail may reduce the need to travel, yet this can paradoxically undercut long-distance networking if it reduces the face-to-face interactions that are still needed to build social capital within a network. Empirical studies of e-mail and Internet impacts on organizational structure have so far failed to turn up consistent evidence of a decentralization effect (Monge and Contractor 2003, p. 231–232). Contextual factors other than technology (e.g., managerial preferences) appear to dominate when determining the degree of centralization likely to be found within a network.

[9] The Africa Window of GDN profiles African researchers and research centers, and publicizes funding opportunities for African researchers, yet up through 2004 this window was run by a GDN team outside of the region rather than by an African team, implying weak local ownership for this network. For information on GDN's Africa Window, see http://www.gdnet.org/regional windows/.

4. MATCHING NETWORK DESIGN TO LOCAL CAPACITY

When international policy research organizations such as IFPRI attempt to create or sponsor networks in developing countries, they must take care to match network design to local capacity. Hypothetically, this would call for the sponsorship of more ambitious networks in higher capacity regions, and less ambitious networks in regions with less capacity. In regions with very low capacity, the attempt to sponsor a new policy network might even have to be delayed, pending larger investments in education, training, and local institutional development. In these very low capacity regions, perhaps the best way for IFPRI to decentralize and localize its policy research and communications operations will be to postpone regional networking and begin by working bilaterally, country by country.

The decision rule for appropriate regional network design thus might be a matching exercise between local capacity and network centralization. The weaker the local capacity, the more centralized the network must be at the IFPRI hub. If local capacity is stronger, more decentralized network designs become appropriate. Hypothetically, we can imagine a typology of five different appropriate network designs matching five different levels of local capacity (Table 1):

Table 1: Matching regional network design to local capacity

Local Capacity Level	Appropriate Network Design
Very Low	**Do not rely on a regional network**. Build bilateral relationships country by country, perhaps by out-posting staff.
Low	**Hub-and-Spoke Network**: Strong hub at IFPRI headquarters with little emphasis placed on links between spokes.
Medium	**Spiderweb Network**: Strong hub at IFPRI headquarters but with greater emphasis placed on links between spokes.
High	**Traffic-Grid Network**: Hub at IFPRI headquarters less dominant, with multiple alternative hubs developing in the region.
Very High	**Internet Model Network**: No dominant hubs anywhere, as connections among all network members proliferate.

Where regions have just barely the local capacity required to network, the appropriate starting point may be a highly centralized hub-and-spoke network, with multiple country team members at the ends of each spoke, but with nearly all the brokering and resource allocation powers still located at the IFPRI headquarters hub. In regions with slightly higher capacity, IFPRI might consider moving to a slightly less centralized spiderweb network, where IFPRI headquarters or a local outposted IFPRI staff member remains the dominant hub but with more independent connections among the country teams and team members at the ends of the spokes. Under this design, IFPRI

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yields some of its brokering and resource-allocation power to network members in the region, at a distance from the hub. In regions with still higher local capacity, a traffic grid model might become appropriate. Regional networks built on this model would have multiple hubs, including hubs in the region beyond the IFPRI hub. Some links in this network grid would be more heavily used than others, and the central IFPRI hub would still be the most visible, but there would be no single choke point in the grid to block local brokering options. In regions of very high capacity — probably not including any of the developing-country regions where IFPRI currently works — a completely decentralized Internet-style network design might become appropriate, with informal and emergent networking activities eventually replacing formal and mandated activities completely.

IFPRI's experience with regional networks so far can provide only a preliminary and partial test of this probable relationship between local capacity and appropriate regional network design. Lessons nonetheless can be learned. In the brief review to follow we see that when IFPRI tried to create a decentralized traffic grid network in East Africa, it did encounter difficulties due to deficits in local capacity. IFPRI has had better luck with a far less decentralized hub-and-spoke network in South Asia. And in some low capacity countries in Africa today, IFPRI has begun to experiment with a more bilateral decentralization strategy that is not so reliant on regional networks.

5. IFPRI'S NETWORK EXPERIENCE

IFPRI has recently launched or envisioned at least three different regional network designs. A traffic grid network was created in East Africa by IFPRI's 2020 Vision initiative in 1999. A hub-and-spoke network was created in South Asia by MTID in 2002. A partnership with a hub-and-spoke network was also briefly considered for Southern Africa by DSGD in 2003.[10] Of these three regional networks, one no longer exists in its original form (the 2020 Vision network in East Africa, now having been taken over by DSGD and altered) and one was never fully created (the DSGD Southern Africa network), so neat comparisons of network performance and output are not possible. Yet even a rough comparison of these three initiatives confirms the importance of taking local capacity into account.

In the regions of East Africa and South Asia, local human capacity to conduct world-class food and agricultural policy research tends to be both weak an uneven. In East Africa, all six of the countries that formed IFPRI's 2020 Vision East African Network are classified by UNDP as countries of "low human development." As Table 2 shows, all six of these nations have human development index (HDI) rankings deep into the bottom fifth of all nations (rankings of 146 or higher out of 175 nations). By comparison in South Asia, only two of IFPRI's six PAANSA countries (Nepal and Pakistan) fall into the "low human development category," with all six having HDI rankings higher than each the East African network countries. Table 2 also provides, as a crude measure of local capacity to engage in high quality food and agricultural policy research, the numbers of researchers in each of these countries who have recently been members of the International Association of Agricultural Economists (IAAE). Here the largest contrasts are within regions, with India holding far more top research capacity than the other South Asian countries, and with Kenya and Ethiopia showing significantly greater capacity than any of their East African neighbors. The overall pattern, however, remains one of conspicuous weakness. In nine of the 12 IFPRI network countries in these two regions, IAAE membership has averaged single digits only.

Finding network structures to accommodate these weak and/or uneven local research capacities has been a challenge for IFPRI. The structures that have been attempted so far have all been "heterarchical" in the sense that some functions have been more centralized than others. We can best describe these heterarchical structures by recalling the nine-step policy research cycle mentioned earlier, and then mapping the physical location where each of these research steps takes place within each of the network designs attempted so far.

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[10] IFPRI also maintains several other regional initiatives, including a regional network on HIV/AIDS, Rural Livelihoods and Food Security (RENEWAL) and a collaborative Mashreq and Maghreb (M&M) project.

