Capacity Building in Networks: An Analysis of the Findings from an IDRC Strategic Evaluation (1995-2005)

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1   INTRODUCTION

About the Strategic Evaluation[1]

IDRC has long recognized the importance of networks in supporting development research and is currently undertaking a more systematic review of its understanding and practice in relation to networks. Due to the dispersed and tacit nature of insights on networks, a strategic evaluation was conducted with the assistance of the IDRC Evaluation Unit to make the learning explicit and make sense of collective experiences. The first stage involved a document review on three core issues: the intended results of IDRC-supported networks, the sustainability of these networks, and the coordination and governance of these networks (see Adamo 2004, Wind 2004 and Schenk 2004). The second stage involved deepening insights via key informant interviews and learning sessions with IDRC program staff, confirming observations about network evolution; member ownership and participation; role of evaluation; and social relations. They also led to the development of a preliminary framework for network planning by Terry Smutylo. In April 2005, 175 IDRC program staff and collaborators met at the Annual Learning Forum in Ottawa to discuss the results of the first two stages, focusing primarily on the public policy influence of networks and their sustainability. The third stage was a commissioned telephone survey of network coordinators and members (Decima Research 2005) that aimed to profile

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1   The first paragraph of this section is based on Willard, forthcoming.

of network coordinators and networks, assess the effectiveness of IDRC support for networks, and examine network outcomes.

This report is part of the fourth and final stage of the evaluation. It is one of a cluster of four analytical papers written by external experts on international networks. These papers seek to facilitate access for IDRC program staff and network coordinators to the extensive findings of the strategic evaluation. The report draws out the major experiences and learning on capacity building from IDRC's 10 years of network support. They provide an analysis of the findings, draw conclusions, make recommendations and raise additional questions for the future.

This report summarizes the findings from the strategic evaluation, over the period 1995-2005 of IDRC-supported networks, focusing on the theme 'capacity building'. The intended users of the report are IDRC program staff and network coordinators, in order to contribute to improved network planning and support. The findings will also be of interest to IDRC management and others in the international development and academic community engaged with or studying research networks. The report summarizes and comments on the findings in the form of points to ponder for IDRC. It aims to provide a balanced review and analysis of the results IDRC can claim from having supported networks, as well as the processes used to achieve those results.

After this introduction and a short explanation of the methodology used, the report continues with four sections. The next section focuses on understanding networks and capacity building, and seeks to define and contextualize the two central concepts. Section 3 describes how IDRC understands capacity building to occur via networks, and explores the importance of articulating assumptions about the pathway of impact. This is followed in Section 4 by an in-depth analysis of the targets for capacity building in IDRC-supported networks, the results achieved and mechanisms used by networks to build capacity. The fifth and final section – 'Points to Ponder' – draws out four themes with questions and observations to guide IDRC in its ongoing discussions on capacity building within and by networks.

Methodology and Data Limitations

A desk study was undertaken of core documents provided by IDRC (see Annex 1) with additional reference to relevant external literature. The documents found most relevant to the capacity building and networks theme of this report were: Adamo 2005, Universalia 2005 and 2006, and the Decima survey 2006. However, each of these key information sources also had certain limitations, which have led to findings in this report being generic in nature and not illustrated by concrete examples. The Adamo report focuses on *intended* results rather than actual results of capacity building within the networks supported by IDRC. The Universalia reports focus on capacity building within IDRC supported work but do not discuss this explicitly within the context of networks. Finally, the Decima survey provides a general fact sheet on networks and includes coordinators' impressions of their own networks' effectiveness, but has limited data from network members. Little information is provided to help explain the reported results.

2 UNDERSTANDING NETWORKS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

This section defines the two core concepts and discusses the range of interpretations that are apparent within the IDRC portfolio.

2.1 Defining Networks

Networks are central in IDRC's strategy of support for development but it is not clear how much money is granted to networks. The total support given to networks by IDRC is not known. However, two figures provide an indication of scale. The Decima survey (2006) identifies 214 distinct networks[2], many with multiple grants. A total value of CAD $5,156,372 is given as being spent over the period 1995-2005. However, for 136 of the 298 entries no financial figures are provided, thus the final amount is likely to be considerably higher. Another estimate relates to total project amount and is significantly higher, estimated to be over $100,000,000 CAD (Sarah Earl, personal communication 20/09/2006). However, it is not clear what is spent on networks and what is spent on other mechanisms.

2   This is based on a total listing in the survey of networks and coordinators with 298 entries from which all duplicates of the same network name were removed, and includes one for which no network name was provided.

While there is no single definition for 'networks' used within IDRC, there appears to be agreement on core features. A network is a forum for human exchange (Highlight 4 2005:1) and a "platform for action" (Carden and Neilson:155). The Annual Learning Forum (ALF) in April 2005 defined a network as: "a social arrangement of organizations and/or individuals linked together around a common theme or purpose, working jointly but allowing members to maintain their autonomy as participants" (IDRC 2005a:1).

Bernard's seminal study (1996) of IDRC-supported networks from an ethnographic perspective provided the foundation for much of IDRC's subsequent understanding of networks. Her review identified defining characteristics of networks: social arrangements, forums of social exchange, and open opportunities. Bernard further characterized networks in terms of their outcomes: strengthen capacities, sustain capacities, and enable creativity and risk taking (1996: 14-18). Smutylo (2005) more recently drew on the work of Bernard and others to characterize the concept of networks as it applies to IDRC:

- Networks are social arrangements made up of individuals and representatives of institutions based on establishing and building relationships, sharing tasks and working on joint activities, enabling new learning and mobilizing alternative action;
- Networks add value to work that would otherwise have been done individually;
- Networks are forums of social exchange, which allow members and users to interact directly with one another so that this interaction influences the way they think or what they do within or outside the network;
- Networks are open opportunities through shared work to raise the profiles of research results, foster cross fertilization, influence the policy community, build research and policy capacities, or build a case for a new research agenda etc.;
- Network members maintain their autonomy as participants (Smutylo 2005:3).

Both Bernard's and Smutylo's definitions contain a mix of elements referring to the structure, mechanisms, intentions, and impacts of networks.

Many concepts comparable to the term 'network' are used within IDRC and illustrated the diversity and broadness of understanding of the term. Other commonly used concepts include partnerships, consortia, alliances, forums, communities of practice (IDRC 2005a:1-2), joint venture, project, group and team (Evaluation Highlight 11:1). The term 'network' as used in the IDRC documentation does not refer to information-, access-, or data-swapping transactions (Highlight 3 2005:1).

IDRC-supported networks deal with three types of products or processes: information, communication and research (Bernard 1996: 14). The Decima Survey (March 2006) noted that the topics and issues covered by IDRC-funded networks are quite evenly spread across IDRC program areas: natural resources, social policy, economic policy and information, communication and technology (Evaluation Highlight 11:2).

Three levels of intentions or intended results of networks can be distinguished: 'corporate', 'network level' and 'network strategies and activities'[3] (Smutylo 2005:18). At the *corporate level*, IDRC has four intended results: improving the effectiveness and reach of Centre support; enhancing research quality; advancing the utilization of Centre-supported research results; and strengthening regional ownership of research and development agendas (Adamo 2004:ii, Smutylo 2005:16) (see section 3 for more on this level). Smutylo found that *network level* results were described as "lower level, more task-oriented categories". Five results can be distinguished at this level: influencing research focus or research methods, providing technical support to IDRC-funded researchers, giving IDRC-funded researchers and research increased profile and influence, promoting exchange, coordination and collaboration amongst researchers, and fostering relationships between researchers and research users (Smutylo 2005:17). Table 5 (Section 4) compares corporate level intended results with network level goals and objectives and the actual results reported. Finally, *network strategies and activities level* consists of many diverse strategies and activities rather than results (Smutylo 2005:18). Some of the listed activities and strategies are both intended results, as well as the mechanisms to achieve those results (see Section 4 for more details).

Defining Capacity Building

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3   Smutylo refers to this triad as a results hierarchy, with each level being more specific and detailed.

Capacity building is a distinctive feature of IDRC's support for development research in the South (Adamo 2004:9). IDRC aims to build up a critical mass of indigenous capacity to carry out research in a particular field working at individual and organizational/institutional levels (Universalia 2005:ii). Capacity building efforts have been guided by the core values of local ownership, flexibility and respect for diversity (Universalia 2006:2). Twenty-six percent of IDRC projects are primarily capacity building projects, according to staff (Universalia 2005: 36).

IDRC uses broad and diverse definitions of capacity building (Universalia 2006:2, 40). It has consciously opted not to construct a single, corporate definition. IDRC staff appear to appreciate the latitude that the loose definition of capacity building allows. While aware of the down-side of allowing such breadth, IDRC staff appear to prefer that to having a more unified and perhaps restrictive concept:

> "We have had wide ranging discussions with IDRC with respect to the importance, or lack thereof, of having an institutional operational definition for capacity building. Such a definition would provide parameters to staff on which projects are considered 'capacity building' and which are not. The overwhelming response from IDRC staff is to keep the existing approach" (ibid 2006:41).

Universalia also noted that there was no process or activity mix that could characterize what might be considered the IDRC approach to capacity building (2005:29). This is logical given the absence of a precise definition of capacity building; the mix of activities/processes will depend on the definition being used for a particular project. Despite the absence of both a definition for capacity building and a defined process or activity mix, the same report stated that IDRC's capacity building process is consistent with the OECD's Principles and Best Practices for Capacity Development (2006: 32-34).

IDRC's focus on capacity building is largely instrumental and functional, with its emphasis on competencies and skills needed for research (Universalia 2005: 26). The Universalia report noted the most frequently reported outputs as: researchers trained, development of training materials, research dissemination (e.g. papers and conferences), and database development (2006: 11). Table 1 illustrates this emphasis on the instrumental nature of capacity building efforts.

Table 1. Research Competencies and Capabilities Built via IDRC support (Universalia 2005: 26)

COMPETENCIES AND CAPABILITIES	INDIVIDUAL	INSTITUTIONAL
Ability to conduct research (from problem identification and project development, to project design, implementation, project monitoring and evaluation)	√	
Ability to do analysis	√	
Ability to do financial management	√	√
Ability to link with other researchers/organizations/	√	√
Ability to communicate results to make research matter	√	
Ability to do research differently (multidisciplinary, participatory research)	√	
Ability to manage or administer a research project		√
Ability to report to donors		√

Capacity building at the organizational and institutional levels is also limited to functional capacities, notably financial management or administrative capabilities, rather than a more systemic or organization-wide approach. (Universalia 2005: 27) (see Table 1). Few respondents in the Universalia study referred to organizational learning and those who did suggested it was inappropriate for IDRC-supported organizations and better suited for more mature organizations (ibid).

