

Working Paper 252

**Networks and Policy Processes in
International Development: a literature review**

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Acronyms

AFREPREN	African Energy Policy Research Network
AFRODAD	African Forum and Network on Debt and Development
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ODI)
CO	Community organisation
CSO	Civil society organisation
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DWCRA	Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (Indian government initiative)
EEPSEA	Economy and Environment Program for Southeast Asia
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GDN	Global development network
GPPN	Global public policy network
GURN	Global union research network
ICASO	International Council of Aids Service Organisations
ICBL	International Campaign to Ban Landmines
ICT	Information Communications Technology
ID	International Development
IFCB	International Forum on Capacity Building
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IT	Information technology
JFM	Joint forest management
KM	Knowledge management
KNET	Knowledge network
LOCOA	Leaders and Organisers of Community Organisations in Asia
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RUPFOR	Resource Unit for Participatory Forestry
SARN	South Asia Research Network
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association
SNA	Social network analysis
SPWD	Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development
TAN	Transnational advocacy network
TIPM	Transnational Indigenous People's Movement
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Executive Summary

Power does not reside in institutions, not even the state or large corporations. It is located in the networks that structure society. (Manuel Castells)

Citizen networks will become a more and more significant development mechanism to link, to provide communal direction, to learn together and to gradually dissipate the considerable constraints from several structural problems which work against the poor. (Somsook Boonyabancha)

We are some way from being able to structure public and organisational power in ways which really harness network potential. (McCarthy, Miller and Skidmore)

From the realm of the Group of Eight (G8), to anti-globalisation protests, to Al Qaeda, ‘networks’ is the latest buzzword. We hear that networks represent the most effective organisational model. So too in the field of international development: researchers on social capital, organisational management and globalisation all talk of networks. Practitioners are setting up numerous networks and showing that they can improve policymaking processes – and particularly the use of information in them.

Networks are structures that link individuals or organisations who share a common interest on a specific issue or a general set of values. When they work, networks are particularly good at fulfilling some key functions – the three ‘Cs’:

- **Communication:** across both horizontal and vertical dimensions;
- **Creativity:** owing to free and interactive communication amongst diverse actors;
- **Consensus:** like-minded actors identifying each other and rallying around a common issue.

There is a considerable body of evidence suggesting that networks can help improve policy processes through better information use. They may, for example, help marshal evidence and increase the influence of good-quality evidence in the policy process. They can foster links between researchers and policymakers; bypass formal barriers to consensus; bring resources and expertise to policymaking; and broaden the pro-poor impact of a policy.

A good example is the Huairou Commission. Until the mid 1990s, grassroots women’s groups were kept out of discussions at global level. In less than 10 years, the Huairou Commission has evolved from an informal, loose coalition into a global network of more than 11,000 grassroots women’s groups. The results of the Huairou Commission have been deeper collaborations and the provision for grassroots women’s groups of a platform that they can call their own.

But some networks don’t work. Access can be varied, interaction meagre, influence marginal and sustainability problematic. There still remains limited systematic understanding of *when*, *why* and *how* they function best for policy impact in international development.

In this paper, we are especially interested in the ways that networks can provide links among research, policy and practice – and the opportunities and challenges therein. We are also particularly interested in civil society – and the way non-state actors use evidence to influence policy processes (in the public interest). And we are principally interested in developing countries – where resources are scarce, political contexts are often more troubled, capacities weaker and our understanding much more limited.

Based on a literature review of over 100 texts, this paper has three main objectives. First, it outlines why networks matter. Secondly, it identifies how networks can influence policy – focusing on their impact on four key components of policy processes: agenda setting; policy formulation;

implementation; and monitoring and evaluation. Thirdly, the paper identifies lessons – for capacity building, communications and policy influence activities – as well as areas for further study.

What impact can civil society networks have on policy processes in international development? Rather than follow the usual approach and focus on types of network themselves, this paper reassesses the literature, taking policy processes as the starting point. In each stage of the policy process, there are a number of ways in which networks can help. These are summarised below.

Table 1 Networks, CSOs and Policy Influence

Stage of the policy process	Key objectives for actors aiming to influence policy	How networks can help
Agenda setting	Convince policymakers that the issue does indeed require attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marshall evidence to enhance the credibility of the argument • Extend an advocacy campaign • Foster links among researchers, CSOs and policymakers
Formulation	Inform policymakers of the options and build a consensus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collate good-quality representative evidence and act as a ‘resource bank’ • Channel international resources and expertise into the policy process • Build long-term collaborative relationships with policymakers • Bypass formal barriers to consensus
Implementation	Complement government capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the sustainability and reach of the policy • Act as dynamic ‘platforms for action’
Evaluation	Collate quality evidence and channel it into the policy process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide good-quality representative evidence and feedback • Link policymakers to policy end-users
Underlying	Capacity building for CSOs aiming to influence policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a dynamic environment for communication and collaborative action • Provide support and encouragement • Provide a means of political representation

Influencing policy is rarely straightforward, but we are getting to know more and more about what works. We identify 10 commonly cited ‘keys to success’, which provides a basic checklist of ways in which networks may overcome their numerous associated problems and capitalise upon their potential to influence policy:

- **Clear governance agreements:** setting objectives, identifying functions, defining membership structures, making decisions and resolving conflicts.
- **Strength in numbers:** the larger the numbers involved the greater the political weight.
- **Representativeness** is a key source of legitimacy and thereby influence.
- **Quality of evidence** affects both credibility and legitimacy.
- **Packaging of evidence** is crucial to effective communication.
- **Sustainability is vital, since persistence over a period of time is often required for policy influence.**
- **Key individuals** can facilitate policy influence.
- **Informal links** can be critical in achieving objectives.
- **Complementing** of official structures rather than duplication makes networks more valuable.
- **ICT:** New information and communication technologies are increasingly vital for networking.

While not changing the basic rules of economics, politics or human nature, networks do deserve some of the recent hype. However, network functioning is much less effective than it could be. And although many gaps remain, we do now know much more about when, why and how they work best in influencing policy in international development.

1. Introduction

From the realm of the Group of Eight (G8), to anti-globalisation protests, to Al Qaeda, ‘networks’ is the latest buzzword. We hear that networks represent the most effective organisational model. Researchers on social capital, organisational management and globalisation all talk of networks. Policymakers and practitioners, in government and civil society, are setting up or becoming involved in numerous networks. We know networks matter. However, beyond the hype, there still remains limited systematic understanding of **when**, **why** and **how** they function best for policy impact in international development.

The objective of this paper is to review and synthesise existing literature in an effort to start to answer these questions. Reflecting broader trends, researchers in the field of civil society and international development have started to give considerable attention to networks – from transnational advocacy networks to global public policy networks (Stone and Maxwell, 2004; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Our understanding of both subjects is as yet patchy and unsure. This paper draws together over 100 diverse texts, hoping to provide a systematic overview of this recent work from the general literature as well as from that focusing on international development. An accompanying annotated bibliography provides more information on each of the sources reviewed.

This paper also aims to cast fresh light on this issue by addressing the research findings from a different perspective. At present, many studies focus on types of network themselves. This study reassesses the literature, taking policy processes as the starting point. In particular, it focuses on four key components in the policy process: agenda setting; formulation; implementation; and monitoring and evaluation. For each stage, we identify the key roles networks can play and some of the reasons they are successful.

From this broad framework, we direct our work in a number of directions. We are particularly interested in the ways that networks can provide links among research, policy and practice – and the opportunities and challenges therein. We are also particularly interested in civil society – and the way non-state actors use evidence to influence policy processes.¹ And we are particularly interested in developing countries – where resources are scarce, political contexts are often more troubled, capacities weaker and our understanding much more limited.

As a background paper for ODI’s Civil Society Partnerships Programme,² this review is intended to identify lessons for the CSPP capacity building, communications and policy influence activities as well as to identify areas for further research. In this context, we focus on those civil society networks aiming for policy influence that is in the public interest, and we do not attempt to present a detailed analysis of the literature relating to ‘uncivil’ or malignant policy networks.

The analysis in this paper is laid out as follows. Section 2 provides a background, reviewing some of the broader literature on why networks matter, particularly for international development. Section 3 is structured around the four ‘key components’ of the policy cycle, drawing out key points from the literature on networks for each stage. Section 4 draws out some main themes, highlights 10 keys to success for networks, and identifies gaps in analysis which may warrant further research.

¹ This paper focuses narrowly on the subject of **networks**, whereas a parallel paper (Pollard and Court, 2005) addresses the subject of **civil society** and policy influence.

² For further information, see www.odi.org.uk/cspp/.

2. Background and Rationale

2.1 Defining networks

Box 1 Key definitions

Network: Formal or informal structures that link actors (individuals or organisations) who share a common interest on a specific issue or a general set of values.

Policy: Purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors (Anderson, 1975).

Civil society organisation: Organisations that work in an arena among the household, the private sector and the state to negotiate matters of public concern (DFID Information and Civil Society Division: see Note).

Research: Any systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge (OECD).

Knowledge: Information that has been evaluated and organised so that it can be used purposefully (Association for Information Management).

Evidence: An indication of the basis for knowledge or belief (Princeton University, Cognitive Science Department).

Note: Identifying clear lines of separation among CSOs and households, the private sector and the state can be problematic. Many CSOs have complex and multifaceted relationships within these other sectors and may be dependent on them for financial backing, political status and other kinds of resources. Our definition focuses on the nature of the work undertaken by CSOs ('to negotiate matters of public concern') rather than the nature of those organisations and their dependencies.

