Organizational Capacity Building
Change on the ground

March 2006

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.
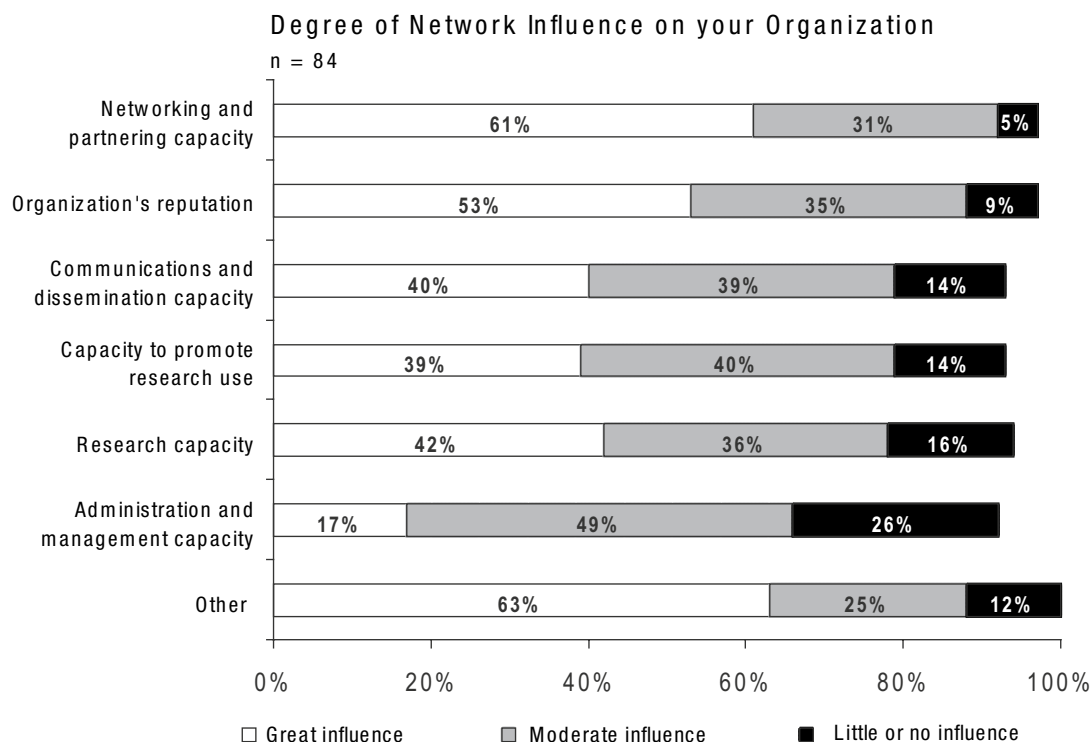
Among its findings, this survey heard from 110 coordinators about how their networks influenced the capacity development of their home organizations.

POSITIVE INFLUENCE

Over three-quarters of these coordinators report that participation in a network has positively influenced their home organization. Notably, only ten per cent say that this involvement has *not* had an influence.

Furthermore, when coordinators are asked about the degree of influence, a majority declare that the impact is "great" or "moderate." This judgement is sustained across the full range of organizational capacities (including organizational reputation) and with little variation among network types.

This graph provides the details:

Degree of Network Influence on your Organization
n = 84

Category	Great influence	Moderate influence	Little or no influence
Networking and partnering capacity	61%	31%	5%
Organization's reputation	53%	35%	9%
Communications and dissemination capacity	40%	39%	14%
Capacity to promote research use	39%	40%	14%
Research capacity	42%	36%	16%
Administration and management capacity	17%	49%	26%
Other	63%	25%	12%

□ Great influence   ▨ Moderate influence   ■ Little or no influence
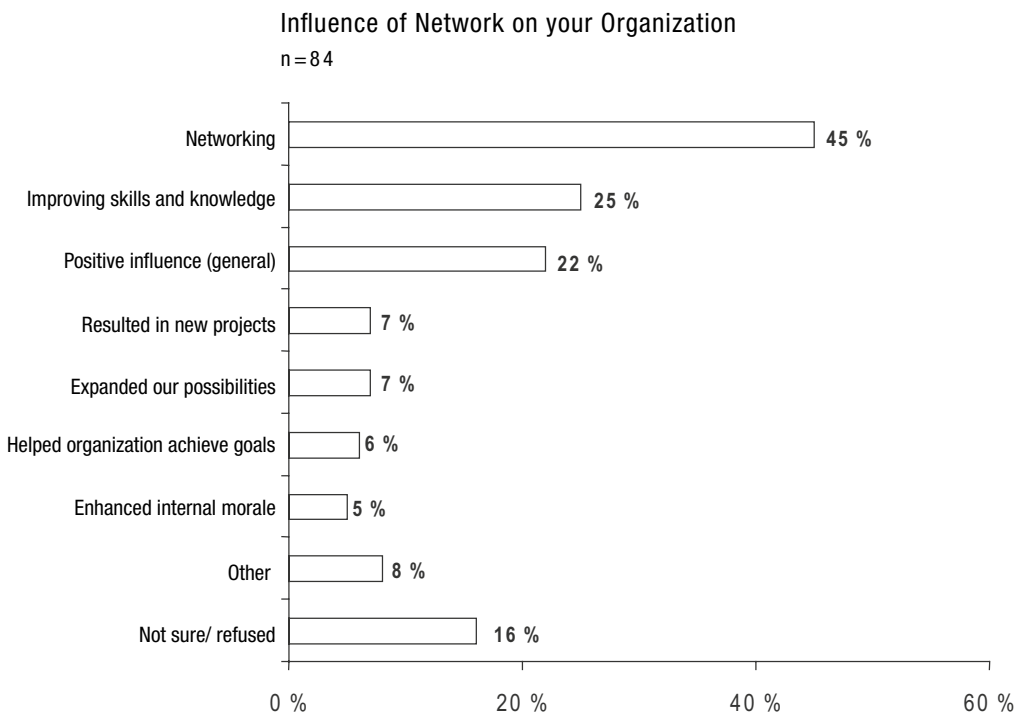
VISIBILITY RAISED

