IDRC Networks:
An Ethnographic Perspective

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Contents

Acronyms 5

Acknowledgements 6

Foreword 7

Introduction 11

Methodology 13

Definitions and Purposes 14
- Defining Characteristics 14
  - Networks are Social Arrangements 14
  - Networks are Forums for Social Exchange 14
  - Networks Open Opportunities 15
  - Networks Strengthen Capacities 16
  - Networks Sustain Capacities 17
  - Networks Enable Creativity and Risk-Taking 18
- Emerging Purposes 18
  - Interface Networks 18
  - Projective Networks 18
  - Platforms for Action 19
  - Non-traditional Networks 20
  - Access Networks 20

Structures and Functions 22

Conditions of Success, Causes of Failure 25
- Flexible Internal Management 25
- Learning Through Diversity 26
- Creating Shared Agreement 27
- Managing Change 27

Risks and Balances 29
- Risks 29
- Balances 30
  - Balancing Hierarchies: International, Regional and Local Networks 30
  - Balancing Environments: Individuals, Institutions and Local Capacity 31
  - Balancing Goals 32
  - Balancing Needs: Donors, Members and Related Institutions 34

Realizing the Benefits 37

Conclusions 39

Futures 44

Bibliography 47

Appendix 1. Commissioned Papers 51
- Phillip English 52
- Andrea Goldsmith 54
- Yussuf Kassam 56
- Jean Michaud 57
- Rachel V. Polestico 59
- Nancy Smyth 61
- Rajesh Tandon 63
- Edward J. Weber 65

Appendix 2. Interviewees 67
- Africa 67
- Asia 68
- Canada 68
- Europe 68
- Latin America 69
- Middle East 69

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Development Through Networks: The Case of CIPS in the Philippines

The PhilDHRRA (Philippines Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas) network was started in 1984 with 32 founding members. Ten years later it included over 70 secondary level NGOs serving grassroots communities throughout the Philippines. PhilDHRRA operates as a proactive NGO network, which demands the synthesis and synergy of many perspectives to create a vision of a desirable future. The network facilitates this process by connecting people with different views, and organizations with different expertise. PhilDHRRA used this mechanism to define its people-centred philosophy of development and to develop its programs for agrarian reform, rural development, people's participation, provision of social services, the environment, industrialization, gender, peace initiatives, foreign relations, sovereignty, and cultural integrity. The main objectives of this project were to help various communities solve specific self-identified problems through the use of a participatory research and planning system and to provide the NGO community with an opportunity to develop appropriate participatory research models, through CIPS, the community information planning system.

The experience of PhilDHRRA with CIPS has shown that the sequence of community integration, consultation, planning, consultation, project implementation, and constant evaluation and reflection, can be easily adopted by NGOs and communities. The PhilDHRRA network offered the infrastructure necessary for the exchange of information and services among members and a wider audience, and in so doing, promoted a wider spread of influence and a broader base for the generation of ideas and action. Key issues in implementation of this approach were identified as:

1. **Coordination** The essence of a network is coordination of the efforts of different members.

2. **Flow of Information** The network used its newsletter, radio systems, and regular mail, but found it more effective and less expensive to relay information through its regional offices.

3. **Leadership** An elected board provided ideological and visionary leadership.

4. **Efficiency** The efficiency of the flow of information and services within the network was facilitated because existing linkages could be used.

5. **Funding** The management of funds was entrusted to the network; funds came from a range of donor and community sources.

6. **Sustainability** Each network activity is used to strengthen the network and to institutionalize the skills in its membership.

7. **Spin-offs** The CIPS generated spin-offs because of the linkages of PhilDHRRA with other national and international groups. Some of the project spin-offs were made possible because of the effort and influence of the participating NGOs.

8. **Networks and Model Building** In modelling work, the influence of a network is very important. For the model to be widely applicable, it should be able to capture various experiences in development efforts.

The review of the CIPS network recommends funding priorities to make a network a focal point for research:

1. Funding is needed to initiate a gathering of potential partner NGOs.

2. The funding organization and the network should work as partners in the project.

3. Funds must be provided for administrative activities of the network as well as for documentation, information dissemination, travel, communication, and staff development.

4. Where possible, the network and funding organization should seek additional sources of funding and explore piggy-backing on other projects as new priorities emerge.

5. There should be provision not only for network-level activities but also for micro projects.

6. Provision should be made for post-project activities.

7. Funded research fellowships to encourage the exploration of ideas that emerge from the network research should be encouraged.