Table 2: Capacity measures for IFPRI network countries

Country	HDI Rank	Average number IAAE members, 1999–2004[11]
East Africa (2020 Vision East Africa Network countries)		
Ethiopia	169	14
Kenya	146	25
Malawi	162	5
Mozambique	170	7
Tanzania	160	6
Uganda	147	9
South Asia (SAI/PAANSA Network countries)		
Bangladesh	139	7
Bhutan	136	0
India	127	34
Nepal	143	2
Pakistan	144	2
Sri Lanka	99	4

East Africa Network (2020 Vision)

IFPRI's 2020 Vision East Africa Network (EAN) operated from 1999–2003, and eventually included six countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda. This was a "traffic grid" network with substantial decentralization, including significantly autonomous country team hubs within each member country. Each country had access to the Network through a "country team" consisting of 8–11 nationals representing a variety of institutions and professions linked to food and agricultural policy. In each Network country, IFPRI approached a leading researcher to manage the job of assembling a country team, but final country team membership was not under IFPRI's control. Each team had a Chair who was typically a senior government official, and a Coordinator who was usually an experienced researcher. Modest compensation was paid to country team members and leaders. The direction-setting body of the Network was the Regional Advisory Committee (RAC), consisting of the chairs of the six country teams, or their representatives, and a local Chairman from the region. A widely respected senior Kenyan policy leader and a former IFPRI board member, who was one of the original conceptualizers of the Network initiative, served as Chairman. The RAC met formally once a year in various capitals in the region. The administration of this Network at the regional level was the responsibility of a Network Coordinator

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[11] For purposes of comparison, there tend to be many more IAAE memberships in leading OECD countries: United Kingdom 68, Germany 126, Japan 91, and United States 167 (National membership counts provided by IAAE, 12 August 2004). There are, however, some problems about where some individuals are coded for in this database, and these could not be taken into account in presenting these data.

heading a small office in Kampala. The Network Coordinator was an African expected to serve the country teams and the local RAC, but the Coordinator worked for IFPRI and was selected by and reported to the Head of the 2020 Vision initiative at IFPRI headquarters in the office of the DG.

The principal activity of the 2020 Vision East Africa Network was sponsorship of local policy research through a competitive research grants program. The significantly decentralized character of the Network was visible at nearly every stage in this competitive grant research cycle, as shown in Table 3.

Research Priority Setting

In the 2020 Vision EAN, research priority setting was a locally controlled function, and not always effectively controlled as a consequence. Each independent country team was invited to prepare a "country paper" describing its own national research priorities at an inaugural regional workshop in Entebbe in October 1998. IFPRI leadership, including the DG, participated in this first regional meeting, but IFPRI never tabled a list of its own research priorities, and did not even force a consolidation of the numerous and diverse priorities brought forward by the country teams. Research priority setting became, by default, a national country team function, and most country teams lapsed into setting priorities on a case by case basis, supporting good research proposals whether they fit a previously identified research objective or not. This was an approach that made some sense for a very low capacity region, where only a handful of local researchers were putting forward good proposals every year.

Table 3: Allocation of Research Tasks—East Africa Network (2020 Vision) 1999–2003

Research Priority Setting:	Local Country Teams
Project Initiation and Design:	Local researchers
Fundraising:	IFPRI HQ (2020)
Budget Allocation:	Shared — Local RAC, Local Network Coordinator, IFPRI HQ (2020)
Data Gathering:	Local researchers
Data Analysis and Write-up:	Local researchers
Final Review and Quality Control:	Shared — PEC, Local Network Coordinator
Publication:	Local Network Coordinator and IFPRI HQ (2020)
Extension of Published Results:	Local Country Teams, Local RAC

RAC = Regional Advisory Committee
PEC = Proposal Evaluation Committee

Research Project Initiation and Design

The EAN was highly decentralized at this second stage of the research cycle, relying entirely on local African researchers to propose fundable projects. These local researchers were invited (as individuals or teams) to compete for one-year grants of roughly $15,000 each. Local researchers appreciated the flexibility of this approach, yet it also implied a certain lack of control (even by country teams) over the direction of research, and in the end it also fell short in generating the desired number of fundable projects. IFPRI's original goal was to disburse roughly $200,000 per year in research support, which would have meant awarding roughly 13 grants per year in the region. In the three rounds of competition that were held (in 2000, 2001, and 2002) the EAN was able to elicit, on average, only 10 fundable grants per year.

IFPRI's sensible response to this shortage of strong proposals in East Africa was to schedule more proposal writing workshops to train local researchers, which transformed the initiative into one of capacity building, alongside research. In 2002 alone, IFPRI's Strategic Training and Policy Communication Program conducted two-day proposal writing workshops with local collaborators in all six Network countries, reaching a total of 195 participants. Many of these researchers subsequently submitted proposals for Round Three of the competition, but local capacity deficits in some countries continued to limit the submission of high-quality proposals. Researchers in Tanzania submitted only seven proposals for consideration over three years, and only two of these were funded. Researchers in Mozambique submitted only one fundable proposal.

Fundraising

Fundraising to support the 2020 Vision EAN was understandably a headquarters function, indeed it was largely a DG function. In August 1996, the DG approached DANIDA with an initial request for planning support to launch 2020 Vision networks in both East and West Africa, and subsequently with a 1998 request for $5 million over four years to fund the operational phase of these two proposed networks. The donor response was sufficient to fund only the East Africa Network, but eventually DANIDA, GTZ, NORAD, the EU, and Rockefeller made a total of $3.16 million available for the EAN.

Budget Allocation

The allocation of Network funds was a function successfully shared between IFPRI headquarters, the RAC, and the local country teams. It was the RAC, not the Network Coordinator or the DG's Office, that effectively controlled the annual awarding of competitive grants. This degree of local control was frustrating to headquarters when the RAC proved reluctant to terminate funding on non-performing grants. The RAC was also empowered to make formal recommendations regarding the expenditure of Network funds for non-research activities, such as national or regional policy fora, but in these cases IFPRI headquarters did retain a veto. Some country teams went directly to headquarters in search of non-research funding. The Ethiopian country team secured

funding for two highly successful national policy forums after approaching IFPRI headquarters bilaterally. Later the chair of the Malawi country team also approached IFPRI bilaterally seeking funding for a national policy conference, but in this case the proposed conference budget of $20,000 exceeded what IFPRI headquarters was willing to consider.