In IDRC, "capacity building work is still operating as an 'art form' and that the science of capacity

building is still at an early stage" (Universalia 2005: iii). Other conclusions from the same study (pgs 43-45) include that:

· IDRC operates with a very narrow range of the types of capacities needed to build research capacity at global, national or institutional levels;

· There is a lack of social science discourse on capacity building within IDRC, despite its apparent value;

· Capacity building is difficult to categorize and identify within the IDRC databases and, therefore, it is difficult to be clear about overall impacts;

· The core values (local ownership, flexibility and respect for diversity) are important ingredients of capacity building;

· IDRC's focus is on the individual level and thus on changes to parts of the system as opposed to a system-level focus, hence the target group merits further consideration;

· The lack of reliable data to monitor and track capacity building hinders the ability of staff to report on it in a valid and reliable way;

· 'Indirect' capacity building activities (e.g. time to reflect, manage, lead, think) may be something for donors to consider;

· A better understanding of the mix of tools needed for specific interventions is required.

A new capacity concept has recently been adopted within IDRC, that of 'complete capacity'. It refers to IDRC-supported projects and institutions, and not individuals (Universalia 2006: 39). It is a new approach for IDRC within its current five-year strategy (2005-2010). However, this is a *corporate level* intention for IDRC capacity building, and does not necessarily affect how *network level* and *network strategy/activity level* work is viewed.

IDRC-supported capacity building efforts can be categorized in a number of different ways to highlight different aspects. A first categorization is the level at which the capacity building is taking place. The Decima Survey identifies three levels at which capacity building results are reported within IDRC-supported networks: individual, organizational and network (2006:100-141, see Table 4, section 4.2). A second categorization is that of the intentions for capacity building within IDRC: corporate, network and network strategies and activities (Smutylo 2005:16-17, see Table 5, section 4.2). Capacity building can also be distinguished by the type of capacity being built: product versus process results (see table 3, section 4.2). And finally the kinds of capacities being built within IDRC-supported networks are predominantly: to undertake research, to influence policy and to facilitate a network (Table 4, section 4.2). Section 4 addresses these different distinctions and levels in more detail (see Table 5, in particular).

3   IDRC INTENTIONS WITH CAPACITY-BUILDING THROUGH AND IN NETWORKS

This section outlines how IDRC views capacity building as occurring via and in networks. It is based mainly on Adamo's report which explores the intended results IDRC seeks to achieve by supporting networks (2004: 4[4]). It also articulates a range of assumptions about the connection between networking and capacity building, which are the authors' unless otherwise indicated. First, it outlines the main justification for investing in networks as a means for capacity building. This is followed by an examination of the four corporate level result areas and some related assumptions about how these results are attained. Finally, the section closes with reflections on the assumptions underlying intended results and the value of using these to strategize and learn from practice.

3.1 *Capacity building in and through Networks*

The evaluation findings identify three reasons that justify the investment in networks as a means and focus for capacity building. These are: (1) the need for systemic change in the research environment, (2) the need for a long term perspective, and (3) the critical contribution of communication and coordination that is made possible through networking.

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4   As a caveat, it must be mentioned that Adamo says that "the vast majority of corporate documentation revealed very little about IDRC's understanding of and position on networks specifically" (2004: 4).

Systemic Change

IDRC considers the problems with research quality and use to be the 'result of more systemic weaknesses in the research environment of many developing regions' (Adamo 2004: iv). Given the poorly resourced research institutions and lack of critical disciplinary mass, collaboration can help research systems in the South to address critical development challenges. Thus, IDRC considers local ownership of research processes and findings to be essential and so research support must be locally driven and locally used (Carden 2005: 2). IDRC focuses on 'networks, in the broadest sense, … to address these systemic challenges' (Adamo 2004: 38). Networks are expected to be able to "integrate important stakeholders (civil society, policymakers, the private sector) into research and policy systems in a more coherent and meaningful way" (ibid).

Longer Term Perspective

IDRC is clear about the long term focus required to induce systemic change in the research environment. "IDRC's experience suggests that networks are a crucial programming mechanism for projects with mainstreaming goals. Mainstreaming and institutionalization processes often require relatively long time horizons as many of the new concepts, methodologies and approaches promoted by the Centre (e.g. participatory research) constitute a fundamentally different way of understanding and undertaking research and often require a significant change in institutional culture to be effective." (Adamo 2004:10)

Networks are considered to be an appropriate vehicle due to their more responsive, comprehensive and coordinated approach to supporting capacity building that is separate from the formal national research systems. They are expected to enable a longer term perspective of capacity building to attract parallel funding to initiatives (ibid: 9-11). "In this way, networks enable a far more comprehensive and coordinated approach to capacity building than support for "stand-alone" research projects might allow." (ibid: 11).

Sustainability is a critical concern for capacity building efforts as a network is essentially about developing 'a lasting capacity to do research and inspire boundary partners to use research findings' (Currie-Alder 2005: 6). The assumption that networks enable longer term perspectives implies that networks are expected to have some sustainability potential that other mechanisms for research on development do not (see Willard, forthcoming).

Communication and Coordination

Most IDRC-supported networks have the "more-or-less explicit" intent to strengthen capacity (Bernard 1996: 14). They are expected to contribute towards 'more effective and sustainable research relationships by providing a mechanism for building researcher, inter-institutional, and inter-sectoral alliances leading to greater coordination of research efforts.' Adamo's report reiterates this in 2004 by stating that IDRC's support for networks seeks to improve the quality and use of research by enabling more coordinated and coherent approaches to capacity building and greater coordination across disciplines, institutions and sectors within developing regions (2004: 7). In the process, networks are considered to build "research communities" in developing regions that provide opportunities for members to share information, experience and skills (Adamo 2004: 13). Network members are expected to be able to 'build ideas' together and apply these ideas.

These views on networks and capacity-building assume certain abilities of network mechanisms to foster more communication among sometimes quite diverse members (and their willingness) and that this communication will lead to better coordination of research efforts (see Section 3.3 for more on assumptions).

Smutylo (2005) adds a word of caution about the extent of coordinated action within IDRC-supported networks: "In practice, IDRC-supported networks appear to stay mostly within the first two of Gadja's levels." He refers to a paper by Gadja (2004) about the five stages in progressive collaboration, namely: networking (or connecting), cooperating, partnering, merging and unifying. Only in the 'partnering' and subsequent stages, is the network (and its members) able to work on common interests and goals. Thus collaboration on shared interests is unlikely in the networks to which Smutylo refers.

3.2   A Closer Look at the Four Intended Result Areas

Adamo (2005: ii) reports that IDRC aims to achieve four results at the corporate level by supporting networks, all of which relate (in) directly to capacity-building. The four results are described briefly be-

low. Table 2 shows some of the assumptions that appear to be important for these results (suggested by the authors of this synthesis report).

The first corporate result area relates to *internal IDRC capacity for providing meaningful support*. The central assumption is that such internal capacity will be improved as a direct result of engagement by IDRC staff with networks. As this report focuses on the capacities within and through networks rather than internal IDRC capacity in relation to network support, this result area will not be considered further in this report.

The second corporate result area relates to *the capacity of network members to undertake research and to improve the quality of research process to obtain valid and reliable findings*. The documentation indicates that capacity building via networks should be comprehensive in order to produce research that is itself more comprehensive but also more relevant and useful, cross-disciplinary, coherent, collaborative, and of better quality. IDRC's network-focused strategies are also expected to lead to a 'deeper, shared understanding of development problems among research communities and other stakeholder groups' (Adamo 2004: 9). Such research reduces existing duplication of efforts, is based on new ideas that emerge through increased interaction, is better able to include key stakeholders, and is more relevant for end users. The process of networking is also meant to capitalize on what people already know and the learning that takes place through IDRC-supported research, and to harness and use this for building capacity (ibid: 15). In so doing, the expectation is that researchers in the South will draw on a larger 'pool of ideas and experience' in order to 'greatly enhance the quality of their research' (ibid).

The third corporate result area focuses on *enhanced capacities to use the results from improved research, particularly in policy making* (see forthcoming for a more detailed analysis and Adamo 2004: 24-33). Engagement in networks is expected to lead to researchers who are more competent to undertake and design research with policy relevance. This requires capacity building that stimulates more interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration – and a critical mass of researchers to effect systemic change in the policy environment. Cross-sectoral collaboration is considered particularly critical, as this is expected to increase "the quantity, quality and comprehensiveness of research" and forms the springboard for enhancing policy capacities. Greater interaction between the worlds of research, civil society and policy is an expected output of networks, thus laying the basis for more relevant research (a researcher capacity) and stronger democratic processes (a societal capacity).

The fourth corporate result area concerns *increasing the capacity of network members to connect with, engage actively in and influence the research and development agendas* (see Adamo 2004: 34-37). Indigenous research 'ownership' is a critical concept for IDRC which believes that research should be driven by regional/local priorities. By offering spaces for engagement and exchange, this provides "an effective mechanism for encouraging the emergence of locally/regionally defined research priorities and agendas". This result area thus sees networks aimed at capacity building as being able to redress imbalances in power between donor-driven, northern research agendas and local agendas.

Table 2 Assumptions about Capacity building and Networks

Corporate Result Areas[5]	Possible Assumptions underpinning Network Activities
Enhancing research quality	· Each network is clear about what is meant by comprehensive capacity building for its particular mandate/focus. · Comprehensive capacity building efforts are based on a grounded assessment of needs within the network. · Network members are willing to share and invest time in network activities in order to generate and benefit from new insights. · Network members are concerned about research quality, cross-disciplinarity and coherence. · Research communities are willing, have the time to and can engage with other key stakeholders via the networks in order to make their work more relevant. · Networks explicitly harness members' knowledge to create capacity building efforts for other members. · Organizations and individuals of mixed research caliber are interested in interacting via a network. · Offering individual opportunities for training, mentoring, etc will have a systemic impact on the research environment
Advancing the utilization of Centre-supported research results	· Stakeholders from academia, civil society and policy are willing to interact constructively via network activities. · Networks are perceived to produce legitimate, good quality, relevant research outputs. · Researchers are able to translate their interactions via networks into more and better research processes. · Interactions via networks can contribute significantly to stronger democratic processes. · Cross-sectoral collaboration occurs via networks in ways that would otherwise not occur.
Strengthening regional ownership of research and development agendas	· Network members are able to operate without undue influence from Northern research/donor agendas. · Networks offer sufficient and open opportunities to set research priorities and agendas that are then acted upon. · Differences within the region - such as power differences between national research agencies and civil society research institutes or others - about research priorities do not hinder the quality of the agendas or the sense of ownership.