As a term that is widely used (with varied uses in mathematics and ecology as well as economics, sociology and political science), 'networks' are inherently difficult to define. In the most general sense, networks are simply collections of linked nodes – where the nodes may be anything from animals in a food web to computers in an office. In social science, a fundamental difficulty of definition stems from the fact that networks can be seen as organisational **structures** or **processes** that bring actors together. And so, for example, what management theorists Lipnack and Stamps (1994) describe as a 'networked organisation' combines both the structural and the procedural elements of networking. The theoretical approach of Giddens' 'structuration' (1976) has helped some scholars to approach this conceptual dilemma by seeing external 'structure' and human 'agency' as a mutually interacting duality. More recently, Riles addressed similar issues in *The Network Inside Out* (2001); she noted that a network is 'both a means to an end and an end in itself', and that the role of actors is in part simply to validate the continued existence of the network.

For practical reasons, it is necessary to settle on a definition. Some of the most useful suggestions derive from the field of Management Studies. Tennyson (2003) offers one simple sentence: 'A communications arrangement linking people who are engaged in similar activities'. Based on this and other definitions, we define networks as: **formal or informal structures that link actors (individuals or organisations) who share a common interest on a specific issue or who share a general set of values.** Given the purposes of this study, this is intended to be a very broad definition which can be applied as much to an informal group as to a rigidly organised corporate management structure. It is not possible (or useful) to identify a set of defining characteristics that relates to all of the networks that fit this definition.

However, in this discussion, there are important functions that are particularly well suited to the network structure. Networks do not necessarily all perform these functions, but they do nevertheless have the capacity to foster the following three 'Cs':

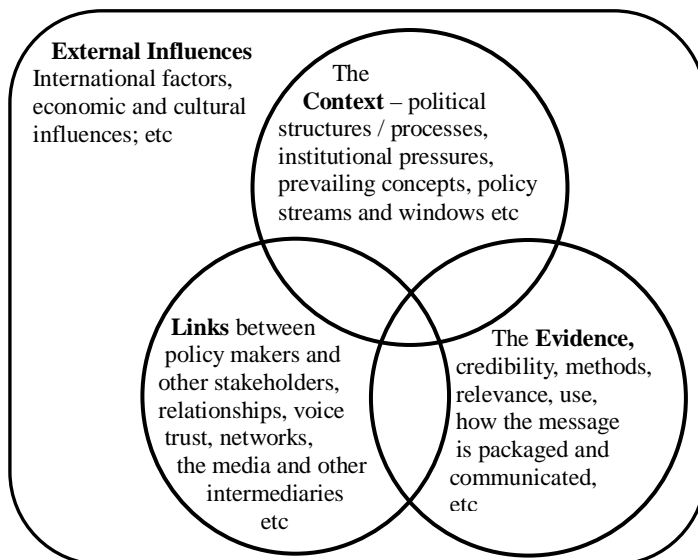
- **Communication:** the multiplicity of links within a network allows for actors to communicate better. Hence, there is the potential for knowledge to be shared interactively across both horizontal and vertical dimensions.
- **Creativity:** free and interactive communication among a diverse range of actors offers a fertile climate for creative action.

- **Consensus:** networks can make use of their many links among diverse actors to build consensus, often circumventing formal barriers. They allow like-minded actors to identify each other and rally around a common issue.

2.2 Background: evidence, policy and links

Before proceeding to the much broader literature, it is worth highlighting why we are so interested in networks. The interest is very much based on our work on bridging research and policy in international development (Court et al., 2005; Maxwell and Stone, 2004). There are three key steps here. First, the better use of research-based evidence in development policy and practice can help save lives, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life. Secondly, we found that an arena we referred to as ‘links’ was one of the four key areas affecting the uptake of research into policy; within this links arena, networks were a key component. As outlined in Figure 1 below, the other main arenas are context, evidence and external influences.

Figure 1 The RAPID framework



Thirdly, and most relevant as a rationale for this paper, our work demonstrates that there is need for further study of the ‘links’ arena of the framework – and one of the key elements of this factor is networks.³ The situation is summarised in the following passage (Court et al., 2005: 209):

Out of the three spheres in the framework (context, evidence, links), our understanding of the links arena remains the most limited. Although it is relatively simple to draw a ‘family tree’ of the key individuals and partnerships involved in a particular policy episode, **it is harder to understand how more diffuse networks influence the research-policy process.** The current theoretical literature provides myriad typologies of ‘formal and informal networks’, ‘epistemic communities’, and ‘downward links’, all of which seem to be evident and important in the case studies. They do not, however, add up to a comprehensive analytic tool for understanding what makes links function.

This paper was inspired by the recognition of networks as important, but an incomplete understanding of their role in policy processes in developing countries.

³ For further information, see www.odi.org.uk/rapid.

2.3 Why are networks seen as so important?

In 1997, Manuel Castells proclaimed ‘The Rise of the Network Society’, spearheading a current surge of interest into the concept of networks and their particular relevance for the world of the 21st century:

This new form of social organisation, in its pervasive globality, is diffusing throughout the world ... shaking institutions, transforming cultures, creating wealth and inducing poverty, spurring greed, innovation, and hope, while simultaneously imposing hardship and instilling despair. It is indeed, brave or not, a new world (1–2).

The word ‘network’ has come to be adopted as a buzzword in a wide range of contexts, and it is often enthusiastically acknowledged that networks have a significant role to play in modern society.⁴ This section focuses on why networks are seen as so important. The discussion is organised around some key themes in the literature, namely: globalisation, governance, social capital, and organisational or knowledge management; and with further crosscutting themes from information communications technology (ICT). For each theme, we draw out some of the key issues from the general literature and then some of the findings specific to international development.

Globalisation

Castells’ seminal trilogy, *The Information Age*, identified two key catalysts behind the rise of ‘global network society’ of ‘production, power and experience’. These are: (i) the increasing complexity of global power systems (symptomised by the decline of the nation-state); and (ii) the development of efficient international ICT to facilitate cross-border communications. For Castells, these trends of globalisation have contributed to the emergence of a new world order, where power in the 21st century will rest in the hands not of governments, corporations or even NGOs but, rather, within amorphous virtual networks maintained by modern ICTs. He uses the phrase ‘space of flows’ to depict a global environment where the significance of physical location has given way to a new emphasis on timeless, placeless ‘flows’.

In the second volume, *The Power of Identity*, Castells then goes on to analyse several global social movements in the context of the network society outlined in the first volume. He examines a broad spectrum of social movements, ranging from the murderous Japanese cult, Aum Shinrikyo, to the (far more benevolent) environmental movement. His conclusion revises the concept of blurred identities within the ‘information age, and ends with a simple and salient observation: ‘Their [the social movements’] impact on society rarely stems from a concerted strategy, masterminded by a center’ (362).

A number of researchers have started to address issues relating to the practical impact of these newly pervasive global networks. For example, Sassen (2002) focused on the networking of global cities, investigating how new global inter-city linkages affect issues such as the spatial organisation within a city, or the way in which a city interfaces with the global economy. A considerable school of thought has arisen around the idea of using network concepts as a methodology for mapping and understanding increasingly complex aspects of global society and political economy.⁵

⁴ See McCarthy et al. (2004) for a spectrum of current academic work on networks within global society.

⁵ For example, Dicken et al. (2001) argues that in response to the complexity arising from economic globalisation, the concept of networks should be adopted as ‘the foundational unit of analysis for our understanding of the global economy, rather than individuals, firms or nation states’. He goes on to examine global commodity chains and actor-network theory as two potentially useful examples of a ‘network methodology’. See Law and Hassard (1999) for an edited volume of works on actor-network theory and Diani and McAdam (2003) for recent work applying this ‘network approach’ of analysis to the context of collective action.

Governance

In many contexts, policymaking has been diversifying to include more non-governmental actors and has become more supranational in nature. There is growing pressure on national governments and international organisations to link better vertically and horizontally in order to ensure legitimacy and effectiveness. For this purpose, **cross-sector networks** offer an interactive environment where information can flow between actors in all directions (Kickert et al., 1997).

A key emerging stream of literature discusses the role of civil society networks in influencing various forms of governance. By linking up in transnational networks, CSOs may increase their individual and collective policy influence by: sharing knowledge, resources and experience; building solidarity; and accessing policymaking fora previously beyond reach. A significant number of major works have emerged recently in relation to this subject – in particular: Clark (2003a); Edwards and Gaventa (2001); and Keck and Sikkink (1998).

Works by Keane (2003), Florini (2000) and Bigg (2002) have discussed the consequences of the rise of an increasingly networked national and transnational civil society, asking how such networks are interfering with and altering our perceptions of global governance. Reinicke et al. (2000) argue that global public policy networks (GPPNs) have risen to prominence recently as a result of the twin modern-day developments of liberalisation and technological revolution. The combination of these two developments has resulted in ‘governance gaps’ within the international system. Specifically, these ‘governance gaps’ are identified as an ‘operational gap’ (inability to deal with complexity) and a ‘participatory gap’ (a large-scale democratic deficit). Civil society and cross-sector networks (government/civil society/private sector) networks are presented as a vehicle to address these ‘governance gaps’.