Data Gathering

Data to support research projects was gathered locally by local researchers, either at the national level or at the district or project level. The small size of the EAN competitive grants usually implied data collection across only a narrow geographic base and time period. These data limitations tended to limit aggregation to the national level, let alone cross-regional comparisons. On the other hand, those EAN research efforts could serve as useful pilot projects for larger research efforts financed at the national level, and some became models followed by researchers in other network countries.

Data Analysis and Write-up

The EAN small grants program also left data analysis and write-up entirely in the hands of local researchers, a practice that contributed to a very low project completion rate. In the first two Rounds of grant competition, a total of 21 research projects were funded, but of these 21 projects nine failed to produce a draft report. Of the 12 research teams that did submit draft reports, only six were able to respond to external reviews with a revised draft.[12] This low completion rate reflected weak capacity among researchers in the region. It also reflected some distraction among these researchers. In East Africa, resources and opportunities always seem to be chasing after the same small number of qualified policy researchers, so rather than complete an EAN research project some grantees dropped their work to accept more lucrative consulting or research opportunities from others. Some projects also lingered too long at the write-up phase because of IFPRI's decision (deferring to the RAC) not to set a firm cut-off date to end eligibility for the final tranche of grant funding.

Final Review and Quality Control

Research projects in the original 2020 Vision EAN were screened for quality at three different points. Draft proposals were first subjected to country team review and critique. Revised proposals were then screened by an independent Proposal Evaluation Committee (PEC), made up of five senior researchers, some Africans and also some outsiders from academia, the donor community, the CGIAR system, the private sector, and private foundations. The RAC would not approve a proposal for funding unless the PEC had also made a positive recommendation. Third, at the end of a project the draft research results were submitted to the Network Coordinator for a final blind peer review by at least two outside evaluators. The Coordinator could then impose significant

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[12] These data reflect the state of the grants program in mid-2003, when 2020 custody of the EAN came to an end.

requirements for revision upon authors prior to any IFPRI publication of the results. The final external review proved too difficult a test for some researchers, as noted above. The presence of a more active and supportive Network Coordinator in Kampala might have helped local researchers to make their way through this demanding review process.[13]

Publication

In the EAN 2020 Vision network model, once final research results were reviewed, revised, and ready for publication, all editing and production obligations were assumed by the Network Coordinator and the Head of 2020 in the DG's Office. Final results were published in the form of a 2020 Vision Network for East Africa Report, summarized as a Network policy brief, and posted on the Network website. The sluggish production of final research results meant that few projects had reached this stage by the time the EAN was moved from the 2020 office to DSGD in 2003. As of August 2003, only one final research report had been published.

Extension of Published Results and Policy Communication

In the original EAN 2020 Vision model, the extension and communication of newly published results was to be a responsibility of local country teams and the RAC. The country teams had been built to include both researchers and senior government officials, so as to ensure from the start a narrowing of the research-to-policy gap. This design worked well enough in Kenya, where the competitive grants program did produce some important research results (e.g., a study on animal health delivery systems in marginal areas that was published and reprinted and received wide attention throughout the region), but in the other countries of the Network the country teams found they had little new research to communicate. Prior to its move into DSGD in 2003, the EAN's most prominent policy communications efforts were two policy fora held in Ethiopia both focused on technology diffusion and grain-pricing policy. In planning both of these fora, IFPRI's Head of 2020 worked bilaterally with the Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI), an organization well placed inside the office of the Prime Minister that was fortunately headed by the chair of Ethiopia's country team. The (commissioned) papers and summarized discussions from the first forum were promptly edited by IFPRI and EDRI, and then published in June 2002 as 2020 Vision NEA Report 1, with an accompanying policy brief. A second EAN-sponsored grain pricing policy forum was held in Ethiopia in May 2003, with the same high-level attendance, more commissioned papers, and an even wider impact on the national policy debate. Once again, backstopping from IFPRI headquarters was an essential ingredient to this policy communication success.

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[13] The first EAN Network Coordinator served formally from May 1, 1999, until May 14, 2002, but was inactive during the final six months of this service. Later in 2002, a new Network Coordinator took over, but worked for most of his first year in Washington, DC, before outposting to Kampala in August 2003, by which time control of the network had been shifted out of 2020 and into DSGD. Thus, for more than a year, there was no active Network Coordinator working in the region.

Was Local Ownership a Mistake in East Africa?

The traffic grid design of the 2020 Vision East Africa Network was intended to ensure a great deal of local ownership. In retrospect, it might have been better to provide more guidance and do more brokering at the IFPRI headquarters hub. Many of the local country teams and researchers were not prepared to take the initiatives that would be required to utilize the competitive grants program effectively, and the links between these country teams never became robust. The 2020 Vision EAN evolved quickly back into a hub-and-spoke operation with six relatively separate and autonomous country team spokes. The country teams in Kenya and Ethiopia, the two higher capacity states in the region, were quite effective in developing country-level Network activities (a strong research program in Kenya, a strong policy forum process in Ethiopia), but the other four country teams were less successful in taking ownership of the initiative. Particularly in Malawi and Mozambique, where local capacity and motivated leadership were both lacking, country teams lapsed into inactivity and the competitive grants program went under-utilized. The 2020 Vision EAN was a modest research success at the country level in Kenya, and a clear policy communication success in Ethiopia, but elsewhere its strongest value came from its improvised capacity-building activities, and then from its role in conceptualizing a new collaborative effort to strengthen M.Sc. degree programs in agricultural economics in Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa.

IFPRI also learned from its early East African network experience how difficult it can be to find and retain effective regional network coordinators. These must be individuals with both strong scholarly credentials and superb managerial skills, and they must be able to rise above their national identity and bring the light personal touch needed to work equitably with a wide range of individuals and institutions across multiple borders. These highly capable individuals must be willing to accept a posting in the region, rather than at IFPRI's comfortable headquarters location in Washington, DC. If the remote location and the administrative demands of the job begin getting in the way of their own career advancement as researchers, these highly capable individuals can be expected to move on.

The Policy Analysis and Advisory Network for South Asia (PAANSA)

In January 2002, IFPRI launched its new South Asia Initiative (SAI). This was a multidivisional effort within IFPRI led by the Markets, Trade, and Institutions Division (MTID) and the Communications Division (CD). As one part of this initiative, IFPRI created the Policy Analysis and Advisory Network for South Asia (PAANSA). There are six PAANSA countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) and a total of roughly 50 individual PAANSA members (21 from India, the largest country in the region; 9 from Bangladesh; 7 from Pakistan; 6 from Nepal; 4 from Sri Lanka; and 3 from Bhutan). These network members have been chosen by IFPRI, and PAANSA is managed at IFPRI headquarters by the Director of MTID, a Senior Research Fellow in CD, and the South Asia Coordinator in MTID.