Articulating assumptions such as those in Table 2 – and then comparing them to existing evidence (e.g. from PCRs) – offers opportunities for IDRC staff and for network coordinators and members to strengthen the capacity building impact of networks.

IDRC *staff* may wish to ask themselves the following questions when planning for and assessing capacity building via networks:

- · Which assumptions has the network articulated explicitly to explain how capacity building occurs and how this will lead to impacts, and which assumptions are implicit ?
- · Are any of these assumptions so-called 'killer assumptions'[6] that are likely to jeopardize success with capacity building efforts?
- · What evidence exists from the network that its assumptions are valid?
- · Which assumptions need to be 'tested' and perhaps addressed by the network with concrete activities?

Network members and/or coordinators could consider the following questions when developing their strategy for capacity building:

- · Which assumptions are made within the network about how capacity building occurs? Who do we assume will have which capacities strengthened? And how are these capacities to be strengthened?
- · Which of these assumptions are valid and what evidence exists that these assumptions are valid?
- · Which assumptions are or might be problematic, perhaps even jeopardizing progress in enhancing research quality, its use and shared ownership?
- · Where might you or others in the network need to undertake activities to ensure that the assumption is valid?

The evaluation findings are not clear about whether such reflections take place on a systematic basis in IDRC. However, several findings do suggest that insufficient clarity exists within IDRC about the pathways of change for capacity building via networks. Section 5 discusses some 'points to ponder' in relation to this gap.

3.3   Intentions and the Role of Assumptions

This section explains the value of articulating and understanding the assumptions that underlie the expected corporate level results.

Capacity building via networks can be considered a so-called 'complex program'[7]. This is partly a result of the very nature of networks: "the voluntary and diverse membership and geographical spread multiply the complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability of what they do and achieve (Wilson-Grau and Nunez 2006). But it is also related to the pathway of change that capacity building via networks is expected to follow. The desired changes, such as systemic shifts in research agendas and quality, will often require multiple, long term efforts at a lower level in diverse and dynamic partnerships. This makes the pathway of change particularly hard to guarantee and renders attribution of results extra difficult. Overall impact is expected to emerge from synergies between multiple activities and mechanisms.

Assumptions play an important role in describing any pathway of change, not least of which complex programs. While assumptions are necessary for any activity or program5, complex programs deal with more uncertainties and linked results. Thus they are often based on more assumptions and these may be more tenuous due to the long term nature of the intended change and synergistic interactions. A solid planning process includes articulating assumptions that must inevitably be made and seeking to ensure that they are as valid as possible. Being conscious about assumptions and seeking evidence to ensure their validity can help the timely review of progress with capacity building and refocusing of a network's strategy. However, not all assumptions can be made explicit, with some emerging only after evidence that is surprising and which forces revision of initial assumptions.

The importance for IDRC of (continually) articulating and questioning assumptions using evidence from the networks is illustrated by the following example. In the 2005 initial study by Universalia, many staff and managers identified networks and networking as effective capacity building mechanisms – both South-South networking and North-South. Such networks were viewed as, "one of the most vibrant and

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5   Assumptions can describe: assertions about the connections between long term, intermediate and early outcomes (plus justifications supporting the links between activities and the outcomes they are expected to produce); any preconditions that are critical for success; and contextual or environmental factors that will support or hinder progress toward the realization of outcomes.

dynamic means for researchers to share and exchange information" (Universalia 2005: 30). Networks are seen to "encourage long-term peer learning and lasting mutual support among researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders, institutions and sectors" (Highlight 4 2005: 2). However, the ALF meeting participants in April 2005 noted capacity building as "often neglected in management of networks" and emphasized the need for "strengthening partners' capacity to publish, access information, manage projects etc….a more holistic approach to capacity building of networks" (IDRC 2005b: 26). This small example indicates that there might be a divergence within IDRC of perceptions and assumptions about networks as vehicles for capacity that could be clarified with more evidence (see section 5.4). Checking the validity of assumptions requires evidence from IDRC- supported networks.

4. TARGETS, REPORTED RESULTS AND MECHANISMS

This section discusses the results achieved by IDRC-supported in terms of capacity building within networks. It begins by identifying whose capacities are being built and introduces the different kinds of capacities linked to specific target groups. The types of results reported are then categorized. Finally this section outlines the mechanisms used by the networks, noting, where possible, the most effective structures for particular types of capacity building.

4.1 Targets for IDRC-Supported Capacity Building in Networks

To understand the reported results requires clarity about whose capacities IDRC and IDRC-supported networks aim to build. The evaluation findings offer three different but complementary perspectives: Universalia, Smutylo and Adamo.

- · *Universalia's* initial assessment identified three broad categories of IDRC-supported capacity building: individual, organizational, and system-wide or institutional (2005: 46). In its final report, however, Universalia suggests a framework consisting of five levels; in addition to individual, organizational (entity) and state/institutional levels, they add network and societal (users of the research)(2006: 17). The Universalia report also introduces the idea of capacity building as a systemic intervention – "individuals operate within organizations, and individual organizations perform within wider systems…nested within other systems" (2005: 6-7).
- · *Smutylo* mentions regional actors and sectors as targets for capacity building and collaboration, specifically in relation to stimulating partners in the South to take ownership of, mainstream, refine and adapt the new ideas, concepts, approaches and methods being promoted (2004: 9).
- · *Adamo* notes that IDRC also seeks to "create spaces for learning among researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders working on complementary issues", albeit informally (2004: 8).

While IDRC documentation suggests that systemic or institutional level capacity building is paramount, the reported results tend to focus on the individual and, to a lesser extent, the organizational levels. This begs the question for IDRC of how to align its corporate intentions with the results (see 5.4). Articulating the assumptions underlying corporate intentions (see Section 3) may be a useful tool for better connecting the different target levels (see Table 5, Section 4).

4.2 Categorizing the Reported Results

A scan of the multitude of results reported in the IDRC documentation have indicated the importance of understanding three dimensions: 1) type of results; 2) kinds of capacities; and 3) levels at which the capacity building takes place.

Types of results

Capacity building in networks leads to two types of results: *product results* and *process results*. Berdegué (cited in Schenk 2005: 23) describes these two outcomes as: "netWORK" (product or content) and "NETwork" (process). Two other sources offer comparable sets of distinctions. The first is from Morgan who refers to '*capacity of what*' versus '*capacity for what*' – and stresses the importance of knowing how the first leads to the second (2006:17). A second distinction is made between the *capacity of the network to do its*

work and the capacity built by the network (see Taschereau and Bolger 2005: 11[9]). These three distinctions and their interconnection appear in Table 3.

Table 3: Types of Results and Kinds of Capacities Built in IDRC-supported Networks

Types of Results Reported	Kinds of Capacities Built
PRODUCT (netWORK) Capacity 'to what' Capacity built by the network	**Capacity to undertake research** · enhance quality of research · build a common research agenda · introduce and mobilize interest in new research concepts and approaches and build skills in these areas · promote mainstreaming of new research concepts across institutions and sectors **Capacity to influence policy[10]** · support new research · develop new fields of research · enhance researcher capacities to work on problems and issues (as distinct from carrying out disciplinary research) · enhance researcher capacities to communicate knowledge and ideas to diverse audiences
PROCESS (NETwork) Capacities 'of what' Capacity of a network to do its work	**Capacity to facilitate the network** · adaptive capacity – managing change and organizational learning · build research communities · promote peer learning and mutual support · facilitate and monitor member participation · internalize networking approach · work with others on a regional/global · North-South collaboration and exchange · internal management capacity

Kinds of capacities

Three kinds of capacities are built within IDRC-supported networks: capacities related to *undertaking research*, capacities related to *using research to influence* policy, and capacities related to *network facilitation*. The capacity to do research and to influence policy are products of a network (within the network category) while the capacity to facilitate the network can be considered a process result (NETwork). These categories are not based directly on IDRC's intended result areas (see Section 3) but are drawn from the material provided (cf the Decima Survey and Universalia reports). Table 3 summarizes the types of results and kinds of capacities that were documented in the evaluation findings.

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9   In Taschereau and Bolger's 2006 paper (pg 11), they make the distinction between 'capability' which relates to making the network effective and 'capacity' to the overall system to perform and sustain itself. They reserve the term 'competence' for network members.

10 As the policy influence of IDRC-supported networks is the focus of another synthesis report (see Yeo forthcoming), the subsection on 'capacity to influence policy' is less detailed than the other two subsections. This part of the table is, therefore, also not a comprehensive presentation of all relevant points.

The evaluation findings focus more on process than product capacities, in particular describing the coordinator's capacity to coordinate the network. Following the distinctions described above, the focus of reported results lies with the "NETwork" aspect of capacity; *capacity of what*; and the *capacity of the network to do its work*. In this report we refer to the process results as the 'capacity to facilitate the network'. Concrete results about product outcomes, such as research skills or common research agendas, are reported less often. A system for evaluation of this kind was not evident in the evaluation findings, although some conclusions might be drawn from the PCRs.

While results are reported in all categories, most of IDRC's support builds individual capacities: 71% of IDRC projects target individuals and/or teams of individuals as the focus of change efforts (Universalia 2006: 16). Individual capacity building refers mainly to capacity building among network coordinators (Universalia 2005: ii). Being involved in a network influences individual coordinator capacities in terms of: coordination and facilitation skills (83%), project management and administration (82%), leadership (81%), communication and interpersonal skills (82%) and research skills (69%) (Decima Survey 2006: 100).

Organizational level capacity building is also mentioned in the evaluation findings. The 2006 Decima survey found that the capacities built within organizations included: networking and partnering capacity (92%), communication and information dissemination capacity (79%), capacity to promote research use (79%) and research capacity (78%). Organizational reputation (88%) was also included in the organizational capacity building category of the Decima Study, although the relationship between reputation and capacity building is not made explicit (Decima Survey 2006: 101). In addition, Universalia found that as projects progressed, individual behavioral change often supported more training (referred to as 'multiplier training systems') and institutional change (2006: 16). Adamo also points out that networks intend to enable more comprehensive approaches to capacity building that can go beyond the individual researcher's skill set to serving a whole profession within a region and at national levels (2004: 25, 36).

The reported results largely relate to individual capacity building and the kind of capacities that support facilitation of the networks themselves. Table 4 illustrates some of the key results reported in the Decima survey, and relates them to the *types of results* identified and the *kinds of capacities* distinguished in this report. The kinds of capacities being built for individuals are quite different than those that relate to organizations/institutions. Note that the Decima survey included 51% of coordinators of IDRC-supported networks – 110 coordinators representing 80 networks. Only thirty-three network members responded to the survey, which represents 20% of the membership (Decima 2006:16).