Recent emphasis on empowering Southern civil society to participate more in the policy process has provoked new interest in developing systems for vertical communication. As informal and dynamic communications structures, networks offer a key tool to bridge the divide between policymakers and those at grassroots level. It is this thinking that has inspired works such as Ashman (2001) – a report from the International Forum on Capacity Building (IFCB) providing advice for Southern NGOs wishing to build alliances, coalitions and networks. Networks, such as the Huairou Commission, can allow local voices – even ‘the voices of the poor’ – to be heard at global policymaking fora (Narayan and Shah, 2000; Reinicke et al., 2000).

Stone and Maxwell (2004) address the issue of whether and how networks can be effective in promoting research-based policymaking. They conclude that, although there are significant grounds for scepticism over the potential of networks, at the same time there are equal grounds for optimism:

Networks can play an important part in helping to create a policy process that is research rich, inclusive, and accountable – at least in theory. Even so, the virtues of networks are not straightforward. We find that access can be unequal, transactions costs high, and sustainability problematic.

They conclude that it is possible to enfranchise disadvantaged communities and influence Southern policy through networks. However, this does require development agencies to think in new ways – particularly towards long-term commitment and regarding issues of knowledge management.

Box 2 Civil society networks and global governance: a UN perspective

In June 2004, the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations/Civil Society Relations submitted a report to the Secretary General entitled: *We the Peoples: Civil Society, the United Nations and Global Governance*. One of the central theses of the report is that in an increasingly complex and diverse international governance context, networks are a crucial mechanism for communication and collaboration between the United Nations and global civil society:

‘The United Nations needs to work with coalitions of actors with diverse but complementary capacities. This implies working with global policy networks, which are better placed to address contemporary challenges rather than conventional hierarchical organisations. They are more flexible and innovative; they generate and use information more efficiently; and they are better placed to identify and deploy needed competencies.’ (Para. 42: 31)

Social capital

Social capital can be defined simply as ‘the norms and networks that enable collective action’.⁶ The concept was rigorously investigated by Coleman (1990) and popularised in particular by Putnam (1993). Both of these authors contributed to a growing recognition of the fact that informal personal relationships can have a significant influence on the nature and outcomes of formal structures and processes.

A plethora of recent works on social capital have assessed the concept from a variety of different perspectives.⁷ For example, Wellman (1999) carried out a cross-cultural analysis of social networks, drawing conclusions about the ways in which they differ around the world; Lin (2001) addressed the issue of internet-based cybernetworks and the influence that they have had in multiplying social capital.

These discussions also relate to the popular concept of ‘strong and weak ties’, which was introduced by Granovetter (1973). The author referred to both individuals and institutions, arguing that any actor will be connected to other actors by a series of ties – some strong (bonds) and some weak (bridges). He pointed out that weak ties are very useful for opening up diverse opportunities, and he provoked widespread interest by relating his theory to the context of job-hunting. In Granovetter’s example, an individual with a broad-reaching social network is likely to be presented with more job opportunities than someone who relies on a small, close-knit circle of friends.

There is an expanding stream of literature highlighting the role of social capital in fostering pro-poor policy. UNESCO/CROP (2002) and the World Bank-funded Social Capital Initiative⁸ provide windows onto the various current debates regarding the political potential of grassroots social networks. A particularly significant stream of literature addresses the links between social capital and poverty alleviation, with the front page of the World Bank Social Capital webpage announcing that: ‘Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion – social capital – is critical for poverty alleviation and sustainable human and economic development.’

Organisational management

In addition to the above theoretical discussions, networks also arise in a more practical application – as tools for efficient organisational and knowledge management. Most of the work in this field is fuelled by the interests of the corporate sector. And so, management theorists such as Lipnack and Stamps (1994) and Tennyson (2003) have developed simple guidelines providing practical advice to corporations that seek to optimise their use of the structure and process of networks.

A recent literature review by Borgatti and Foster (2003) provides a useful overview of some of the key themes that have emerged with regard to ‘the network paradigm in organisational research’.

⁶ See World Bank Social Capital for Development website: www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/.

⁷ See <http://w3.uniroma1.it/soccap/eng-index.htm> and the World Bank site in footnote 6 for an overview of some of this work.

⁸ See: www.iris.umd.edu/adass/proj/soccapubs.asp and www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/library/keyread1.htm.

They acknowledge that terms such as ‘network organisation’ became popular in the 1980s and 1990s in response to the increasingly globalised and complex climate of commerce – network organisations were seen as offering an effective balance between rigid hierarchical structures on the one hand and turbulent markets on the other. Current thinking likewise emphasises the capacity of network organisations to be flexible and innovative in complex situations. For example, Accenture in 2002 identified networks as a model of work setting that is particularly suited to adapting to meet new challenges (Hovland, 2003).

Networks are also relevant to current thinking in the field of knowledge management. Recent studies have emphasised the fact that the creation and utilisation of knowledge are fundamentally human processes, as such partially reliant on social and structural relationships among individuals in an organisation. A key question focuses on how the nature of these networks of relationships can impact the ability of an organisation to share knowledge effectively among its members (Borgatti and Foster, 2003).

Church et al. (2002) review a number of issues regarding networks in the field of international development, such as network relationships, trust, structure and participation. They see networks as a potential mechanism to redress those marginalised at the global level. They discuss the challenges facing networks in practice and identify solutions for networks based on the four ‘Ds’ used by Chambers (1997) in his participatory approach to development: diversity, dynamism, democracy and decentralisation. They conclude with some practical advice on evaluating networks.

ICT

Acting as a catalyst in all of the above three contexts, recent developments in ICT have greatly enhanced the scope of networks. In particular, this refers to the rise of the internet and email. A stream of literature has emerged to address some of the various questions that arise.⁹

A key question regards the issue of civil society: how is modern ICT influencing the nature and role of both local and global civil society networks? The work of Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1998, 2001) has been salient in addressing this question; the authors have used examples from both ‘civil’ (for example, the Zapatista movement based in Mexico) and ‘uncivil’ (for example, the Al Qaeda international terrorist network) society to argue that modern ICTs have facilitated the rise of dynamic and potent cross-border civil society network organisations that pose a major new challenge to existing structures of power (Hajnal, 2002).

Box 3 Social network analysis

The tools of social network analysis (SNA) relate to all of the above network contexts. SNA has been developed primarily by sociologists and mathematicians as a means to analyse and map complex social networks. Current work involves the use of computer software to create simple ‘sociograms’ or multidimensional ‘maps’ which can help researchers to clarify certain aspects of a network. Key measurements apply to the nature of the links (direction, distance, density); the centrality of the overall network; and the make-up of the various sub-groups (Scott, 2000).

A recent development in this field is the emergence of ‘small world network theory’, which uses mathematical graphs to explain the classic notion of the ‘six degrees of separation’ (the idea that everybody in the world can be linked by just six steps). The key finding is that the simple addition of a small number of random linkages within a network can greatly decrease the average number of steps between nodes. This work has even led to the suggestion that there may be some highly efficient form of network structure that occurs naturally in many phenomena such as neural networks, social networks or even the national grid (Buchanan, 2002).

⁹ For current academic work on networks and the internet, see www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wellman/netlab/ABOUT/index.html.

There are some general lessons here. The first point is that networks constitute a ‘natural’ form of organisation. Secondly, while they may not change the laws of economics, politics or human behaviour, they do play a crucial role in structuring the day-to-day running of society. Thirdly, networks can be a helpful practical approach to complexity and pluralism. For example, using networks is a way of structuring an organisation to deal with complex challenges (Borgatti and Foster, 2003; Hovland, 2003). Fourthly, using concepts of networks analytically can also provide a methodology for analysing complex situations (Dicken et al., 2001; Castells, 1997).

So there are advantages and disadvantages to ‘networking for development’ as Starkey (1998) puts it. He argues that networks are important since they can help to share information, further common objectives and make best use of limited resources. Networks provide a forum for interactive information exchange and also a useful conceptual tool in tackling the problem of how to ensure that such North-South relationships are genuinely equal. Nevertheless, there are still many potential pitfalls in establishing such networks, as have been addressed by works such as Bernard (1996), Church et al. (2002) and James (2002).

2.4 Networks specifically relevant to the policy process

The previous section focused on networks and, in general, why they are seen as important. Now we will narrow down our focus to concentrate on networks that specifically relate to the policy process. There are a number of terms regularly used in the literature to categorise these ‘policy networks’. These categories are neither exclusive nor comprehensive, and there may be networks that conform with many or none of these definitions. There is considerable debate among researchers and practitioners as to the relative worth of each of these terms (see Coleman and Perl, 1999). At the same time, it is necessary to be wary of limiting one’s analysis from the outset by relying on prescribed definitions. Nevertheless, such categories can provide a useful inroad into the mass of information and conjecture surrounding the issue of policy networks. This section presents a brief overview of the most common emerging terms.

Box 4 Paul Revere and the importance of networkers

The story of Paul Revere, who rode out and famously raised the American militia against the British in 1775, is well known to many. What is less well known is that there were two riders who went out that night; while Revere is well known, the other rider failed to mobilise the villages he went to and remains unknown. *So why did Paul Revere succeed?* Gladwell (2000) argues that Revere was successful because he was well known already and credible because of his skills as a networker. Stone and Maxwell (2004) use this story to emphasise the importance of networkers in policy processes for international development.

Policy network

‘Policy network’ is often used as an umbrella term to describe any network that relates to the policy process. The definitions that follow may all be understood as subsets of this category. Smith (1997) identifies that one common way to view policy networks is as a continuum, ranging from the highly formalised (and possibly more exclusive) ‘policy community’ to the loosely structured ‘issue network’.