The PAANSA network in South Asia differs significantly from the original 2020 Vision network in East Africa. Whereas EAN was intended to function like a traffic grid with considerable local ownership, the research part of PAANSA operates more like a hub-and-spoke network, with management and most research initiatives led from IFPRI headquarters. At the ends of its spokes, PAANSA does not have institutionalized country teams with designated chairs, coordinators, and a budget. PAANSA only has individual members. PAANSA has not tried to operate a local competitive research grants program, and for its first two years PAANSA did not even have a Network Coordinator posted to the region. In countries where donor funding is available, PAANSA sponsors local and collaborative research primarily at the initiative of IFPRI headquarters, one project at a time. In part because the PAANSA hub keeps such firm control, the local research sponsored within this network has been completed and published on schedule. Compared to EAN, the PAANSA in South Asia has also been far more successful in sponsoring a wide range of events — workshops, conferences, brainstorming sessions, policy dialogues, and publication projects — that go beyond research. These activities also follow the hub-and-spoke model, as they tend to be planned and managed from headquarters.

Allocation of Research Tasks: PAANSA (2002–2004)

Research Priority Setting:	Shared — IFPRI HQ (SAI) and local country teams
Project Initiation and Design:	IFPRI HQ (SAI)
Fundraising:	IFPRI HQ (SAI)
Budget Allocation:	IFPRI HQ (SAI)
Data Gathering:	Local researchers
Data Analysis and Write-up:	Shared — Local researchers and IFPRI HQ (SAI)
Final Review and Quality Control	IFPRI HQ (SAI)
Publication:	IFPRI HQ (SAI)
Extension of Published Results:	Shared — Local researchers and IFPRI HQ (SAI)

Research Priority Setting

In PAANSA, research priority setting is an informal and ongoing activity, shared between IFPRI headquarters and country team members in the region. PAANSA's first priority-setting exercise took place at a workshop attended by the new Indian members of the Network in January 2002. The priorities identified at this meeting included a need to promote the role of the private sector in the procurement and distribution of agricultural commodities, the advance of institutional and pricing reforms for major agricultural input markets and input subsidies, and diversification into higher value agriculture for smallholders. Three months later, a region-wide priority-setting exercise took place coincident with a joint conference between SAI and the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER). At this conference, PAANSA members from the region met, identified common themes, and agreed that the other individual

member countries in the region should hold their own consultative priority-setting meetings similar to the earlier Indian meeting. By the end of 2003, PAANSA meetings had been held in five out of the six countries of the region; and in August 2003, SAI held a region-wide PAANSA conference, again in New Delhi. At these and at numerous other meetings and workshops, research priority setting discussions were ongoing.

Despite the widely participatory nature of these multiple priority-setting meetings, the IFPRI hub has clearly influenced the outcome, and the research themes finally established for PAANSA correspond closely to the themes earlier established at IFPRI headquarters for the larger SAI (e.g., national and regional market and trade policies, agricultural diversification, and agro-processing). One impediment to effective bottom-up priority setting has been earmarked donor funding. Roughly 80 percent of the resources raised for PAANSA so far have been earmarked by for work in India, making it difficult for PAANSA to be responsive to locally generated research priorities in countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan. PAANSA's leadership continues to work at raising significant donor funds for Bangladesh and Pakistan, but as yet without success. PAANSA tries where it can to cross-subsidize under-funded countries through re-allocations from over-funded countries, but the legal and political limits to this approach are obvious. The disproportionate concentration of donor interest in India has prevented Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Bhutan from participating fully in many of the activities of PAANSA.

Project Initiation and Design

By the end of 2003, SAI had launched 14 research studies on various food security issues in India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, based on the priority-setting exercises undertaken during the PAANSA meetings. PAANSA has no separate competitive grants program operated by its own members, so when research projects are launched within PAANSA they tend to be launched similar to other SAI research projects, at the initiative of headquarters. Typically, IFPRI headquarters identifies key researchers then asks them to submit, for approval, a concept note within the frame of an already donor-approved project. Because SAI/PAANSA has to rely on country-specific donor funding, as noted above, it has so far not been able to initiate research projects in countries, such as Bangladesh and Pakistan, which have not enjoyed separately earmarked research support.

SAI makes grants to individual researchers working at collaborating institutions in the region, often with the added inducement that these researchers will be able to spend a month or so as part of a "Visitor Exchange Program" working with counterparts at IFPRI headquarters. For example, in the period from August 2002 to September 2003, seven researchers from the region visited IFPRI under this Visitor Exchange Program. Of these seven, six worked on collaborative projects with researchers at headquarters. PAANSA takes care on these collaborative projects to preserve lead authorship for researchers from the region, to facilitate the subsequent extension of research results in-country and also to allay local suspicions about IFPRI headquarters exploiting local research talent.

Altogether in 2003, twelve SAI lead researchers visited IFPRI headquarters under this Exchange Program (eight from India, two from Nepal, and one each from Bhutan and Sri Lanka) to collaborate and present brown bag seminars on their respective research topics. Indian domination of this program partly reflects India's overwhelming size in the region (almost 3/4 of regional agriculture, population, and poverty), plus India's popularity among donors (almost 80 percent of total SAI resources raised for research so far have been for work in India).

Fundraising and Budget Allocation

Fundraising and budget allocation in PAANSA are also headquarters functions. To support PAANSA and the Visitor Exchange Program, IFPRI has raised money from the Ford Foundation, USAID-Delhi, and USAID-ANE Bureau. Other SAI activities, including training activities, have been funded by the Asian Development Bank, the EC, and the World Bank. To date, donors have earmarked most research funding support for work in India, with much smaller amounts available for Sri Lanka and Nepal. Donors promised to fund a project in Bhutan but then shifted resources to Pakistan. Strenuous efforts by IFPRI headquarters persuade donors to fund Visitor Exchange researchers from Bangladesh and Pakistan have met repeated disappointment, and SAI was able to secure only training program support for these two PAANSA countries.