Table 4: Reported Results per Level, Type of Result and Kind of Capacity Building (Decima 2006:100-141)

Results Reported	%	Product Results		Process Results
		Undertake Research	Influence Policy	Facilitate a Network
Individual Capacity Building				
Coordinator of the Network				
Coordination/facilitation skills	83			X
Project management and administration	82			X
Leadership	81			X
Communication and interpersonal skills	82			X
Research skills	69	X		
Monitoring and Evaluation skills	69	X		
Writing skills	55		X	
Member of the Network				
Monitoring and Evaluation	67	X		
Coordination and facilitation	64			X
Communication and interpersonal skills	58			X
Leadership	52			X
Organizational Capacity Building				
Networking and partnering capacity	92			X
Organization's reputation	88	X		X
Communication and information dissemination capacity	79		X	
Capacity to promote research use	79		X	
Research capacity	78	X		
Administration and management capacity	66			X
Network Level Capacity Building				
Enhanced quality of research	**80**	X		
Dimensions of quality of research enhanced				
Methodologies	57	X		
Communication tools/peer review/journal publications	19	X		
Social analysis	10	X		
Gender issues/analysis	8	X		
Capabilities to accomplish relevant policy research	**54**	X	X	

The impact of participation in networks varies depending on the level of involvement and whether individual or organizational impact are considered.

The Decima survey found that 94% of *coordinators* were satisfied (74% very satisfied) with the effect of network involvement on their career in terms of skill building due to networking and that being in the network kept them informed (2006: 6). By comparison, only 45% of *network members* reported being very satisfied with the effect of network involvement on their individual capacity development and 33% were somewhat satisfied (ibid:108). At the organizational level, the survey also reports that 78% of *coordinators* feel that their home organization has been positively affected by the network. The first four of these results listed (networking and partnering capacity and organization's reputation, communication and information dissemination capacity, capacity to promote research use) can be considered process results whereas the final point (research capacity) is a *product* result.

It is relevant to note that the organizational development results are reported by network coordinators and not the members. The Decima document is clear that network members do not report networks as having a great or moderate influence on their organization to the same extent as network coordinators. Thirty-nine percent of members reported that the network influenced their organization and 27% reported no influence (Decima 2006:109). Members who reported influence in their organizations noted organizational reputation (92%) and networking and partnership capacity (85%) as the most influenced areas (ibid). When influence was reported at the organizational level, it was noted as positive, but not as positive as the perspective of the network coordinators (2006: 109-110).

Comparing Intended and Reported Results

Adamo noted that the documentation she reviewed on network projects paid relatively little attention to strengthening research management and resource mobilization capacities of network partners, despite their importance for network sustainability (2004: 12, 35). Adamo stresses the value of institutional capacity building in these areas (ibid). The Decima survey addressed these points by asking about individual capacity development at the network coordinator level. These reported results are clustered as 'capacity to facilitate a network'. Although the information in Table 4 that relates to 'individual process results' are not explicit in IDRC's four corporate result areas, they are reported on in some detail in the Decima survey.

Connecting the different types of intended and reported results offers insights into understanding the multitude of possible results. Section 3 discusses the intended capacity building results of IDRC-supported networks, which are articulated primarily at the corporate level. Furthermore, the Decima survey reveals significant results that are unintended (or at least unarticulated) at the corporate level. In addition, each network also has its own intended results, the so-called *network level*, as is evident in the Decima survey (2006:100-141). Table 5 compares the results intended at IDRC's corporate level, the goals and objectives identified at the network level, and the results reported in the Decima survey.

Table 5: Comparison of Intended and Reported Results

IDRC corporate-level Intended Results (Adamo 2004, Smutylo 2005:16)	Network-level goals and objectives (Smutylo 2005:17)	Results reported (Decima 2006)
1. Internal IDRC capacity for providing meaningful support	n/a	n/a

IDRC corporate-level Intended Results (Adamo 2004, Smutylo 2005:16)	Network-level goals and objectives (Smutylo 2005:17)	Results reported (Decima 2006)
2. Enhancing research quality -capacity of network members to undertake research and improve research quality	1. Influencing research focus or research methods 2. Providing technical support to IDRC-funded researchers	**Capacity to undertake research** · enhance quality of research · introduce and mobilize interest in new research concepts and approaches and build skills in these areas · promote mainstreaming of new research concepts across institutions and sectors · support new research · develop new fields of research · enhance researcher capacities to work on problems and issues (as distinct from carrying out disciplinary research) · build a common research agenda
3. Advancing the utilization of IDRC-supported research results (enhance capacity to use results, particularly in policy making)	5. Fostering relationships between researchers and research users	**Capacity to influence policy[11]** · enhance researcher capacities to communicate knowledge and ideas to diverse audiences
4. Increase capacity of network members to connect with, engage in and influence research and development agenda (strengthening regional ownership)	3. Giving IDRC-funded researchers and research increased profile and influence	n/a

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11 As policy influence of IDRC-supported networks is the focus of another synthesis report (Yeo forthcoming), this aspect is not dealt with comprehensively here.

IDRC corporate-level Intended Results (Adamo 2004, Smutylo 2005:16)	Network-level goals and objectives (Smutylo 2005:17)	Results reported (Decima 2006)
Unarticulated but significant results	4. Promoting exchange, coordination and collaboration amongst researchers	**Capacity to facilitate the network** · adaptive capacity – managing change and organizational learning · build research communities · promote peer learning and mutual support · facilitate and monitor member participation · internalize networking approach · work with others on a regional/ global · North-South collaboration and exchange · internal management capacity · facilitating and monitoring member participation

CATEGORIZATION ISSUES TO CONSIDER

The different perspectives in the diverse evaluation findings indicate the plethora of options for categorizing and understanding what IDRC expects of and is achieving in the area of capacity building and networks. The difficulty in aligning the different perspectives and coming to definitive conclusions about what has worked and why or why not is partly a result of the lack of a single coherent framework in IDRC on capacity building and networks.

Several discussions may help IDRC to understand the multitude of reported results on capacity building in /via networks (also see Section 5):

· Distinguishing between and finding the balance between individual versus organizational levels and process versus product results may help IDRC the reported results and to seek specific evidence of progress. What balance does IDRC seek to support between individual/organizational capacity building and product/process results?

· Making the unarticulated but significant process capacities visible at the corporate level may be valuable as it can allow for conscious strategizing and backstopping by IDRC.

· Exploring the link between individual capacities or 'process results' and IDRC's more clearly articulated intentions for networks may provide insights on the relationship between a coordinator's ability to facilitate a network and the network's ability to undertake research and influence policy. Investment in consolidating the 'process' results may well lead to more 'product' results.

4.3   Discussion of Key Results per Kind of Capacity

This sub-section details the key results of IDRC-supported networks related to capacity building: the capacity to undertake research, the capacity to influence policy, and the capacity to facilitate the network.

Capacity to Undertake Research

The capacity to undertake research is a key objective for IDRC and is articulated clearly at the corporate level. The evaluation findings indicate which aspects are needed to build research capacity: enhancing the quality of research, introducing and mobilizing interest in new research approaches, and building skills in these areas.

Research quality at IDRC refers to the "rigour and comprehensiveness of research and its relevance and usefulness to intended users" (Adamo 2004: 8). IDRC works with networks to enhance research quality by: strengthening and sustaining research capacities; promoting collaboration and coordination of research efforts across disciplines, institutions and sectors (nationally and regionally) to strengthen the comprehensiveness and coherence of IDRC-supported research; supporting networks as a mechanism to facilitate the inclusion of key stakeholders (ibid).

Enhancing research capacity building is not just about the introduction of new concepts, but also about influencing firmly and long-held paradigms, practices, behaviors and attitudes (Adamo 2004: 11). Universalia found that 'research capacity building' was seen in IDRC as "changing individual behaviour a well as a wide assortment of individual, group, organizational and inter-organizational relationships" (2006: 14). Universalia also noted the links between individual behavior change and the relationship to institutional changes (ibid: 16).

Concrete results with enhanced research capacity are documented by the Decima survey (2006). Three-quarters of IDRC-supported networks wanted to enhance the quality of the research being conducted by its members and four fifths did so (ibi: 113). Other reported results included:

- 73% of networks intended to increase their research quality and 82% did so;
- 80% of networks report that network involvement has had a positive influence on the research being conducted by its members with 37% saying there was a 'great enhancement'.

Eight out of ten networks report that the quality of research being conducted by its members is influenced by participation in the network (ibid: 114). The most noted improvements related to methodological improvements (57%) (ibid:115), while 19% mentioned 'better communication tools' (ibid: 101). Skill-building networks focus on enhancing practical expertise and the ability of researchers to carry out investigations. Such networks report more individual capacity building than others (Highlight 11:3). Over half of the networks in all regions report influence by the network on their ability to do research (ibid:123). Information about other results or intentions and the success for specific network types is not available.

Capacity to Influence Policy

Capacity building in networks is about strengthening research skills, as well as enhancing the position of researchers in debates (Carden and Nielson 2004:156). They comment that capacity building is not just about building researcher capacity to undertake research, but also refers to building the capacity to carry out policy relevant research and to communicate the findings effectively to policy and decision-makers (ibid:155).

Expanding policy capacities includes: supporting new research, the development of new fields of research, enhancing researcher capacities to work on problems and issues (as distinct from carrying out disciplinary research), as well as enhancing researcher capacities to communicate knowledge and ideas to diverse audiences (ibid:147). Guilmette found that a policy-related role for networks was to provide researchers with funding opportunities, information sharing and mutual learning, technical support and training (2004:50, cited in Adamo 2004:25).

Almost half of the networks polled in the Decima survey felt that they had expanded the capacity of researchers to carry out investigations that are relevant to policy (Highlight 11: 6). Other reported results included:

- 65% of networks report that expanding the capacity of researchers to carry out policy relevant research is part of their mandate and 56% report success in this area
- 85% of networks report an objective as being "broadening of knowledge of policy makers" and 67%

report being successful in this area

- · 66% of networks report the intention to affect laws, policies, regulations and legislation (Decima Study 2006: 101).

Drawing from 25 case studies, one source identifies several lessons about building policy capacities in research networks.

- · Ownership is very linked to capacity building – IDRC supports projects that build the capacity of researchers and policy makers to use their own research(ers) (Carden and Nielson 2004:156)
- · Persistence – building capacity to do research takes a long time and is not a single project effort (ibid:157)

Another source notes that communication and dissemination of research results is an area demanding more capacity building support (G-24 2003:25).