Policy community

Stone (2001: 3–4) identifies policy communities as ‘stable networks of policy actors from both inside and outside government [which are] highly integrated with the policymaking process’. She stresses that the key characteristic of policy communities is their stability; as such, they are more relevant in the governance context of developed rather than developing countries.

Global public policy networks (GPPN)

GPPNs are an overarching network, spanning all three sectors of government, business and civil society, and addressing all stages of the policy process.¹⁰ They can perform a variety of functions, which Reinicke et al. (2000) identify as:

- Raising new issues to the global agenda; in particular, this relates to ‘transnational advocacy networks’ (e.g. the Campaign to Ban Landmines);
- Facilitating the setting of global standards: in particular, this relates to trisectoral networks (e.g. World Commission on Dams);
- Gathering and disseminating knowledge (e.g. the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research);
- Creating markets: specifically, linking demand for public goods with supply (e.g. Medicines for Malaria Venture);
- Implementing inter-governmental treaties (e.g. the Global Environment Facility);
- Closing the ‘participatory gap’ (e.g. the Hairou Commission).

Epistemic community

This is a highly informal network of experts, convened around shared values and ideas. Haas (1991) argues that by acting outside of the formal policymaking process, the epistemic community provides a potent means to challenge and invigorate the policymaking process. Stone and Maxwell (2004: 94) identify four common characteristics of epistemic communities:

- Shared normative and principled beliefs which provide the value based rationales for their action;
- Shared causal beliefs or professional judgements;
- Common notions of validity based on inter-subjective, internally defined criteria for validating knowledge;
- A common policy enterprise.

Knowledge network (KNET)

According to Stone and Maxwell (2004: 11 and 89–105), ‘knowledge networks incorporate professional bodies, academic research groups and scientific communities that organise around a special subject matter or issue’. By facilitating information exchange, knowledge networks can help to disseminate relevant information and also to advertise important findings, as well as gaps in the existing knowledge base. If the knowledge network includes a number of influential individuals, then it may be a vital tool in bridging research and policy. However, much of the literature warns of the difficulties in establishing successful knowledge networks, which may suffer from the inefficient use of resources or conflict arising between politically heterogeneous actors (see also Bernard, 1996; Rai, 2003).

Community of practice

Combining elements of both an epistemic community and a KNET, ‘communities of practice are groups of professionals, informally bound to one another through exposure to a common class of problems, common pursuit of solutions, and thereby themselves embodying a store of knowledge’ (de Merode, 2000).

¹⁰ For further information, see www.globalpublicpolicy.net/. See also, Benner, Reinicke and Witte (2003: 18) who draw attention to an ‘ongoing transition to a broader notion of networked governance involving not only governments and international organizations but also businesses and nongovernmental organizations’.

Advocacy network

An advocacy network may contain any combination of actors who have come together through shared interests or values for the main purpose of seeking to influence the policy process. Such a network will often comprise civil society campaigners or campaign organisations.

In particular, transnational advocacy networks (TANs) are currently enjoying significant scholarly attention – thanks in part to the seminal work of Keck and Sikkink (1998). In *Activists Beyond Borders*, the authors describe modern-day advocacy coalitions, emphasising the importance of their ability to operate beyond the boundaries of the state. They identify a ‘boomerang pattern’: in cases where a national government is not responding to pressure from its own civil society, a TAN offers an alternative channel of influence. NGOs are trying to influence State A, but are blocked, and so pass information to NGOs in State B. These NGOs influence State B, which then influences State A. They may also enlist an intergovernmental organisation to help influence State A.

Private-private policy network

This is a civil society/business network, which may not include any state-sector actors, but nevertheless formulates and implements policy. Pattberg (2004) represents an example of the emerging literature on non-governmental policymaking. He discusses the concept of private-private policymaking coalitions, such as the Forest Stewardship Council, and their increasingly significant role in global policymaking and implementation.

Other civil society networks

There are numerous other civil society networks which have an impact upon the policy process, but which are not so explicitly categorised in the literature. Trade union networks; networks of religious groups; and grassroots or community networks would all fall into this important category. Such networks may collaborate with governmental actors in the policy process, or they may simply influence livelihoods by taking matters directly into their own hands. Lundin and Söderbaum (2002) describe an informal trading and social network in the Maputo corridor which has managed to maintain the livelihoods of its members despite the imposition of disruptive policies by governments and international donors.

An alternative – and perhaps more useful – classification focuses on the functions that networks are designed to play. This recognises that networks can take multiple forms depending on the characteristics of their internal and external environments. Based on the work of Portes and Yeo (2001) we emphasise the following six non-exclusive functions for networks. They can act as:

Filters, which ‘decide’ what information is worth paying attention to, and organise unmanageable amounts of information. For example, the Development Executive Group is an international forum which provides and exchanges information on project and employment opportunities.

Amplifiers help take little known or little understood ideas and make them more widely understood. Advocacy or campaigning NGOs, such as the Jubilee Campaign, are amplifying networks. The FairTrade Foundation, for example, works through a network of those licensed to use the brand to amplify the fair trade message.

Convenors bring together people or groups of people. For example, Coalition 2000 in Bulgaria brings together CSOs, government institutions, the private sector and donors in various coordinated initiatives to fight corruption.

Facilitators help members carry out their activities more effectively. For example, the MediCam network in Cambodia gives members access to services and facilities such as meeting rooms, a specialised library, communication means, training opportunities and access to policymakers and donors.

Community builder networks promote and sustain the values and standards of the individuals or organisations within them. The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) promotes best practice and minimum standards of learning accountability and performance among humanitarian agencies.

Investor/provider networks offer a means to give members the resources they need to carry out their main activities. The African Capacity Building Foundation, for example, provides technical assistance, skills and funding to its policy research partners.

Networks can play more than one role. Indeed, they usually carry out several functions simultaneously in order to maximise their chances of influencing policy. The specific mix will vary. However, different functions require different structures for maximum effectiveness. Networks designed for – and effective at – one role may not be good at others. Introducing new functions might compromise the original objectives. Specific networks will need to consider carefully how many and which functions they can carry out successfully.

2.5 Emphasis on policy influence and public interest

Networks may be classified along a continuum from formal to informal – according to the clarity of objectives, definition of membership and hierarchy of power (see Smith, 1997). It is possible to draw out from the literature certain characteristics which seem to make networks ‘successful’ in influencing policy. Ideally, they conform to the following descriptions (Pal, 1997):

- **A unifying purpose:** having a clear purpose is a key principle.
- **Interactive communications:** information is freely accessible, with the possibility of constant feedback from all actors. As such, there is no monopoly on knowledge and the cumulative capacity of the system is greater than the sum of its parts.¹¹
- **Autonomous actors:** ‘independence is a prerequisite for interdependence’ (Lipnack and Stamps, 1994). Since actors are autonomous,¹² they are less likely to submit to a strict hierarchy and more likely to take action of their own accord – hence the observations that networks harbour individual **entrepreneurs** and can have **multiple leaders**, and that they have a **fluid** structure.¹³
- A well coordinated network also has the capacity for **simultaneous action** from multiple nodes. This links to Maxwell’s concept on ‘policy code sharing’.
- **Dynamic culture:** the atmosphere of interactive communications among multiple empowered actors fosters a capacity for ‘creativity and risk-taking’ (Bernard, 1996) and enhanced collective action.
- **Shared interests or values:** the structure of a network is fluid, but a base level of cohesion is provided by the shared interests or values of actors.

¹¹ See also Stone (2001: 3): ‘A network can often be greater than its constituent parts.’

¹² See also Church et al. (2002: 14): ‘A network can be called a network when the relationship between those in the network is voluntarily entered into, the autonomy of participants remains intact, and there are mutual or joint activities.’

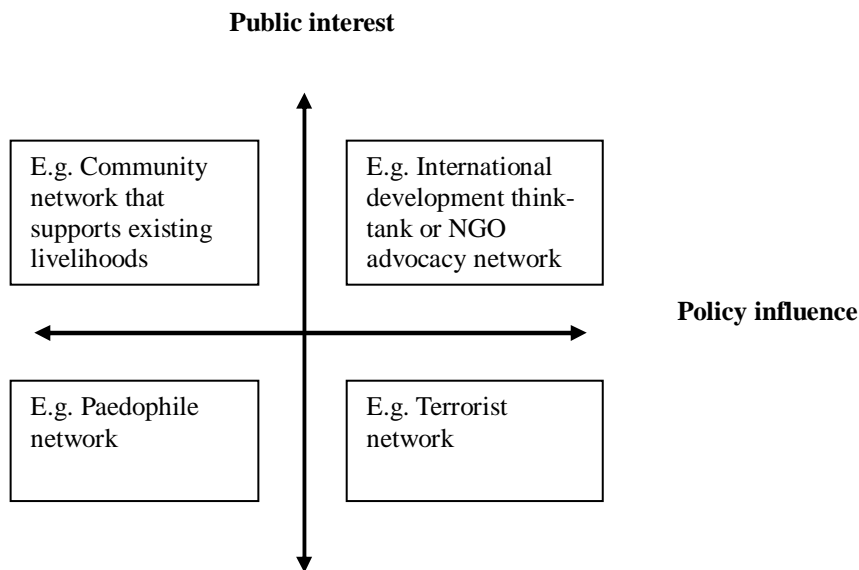
¹³ Lipnack and Stamps (1994) describe networks not as ‘leaderless’, but rather as ‘leaderful’.