Budget allocation for PAANSA has been through SAI at IFPRI headquarters. In contrast to the 2020 Vision EAN, PAANSA through 2003 had no permanent administrative infrastructure in the field to make separate budget claims or take separate decisions on funding allocation. SAI does not allocate funds to local country groups for fear of creating an impression of IFPRI as donor agency, rather than a policy research sponsor and collaborator. In 2004, IFPRI announced its intent to hire a Research Fellow as part of the SAI, outposted at a new IFPRI office in New Delhi, and the creation of this local South Asia Office may help to decentralize the management of PAANSA. A parallel payoff from this new regional office could be a more successful collaboration with other CGIAR centers, eight of which already have established regional or liaison offices housed within the same New Delhi complex.

Data Gathering, Analysis, and Write-up

Data gathering for SAI/PAANSA research projects is accomplished locally, as would be expected. Yet the analysis and write-up of these projects has quite often been shared between local researchers and headquarters researchers as part of the Visitor Exchange Program. The first research project to be completed under SAI/PAANSA sponsorship and through the Exchange Program, a study of "Implications of Domestic Deregulation and Reform under Liberalized Trade," was originally presented in 2003 as an "IGIDR-IFPRI Collaborative Study," but was later published as MTID Discussion Paper No. 67 in May 2004, with only the regional researchers listed as authors. This was in keeping with IFPRI's determination to reserve lead authorship for researchers from the region.

Final Review, Quality Control, and Publication

Final review, quality control, and publication are also headquarters functions within PAANSA. Research studies sponsored within SAI/PAANSA, when published as MTID Discussion Papers, are subject to the same significant and often-time consuming quality control procedures — including external review — used for other IFPRI Discussion Papers.[14] As PAANSA is still a young initiative (the first Visitor Exchange took place September–October 2002), the studies produced by these visitors are only just beginning to appear. The first two MTID Discussion Papers to emerge from the PAANSA were published in May 2004.

Extension of Published Results

Research results specifically from the SAI/PAANSA Visitor Exchange Program are still so fresh that it is currently difficult to evaluate the manner in which they have been extended. Yet SAI/PAANSA has already been extremely active in its efforts to communicate policy research within the region. In 2003, SAI/PAANSA organized two "brainstorming sessions" in Bangladesh, nine meetings of one kind or another in India (brainstorming sessions, policy dialogues with officials, priority-setting workshops, international workshops), three events in Pakistan (including a meeting with the Planning Commission), and a workshop in Sri Lanka.

Particularly within India, PAANSA has played an effective role in bringing together policy-oriented academics, planning commission members, and institute-based researchers to share information and exchange views on a regular basis. PAANSA members explain that the key to this success has been strong leadership from IFPRI's MTID Director, who was able to draw heavily on his own personal ties to top researchers, particularly in India, to secure quality participation in SAI and PAANSA events. India's 21 PAANSA members (which prior to 2004 included India's current Prime Minister) are an unusually influential and illustrious group. The seniority and visibility of these Indian Network members creates its own dilemma, however. Will these top Indian members be willing to work through the somewhat more junior IFPRI Research Fellow now outposted to the new regional office in New Delhi, rather than continuing to communicate directly with the MTID Director at headquarters? Given PAANSA's history as a centralized hub-and-spoke system, it may be a challenge to establish a strong enough role for the new decentralized hub in New Delhi.

Has PAANSA's Hub-and-Spoke Design Been a Limitation?

South Asia's stronger local capacity, compared to East Africa, might have encouraged IFPRI to consider a spiderweb or even a traffic grid network for the region,

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[14] MTID describes its discussion papers as "containing preliminary material and research results, and are circulated prior to a full peer review in order to stimulate discussion and critical comment. It is expected that most Discussion Papers will eventually be published in some other form, and that their content may also be revised."

yet PAANSA was created with a centralized hub-and-spoke design, with significant control over most research steps maintained by the SAI hub at IFPRI headquarters. IFPRI's traffic grid design was too demanding for East Africa, but this highly centralized network design might seem not demanding enough for some countries in South Asia. Researchers in India might be capable of taking on more local ownership, in the form of a more autonomous country team perhaps with its own national work plan and budget, or even with its own nationally-operated competitive grants program.

This alternative approach has been blocked by a combination of factors, including donor preferences (for centrally controlled research support), preferences among leading states in the region (PAANSA members in India are comfortable with the current model), and a preference within MTID itself not to move IFPRI in the direction of becoming a "donor" agency to local country teams. India's dominating presence in this region is another reason favoring centralization and a hub-and-spoke design. If PAANSA had been designed as a spiderweb or as a traffic-grid network, most of the connections and hence most of the local brokering opportunities would probably have shifted even more toward India. The centralized hub-and-spoke system gives IFPRI headquarters greater means to reallocate resources between countries and cross-subsidize where possible to move support to non-Indian recipients.

Most PAANSA members in the region appear comfortable with the hub-and-spoke approach. Among non-Indians, it is valued as a hedge against single-country domination. And among Indians as well it seems a comfortable way of working, since Indian researchers trust the MTID Director's knowledge of the policy scene in India and his fairness in spreading around opportunities and responsibilities (e.g., for research contracts, workshop participation, invitations to IFPRI). Indian PAANSA members seem almost glad that they do not have to argue among themselves over which PAANSA initiative will be taken next, which institute will co-host the next workshop, which researcher will get the next grant, or who will be invited next to visit IFPRI. The centralization of brokering options implied by PAANSA's structure might seem inappropriate to India's more advanced stock of human capital, yet PAANSA members in India are not complaining. They are already quite well connected to each other through their own personal networks, so they feel little need to take greater control over PAANSA. For many Indians, PAANSA is valued mostly as a means to stay in closer touch with IFPRI headquarters, and the centralized network design is for this purpose seen as a plus.

When pressed, some PAANSA members in India do raise questions about the sustainability of the present model. One risk is that the SAI in general and PAANSA in particular will see its convening power decline over time if it continues to operate primarily as a sponsor of relatively small individual research projects, or as an organizer of workshops and training programs. The individual research projects are valuable, but they tend to generate incremental and non-cumulative gains at the country level, rather than region-wide knowledge breakthroughs. The workshops are valuable for the participants, and many of the papers presented at these workshops have been of high quality, but the new insights contained in these papers and the points of agreement that

emerge from the discussions are not being sufficiently captured and extended, and are thus also a bit fleeting and non-cumulative.[15]

One option for moving PAANSA's research agenda beyond the small-project country-by-country approach would be to use the network's hub-and-spoke capacity to design a centrally conceived research project with region-wide implications and applications. For example, the SAI might develop a market model for the entire South Asia region, suitable for estimating both national and regional consequences of a South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). The model could then be shared through PAANSA with members in the region, for local use and extension.[16] The constraint here is one of donor funding preferences. So long as the donor community remains wedded to imposing separate and individual country earmarks on policy research support, with so much of that support in South Asia going to India, the PAANSA network design alternatives available to IFPRI will be limited.