When asked which attribute of networks most influences their organization, almost half the coordinators cite "networking" itself; some refer to the "convening capacity" of networks and their potential to increase "visibility." Economic policy (23 per cent) and social policy (22 per cent) networks are more likely to cite this effect, while those dealing with information, communication, and technology (7 per cent) are less likely to do so.

One-quarter of the respondents feel that their organizations are most influenced by one

particular factor: the improvement in skills and the access to knowledge that are achieved through their involvement in networks (networks show a "new way of doing research"). One person says: "On account of the network efforts, hard work and outputs, our organization is now considered by many experts as a potential organization for developing into a centre of competence in the discipline of watershed management."

Here's the breakdown on network attributes:

Influence of Network on your Organization
n = 8 4

Attribute	Percentage
Networking	45 %
Improving skills and knowledge	25 %
Positive influence (general)	22 %
Resulted in new projects	7 %
Expanded our possibilities	7 %
Helped organization achieve goals	6 %
Enhanced internal morale	5 %
Other	8 %
Not sure/ refused	16 %

SATISFACTION HIGH

Network coordinators report strong approval for the effect that networks have on their organizations, with 93 per cent being either "very satisfied" (59 per cent) or "somewhat satisfied" (34 per cent). Contrary to the overall trend, however, in networks with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa, coordinators are less likely to declare they are "very satisfied" with the networks' influence: only 42 per cent say so.

Here's the graph:

Satisfaction with Influence Network has had on your Organization

n = 84
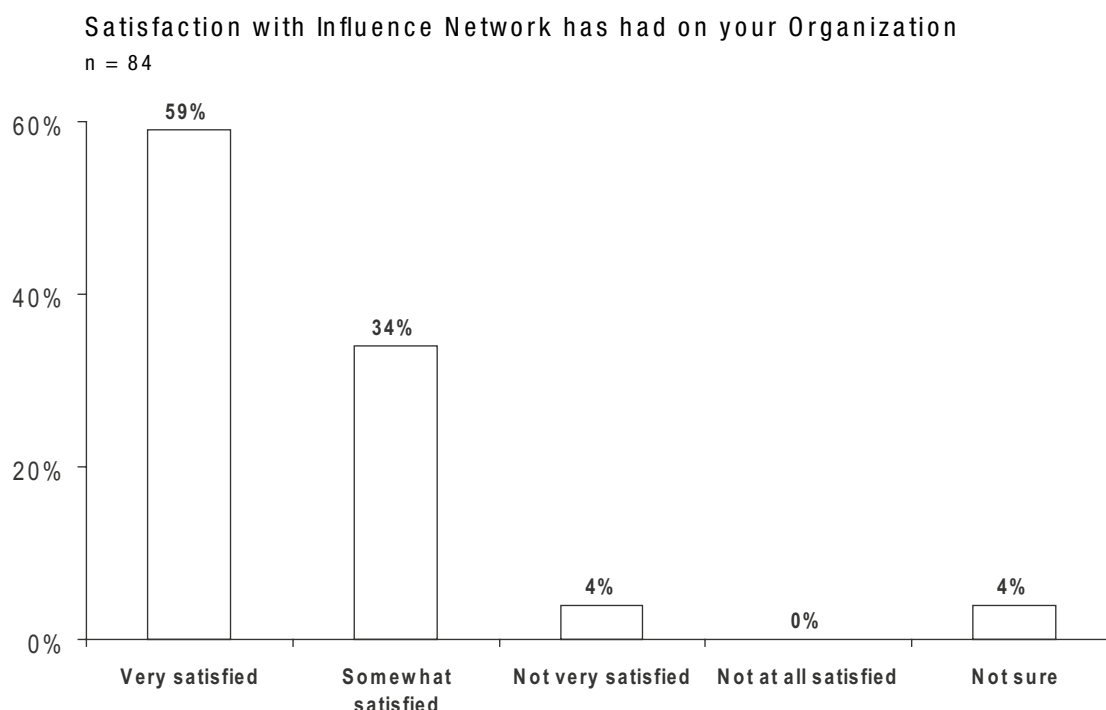
NGOS BENEFIT

When the social characteristics of these coordinators are examined more closely, further nuances emerge.

One category that stands out dramatically is that of coordinators who work for a non-governmental organization (NGO). These people are more likely than others to state their intention to have the network influence their organization. They are also more likely to report their organization's capacities for communication and dissemination, conducting research, research promotion, networking and partnerships, and administration and management all being increased by their network involvement.

In addition, male coordinators (100 per cent) express greater satisfaction with the overall effect of the network on their organization than do female coordinators (89 per cent).

Finally, in the areas of communication and dissemination and promoting research use, paid coordinators report more frequently than do volunteers a positive influence on their organization.

Overall, the influence of network involvement on all types of organizational capacity seems clear. What matters in the end is the effectiveness of the effort to achieve human development. One coordinator sums it up: "The network has shown my research centre a new way of doing research with partners so that we ended up with more effective and collaborative tools and research outputs and thus contribute to change on the ground."