We are also particularly interested in networks that act in the public interest – particularly in promoting pro-poor policy and policy processes. There are numerous illicit, malignant or ‘uncivil’ networks that influence policy to a greater or lesser extent according to their own private agendas – for example, terrorist networks, money-laundering networks, corruption networks, paedophile networks and racist networks. In addition to this ‘dark side’ of civil society, there is also a significant grey area containing networks that are motivated by private interests, and those that aim to act in the public interest but do so on the basis of deeply contentious convictions. The work of Arquilla and Rondfelt (1998, 2001) on ‘netwars’ discusses the rise of a new generation of civil society networks that capitalise upon their network form of organisation in order to confront the political and legal systems which they oppose.

This paper is aimed at those networks towards the ‘civil’ end of this spectrum, which set out to act primarily in the public interest. In such networks, the key issue is that members must gravitate around shared values and interests that focus on the public interest. But in addition, networks seen as successful will have to overcome numerous challenges regarding issues of legitimacy and representation, as well as overall capacity to identify good quality evidence. Such challenges are issues that emerge as key themes in the literature and will recur throughout this paper.

The interplay between our two areas of particular interest – policy influence and public interest – can be mapped out in a simple two-way matrix, as illustrated below. This paper is primarily concerned with the top right section of the matrix, where the networks are successful in both influencing policy and in the public interest.

Figure 2 Civil society networks, by policy influence and commitment to the public interest



This section has provided a background discussion. It is clear that the concept of the network features prominently in a number of contemporary debates and that networks are (or can be) important. The literature itself – and our synthesis above – very much starts from the networks themselves in terms of understanding their functioning and the roles that they play in making policy. In the next section, we will build on these foundations, drawing on detailed material from the existing literature to address the specific question of this study, but starting from the policy process rather than networks.

Box 5 Examples of network opportunities and challenges

A global grassroots CSO network

‘In less than seven years, the Huairou Commission has gone from an informal, loose coalition representing an international spectrum into a global network, reaching upwards of 11,000 grassroots women’s groups. Up until 1995, women, especially from the grassroots, were locked out of discussions at the global level. They had to rely on intermediaries within formal government delegations and/or within the women’s movement to make their voices heard. As good as those relationships might have been, the existence of the Huairou Commission has resulted in deeper collaborations and provided a platform that grassroots women’s groups can call their own. As intersecting shifts changed within the UN and in its relation to NGOs, the Huairou Commission emerged as a unique opportunity, offering a forum in which ideas are exchanged, projects jointly undertaken, and policies crafted.’ (Leavitt and Yonder, 2003)

The benefits and challenges of cross-sectoral cooperation through networks

This analysis of cross-sectoral alliances in Brazil identifies both the rewards and the pitfalls of seeking effective cooperation among diverse policy actors. ‘Among the results of this research, is the fact that partner organisations and enterprises acknowledge the benefits inherent to the establishment of partnerships – [referring primarily] to the optimisation of complementary competencies and project results. However, there are challenges still arising, particularly related to the different organisational cultures, lingoes and work styles of institutions from diverse sectors. There is also difficulty concerning the alignment of objectives, strategies and values between allied organisations.’ (Rocha de Mendonça et al., 2004)

Global-local networking problems in El Salvador

‘The Transnational Indigenous Peoples’ Movement (TIPM) can convey important political leverage to local indigenous movements. Yet this study exposes a more problematic impact: the political authority gained by funding organisations who interpolate TIPM norms into new discourses regarding indigeneity, and deploy that discourse in local ethnic contests. In El Salvador, the TIPM has encouraged the state to recognise the indigenous communities and has opened a political wedge for indigenous activism. Yet TIPM-inspired programmes by the European Union and UNESCO to support indigenous activism paradoxically weakened the Salvadorian movement by aggravating outside impressions that Salvadorian indigenous communities are ‘not truly Indian’.’ (Tilley, 2002)

3. CSO Networks, Evidence and Policy Processes in International Development

3.1 Introduction

Many of the key texts mentioned above provide useful analyses of the structure and function of CSO networks operating in the field of international development policy. However, the emphasis tends to favour systematic analysis of the networks themselves, with the question of their impact on policy featuring only as a secondary issue. And so, in order to cast a new angle on the debate and make it more useful for our purposes, this section synthesises the existing literature from the perspective not of the networks, but of the policy process itself.

A central theme in our analysis is that networks have great potential to help CSOs to influence international development policy, but that it is difficult to realise this potential because of the numerous risks and pitfalls associated with networking. By looking from the point of view of the policy process, we encounter only those networks that succeed in influencing policy. Hence, this approach is intended to help to identify the most common attributes of those networks that overcome the barriers, capitalise upon their potential and ultimately succeed in influencing international development policy.

In this section, we adopt the policy process as our central organising theme, and then seek to analyse how CSO networks contribute to it. The discussion is centred around four key components of the policy process as laid out below: agenda setting; formulation; implementation; and evaluation/monitoring.

3.2 Introduction to the policy cycle

We define policy as a ‘purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors’ (Anderson, 1975). This goes beyond documents or legislation to include activities on the ground. The policy *process* is by nature complex and somewhat haphazard; any policymaking model will be simplified by default. There are extensive literatures about the policy process (e.g. Hill, 1997).

We focus on four of the main functional components of the policy processes outlined in the literature on public administration and stemming from the work of Lasswell (1977). These include:

- **Problem identification and agenda setting:** Awareness of and priority given to an issue or problem;
- **Policy formulation:** How (analytical and political) options and strategies are constructed;
- **Policy implementation:** The forms and nature of policy administration and activities on the ground;
- **Policy monitoring and evaluation:** The nature of monitoring and evaluation of policy need, design, implementation and impact.

We stress that policymaking is not linear and does not in reality work through these stages logically. Although this is the case, this model does provide a useful entry point for thinking about how CSOs may influence different parts of the process.¹⁴ If policy processes tend to have similar functional elements, it is likely that CSOs will impact upon their various aspects in different ways. It may well

¹⁴ For a fuller discussion of the policy cycle, see www.odi.org.uk/rapid.

be that success in influencing an agenda, for example, requires a different kind of approach than does influencing the implementation of policy.

Each of these stages may involve input from various different actors. Traditionally, the main actors in the policy process have been the representatives of the national government. However, current trends show that other actors are also becoming increasingly involved as governments are being forced to collaborate with the private sector and civil society. Furthermore, as a result of both globalisation and trends towards devolution, the national level policymaking forum now runs alongside parallel fora at the local and supranational levels. The result is a policymaking process that in many cases involves an increasingly diverse range of actors (Benner et al., 2003; Pattberg 2004).

This trend has profound significance for the subject of this paper. With their capacity to foster interactive contributions from a broad-based membership, as well as their informal patterns of communication, networks can present a valuable method for multi-actor collaboration across all stages of the policy process (see Sutton, 1999).

The four functions will be used to organise the literature in this section. In each part, we will map the specific issues that arise as CSOs use evidence to influence different parts of the policy process. We hope through this to identify how CSOs might maximise their chances of policy impact.

3.3 Agenda setting

How do CSO networks facilitate the introduction of new problems to the international development policy agenda? In order to introduce a problem to the policy agenda – or ‘turn the problem into an issue’ (Young and Quinn, 2002: 13) – it is necessary to convince the relevant policy actors that the problem is indeed important. Key factors that help to convince policy actors are credibility and links, both of which can be facilitated through CSO networking.

In part, credibility depends on the nature of the evidence used to support an idea. In some cases, this will be research-based evidence from universities or think tanks. As has been demonstrated elsewhere, the key issues here are the quality and the policy relevance of the evidence (Court et al., 2005).

In international development policy, the primary intended beneficiaries of policy are often poor people – and hence the perspectives and experience of these people offer crucial evidence to inform the policy process. Such grassroots testimony can be fundamental to the credibility of an advocacy campaign. However, at the same time, poor people often lack the time, resources, capacity and political leverage to communicate this evidence. In this context, networks may offer a useful tool to overcome some of these barriers.

For CSOs operating at grassroots level, networking can facilitate the communication of evidence on both a horizontal and a vertical level. Within formal systems of communication based on established hierarchies of power, such organisations would tend to stand isolated at the bottom end of the line, only able to communicate their evidence to the actor ranking one step above them in the vertical hierarchy. But by joining a network, a grassroots CSO will become much more easily linked to numerous other actors both at grassroots and also top level. Edwards and Gaventa (2001) cite the successful example of ‘Shack/Slum Dwellers International’ as a CSO network that collates the grassroots testimony of 650,000 shantytown dwellers and represents their interests on the world stage. The success of such networks does however rely on possessing adequate resources: Niombo (2003) identifies the importance of ICT in strengthening grassroots networking in Africa; but as he

and Karl et al. (1999) both stress, it is very difficult for Southern CSO networks to secure sufficient long-term funding.

For Northern-based INGOs, evidence drawn from CSOs acting at grassroots level in the South can underpin the credibility of an advocacy campaign aimed at Northern or international policymakers. However, there is a common difficulty in establishing North-South relationships where communications flow equally in both directions: resources, information and expertise are easily channelled from North to South, whereas it is less easy for evidence to filter through from South to North. The more informal and dynamic environment of a network offers a way to free up the flow of evidence towards Northern actors. Madon (2000) discusses the potential of INGOs to earn credibility at a high level through networked 'learning from the field', arguing that in order to optimise the use of grassroots evidence in their advocacy programmes, INGOs must strengthen their learning capacity.

