Networks

Three Definitions

1. A network is a group of individuals and/or organisations who, on a voluntary basis, exchange information or goods, or implement joint activities, and who organise themselves for that purpose in such a way as their autonomy remains intact (ILEIA)

2. Formal or informal cooperation of 3 or more organisations with a common interest to reach together a certain, implicitly or explicitly formulated common goal (MDF)

3. A strategic network is a temporary alliance of individuals and organisations through which their resources are combined in pursuit of shared, defined, and consequential goals that strengthen the movement’s position in relation to major opposing forces (Korten – Strategic Network)
Key Aspects of Networking

1. Members take part voluntarily

2. Members do things together they cannot do easily, or as well, alone

3. Members autonomy is intact

4. There is a great diversity of forms – both formal and informal

Forms of Networking

Loose – anyone can contact anyone

Centralized – contact is through a central secretariat

Decentralized – different functions are centralized, or geographical nodes
Possible Activities of Networks

Loose
- Exchange of information between members (newsletter)
- Cross fertilization of ideas
- Access to new information
- Peer support for each other

More Formal
- Research
- Training and technical assistance
- Common purchasing and marketing
- Common practices/methodologies
- Linked activities and joint activities
- Higher profile for members of the network
- Influencing public policy/policy dialogue

Stages of a Network

1. Preparation:
   Initiators identify a topic of common interest, suggest a network, arouse interest, mobilise energy and resources

2. Establishment
   Members form mechanisms and structures – formal to informal – promote coordination and linkage building

3. Operational
   The Network sets up activities, manages resources, organises internal cooperation

4. Network Development
   Network re-thinks its organisational design and management in the light of experience of network activities

5. Sustainability
   Network considers life of network and what needs to be done to sustain it.
Possible Problems with Networking

1. Involvement v. Responsibility
   are you giving or taking?

2. Coordination or Control
   coordinating activities of members
   without attempting to control them

3. Person v. Institution
   contributions of individuals need to be
   backed up by institutional commitment

4. Information v. Action
   what are you hoping for from sharing
   information?

5. Converted v. unconverted
   who are you trying to include?

   Pressure towards institutionalisation and
   possible stagnation

7. Autocracy or democracy
   Who is allowed to suggest / select new
   members?

Preconditions for Networking

1. Common vision and common goals?

2. Common problems and constraints

3. Do potential members understand
   what a network is and what it might
   mean for them?

4. Are potential members prepared to
   spend the necessary time and energy
   in sharing (at possible expense of
   their own programs)?

5. Is someone prepared to coordinate
   things at the start

6. Will members put their money into it
   – do they value it that much?