DSGD Decentralization and Outreach Initiatives in Africa

Since 2002, the new Development Strategy and Governance Division (DSGD) at IFPRI has also been pursuing a bold decentralization strategy, one that will eventually move half of this division's senior staff into the field.[17] Yet "regional networks" are only one feature of DSGD's decentralization and outreach design. Outposted staff are also being assigned to work closely with non-regional and non-network organizations, and with policymakers and researchers at the national level, within individual focus countries. The program of these outposted IFPRI staff will be driven by a larger vision that combines cross-country analysis, country case studies, and a development and provision of "strategic analysis and knowledge support systems" (SAKSS). One purpose of the

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[15] In order to capture and build more effectively on insights that emerge from the regional workshops, SAI might assign to a respected researcher the task of preparing for each workshop a "synthesis paper" that would report briefly on the most important conclusions that emerged from workshop papers and discussions. This would be more than just a "rapporteur's summary," as it would be authored by a senior researcher capable of synthesizing and extracting new analytic insights from the substantive materials of the workshop. These synthesis papers could then be posted on a PAANSA website (or on a PAANSA link on IFPRI's website). The goal would be to provide the wider research and policy community with a more cumulative and durable record of SAI/PAANSA work in the region.

[16] As governments in the region move toward SAFTA, there will be a need for quantified estimates of the probable impacts within various commodity markets and farm input markets (fertilizer, machinery, pesticides, seeds) under different free trade scenarios. Such a regional market model would be challenging to construct, given data gaps in some of the countries of the region (albeit not in India) and given the high volume of illicit and hence already duty-free trade currently taking place (illegal trade in the region is currently estimated to be twice the volume of official trade). Yet currently there is not even a crude form of such a regional market model available to help researchers and policy makers respond to questions, criticisms, and (often unfounded) fears regarding SAFTA. Some PAANSA members in India believe that such a model is certain to be developed sooner or later, and that it would be better if a credible independent institute such as IFPRI did the job, and then offered access to users in the region as a public good, rather than seeing results emerge only from the less transparent models that may eventually be developed entirely within government ministries.

[17] Most of the depictions of the DSGD approach presented here are taken from "IFPRI's Agenda for Contributing to Improved Development Strategy," April 2004.

cross-country analysis will be to develop more useful techniques for classifying the development circumstances of countries, to match them with appropriate policy strategies. The country case studies (to be carried out in the focus countries) will help IFPRI develop more practical frameworks and decision tools to support policy decisions and test the effectiveness of different policy mixes in countries with different characteristics. DGSD will then be able to develop and deliver SAKSS, the packages of analytic tools and accompanying data bases that will help officials make informed policy choices. These packages will be developed as dynamic multi-purpose instruments, with monitoring and evaluation systems to measure progress, analytic tools and data bases subject to regular update, and close links to ongoing training and capacity-building work.

Eastern and Southern African Regional Networks

DSGD's initial intent had been to build a substantial part of its outreach effort around multi-tier regional networks, not only in Eastern and Southern Africa, but in Central America as well. It was originally envisioned that these networks might be similar across regions and structured in two tiers, with a first tier of senior policymakers who would be the primary users of network services and would identify priority cross-cutting regional issues for research and dialogue, then a second tier of national researchers who would be expected to undertake research at the country level and report back to the first tier. The membership of the country research teams was to have remained fluid, as groups of researchers could be joined together, and then dissolves as different tasks were taken on and completed.

These envisioned DSGD regional networks were going to be hub-and-spoke in design, to avoid an overburdening of local capacity. In some cases these networks would be created from scratch, and elsewhere partnerships would be formed with pre-existing regional networks. In East Africa this implied a shift away from the ambitious traffic grid approach of the 2020 Vision network, with fewer responsibilities placed on IFPRI's own country teams in the region and more partnering with an existing policy network, the Eastern and Central African Program for Agricultural Policy Analysis (ECAPAPA) in Entebbe.[18] ECAPAPA has its own competitive research grants program, it receives considerable support from a number of donors including IDRC, SDC, and USAID, and as an organization it has been growing stronger and taking on a broader range of issues. ECAPAPA values a link to IFPRI because its own autonomous policy analysis capacity remains limited. DSGD, for its part, hopes a closer link to ECAPAPA can give strength to IFPRI's own East Africa Network, which began holding new rounds of country team meetings in 2004 to redefine its purposes and programs.

Partnering with existing regional networks is a strategy DSGD also considered in southern Africa. In this region, DSGD initially considered partnering with a network recently created within the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the Food,

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[18] ECAPAPA is a program of ASARECA, the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa, which covers 10 countries: Burundi, D.R. Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), based in Harare.[19] FANRPAN was a hub and spoke network with a small secretariat that worked through designated contact points ("nodes") located within existing research institutions (mostly donor-funded think tanks) in separate member countries. In November 2002, IFPRI signed a memorandum of understanding with FANRPAN to undertake joint research and capacity-strengthening activities in the Southern African region. In March 2003, IFPRI partnered with FANRPAN, and also with the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS NET), to organize a regional policy dialogue in Botswana on agricultural recovery, food security, and trade policies in Southern Africa; and in April 2003, IFPRI and FANRPAN convened a two-day meeting in Johannesburg, to launch a regional policy dialogue on Biotechnology, Agriculture, and Food Security in Southern Africa.[20]

IFPRI's larger strategy was to build a partnership with FANRPAN that would attract more funding to this young and struggling network organization. In May 2003, IFPRI drafted a concept note to the donor community, laying out a vision of an initial three-year partnership with FANRPAN, to be managed from IFPRI through a senior staff member outposted to FANRPAN, supported by a "non-executive" Regional Advisory Committee.[21] This effort fell short when neither USAID nor DFID agreed to provide the needed budget support. If it had gone forward, this DSGD/FANRPAN research network in Southern Africa would have built on FANRPAN's a hub-and-spoke system, through a partnership between FANRPAN's secretariat and IFPRI's outposted senior staff member in the region.