Understanding what explains success in expanding research capacities to influence policy outcomes is essential for IDRC. The Decima Survey (2006:119) notes that networks reporting more success in influencing policy are those: where IDRC is very involved; with at least one frequent channel of communication (monthly or better); with more organizational members; that are economic policy networks; with two subject matter foci; and those with two geographic foci. In terms of the most relevant network structures and means to influence policy, the Decima survey found higher success rates where: IDRC was very involved, and within the networks that focus on economic issues (Highlight 11 2006:6, Decima 2006:120). In addition:

…..two-thirds of the networks felt they had helped broaden the perspective of government policy-makers and increase the knowledge available to them. Coordinators working for an international organization or for an NGO were the ones most likely to report progress on this kind of important groundwork…….actually have affected policy, programs, laws, legislation, and regulation. Among …….those that say they have had "great influence" – are a focus on economic policy, a single geographic interest (especially if Southeast Asia), a large number of individual and organizational members, a closed membership structure, and an active communications system (ibid).

Economic policy networks were reported to be the most successful type of network vis-à-vis expanding the capacity of researchers to carry out research — 69% reported a positive influence (Decima Survey 2006:121).

Capacity to Facilitate the Network

Capacity to facilitate the network is a process result, in contrast to the *product* results discussed above. Capacity to facilitate the network is critical for the successful research and policy influence. Without good management and facilitation, the potential synergies of network participation may at worst be lost or, at best, not be used optimally. The process results play a support function – they create the net of the "NETwork" that enables the work of the "netWORK" to be done (see section 2.1).

Despite their importance, these process capacities are not articulated as intended results at IDRC's corporate level and only marginally at the network level. As such, they are referred to in this report as 'unarticulated but significant' results (see Table 5). The process capacities were not included in the Decima survey, hence detailed insights are not possible.

The evaluation findings indicate several key aspects related to network facilitation: adaptive capacity; creating research communities, promoting peer and mutual support, facilitating and monitoring member participation, internalization of the networking approach, working with others on a regional/global scale, and internal management capacity. Each is elaborated below. Much of this type of capacity relates to the coordinator or home organization of the network.

ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

Networks are used to achieve development goals and objectives but are complex and non-linear in terms of the process by which they work (Schenk 2005:38). Bernard found that a component of successful networks is the ability to evolve over time – its 'adaptive capacity'. Schenk found two factors to be influential for building adaptive capacity: managing change and organizational learning (ibid).

In terms of managing change, the transitions in a network can potentially shift the emphasis of the network, which requires reconsideration of priorities and goals (Schenk 2005: 44). Some common changes within network include: change in leadership or membership base; change in network phase or project life cycle; devolution (of network leadership to Southern partners); formalizing network relationships and processes (ibid:39-44). Schenk identifies two aspects of network functions that need to be governed and coordinated in order to manage change: managerial processes (network governance and coordination), and the dynamic interactive process between network members (2005:44).

In terms of organizational learning, Bernard argues for managing networks as learning organizations, which requires mechanisms for regular feedback, capacity development and reflected analysis in order to deal with ambiguous environments and to adapt interactively with them (Bernard in Schenk 2005:45). Two elements of learning organizations were noted by Schenk to have emerged from IDRC documentation: learning-by-doing and monitoring and evaluation (ibid). Organizational learning is both a process and an outcome of networking activities (Schenk 2005:5).

CREATING RESEARCH COMMUNITIES

Networks could sometimes create research communities – building a sense of community, and commitment amongst members through joint activities (Adamo 2004:11[12]). Building research communities in developing regions promotes local ownership for research and development and build the relationships and mechanisms necessary to enable developing countries to define and implement local research and development priorities and to translate research outputs into policies for change regions (Adamo 2004:38). This point is closely linked to the capacity to influence research and development agendas.

PROMOTING PEER LEARNING AND MUTUAL SUPPORT

Peer learning and mutual support occur through networking projects with similar objectives, mentoring between junior and senior researchers and networking stakeholders across sectors and institutions (Adamo 2004:12-14). The idea is that weak institutions are linked with stronger institutions to learn from them, and likewise between junior and senior scholars (Highlight 4 2005:3, Smutylo 2005:18, Universalia 2005:29).

INTERNALIZATION OF NETWORKING APPROACH

Schenk found that internalization of a networking approach is an intangible development outcome and process that enabled participants to "transfer their learning experiences to new environments and/or organizations, new research activities or new forms of collaboration" (2005:35-36). Schenk made a link between the strategic intent of IDRC-supported networks and the use of their results through the internalization of activities (ibid:37). Internalization was seen to contribute to a new way of thinking that is valuable in many spheres including: research methods used by individuals or organizations, government policy-making, technology transfer (Schenk 2005:37).

INTERNAL MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

The internal management structure influences how network objectives are implemented and attained. Yet this need for administrative and logistical support is an often underestimated aspect of network coordination (English 2005 and Bernard 1996 cited in Schenk 2005:16). Schenk distinguishes two coordination mechanisms that influence the operation of IDRC-supported networks: authority relations and network member participation (Schenk 2005:16). Authority relations refers to the delineation of roles and responsibilities throughout a network, ideally to the point that member ownership is established and maintained. Bernard refers to this as "members working within the network not for it" (1996:25, cited in Schenk 2005:18). Member participation is closely liked to authority relations in that active participation is at the "core of what makes a network different to other organizational forms (Schenk 2005:18).

Other important kinds of network facilitation capacities include: skills related to administration and project management (Highlight 11:5, Decima 2006:100); networking and partnership capacity (Highlight 11:5), and the ability to work with others on a regional/global level (Universalia 2006). The evaluation findings do not include concrete evidence on the extent or nature of these additional skills.

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12   Note Adamo's material is based on intended results, while Section 4 seeks to describe reported results. Her reflections have, nevertheless, been included here as they offer insights not present in other evaluation documents on which IDRC can build.

4.4 Mechanisms used by Networks

This section addresses the mechanisms used for capacity building (the *how*) within IDRC-supported networks. It complements the focus of sections 4.1 to 4.3 on the targets of capacity building efforts (the *who*) and the results of capacity building in networks (the *what*).

IDRC support to networks makes use of a wide array of capacity building activities (Universalia 2005:29-30). With the many different structures and intentions that pass as 'networks' (consortia, fora, platforms etc) and the many different levels of capacity building (individual, organizational, systems, etc) addressed by IDRC-supported networks, such a diverse collection of potential capacity building activities is unsurprising. However, it does signal the absence of a clearly defined 'IDRC approach', instead constituting a "mixed bag" or buffet of possible mechanisms for capacity building from which to choose (ibid:30).

Funding-related
- Funding graduate program development, scholarships, and awards (Universalia 2005:ii, Highlight 4 2005: 3)
- Small grant programs for institutional capacity building (Highlight 4 2005:3)
- Small grant competitions (Smutylo 2005:18)

Peer-support
- Mentoring function – encouraging peer review and linking junior and senior scholars with weak and strong institutions (Highlight 4 2005:3, Smutylo 2005:18, Universalia 2005:29)
- Coaching (Universalia 2005)
- Networking opportunities amongst researchers and practitioners experimenting with new methods and approaches (Adamo 2004:9)
- Long-term peer learning, guided peer learning (Adamo 2004:11)
- D-group moderating (Smutylo 2005:18)
- Collaborative research (Smutylo 2005:18)

Face-to-face interaction
- Monitoring and site visits (Adamo 2004:11)
- Study tours, exchange visits (Smutylo 2005:18, Adamo 2004:11)
- Internships (Smutylo 2005:18)
- National, regional or international meetings, conferences (Smutylo 2005:18)

Technical assistance
- Training (formal, informal, non-formal) connected to a research project on specific methodological approaches to research and evaluation, including training courses (Highlight 4 2005:3, Adamo 2004:11, Smutylo 2005:18)
- Technical assistance (Smutylo 2005:18)

Other
- Centers of Excellence (Universalia 2005:29).

Some of these activities are used within networks and, networks and networking themselves are also included as a mechanism for capacity building (Universalia 2005:29). Beyond practical skills, networks are also intended to build a sense of community and commitment among members through: joint training exercises, guided peer review, monitoring of field work, cross-sector or region exchange and other opportunities for professional engagement (Highlight 4 2005:3). Adamo remarks: "the purpose is to stimulate lateral thinking and the cross-fertilization of ideas on issues of common concern" (Highlight 4 2005:3).

The evaluation findings do not make clear how the activities (mechanisms) are used strategically to achieve capacity building results. The evaluation findings list activities undertaken by networks. It is clear that capacities are being built and have, in this report, distinguished the kinds, types and levels of capacities. However, the pathways of how this change occurs are unclear. The Decima Survey was the only source that

sought to explain **how** capacity building occurs but only reports about the individual and organizational levels. For example, coordinators perform different roles. Further insights as to the mechanisms used for individual (coordinator) capacity building can be found by looking at the roles coordinators play. Their reported roles include: disseminating the network's research results (85%); promoting the network (83%); organizing conferences (83%); facilitating communication and interpersonal relationships (81%); presenting at conferences (80%); forging new relationships for the network (73%); coordinating research within the network (70%); conducting research within the network (58%) (ibid:102). However, it is unclear as to how these roles related to the capacities being built. The evaluation does not provide these insights.

As discussed in section 4.1, most capacity building reported in networks currently occurs at the individual level, while some takes place at the organizational level. The Decima survey reported that coordinators individual capacity building is most influenced by: networking (42% mention this aspect); being kept informed (30%) and skill improvement (26%) (2005:100). As to organizational capacity building, the influences most frequently cited by coordinators were: networking (45%) and skill building (26%) (Decima 2006:101). However, these statistics do not provide additional insights to IDRC as they are based on circular logics. For example, skill-building is listed as an influence on capacity building, yet can be equated with capacity building. A similar logical flaw can be discerned in the observation that capacity building in networks is most influenced by networking.

Issues to Consider on Mechanisms

If IDRC wants to stimulate more strategic use of specific mechanisms for capacity building by networks, then it might be useful to identify the mechanisms used for different network structures and different kinds and levels of capacity building. Such an inventory might provide insights about effectiveness of mechanisms and allow a shift from generic to more specific and more coordinated analysis, evaluation and understanding of what capacity building is happening, where, how and in particular why.

