In 2006, IDRC completed a wide-ranging evaluation of the support it gave to research networks during the decade 1995-2005. This assessment included a review of IDRC’s documentation, interviews with key players, a learning forum, and a telephone and e-mail questionnaire survey addressed to hundreds of network coordinators and members.

The survey received responses from 110 coordinators to an array of questions about the 80 research networks these people represented. Some of the questions addressed the geographic focus of these networks, that is, the world region of primary interest to them.

On the basis of the coordinators’ responses, here’s how these networks are distributed among ten world regions, plus the category “global,” which happens to be the most common.

Often, the study found no significant differences among networks in terms of this regional breakdown. Sometimes however it uncovered unexpected and provocative relationships, involving for example the age of these networks, their coordination and management, the nature of their institutional homes, and their modes of communication. These findings are detailed in the full survey report. Here we concentrate instead on aspects of network membership, on the relationship with IDRC, and on policy outcomes.

**MEMBERSHIP: LOCATION MATTERS**

Network size seems to relate to regional profile. Those networks likely to report having more than 50 individual members focus on Eastern and Southern Africa (63%), compared for example with Latin America and the Caribbean (32%) and South East Asia (36%) networks. Meanwhile, global networks (17%) are the least likely to have fewer than ten organizational members,
particularly when compared with Middle East and North Africa (49%) and Eastern and Southern Africa (41%) networks.

Universities and colleges are more likely to be involved in networks with an Africa focus. Among Middle East and North Africa networks, 96% have representation from academia, while the figure for Eastern and Southern Africa is 86%, and for West Africa it is 84%. This contrasts with the figures for global networks (74%), South Asia networks (70%), and Latin America and the Caribbean networks (62%).

Among global networks, 25% have representation from developed countries, while fewer than 15% of all the networks with a specific regional focus have such representation. Middle East and North Africa networks are the least likely, at 36%, to include members from government. And Eastern and Southern Africa networks (43%) have the highest representation from the private sector.

All the networks with a global focus have researchers among their members. Eastern and Southern Africa (39%) and West Africa (31%) networks have the highest percentage of researchers who are medical and health professionals. Latin America and the Caribbean networks have greater percentages of researchers who are natural scientists (54%) and engineers (42%).

Networks with a Middle East and North Africa focus (88%) are more likely than others to have a closed membership policy, meaning that members are selected rather than being able to join without criteria.

**RELATIONSHIP WITH IDRC: WORLDWIDE ALLIANCES**

Eastern and Southern Africa networks differ from others in that they have more recently begun their involvement with IDRC. Fully 26% of these networks started working with IDRC only during the final two years of the study period.

Global networks are the least likely to have had IDRC involvement from start-up (75%) compared with other types of networks where the connection rate from initialization is over 88%. IDRC involvement from start-up in South Asia networks is 100% and in Eastern and Southern Africa networks is 94%.

Overall, 63% of networks report continuing IDRC involvement – that is, the remainder have disengaged from IDRC. At 44%, networks with a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean are the least likely to report ongoing IDRC links.

South Asia networks (98%) report IDRC being “very involved” in their work significantly more often than do those with a global focus (52%).

IDRC plays different roles in networks. It is more likely to play a coordinator role in Middle East and North Africa networks (47%) and in South East Asia networks (34%) than in Latin America and the Caribbean networks (16%) or in those with a global focus (14%).

Networks are “very satisfied” with IDRC involvement on both network content and administrative and management issues. Three types of networks differ due to their tendency to be “somewhat satisfied” as opposed to “very satisfied” with help on network content. Networks with a global focus (55% are “very satisfied”), a Latin America and Caribbean emphasis (59%), and a West Africa focus (48%) have a dampened sense of satisfaction compared with others. On administrative and management issues, however, this regional difference disappears.

IDRC is involved in network content in many ways. South East Asia networks report receiving assistance in “research design and implementation” (79%) and “promoting research use” (77%) more than do other networks. South Asia networks also differ from other groups by citing extensive help from IDRC with “networking and partnership” (93%).

“Increased communication” is the most frequent suggestion for improvement in IDRC’s contribution to network content. West Africa networks are also more likely to point to “research” (50%) as a point of improvement, compared with Latin America and Caribbean networks (19%) and those with a global focus (20%).
CAPACITY BUILDING: REGIONAL VARIATIONS

Network involvement has a strong impact on building skills. The development of computer and technical skills, for example, varies depending on the geographic focus of the network. Networks with an interest in South Asia (66% cite a “great” or “moderate” influence on skill level), South East Asia (67%), and Eastern and Southern Africa (62%) are all more likely to report involvement affecting their abilities in this area than are other networks – particularly Middle East and North Africa (30%) and West Africa (31%) networks, and those with a global focus (35%).

Three-quarters of coordinators say that the network link has influenced their home organization. Coordinators from Latin America and the Caribbean networks (93%) and South East Asia networks (91%) are more likely to report this kind of influence than those from Middle East and North Africa networks (62%).

Satisfaction with this kind of influence is very high. Contrary to the overall trend, however, networks with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa are less likely to say they are “very satisfied” in this regard – only 42% say they are “very satisfied” with the influence of the network on their organization and another 42% report being “somewhat satisfied.”

South Asia (91%) and South East Asia (87%) networks are more likely to report that network involvement enhanced the quality of research being accomplished by their members than are Eastern and Southern Africa networks (66%), and those with a global focus (66%).

The pattern is similar when the degree of this enhancement is investigated. Almost all the South Asia (100%) and South East Asia (97%) networks report a “great” or “moderate” enhancement to the quality of research being conducted by their members as a result of network involvement. These very high levels differentiate these network types from others where between 72% and 81% report that level.

POLICY OUTCOMES: A MIXED RECORD

Networks can influence public policy in different ways. They can broaden the knowledge available to policy makers. As we have already seen, they can expand the capacities of researchers to carry out policy-relevant research. And they can affect directly policies, laws, and government structures.

Building capacity

Regardless of geographic focus, networks report that the ability of researchers to carry out research is positively influenced by the network. This graph sets out the details.
**Success of Network in Building Capacity of Researchers to Carry Out Research by Geographic Focus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Great Influence</th>
<th>Moderate Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total n=100</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Asia n=26</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia n=19</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa n=12</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East and South Africa n=25</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and Caribbean n=34</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Africa n=23</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global n=28</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Broadening knowledge**

Overwhelmingly, South Asia (87%) and South East Asia (81%) networks report success in broadening the perspectives of policy makers. Networks from other regions cite rates in the 60% to 70% range.
Affecting policy, programs, and legislation

As the graph shows, 63% of South East Asia networks report affecting policy, programs and legislation, with one-fifth reporting a “great influence.” The next most optimistic category are South Asia networks where almost six out of ten report having had a “moderate influence” in this outcome area; however, none of these report having a “great influence.” In the case of Middle East and North Africa networks, none report having a “great influence” in this area, and only 10% report a “moderate influence.”