DSGD's effort to build this partnership with FANRPAN began with the development of five regional research priorities, developed at the policy dialogue conference in Botswana in March 2003.[22] These five cross-cutting research themes were to be the building blocks for subsequent national and regional research initiatives. IFPRI envisioned a collaborative program in the region consisting of roughly five larger projects per year (one per cross-cutting research theme, $48,000 each) and 10 smaller projects per year (two per research theme, $8,000 each). The initiation and design of these projects would come from IFPRI, but the hub of the network would be IFPRI's senior staff member outposted in the region, working with the FANRPAN secretariat and

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[19] Eight SADC countries are currently members of FANRPAN: Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

[20] This was the first in an integrated series of participatory multi-stakeholder roundtable discussions responding to the 2002–03 food emergency in Southern Africa, addressing specifically the role of GM crops and food aid. These discussions were strategically linked to the work of a Biotechnology Advisory Committee recently created by the SADC Council of Ministers for food, agriculture, and natural resources (SADC-FANR) and with a proposed NEPAD African Panel on Biotechnology (APB).

[21] "Achieving Food Security in Southern Africa through Strengthened Capacity for Food Policy Research, Analysis, Dialogue, and Implementation," a concept note for a regional research, capacity strengthening, and outreach program submitted to the Department for International Development by IFPRI, May 2003.

[22] The five priorities: agricultural science and technology policy to strengthen farm production for food security; improved governance of food reserves; making food market liberalization work for the poor; regional and global market integration; and food insecurity vulnerability assessment and monitoring, for crisis response.

supported by a local RAC. The presence of this IFPRI hub in the region was to have facilitated local fundraising as well. The goal was to work through FANRPAN's hub-and-spoke network design at the outset, then move where possible toward more and more local ownership.

FANRPAN was a young organization with a small secretariat that had been established only in 2001, and IFPRI knew additional donor funding would be needed to make its partnership design work. When these funds could not be raised in 2004, the plan was put aside.

IFPRI's Link to NEPAD

In 2004, IFPRI found a more promising venue for outreach activities in Africa by outposting a Senior Research Advisor to quite a different local organization: the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). NEPAD cannot be described as a regional network; it is an Africa-wide initiative created in 2002 in part to give donors among the G8 countries and African governments an alternative venue to the African Union (AU) for coordinating development assistance initiatives.[23] Within Africa, NEPAD has been most strongly championed by Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, as an alternative to the AU which has been strongly influenced recently by the oil-rich but mistrusted Mohmmar Qadaffi of Libya. NEPAD is organized around a Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC) Chaired by President Obasanjo, a Steering Committee, and a Secretariat. In the area of food and agriculture, NEPAD has launched a Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) initially consisting of just principles and goals, but soon to become a draft implementation roadmap intended to provide a coherent framework to coordinate external assistance to African countries.[24]

Two years after its founding, NEPAD continues to hold the attention of the donor community and a number of top African leaders, so it gives IFPRI a high-powered setting in which to extend policy research results.[25] In August 2003, IFPRI signed of a memorandum of understanding with NEPAD to facilitate cooperation; and, in May 2004, a senior DSGD researcher was outposted to Pretoria as a Senior Research Advisor to NEPAD's Technical Secretariat to assist in the process of moving from the CAADP

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[23] In November 2003, Professor Welshman Nkhulu (the South African chairperson of the NEPAD Steering Committee with whom the CGIAR has signed its MOUs) proposed legal separation from the AU Secretariat in Addis. Nkhulu said he wanted NEPAD to be able to cut across Africa's system of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as SADC and ECOWAS, and remain flexible enough to lead in the interface with donors and multilateral lending institutions. This proposal was seen by some at the AU as a challenge to the authority of its own secretariat and as threat to the regional economic integration plans envisioned in the AU Constitutive Act.

[24] Communique: 10th Summit of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC), Maputo, Mozambique, 23 May 2004 (http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0000825/index.php).

[25] One of NEPAD's innovations has been to create an African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) for assessing and critiquing the governance of individual African states. The APRM, designed in part to reassure donors that assistance funds will be well spent, conducted its first government performance review in Ghana in May 2004.

framework document to actual implementation of the program. With IFPRI's support, the Agricultural Unit of the Secretariat has now translated CAADP priorities and themes into a finite set of major agricultural development programs and initiatives, a strategic roadmap to guide the Secretariat's implementation efforts. IFPRI has begun carrying out joint missions with the Secretariat to discuss financial support from the G8 governments and from multilateral development organizations, and is providing regular support to the Secretariat's semi-annual African Partnership Forum meetings with the G8 partners to review implementation.

This new IFPRI link to NEPAD is a further step toward decentralization and outreach, but not in a "regional networking" mode, since NEPAD is an all-Africa organization, and more of a formal network between Africans and donors than an informal network just among Africans. IFPRI's link to the NEPAD Secretariat in Pretoria provides local networking opportunities within South Africa itself, but does not provide IFPRI with a substitute for the Southern African regional network that was envisioned with FANRPAN. The challenge for IFPRI will be to find appropriate research products it can bring to the table in support of the CAADP, while working in cooperation with the other research organizations designated to support NEPAD, such as the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA).[26] FARA, like so many organizations in Africa, has a convoluted political history but little independent scientific or administrative capacity.[27]

Focus Country Initiatives

A final decentralization initiative by DSGD in Africa has been the creation of Country Strategy Support Programs in individual focus countries in the region. The first and best developed program so far is in Ethiopia, a second program has been launched in Uganda, and candidate focus countries are being identified in West Africa as well. Donor interest in country-level support programs has been high, facilitating a rapid expansion of this bilateral in-country work. IFPRI hopes this work at the individual country level will supplement rather than compete with its parallel efforts at regional networking. The country-level approach cannot possibly be followed in all 47 countries of the region, but some kinds of policy research done well at the country level can later be extended regionally, including through regional networks.

In Ethiopia, the new Support Program is designed to work as a partnership with the Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI), the same organization inside the office of the Prime Minister that earlier planned successful policy forums through the 2020 Vision EAN. Ethiopia has always preferred to maintain a bilateral rather than a

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[26] "CGIAR Strengthens its Partnership with NEPAD," *CGIAR NEWS,* June 2004, p. 10.