Assumptions about the effectiveness and appropriateness underpin the choice of mechanisms and how these are used by the networks to contribute to the above-mentioned effects. Various network mechanisms that build individual and institutional capacities are suggested including mentoring between researchers of different experience and caliber, and linking weak and strong institutions, e-discussions, meetings, shared research and so forth. However, if assumptions are not explicit, then mechanisms can appear random choices. Adamo quotes the example of the promotion of mentoring "with little or no explanation of what this is intended to mean and the kind of engagement it might involve in practical/operational terms" (2004: 13). Similarly, organizational mentoring is based on the assumption that pairing weak and strong institutions will strengthen the capacities of the former. Adamo continues: "However, as Yeo (2004) emphasizes, it is not clear whether networking institutions is an effective way of building capacity unless the institution which serves as the hub of the network has specialized expertise in research capacity building, and is focused on coordinating this task" (2004: 13-14). This is an important point that could explain the degree of success with capacity building among different networks.

4.5   Explanatory Factors for Effectiveness of Networks in Capacity Building

The evaluation findings do not provide systematic and evidence-based insights about which networks work better or worse in terms of capacity building or why. This limits the extent to which IDRC can consciously strategize for certain results or support networks to achieve optimal outcomes. Sections 3 and 4 offer some insights about the best ways of realizing particular results, mostly drawn from the Decima Survey. Adamo notes some general points addressing the types of networks or conditions that are most amenable to capacity building: long timelines, consistent mandates to allow staff to identify and adapt training needs and create learning opportunities (2004:9); and clearly specified objectives (Carden 1995: 5 cited in Adamo 2004:14). However, her sources are project proposals rather than project evaluations or PCRs. Universalia identifies factors that contribute to capacity building within IDRC as: conducive conditions related to networks include: persistence, long-term commitment, flexibility, range of expertise, mutual learning, agility, provision of support beyond "one-off" training sessions, and location in the government system (2005:32). IDRC's history and experience with networks is also listed as a supporting factor (ibid).

An important aspect for deepening understanding about network effectiveness is understanding the interplay between product and process results. *Product* results (see sections 4.1-4.3) lead to systemic change, which requires network sustainability (see Wind 2004, Smutylo 2005) and *process* results. Individual coordinators make an important contribution with skills and capacity building 'on the job'. In order to achieve *product* results (enhance research capacities and influence policy), IDRC recognizes that long timelines are required (see Section 3.1). This implies that sustainability is important for capacity building in networks.

Network sustainability provides a clue about understanding effectiveness because of long time horizons that are necessary for the type of systemic change that IDRC seeks. Smutylo notes that IDRC is primarily interested in sustaining: "strengthened research capacity, research being applied to development and relationships fostered or strengthened" (2005: 29). Tricia Winds 2005 report on the sustainability of IDRC-supported networks defined network sustainability as: "a network that continues to function until it achieves its goals, or until its members are no longer willing or able to continue or until it becomes irrelevant (Highlight 3 2005: 2). Wind also identifies factors that help or hinder network sustainability, including: internal relations, external relationships and contextual factors, ongoing relevance, financial sustainability and housing (ibid: 2-5). Through considering the conditions needed for network sustainability, one is lead back to valuing *process* (NETwork). Product and process results are linked through this notion of sustainability.

5 POINTS TO PONDER ON CAPACITY BUILDING AND NETWORKS

This section focuses on four issues for reflection that emerge from the evaluation findings. They are presented as 'points to ponder' for those staff at IDRC who are involved in supporting networks and capacity building efforts. The four issues are:

1) definitions;
2) capacity assessment;
3) power and networks; and
4) planning and evaluating capacity building with diverse and dynamic networks.

5.1 Making the Case for Definitions

It is clear from the key evaluation documents that both concepts that are central to this synthesis are not precisely defined by IDRC which can limit the strategic understanding and use of networks for capacity building.

Both Smutylo and Adamo identify a certain amorphousness of the notion 'network' as used by IDRC, although this does not appear to be a conscious decision of the Centre. The Universalia reports are clear about the lack of precision of capacity building and the difficulties of limited definitions for IDRC, and Smutylo comments that: "the term network is applied ubiquitously to refer to a variety of situations and processes." He notes that the term is "too plastic to use as a basis for setting programming approaches or funding conditions" and calls for a more precise focus lens (2005: 28). Currie-Alder suggests the need to "unpack what the word 'network' means in IDRC" (2003:13). Smutylo began the process of developing a 'Network Intentions Framework' to facilitate more deliberate planning, documentation, and monitoring/evaluation of networks. The framework includes a question on the goals and objectives of the network: "What capacity building results is it seeking?" (Smutylo 2005: 12). This signals the need for more clarity about the interconnection between networks and capacity building (see point 3 in this section).

In the case of 'capacity building', the lack of a single definition is a conscious choice of IDRC but constitutes a problematic definitional gap. Clearly, the diversity of capacity building efforts that IDRC supports via an equally diverse range of networks may obviate precise definitions, hindering rather than helping with innovations and context-specific initiatives. Nevertheless, the Universalia report (2006) urges IDRC to work towards at least *a shared understanding* of what capacity building means. As Morgan (2006: 2-3) states in relation to another study of capacity building:

"The lack of a shared understanding or a common frame of reference about capacity is not an abstract point without operational implications. International development agencies … harmonizing their resources in a sector-wide approach … to support capacity development means coordinating to do what exactly?

Strategies for capacity development add up to a focus on what activities? Does monitoring that looks at short-term changes to structure and performance at a point in time but ignores issues to do with process, relationships and legitimacy tell us anything significant about capacity? When we evaluate capacity, what is it we think we are looking at?"

Lack of precision about what IDRC collectively means with 'capacity building' can lead to problems in three areas, all of which are significant for an organization such as the Centre that seeks to make a strategic difference:

- generic expectations of how capacity building is supposed to happen in networks with scope for misunderstanding and erroneous expectations;
- imprecise or un-strategic direction setting for the kind of capacity and whose capacity is supposed to be built; and
- difficulties in knowing how to assess progress towards capacity building via networks and, therefore, missed opportunities in terms of building capacity.

Point to Ponder 1 - Developing a shared understanding

While a single precise definition of networks and of capacity building could constrain the current diversity and flexibility of IDRC-support, an articulated vision and 'shared understanding' of both concepts could be distilled from existing experience. An inductive exercise based on the IDRC-supported networks that have been most successful at building capacity building over past ten years could provide a fertile starting point (see Box 1 for inspiration). One opportunity for this is the Annual Learning Forum (ALF), which can be used for organizational learning internally for IDRC staff and management. The Universalia report suggests that one year the forum could focus on capacity building – how programs address capacity building and how IDRC can better build capacity with its partners (Universalia 2006: 40).

Box 1. Describing rather than defining capacity (Morgan 2006)

In the context of a global research initiative about the link between capacity development and performance, Morgan discusses the difficulties of defining 'capacity' and related terms. Instead, they chose to describe 'capacity'. He and his team undertook a scan of case studies involved in the research led to a generic definition and description that consists of:

- five features of capacity: empowerment & identity, collective ability, a systems phenomenon, a potential state, creation of public value;
- three components: foundational components, competencies, and capabilities that lead to capacity; and
- five core capabilities: to act, to generate development results, to relate, to adapt and self-renew, to achieve coherence.

The starting point for such an exercise will require clarity about the analytical framework. This report contains some observations about how IDRC could differentiate between types of products, levels of capacity building, and kinds of capacities that might need to be built. This full diversity will need a place in IDRC's shared understanding of capacity building. For both terms 'capacity building' and 'networks' clearer boundaries around what they do and do not constitute will contribute to a shift from the 'art form' to 'the science' to which Universalia (2005) refers.

5.2 Capacity Assessment

Two issues merit further clarification – first, the link between capacities being built and IDRC's focus on systemic change and, second, the importance of developing 'process' capacities. For both issues, capacity assessment may prove to be a valuable tool.

The focus of IDRC-supported networks on individuals, particularly coordinators (Universalia 2005,

Decima 2006) sits uneasily with the Centre's clear views about the need for systemic change within the research environment: "Introducing new concepts and approaches to research is not just about imparting new skills to researchers and practitioners in the field; it is about influencing established (and often firmly held) paradigms, practices, attitudes and behaviors at all levels and in all sectors." (Adamo 2005: 11) The evaluation findings highlight the anomaly between supporting individuals and the need to tackle systems. This has been one trigger for the recent shift by IDRC to support on what is called 'complete capacity' (see section 2.2 and Universalia 2006: 39). Knowing what capacity needs exist in the research environment requires a stock-taking exercise of the network members.

Given the focus in various evaluation findings on 'process' capacities (see section 4.3) for facilitating the network, it is an anomaly that these capacities are not explicitly articulated at the corporate level in terms of intended results. If the networks are expected to produce results that induce systemic change, then they will need sustained efforts by the networks to achieve this. This requires support for the process capacities that create and sustain healthy and vibrant networks. Knowing what capacity is needed for the network to function well requires a stock-taking exercise within the network of the members and the coordinator.

Capacity building commonly starts with a needs assessment process but the evaluation findings do not reveal if this is standard practice in all IDRC-supported networks. Adamo's report reiterated Bernard's 1996 finding that capacity building networks work best when they are, "designed and managed with sufficiently long timelines and consistent mandates to allow staff to identify and adapt training needs and create learning opportunities which support and address the evolving needs of members in reasonably coherent ways" (Bernard 1996: 16 in Adamo 2004: 9). In the case of IDRC-supported networks, such an assessment process would focus on the members and their needs in relation to research capacity, use and ownership of the agenda. However, the evaluation findings do not report on whether and how networks undertake detailed needs assessments prior to planning capacity building mechanisms and opportunities. Nor is there evidence that indicates that networks have a systemic change perspective underpinning their capacity building efforts.

Points to Ponder 2 – Using assessments for strategic capacity building

Given that research for development requires a systemic change, IDRC-supported networks may wish to develop a detailed and systemic perspective on whose capacities are being built and what capacities are required to achieve system-wide change. Embedding a needs assessment process, with regular updates, as part of network development can enhance strategic efforts on capacity building. Do IDRC and the networks currently make decisions about capacity building on sufficient information about whose capacities need building and on what, as well as clarity on the impact these capacities aim to have? Can this be made more purposeful and widespread rather than what appears to be the current implicit and ad hoc manner? If IDRC chooses to move more fully towards organizational capacity building, the Universalia report raises the question of approach (2005: iii, 8) – what approach does IDRC want to use in addressing organizational capacity building? Box 2 describes one framework for undertaking a capacity assessment.

Box 2. Capacity Assessment Grid (McKinsey 2001)

McKinsey developed a capacity assessment grid for non-profit organizations. While networks are distinct from such organizations in several ways, the grid illustrates a systematic approach to the types of capacities that should be in place for an organization to be effective and awards to each type a rating.