Likewise for researchers, effective participation in networks has the potential to lead not simply to greater dissemination of findings, but also to enhanced dialogue, the exchange of productive feedback, and increased collaborative action. Research networks using innovative means to promote such dynamic communication are expected to improve the quality and overall impact of the evidence that researchers present to policymakers. Simon Maxwell at ODI has promoted the idea of 'policy code sharing' to refer to this style of interactive research network, whereby research institutes operate within an alliance similar to an airline alliance, 'sharing ideas, modifying messages, and collaborating to achieve change'. An example of such an alliance is the European Development Cooperation to 2010 project coordinated by the European Association of Development Institutes (EADI). This project makes use of various features to facilitate feedback and promote action within the network: briefing papers; website; public meetings; workshops; and opinion pieces to stimulate debate.

Beyond the quality of the evidence, carefully coordinated networks may also help to boost the credibility of an advocacy campaign in other ways. Strength in numbers provided by a network can bolster the political clout of an argument – although increased numbers of actors also means increased complexity within a network. In order to present a message that is both strong and clear, it is important to think carefully about issues such as: clear identification of objectives (James, 2002); balancing strong, charismatic leadership with participatory decision-making (*ibid.*); joint programming (AFRODAD, 2003); balancing macro and micro incentives (Edelman, 2003a); and effective use of ICTs within the network (Rondfelt et al., 1998). Likewise, networks may help to build credibility by sustaining a campaign over a wide geographical area and a long period of time (Bosco, 2001; Saguier, 2004). However, this is a contentious issue in the literature and Edelman (2003a), for example, uses the example of Latin American TANs to argue that advocacy coalitions are not durable organisational forms, but that they in fact rise and fall in periodic cycles.

A number of authors also emphasise the function of networks in fostering links between policymakers and those aiming to influence the policy agenda. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999) are among many who point out the important bridging role played by certain key individuals within a policy network. Meanwhile, Keck and Sikkink's (1998) 'boomerang pattern' of links, as we have seen: in situations where a country's government does not respond to pressure from domestic CSOs, such CSOs are able to use network partners in other countries in order to gain indirect access to policymakers in their own government. The links within a network are so useful because they have the ability to bypass barriers imposed by formal channels of communication. A further example is cited by Bernard (1996), regarding the ability of diverse networks to advertise unorthodox or novel ideas, which hitherto may have been overlooked in mainstream discourse. CSO networks in the Philippines project new ideas into the policy ballpark and, as such, play a useful role in counterbalancing the influence of large institutional powers such as international donors.

Many of the above points are summarised by Church et al. (2002: 2–3), who identify five key ways in which ‘linking and coordinating’ bring added value to CSO advocacy work:

- (i) The improved quality and sophistication of joint analysis that underpins the advocacy;
- (ii) The extended reach to key actors in key contexts through which that improved analysis can be channelled;
- (iii) The capacity to act simultaneously, with shared ideas, in many places at once;
- (iv) The space for competing views to be discussed and consensus positions achieved;
- (v) The opportunity for those with few other avenues to powerful decision makers to gain access through the networked relationships.

Box 6 CSO networks and agenda-setting: example of tropical deforestation

One case study in Keck and Sikkink’s *Activists Beyond Borders* analyses the history of how CSOs influenced the agenda setting of national and international policy on tropical deforestation. Specific examples are drawn from Brazil and Malaysia to reveal that:

- The issue of tropical deforestation was first brought to the agenda in the 1970s by ‘epistemic communities’ of scientists and policymakers who sought to influence the policy agenda on the basis of the credentials of their research.
- CSO activists adopted the issue in the 1980s and politicised the debate: for these campaigners: ‘the issue ... was not ultimately forests, or dams, or any other particular issue, but leverage over institutions that make a difference’.
- Transnational CSO networks developed, involving Northern academics and campaigners, as well as Southern grassroots activists. This combination brought new evidence to the agenda in the form of grassroots testimony. While the Brazilian government tended to be unresponsive to local activist campaigners, the testimony of these people was relayed to partner organisations in the USA, who lobbied the American government on their behalf. The American government in turn carried significant influence within the World Bank. Hence, the situation is an example of the ‘boomerang pattern’ at work.
- At various stages, a crucial role was played by key individuals.

Source: Keck and Sikkink (1998)

3.4 Formulation

There are two key stages to the policy formulation process: determining the policy options and then selecting the preferred option (see Young and Quinn, 2002: 13–14). For both stages, policymakers should ideally ensure that their understanding of the specific situation is as detailed and comprehensive as possible – only then can they make informed decisions about which policy to go ahead and implement. However, even when they are armed with this knowledge, the sheer variety of interests will still make it difficult to reach a consensus. The literature identifies two main roles that CSO networks can play in promoting pro-poor policy formulation: communicating grassroots and research evidence to policymakers in order to enhance their understanding of the specific situation; and using innovative means to link actors and ideas together and build a pro-poor consensus.

The role of communicating grassroots and research evidence to policymakers for policy formulation is similar to the same role in the agenda-setting stage; in this case, though, the fundamental concept has already been agreed and it is now the strategy (how to achieve objectives) that is under discussion. In some cases, grassroots or research networks may be better positioned than governments to gather and process relevant information on the situation of the policy end-users or other crucial details. Hence, CSO networks may provide useful evidence by collaborating with government policymakers. For example, Pollard (2005) emphasises the role played by the Catholic Church in Bolivia in using its widespread grassroots presence to conduct a dialogue on the Bolivian PRSP (see also Box 7 on GURN). Similarly, Stone (2001) describes the role played by knowledge networks as ‘resource banks’ in informing policy formulation.

Building close communications between government and CSO actors relies on developing mutual understanding and trust. Several texts describe the capacity of networks to foster such an environment. One example is the African Energy Policy Research Network (AFREPREN) in developing trust between researchers and policymakers. By building up long-term relationships between researchers and policymakers, and by actively including policymakers in the research process, AFREPREN has been able to maximise the policy impact of its knowledge (Karekezi and Muthui, 2003). Meanwhile, Rutherford (2000) describes how the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) has made effective use of ICT to develop a deep understanding of both the government and the grassroots position – the network has then channelled this knowledge into the policy-formulation process at both national and international levels. Both Rutherford and the AFREPREN case highlight the way in which CSO networks develop not only their grassroots knowledge base, but also their own understanding of the government’s standpoint during the policy-formulation process.

Several authors point to the influence of using networks to import international resources and expertise into the process of policy formulation at national level. It is clear that such involvement can have its advantages and its disadvantages. On the one hand, international donors can coordinate and channel a wealth of experience in order to support the policymaking of weak national governments – for example, the Soros Network’s activities in Central and Eastern Europe (Kriszán and Zentai, 2003). On the other hand, it is important to remember that approaches based on knowledge gleaned in one country may not be appropriate to the situation of another country – and hence, such international networking creates problems of legitimacy and representativeness. For example, Brown et al. (2000) note that when CSOs are empowered by international funds, it is hard for governments to see the wood for the trees and isolate the information from the CSOs themselves. Meanwhile, Tilley (2002) presents a real-life reminder that international intervention risks usurping local initiatives.

As regards building a consensus, Börzel (1997) describes a situation where the formal procedure of policymaking reaches a stalemate: in such situations, informal cross-sectoral policy networks offer a way to bypass the problem. Because such networks allow for inter-personal links to play a role, and because they function outside formal hierarchy, they are able to reinvigorate the process of policy formulation by injecting evidence that may not have reached the table through formal processes.

Hence, it is important to remember that a key value-added of networks comes in their incorporation of diverse actors – networks may be less successful if their membership is limited. In the case of CSO networks seeking to foster a consensus on pro-poor policy, the outcome will be more representative if the network contains not only horizontal links among civil society actors, but also vertical links between grass-roots and policymaking level. This point is highlighted by Beall (1997), who provides examples of horizontal networks convened around waste management policy, which have acted not as social levellers, but rather to further entrench social hierarchy.

A useful summary of the key points for this stage is provided by Behringer (2003), who presents four indicators of best practice for networks aiming to represent grassroots voices at policy level. The first two indicators address the issue of how a grassroots network can improve its representativeness as it seeks to provide policymakers with accurate evidence. The second two indicators refer to the importance of fostering close and trusting links between grassroots actors and policymakers.

- The representation of native languages as working languages within the network;
- Mutual social learning via personal encounters among actors;
- Counselling of the municipalities/local authorities;

- Dynamic individuals within local communities or municipalities who assume responsibility and actively promote the aims of network on the local community-policy level.

Box 7 Examples of CSO networks influencing policy formulation

The Global Union Research Network (GURN)

Why?

Established in January 2004, GURN states that its aim is: ‘to give union organisations better access to research carried out within trade unions and allied institutions, while enabling them to exchange information on matters of joint concern and to develop the capacity to make analyses and take part in debates and policy formulation’ (www.gurn.info/). Hence, the network sets out to gather and process grassroots evidence and research, which can then be translated into trade union and also governmental policy.

How?

At the inaugural meeting of the network’s coordinators, various key points were identified as to how the network could ensure success in its aims. The main issue discussed was the use of the internet as the network’s central vehicle for information exchange. In order to counter weak IT capacity in many Southern environments, the following measures were proposed: IT training; user-friendly web-pages; regular mailing of printed matter as well as digital transmissions; free services such as email, web-hosting and access to digital databases. Other key points included the importance of reliable, good quality information, and sensitivity to language barriers.