[27] In 1997, the sub regional organizations (SROs) in Africa and the Special Program for Agriculture in Africa (SPAAR) decided to form FARA during the SPAAR plenary in Mali. In 1999, SPAAR started acting as FARA's secretariat but, during the African Agricultural Research week in 2000 in Guinea, there was consensus to replace SPAAR with FARA. SPAAR, therefore, started the transition process in 2001 to 2002 with the help of ISNAR. By July 2002, the FARA secretariat was fully functioning and it is currently hosted by the FAO Regional Office for Africa in Accra, Ghana.

regionalized relationship with IFPRI, and Addis has now become a more important decentralization hub for IFPRI, with the establishment of IFPRI's new ISNAR division in April 2004 at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) campus in Addis.

IFPRI's next step might be to initiate focus country work in West Africa as well, in Ghana, Nigeria, or perhaps Senegal. This could be done as a supplement to regional networking in West Africa, but the original 2020 Vision initiative considered creation of a West African Network (WAN) and at that time donors were only willing to fund a network in the east. If it cannot fund its own regional network from scratch, IFPRI could alternatively seek donor support for a partnership with an existing regional organization, such as the ECOWAS secretariat in Nigeria.[28] This model would be roughly parallel to IFPRI's current East Africa regional network strategy of partnering with ECAPAPA.

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[28] ECOWAS is the Economic Community of West African States, a regional group of 15 countries founded in 1975. Its expansive mission has been to promote economic integration in "all fields of economic activity, particularly industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial matters, social and cultural issues…" — in other words, everything.

6. LESSONS FROM IFPRI'S EXPERIENCE

IFPRI has made several attempts to create or use regional networks in pursuit of its decentralization objectives. The record has been mixed, and for understandable reasons. IFPRI's work focuses increasingly on South Asia and Africa, where weak and uneven local capacities, poor coordination between multiple donor-funded institutions, and rivalries among countries have all tended to impede optimal regional network operations.

In South Asia, regional network operations have been a challenge because of donor reluctance to provide balanced funding among the states in the region. India's dominating size has thus been reinforced by a dominating donor focus on India, making IFPRI's efforts to fund of region-wide work through PAANSA more difficult. The hub-and-spoke design of the PAANSA was perhaps the best way to manage this difficulty, as it allows the IFPRI hub to cross-subsidize the non-Indian members of PAANSA to some extent. PAANSA is now in the process of moving more of the IFPRI hub from headquarters out to the field, but this by itself may not build more regionality into the network. It thus might be in order to introduce more multi-country and region-wide themes into the network's research agenda. The policy challenge of SAFTA could serve as one such theme in the future.

In Africa, IFPRI's regional network efforts have struggled because of low donor support, low and uneven capacity among the dozens of countries on the continent, and also for political reasons (sub-regional groupings of states are sometimes seen as unwelcome efforts by donors, or by dominant states, to "divide Africa"). Regional and sub-regional institutions in Africa often have weak secretariats, large memberships, little reliable interface with each other, as well as little proven influence over the actual policies of national governments. These regional institutions may accurately reflect the aspirations of many Africans to build greater continental integration, yet regionalization and sub-regionalization efforts in Africa have also to some extent been donor-driven. Institutions and initiatives that aggregate African states give donors a more convenient way to manage assistance programs on the continent, without a need to have separate representation in each individual African country. This kind of donor-sponsored regionalization has not always been a mistake, but it should only be undertaken when it is a convenience to Africans as well as donors.

IFPRI's regional networking efforts in Africa have not always been perfectly tailored to navigate such challenges. In the original 2020 Vision EAN, an ambitiously decentralized traffic grid network was mandated for a region that barely had the capacity to work through a hub-and-spoke system. More recent DSGD efforts to decentralize into Africa have tried to learn from this experience. In East Africa, DSGD moved back a step, and is now relying more heavily on a partnership with an existing regional policy network, ECAPAPA. In Southern Africa, DSGD did attempt to design a regional

network partnership with FANRPAN, but the needed donor support for this effort was not forthcoming. The strongest forward steps taken by IFPRI toward decentralization into Africa have not been through regional networks at all. Instead, IFPRI has outposted senior staff to form productive relationships with individual African-country governments, and also with an all-African partnership initiative between donors and governments, NEPAD.

In Africa, IFPRI appears to have been moving by trial and error away from strategies based primarily on regional networks, and instead toward strategies heavily grounded in bilateral relationships with key focus countries, as with the Country Strategy Support Program in Ethiopia. In low capacity countries where donor funds are available, such as Ethiopia, working bilaterally in-country emerges as the most promising decentralization strategy. IFPRI's greatest institutional challenge has always been to bridge the research-to-policy gap, and the probability of bridging this gap goes up when IFPRI staff are outposted closer and closer to policymakers at the national level. Creating or trying to work through an intermediate layer of regional networks may only widen the gap between IFPRI's researchers and these final decisionmakers within national governments. Working at the national level is always risky for IFPRI, because it can require staff to make specific policy recommendations and then take at least partial responsibility for the outcome. Yet in the past, some of IFPRI's highest payoff work has been accomplished at the national level.[29]

Increased bilateral efforts at the country level are not a rejection of networking as such. Local Country Strategy Support Program offices can in fact become good mechanisms for linking IFPRI to some of the most powerful *non-regional* networks that currently operate to shape policy*,* including in-country networks among international donors, among donors and NGOs, and local political networks between governments and civil society. All such networks must be engaged in any case if difficult policy decisions are to be taken, funded, and implemented.

IFPRI's experience so far also tends to confirm the hypothesis that regional network creation will be especially difficult in low capacity regions. In regions such as Africa, highly centralized hub-and-spoke networks may remain the only viable design, pending a buildup of local human capital. Donor investments to build local human capital may be a more urgent need in these regions than still more policy networks. The original 2020 Vision network effort in East Africa acknowledged this reality when it spun off a new collaborative effort to mobilize more donor funding for masters degree training in agricultural economics in Africa. In low capacity regions, policy research networks (both formal and informal) operate best within countries: among government officials, universities, think tanks, donor representatives, and NGOs. To engage these important *intra*national networks IFPRI should not be afraid to conduct more of its

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[29] For example, IFPRI's work with Viet Nam in 1995–97 led to rice policy changes that proved within four years to be worth more than $60 million dollars to Viet Nam's economy. James G. Ryan, "Assessing the Impact of Rice Policy Changes in Viet Nam and the Contribution of Policy Research," Impact Assessment Discussion Paper No. 8 (Washington, DC: IFPRI, January 1999).

research efforts through country strategy offices. Decentralization is important for IFPRI, and networking is important, but neither objective should be attempted exclusively through regional networks.

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