Area 1 'Aspirations' relates to whether an organization is able to articulate its aspirations clearly and has a vision. It consists of four criteria.

Area 2 'Strategy' helps analyze if capacities are in place to develop solid strategies by scanning if certain strategic elements exist, such as goals/performance targets, clarity about program relevance and integration, and ideas for new program development. It consists of six criteria.

Area 3 looks at the capacity to analyze performance, strategic and financial planning, monitor the context and other players, raise funds, build external relationships, etc. It consists of fifteen criteria.

Area 4 includes issues such as the engagement of the Board and its composition, the vision and passion of the director/leader, staffing levels and volunteers. It consists of fourteen criteria.

Area 5 considers the quality of existing systems for aspects such as knowledge management, recruiting, financial operations, etc, as well as capacities that relate to physical and technological infrastructure. It consists of twelve criteria.

Area 6 considers aspects such as inter-functional organization and job design. It consists of four criteria.

Area 7 relates to shared values and practices. It consists of three criteria.

For each of these seven areas, a detailed description is provided that enables an organization (or network) to identify how it rates in relation to four levels. This is not a precise rating but rather a kind of 'temperature' of current capacity levels. The ratings indicate if there is:

- A *clear* need for increased capacity;
- A *basic* level of capacity in place;
- A *moderate* level of capacity in place; or
- A *high* level of capacity in place.

One example of a criterion within the area of 'Strategy' is given below.

	1 Clear need for increased capacity	2 Basic level of capacity in place	3 Moderate level of capacity in place	4 High level of capacity in place
Overall strategy	Strategy is either nonexistent, unclear, or incoherent (largely set of scattered initiatives); strategy has no influence over day-today behavior	Strategy exists but is either not clearly linked to mission, vision, and overarching goals, or lacks coherence, or is not easily actionable; strategy is not broadly known and has limited influence over day-to-day behavior	Coherent strategy has been developed and is linked to mission and vision but is not fully ready to be acted upon; strategy is mostly known and day-to-day behavior is partly driven by it	Organization has clear, coherent medium- to long-term strategy that is both actionable and linked to overall mission, vision, and overarching goals; strategy is broadly known and consistently helps drive day-to- day behavior at all levels of organization

5.3 Power and Networks – and the Effect on Capacities

IDRC's support to networks is based on the premise that indigenous research capacity needs to be empowered by strengthening it through network interactions. Regional ownership is a key objective. This would enable greater influence over policy processes and more relevant research agendas, etc. Thus an important driving force revolves around redressing various power inequalities: between North and South, between isolated researchers and well-established researchers, between policymakers and academics, and between civil society and policymakers.

However, the evaluation findings do not deal with the aspect of power inequalities in their analysis. It is not clear if a thorough power analysis about such inequalities informs how networks operate and determines their core activities. Such an analysis may help in more precise detailing of the types of capacities required to tackle power inequities in certain policy debates or within certain research environments. Carden (2005) points out that "Policy influence may be less pronounced, or slower, where policymakers either need basic training to understand the research findings or they are torn by competing interests." Understanding competing interests and how to respond to this as a network may help with more precisely targeted activities by policy-oriented networks.

Furthermore, it is unclear if networks examine power inequalities that are present among their members. For example, Adamo reports: "While there is certainly evidence to suggest that IDRC supports networks intended to respond to locally expressed needs, this review cannot confidently comment on the issue of network/research ownership as the majority of project appraisals reviewed provide surprisingly little information about, for example, where the impetus for forming new networks originates, and how, and in whose interest, the networks are established and maintained." (2004: 34) An analysis of power could add clarity to the wish for shared ownership of the research agenda and could alert the network to possible marginalization of network members. This could then form the basis of more concerted and more effective building capacity for all members. These improvements could, in turn, enhance network effectiveness.

Points to Ponder 3 – Making power in and around networks explicit

Given that regional/local ownership of the research agenda is central to IDRC's choice to support networks, IDRC staff working with networks may find it insightful to analyze power issues in and around networks. Would IDRC find it useful to reflect on power inequalities that networks are supposed to resolve, as well as possible power inequalities within networks and how these may affect capacity building of its members? Box 3 provides some thoughts on power analysis that may inspire further reflections by IDRC.

Box 3. The power cube for analyzing networks and their capacity building

There has been much talk about new opportunities for citizen participation in decision-making that affects their lives. But do these opportunities genuinely shift power and lead to on the ground change for citizens? Such questions can also be asked of the networks supported by IDRC. Does the presence of new networks and the capacity building that takes place enable influence the research agenda or policy environment? And do internal processes make it possible for the more marginalized network members to be equals in the research initiatives and therefore also own the research agenda? Simply creating new arrangements, such as networks, will not increase local ownership of research agendas nor the ability of the network to make an impact. Much will depend on the nature of the power relations that surround and permeate these networks.

Researchers at the Institute of Development Studies (United Kingdom) have developed an analytical framework that looks at opportunities for participation along three dimensions:

- at different levels (or 'places) - international, national and local;
- across different types of (political) 'space'[13] - closed, invited and created;
- in terms of how power dynamics shape the inclusiveness of participation in each space: formal power, hidden power and invisible power.

These dimensions can be used in two ways to analyze networks. First, it can be used to assess the network itself. Assessing space will help identify what exists in terms of closed, invited or created spaces. Where are decisions being made 'behind closed doors, without any pretence of broadening the boundaries for inclusion'? (Gaventa 2006: 6). Are there opportunities in the network where the relative power-brokers invite others to participate in decisions? Or do members engage openly and organically around common concerns? Taking up the 'power' dimension means seeking to understand the 'visible power' in terms of observable decision-making, the 'hidden power' in terms of who is setting the agenda behind the scenes, and 'invisible power' which "shapes people's beliefs, sense of self, and acceptance of the status quo – even their own superiority or inferiority"(ibid 9). This can help clarify the extent to which the network offers equal opportunities for all its members, and thus can help align expectations with organizational structures and internal capacity building.

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13   Defined as: "opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives and interests" (Gaventa 2006: 5)

Second, it can be used to analyze the arenas in network members are expected to have an impact. Looking at 'levels' will enable insight into whether the level at which the network is acting is the most strategic for the level it is expected to influence. Assessing 'spaces' will open up reflections on whether network members are active externally in different arenas. And finally, by analyzing the spaces within which network members wish to make a difference and understanding the power relationships that are present, it could help a network be more conscious of the capacities that its members need in order to contribute towards achieving the network's objectives.
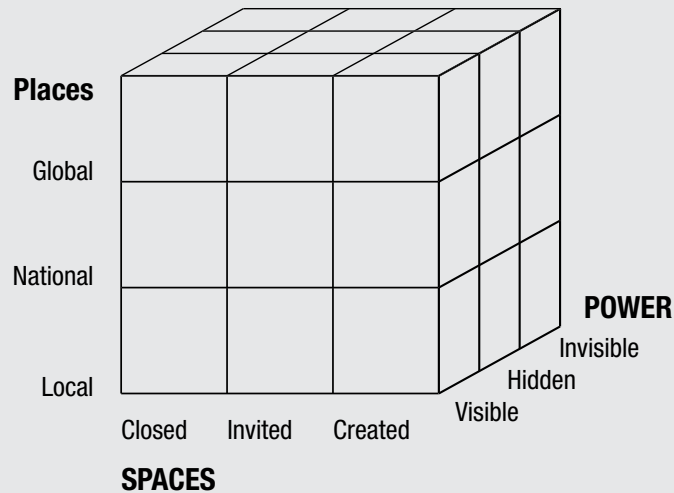
5.4 Planning and Evaluating Capacity Building in Networks

The evaluation findings did not reveal a coherent and clear corporate understanding about the link between networks and capacity building, nor did they provide information on how well different types of networks perform for different capacity building result areas. Also missing are clear explanations about how the desired 'enhanced research quality and use' was achieved. Several reviews state that evidence is lacking for some of the claims made about what networks are supposed to be achieving. Where results were reported in the documentation, there were no detailed explanations of factors for success or failure, or plausible causal connections between mechanisms, capacities built and results achieved.

Clear explanations of such causal connections based on concrete experiences with IDRC-funded networks could support strategic decision making about which networks to support but also what can be expected of them and what they need for optimal effectiveness. This does not mean that IDRC should develop a single corporate theory of change about networks and capacity building – or one that is static. However, by using a set of articulated trajectories of change, with short and mid term progress markers or indicators, it becomes possible to gather evidence needed to support claims that IDRC makes about the capacities being built in and by networks.

The diversity of IDRC-supported networks does not make such explanations of change a straightforward endeavor. The networks funded by IDRC clearly vary greatly[15] – in thematic focus, level of operation (national/regional/international), objectives, governance (more or less formal/centralized and the actual variations in structures), mechanisms, intensity, degree of participation, dynamism, membership, democracy, leadership, trust[15], and so forth. Networks aiming to influence policy via research have differing results depending on the capacities of network members (Carden 2005:3). Carden (2005) identifies a range of influential factors – some of which are manageable by networks and can be purposively used to create appropriate capacity building initiatives.

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14   See Taschereau and Bolger, 2006, page 3, for different ways to cluster networks.

15   To this list can be added: variation in 'level of integrated activity, communication and interpersonal relations, and strategies and activities (Smutylo and Etherington 2005, cited in Currie-Adler 2005: 14).