AFREPREN: A GDN case study of research-policy linkages

‘The active participation of senior decision-makers in the identification of research themes and in actually undertaking the research work provides very concrete evidence that policymakers are in some way ‘commissioning’ AFREPREN research work and are therefore more likely to use its results. The extent of trust between users and researchers is particularly strong within AFREPREN primarily due to the involvement of users (policymakers) in research work. In addition, the longevity of AFREPREN (from 1987 to-date) has strengthened its credibility with decision makers in the region and provided the time for researchers to cultivate and establish relationships of trust with key decision makers in the region’s energy sector. The level of trust that AFREPREN has engendered is demonstrated by numerous cases where AFREPREN researchers have been able to secure confidential documents that are not available in the public domain.’ (Karekezi and Muthui, 2003).

3.5 Implementation

The literature on CSO networks and policy implementation is dominated by the theme of the weak capacity of the nation-state to implement its own policies. In particular, it is difficult for government actors to operate effectively in very poor or very remote areas. At the same time, governments may also see their power diluted as a symptom of globalisation. In this context, governments may find it convenient to collaborate over policy implementation with well connected or experienced CSOs. Alternatively, CSOs may feel empowered to start implementing their own policy, in opposition to or in parallel with insufficient government programmes. In either case, networks may help to enhance capacity to implement policy in a manner that is both relevant and sustained.

Government collaboration with civil society

Kickert et al. (1997) argue that in line with the perceived global trend of weakening government capacity, there is an increasing climate of interdependency among governments, private actors and civil society. This interdependency has given rise to cross-sector policy networks, which combine the resources of multiple actors in order to implement policy. It follows that management of such networks is therefore a form of governance.

All the same, it is certainly possible for government and civil society to collaborate successfully over pro-poor policy implementation. In particular, there are two overriding advantages of cooperating in multi-sector networks: sustainability and reach. As regards sustaining and enhancing the impact of a policy, networks can provide a number of useful functions, such as: furthering awareness about an issue; sharing the work; preventing the duplication of efforts or waste of resources; providing solidarity in tough situations; mobilising financial resources; entrenching

grassroots representation within long-term frameworks of implementation (Brown, 1991; ICASO, 1997). As regards improving the reach of a policy, Nanavaty (1994) describes the case of Indian government collaboration with the SEWA grassroots women's network: whereas the government possessed the funds, SEWA had crucial access to the people at grassroots level. By collaborating, it was possible to implement effective policy. Nanavaty does, however, indicate the difficulty of persuading governments to accept such involvement of NGOs (see Box 8).

Furthermore, it would seem likely that community-based networks could provide an effective means of delivering national policy so as to be specific to the local context. However, Provan and Milward (2001) state that there is not yet enough systematic evidence to prove this. In order to evaluate the function of such networks, they suggest three key indicators of network effectiveness: impact at community level (how well is policy implemented?); resilience of the network itself (at what rate does the membership ebb and flow?); and the ways in which participants feel that they benefit from membership.

CSO networks implementing policy outside of government

Bernard (1996) draws on the dynamic characteristics of networks to present them as potential 'platforms for action'. In cases where a government is being inert, CSOs may take direct action to instigate a policy themselves, deriving strength and inspiration from a network and evidence of a gap in policy response to a problem. For example, Samuel (2000) describes how CSOs formed alliances in order to monitor elections in Sri Lanka. Young et al. (2003) describes how a network of NGOs provided community-based animal health care in Northern Kenya even though it was technically illegal. Likewise, on an international scale, Wapner (1997) describes how transnational environmental coalitions have impacted grassroots livelihoods by lobbying the private sector and conducting education campaigns.

An emerging stream of literature addresses the practice of CSOs linking up in networks with the private sector so as to implement policy beyond government jurisdiction. Kern (2003) assesses the example of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), identifying that it has been successful thanks to the 'dynamic combination of civil society self-organisation with market mechanisms' as well as the fact that a gap had arisen through the political failure of international government.

Box 8 CSO networks and policy implementation

SEWA and the implementation of the DWCRA

Nanavaty (1994) highlights the experience of SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association), an Indian female labourers' civil society network, in facilitating the implementation of a government-directed poverty alleviation programme. Although the government has committed considerable funding to poverty alleviation, projects often turn out to be wasteful or irrelevant. The involvement of civil society networks empowers the stakeholders to influence the formulation and implementation of the programme. In other words, the network plays a crucial role in linking the policy process to the experience of the poor women themselves.

The paper notes: 'The single government department may not be able to perform the multiple roles needed for the viability of the programme, such as organising, selection of activity, linking with the markets. However, the non-governmental organisations working for these objectives, functioning in rural areas, and working with poor women and communities can perform these roles. They can establish rapport with the women, leading to group formation without much difficulty and the economic activity; voluntary organisations should be involved more in the implementation of the programme.'

The impact of religious networks on HIV/AIDS policy implementation in Uganda

Religious organisations are particularly influential in Ugandan society. In fact, according to Putzel (2003), networks of religious organisations have been able to 'reach far into the rural communities, perhaps where even the National Resistance Movement (the new government at the time) could not'. Regarding policy implementation for HIV/AIDS, these networks have been able to exercise their authority in remote areas to play a crucial role: 'their actions on communication, behavioural change, care and treatment have been vital in fighting the stigma ... Religious organisations have been major providers of healthcare and education in the absence of public authorities' ability to do so' (Court, 2004).

3.6 Monitoring/evaluation

According to Young and Quinn (2002), ‘a comprehensive evaluation procedure is essential in determining the effectiveness of the implemented policy and in providing the basis for future decision-making’. In the processes of monitoring and evaluation, it is important to ensure not only that the evidence is helpful and thorough, but also that it is then communicated successfully into the continuing policy cycle. As regards CSO networks and the monitoring/evaluation stage, there are two key forms of participation: grassroots monitoring and the work of knowledge networks.

Where policy relates directly to people at grassroots level, the involvement of grassroots CSOs can help to contribute valuable primary evidence from the policy end-users into the monitoring and evaluation process. Bebbington et al. (1997) show that rural people’s organisations have a potentially very significant role to play in maintaining the accountability of pro-poor development policies. However, the credibility of the evidence they provide relies upon their ability to represent all of the constituents for whom they speak. Networks can help to address this challenge: by providing a loose framework for interactive communications among multiple policy end-users, a network can act as a forum for proposing many points of view. The broadly relevant points stand to attract the attention and support of many network members, whereas the more subjective observations are less likely to continue being communicated among actors. Portes and Landolt (2000) show the benefits of having extensive links between grassroots actors, using examples from Latin America to reveal the function of social capital in monitoring grassroots economic initiatives.

However, this grassroots evidence, once collated, may still be inaccessible to policymakers involved in the monitoring and evaluation process. Bebbington et al. (1997) note that the monitoring carried out by a rural people’s association is especially successful when the network contains links to powerful charismatic individuals who can bridge the vertical divide between grassroots and policymakers. But the language and style of the grassroots testimony may also clash with that of the policymakers. Pollard (2005) show that in the case of Bolivia, think-tanks have played a crucial role in mediating communication between grassroots observers and government policymakers by raising the overall quality of debate.

Meanwhile, a somewhat different form of evidence is provided by the knowledge networks of international development professionals, such as researchers, NGO practitioners and policymakers. There is not the same problem of issues being ‘lost in translation’, but the issues of credibility and representativeness are very similar to the issues faced by grassroots CSO networks.

A number of texts identify the potential benefits (and concurrent difficulties) of developing interactive communications among diverse actors. For example, Farah (2003) argues that research networks can enhance their output through collaboration with international actors. She focuses on the field of education research in Pakistan to emphasise the crucial role of transnational research networks in securing both quality (from international support) and credibility (from local participation) for locally focused research. But, needless to say, such networks require careful coordination in order to maximise their potential (Struyk, 2000; Riker, 2004). Meanwhile, there is a general consensus that implementing agencies can derive common benefit from linking up in monitoring/evaluation networks to learn from each others’ experience and identify standards of best practise. An example of such a network would be ALNAP (the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action) which, among other activities, produces an annual synthesis report of its members’ own self-evaluations.¹⁵

¹⁵ Personal communication with John Lakeman, ALNAP. For further information, see: www.alnap.org/.

Bernard (1996) concluded that knowledge networks are certain to become increasingly significant ‘as means of advocating, facilitating and rationalising (making more cost effective) the development agenda’ but that, nevertheless, there are many potential pitfalls relating to factors such as the structure, scope and sustainability of the network concept. A number of key texts¹⁶ have identified key points to ensuring the success of a knowledge network:

- Quality of the research;
- Relevance of the research;
- Clarity of network objectives;
- Sustained funding for the network;
- Use of ICT;
- Sensitivity to the political heterogeneity of network members – ensuring that the less powerful members are not marginalised;
- Packaging of network publications;
- Informal links between network members and policymakers.

Box 9 Example of a CSO network in monitoring/evaluation

The International Budget Project

‘The International Budget Project of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities assists non-governmental organisations and researchers in their efforts both to analyse budget policies and to improve budget processes and institutions. The project is especially interested in assisting with applied research that is of use in ongoing policy debates and with research on the effects of budget policies on the poor. The overarching goal of the project is to make budget systems more responsive to the needs of society and, accordingly, to make these systems more transparent and accountable to the public. The project works primarily with researchers and NGOs in developing countries or new democracies.’

Source: IBP website (www.internationalbudget.org/about/index.htm).