The evaluation findings do not explain how IDRC translates network variations into different expectations of capacity building efforts. Adamo's review showed that networks vary in the extent to which they included a comprehensive capacity building focus or whether they relied on more informal mechanisms to strengthen capacities – but did not demonstrate the effect of one approach compared to the other. Learning from what has worked amidst the diversity might help in planning and assessing capacity building/network efforts.
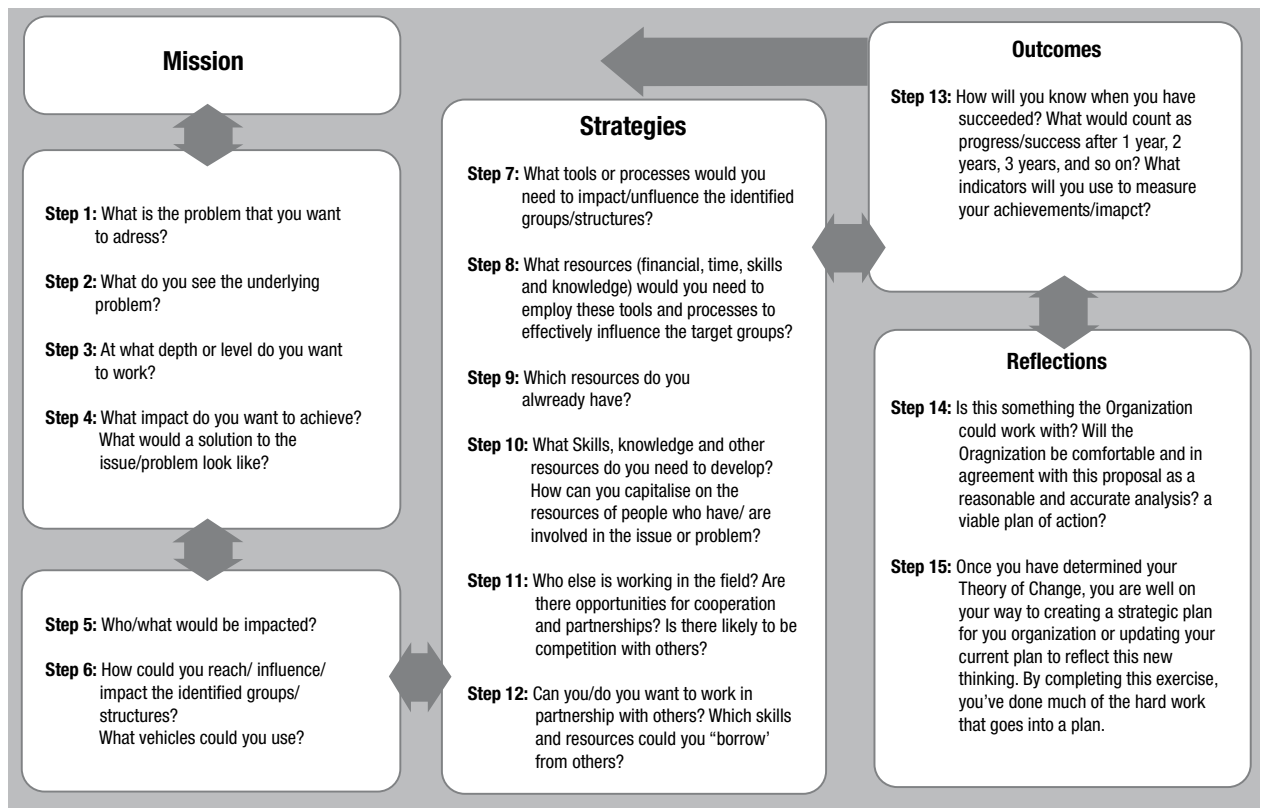
Taking the dynamism of networks into account in planning and management can increase the network's resilience, retention of members and results. It changes through a mix of "planned, deliberate actions and …unplanned processes and influences" (Smutylo 2005:27). He therefore suggests that project approval should "be specific and realistic about the network's starting point" (ibid), with the tendency being to overstate network objectives due to a rather optimistic view of network members' capacities, connectivity and interest at the onset. Church (2006) stresses the importance of quality of relationships to sustain participation: "[A network] *is very dependent on communication, trust and actively doing things together to ensure it doesn't stagnate. At the same time it has to remain an environment in which participant members contribute because they want to and are excited and have something to offer. Few networks survive when coercion or control are exercised too heavily."*

Shifts in a network's mandate and activities imply the need for evolution of capacity building efforts. Smutlyo (2005) concluded that IDRC could positively influence network outcomes by paying more attention to a wider range of network processes or dynamics prior to approving the funding of networks. Currie-Alder (page 4) gives the example of the Medicinal Plants Network that "initially focused on issues involving collectors and growers at the local level, then scaled up to include additional stakeholders as needed to address problems and link to national level policy and programs." He continues: "In more sustainable networks, members will adjust their respective roles over time to adapt to changes in network memberships and changes in their own capacity to participate in network activities. Sustainable networks will even adapt their purpose and activities to respond to new challenges as external conditions change or the reason for establishing the network is either satisfied or ceases to be relevant." (ibid: 9). Such scaling up of issues and extension of network members will require an agile and conscious approach to capacity building.

Greater clarity about the types of networks, key variations and their evolution could help guide the networks and IDRC staff members in planning and designing capacity building efforts with specific results in mind, and then monitoring and evaluating these results. The conditions needed within the network to ensure that the appropriate capacities are built could then be intentionally catered for and strived towards. This could include a concrete set of capacity building mechanisms, but also other aspects of the network to facilitate success such as "leadership structures, communications or advocacy tactics, or the institutional base for research findings" (Carden 2005:X).

Point to Ponder 4 – Clarifying expectations amidst diversity and over time and assessing results

IDRC might wish to articulate a set of change trajectories that make explicit how capacity building in and by networks is expected to lead to intended results at the corporate level. When working with a specific network, IDRC staff members and network members can develop a clear shared explanation of how certain network mechanisms will lead to enhanced capacities and network specific results. At both levels, these theories of change can be revisited to track whether or not and how capacities are being built through networks. Box 4 provides ideas for articulating a theory of change to guide planning of the network level goals, strategies and activities. These include a set of questions that are widely recognized as basic building blocks that then enable the development of a more precise action plan. Box 5 offers one framework for evaluating network effectiveness.

ox 4. Making explicit the plausible causal connections between capacity building and network results (Grantcraft 2006)

Mission

Step 1: What is the problem that you want to adress?

Step 2: What do you see the underlying problem?

Step 3: At what depth or level do you want to work?

Step 4: What impact do you want to achieve? What would a solution to the issue/problem look like?

Step 5: Who/what would be impacted?

Step 6: How could you reach/ influence/ impact the identified groups/ structures? What vehicles could you use?

Strategies

Step 7: What tools or processes would you need to impact/unfluence the identified groups/structures?

Step 8: What resources (financial, time, skills and knowledge) would you need to employ these tools and processes to effectively influence the target groups?

Step 9: Which resources do you alwready have?

Step 10: What Skills, knowledge and other resources do you need to develop? How can you capitalise on the resources of people who have/ are involved in the issue or problem?

Step 11: Who else is working in the field? Are there opportunities for cooperation and partnerships? Is there likely to be competition with others?

Step 12: Can you/do you want to work in partnership with others? Which skills and resources could you "borrow' from others?

Outcomes

Step 13: How will you know when you have succeeded? What would count as progress/success after 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, and so on? What indicators will you use to measure your achievements/imapct?

Reflections

Step 14: Is this something the Organization could work with? Will the Oragnization be comfortable and in agreement with this proposal as a reasonable and accurate analysis? a viable plan of action?

Step 15: Once you have determined your Theory of Change, you are well on your way to creating a strategic plan for you organization or updating your current plan to reflect this new thinking. By completing this exercise, you've done much of the hard work that goes into a plan.

Box 5. Knowing how to evaluate networks (Wilson-Grau and Nunez 2006)

Wilson-Grau and Nunez (2006) have developed a framework of indicators to help evaluate networks, with a focus on international social change networks. Their framework includes the assessment of four qualities of a network.

1. **Democracy** means equity in the relations and exercise of power within the network – active participation in decision-making, is the best guarantee that the decision will be implemented.

2. **Membership diversity**, along with shared values and a collective purpose, puts much creative potential at the disposal of the network.

3. **Dynamism** means harnessing the enthusiasm and energy of a voluntary membership, which requires enhancing interactions and facilitating action and innovation.

4. **Performance** in achieving network objectives is determined by the quality of relationships between organisations and individuals in the network.

These four quality criteria are related to three operational dimensions

· **Political purpose and strategies** means clarifying the type of change that the network seeks, what values drives the membership and also how the network proposes to achieve the results that will fulfil its purpose.

· **Organisation and management** requires looking at the structure, operational management, institutional capacity, and communication.

· **Leadership and participation** requires decision-making processes and collaboration that emerges from democratic leadership and the active involvement of the members.

Based on these elements, Wilson-Grau and Nunez composed a 4 by 3 matrix that can be used to assess the quality of the network. In each of the 12 cells, they suggest indicators that can guide the evaluator. For example, where it concerns 'Democracy' in relation to 'Organisation and Management', two suggested indicators are:

· The members contribute and have equitable access to the resources (people, funds, goods and services) and reputation of the network.

· The structure is neither hierarchical nor gender-biased.

The matrix is meant to be used flexibly, so not all cells may be relevant. They then convert the indicators into a questionnaire as per the diagram below.

Quality Indicators		To what extent does the statement in the second column characterise the network? Max <<<<<<<>>>>>> Min						If you consider this is a special strength, explain why. On the other hand, if this is a weakness that the network should devote time and energy to solve also explain why.
	Political Purpose and Strategies	5	4	3	2	1	0	
1	All members share the vision and mission							

Finally they suggest a thorough look at four types of outputs of the network: 'operational outputs', 'organic outcomes' (capacity of network members), 'political outcomes', and 'impact'.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation findings revealed little unequivocal evidence from practice that explains the relationship between capacity building and networks. Nevertheless, the evaluation findings did allow the identification of four areas or 'points to ponder' that merit further consideration within IDRC.

Developing a shared understanding

While a single precise definition of networks and of capacity building could constrain the current diversity and flexibility of IDRC-support, an articulated vision and 'shared understanding' of both concepts could be distilled from existing experience. An inductive exercise from among the most successful in capacity building terms of the over 200 networks that IDRC has funded over the past ten years could provide a fertile starting point. See Box 1 for inspiration.

Using assessments for strategic capacity building

Given that research for development requires a systemic change, IDRC-supported networks may wish to develop a detailed and systemic perspective on whose capacities are being built and what capacities are required to achieve system-wide change. Embedding a needs assessment process in network development can enhance strategic focus of capacity building. Do IDRC and the networks currently make decisions about capacity building on sufficient information about whose capacities need building and on what? Can this be made more purposeful and widespread rather than what emerges as an implicit and ad hoc process?

Making power in and around networks explicit

Regional ownership of research agendas requires opportunities for equal participation in networks. Such opportunities cannot be assumed but must be created. This means understanding how power affects the effectiveness of the network. IDRC reflect on power inequalities within the research environment that networks are supposed to resolve, as well as possible power inequalities within networks and how these may affect capacity building of its members?

Clarifying expectations – and checking results - amidst diversity and over time

Many questions about network effectiveness at building research capacity for development remain to be answered. These require clarity about what is expected of networks in terms of capacity building, and how capacities will translate into effective results. Questions for which evidence is needed include: To what extent are IDRC-supported networks indigenously embedded with strong regional ownership – and if so, what has helped achieve this? Does more rigorous research result from network interactions and how? How are policymakers' capacities to use research findings enhanced by engagement with researchers in networks? Insights to these questions can emerge by comparing evidence with expectations about how networks build research and policy-influencing capacity in the South that is indigenously embedded and leads to better use of research findings.

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