3.7 Underlying the policy process: indirect policy influence

Underlying all the above stages of the policy process, the literature identifies a further crucial role for networks, whereby they do not seek to influence policy directly, but rather to provide background support for the policy influencing operations of their member organisations. Korten (1990) describes the quiet service-provider role played by a ‘networking NGO’ during civil society opposition to the Nam Choan Dam in Thailand. The EEPSEA impact report (2000) outlines a research capacity-building role that includes building communications among researchers, helping package research and also providing training. Brown (1999) underlines the virtues of knowledge-sharing among activists and researchers, and among actors in the North and the South – a function that tallies with what Nelson and Farrington (1994) categorise as ‘information exchange networks’.

CSO networks can also be seen as underlying the policy process in a broader sense. In the context of debates on how globalisation is reshaping global democracy, networks offer a possible means to deliver policy that is accountable to diverse transnational constituencies, legitimising policy practice and public authority. Held (1998: 25) addresses these particular issues in his theory of ‘cosmopolitan democracy’: ‘In a world of intensifying regional and global relations, with marked overlapping ‘communities of fate’, democracy requires entrenchment in regional and global networks as well as in national and local politics. Without such a development, many of the most powerful regional and global forces will escape the democratic mechanisms of accountability, legitimacy and considered public intervention.’

¹⁶ Creech and Willard (2001); Kirton and Bailey (2003); Portes and Yeo (2001); Rai (2003); Stone and Maxwell (2005).

Box 10 A background support network**Leaders and Organisers of Community Organisation in Asia (LOCOA)**

The LOCOA 2001 Annual Report (www.locoa.net/) states:

‘People who are suffering should know how to use the carrot and the stick against government ... It is necessary to strengthen people’s organisations so they can negotiate and be partners with government. To strengthen community organisation (CO) can be the solution for long-suffering people.’ By this rationale, the LOCOA network aims to build local capacity for community organisations in countries across Asia. Key objectives are identified as follows:

- Provide top level, professional CO training in Indonesia.
- Set up a network of CO practitioners who use the internet as their means of communication.
- Bring CO persons together to evaluate, exchange experiences and learn from one another and to reflect on new initiatives in organising.
- Arrange visits of CO persons to CO areas in other countries to broaden the experience of both groups of persons.
- Publish articles, manuals and books that will help COs do their work more effectively.
- Cooperate with other social action networks in Asia.
- Offer occasions for COs and others to discuss how the larger context of Asia affects the CO work and what other responses might be.

4. Emerging Themes and Gaps

4.1 How networks can help influence policy (What to do!)

There is an overall consensus that, notwithstanding the barriers, CSO networks harbour great **potential** to improve the effectiveness of international development policy. A brief summary of the previous chapter reveals certain key ways in which networks can help CSOs to influence policy at each stage of the policy process. The findings are laid out in the following table:

Table 2 Key ways in which networks can help CSOs to influence policy

Stage of the policy process	Key objectives for actors aiming to influence policy	How networks can help
Agenda setting	Convince policymakers that the issue does indeed require attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marshall evidence to enhance credibility of the argument <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ facilitate vertical and horizontal communications ○ provide a mechanism for knowledge sharing and feedback across global boundaries between North and South • Extend an advocacy campaign <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ strength in numbers ○ sustain a campaign over time and across geographical areas • Foster links among researchers, CSOs and policymakers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ create a 'boomerang pattern' whereby CSOs use international partners to pressurise unresponsive local governments ○ capitalise upon key individuals in the network to communicate evidence ○ bypass formal barriers to dialogue
Formulation	Inform policymakers of the options and build a consensus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collate good-quality representative evidence and act as a 'resource bank' • Channel international resources and expertise into the policy process • Build long-term collaborative relationships with policymakers • Bypass formal barriers to consensus
Implementation	Complement government capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the sustainability and reach of the policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ provide an effective means of grassroots service-delivery on behalf of government ○ enhance sustainability by: sharing workload; cutting down inefficiency; providing solidarity; mobilising funding; entrenching grassroots representation • Act as dynamic 'platforms for action'
Evaluation	Collate quality evidence and channel it into the policy process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide good-quality representative evidence and feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ refine the evidence through the input of multiple actors (for both research and grassroots advocacy networks) ○ access and channel feedback from grassroots communities ○ provide a forum for peer evaluation amongst implementing agencies • Link policymakers to policy end-users <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ make use of diverse links and powerful individuals to bridge vertical divides ○ provide a mechanism to mediate among diverse actors
All stages (underlying)	Capacity building for CSOs aiming to influence policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster communication • Provide a dynamic environment for knowledge sharing and collaborative action • Provide support and encouragement • Coordinate member evaluations • Provide a means of global political representation

Taking these findings altogether, it is then possible to identify four key ways in which CSO networks may influence the policy process overall:

- (i) Increase the influence of good quality evidence throughout the policy process;
- (ii) Build consensus amongst diverse actors;
- (iii) Bring civil society resources and expertise into the policy process;
- (iv) Broaden and sustain the pro-poor impact of a policy.

4.2 Ten keys to success (How to do it!)

However, it is equally clear that none of the above outcomes are guaranteed; a network must satisfy many criteria in order to succeed in influencing policy. In this section, we will draw together from the existing literature ten ‘keys to success’, as a basic checklist of ways in which networks may overcome their numerous associated problems and capitalise upon their potential to influence policy. This checklist is not intended to present any new information, but rather to offer an informed synthesis of the central issues arising in the existing literature.

i) Clear coordination structure and objectives

Great skill is needed to manage a network so that it maximises its potential for versatility and innovation, but at the same time retains a working structure and unifying objectives. It is important to be wary of deceptive rhetoric: the concept of the network has become a popular buzzword, often used with very positive connotations – networks have the capacity to be interactive, dynamic and versatile. However, networks do not achieve such status simply by dint of being a network. It is necessary to remember that a successful network is one that actively creates an atmosphere of interaction and exchange, with the participation of all members, but at the same time retains good coordination and clear objectives (see Stone and Maxwell, 2004; Rai, 2003; Söderbaum, 1999; Rocha de Mendonça et al., 2004; James, 2002; AFRODAD, 2003; Provan and Milward, 2001; Bernard, 1996; Ottaway, 2001; Madon, 2000).

One particular issue for caution is the macro-micro dilemma, which calls for great skill in balancing objectives at different levels. A prime example here relates to transnational networks, where it may be that the presence of Northern donors or researchers is seen to compromise the credibility of Southern actors in the eyes of their own governments (see Behringer, 2003; Tilley, 2002; Edelman, 2003a; Farah 2003).

ii) Strength in numbers

By linking large numbers of actors through shared interests or values, networks can rally support to boost the political clout of an argument. For example, Rondfelt et al. (1998) and Rutherford (2000) are among those who highlight the value of the internet in bringing large numbers of actors together to enhance the prestige of an advocacy campaign.

iii) Representativeness

Representativeness is a key challenge facing networks aiming to influence policy. For example, on the one hand, grassroots networks and religious networks have a particular capacity to develop links with policy stakeholders who may be inaccessible to governments; as such, they have the potential to inform or assist policymakers. However, on the other hand, their degree of success in fulfilling this potential will rest in large part on the ability of the network to be genuinely representative (see Nanavaty, 1994; Pollard (2005); Box 10 on HIV/AIDS implementation in Uganda).

Networks with a diverse membership suffer from an inherent problem regarding cultural and material divides: it is essential to bridge these divides if the network is to become genuinely interactive, with objectives that are fully representative (see Wellman, 1999; Reuter, 2004; Brown, 1999; Foster and Meinhard, 2004; Beall, 1997; Edwards and Gaventa, 2001; Madon, 2000; Tilley, 2002; Kirton and Bailey, 2003). In this context, a number of authors call for greater self-evaluation of networks – a process that would lead not only to greater all-round effectiveness, but also to greater credibility (Church et al., 2002; Creech and Willard, 2001; Karl, 1999; Provan and Milward, 2001).

A key issue relates to managing power dynamics within a network so as not to misrepresent the weaker members. Despite the common idealistic view of networks as non-hierarchical systems, in reality all civil society networks are inevitably subject to macro-level power dynamics, which may interfere with the sustainability of the intended structure and aims of the network. Rai (2003: 71) discusses the case of the South Asia Research Network on gender, law and governance (SARN) from a subaltern perspective, concluding that: ‘Networks, like any other structure/agent, are implicated in the many nodes of power in our global society: ... they are politically heterogeneous. For subaltern networks to be sustainable not only of their organisation, but also of their politics, they need to be self-reflective.’

iv) Quality of evidence

We have approached evidence as ranging from formal research findings to grassroots testimony. For both ends of this spectrum, networks can help to improve the quantity and quality of the evidence, and hence also improve the credibility and legitimacy of arguments put forward by CSOs attempting to influence the policy process.

A research network can enhance the quality of its members’ output by linking and also coordinating diverse actors. By forming links among actors in different regions and with different experience and resources, networks can help to pool knowledge and expertise. A successful research network will have developed a suitable communications protocol and system for optimising the benefits of ICT according to local capacity. It will also be well coordinated: this would ensure that policy-relevant research objectives are clearly defined and assigned to the most capable research teams, without wasting resources through duplication (Bernard, 1996; Stone and Maxwell, 2004; Creech and Willard, 2001; Portes and Yeo, 2001; Rai, 2003).

As regards grassroots testimony, the underlying issue developing a policy that is genuinely ‘pro-poor’ must be based on the evidence of the poor people themselves – and yet, the very fact that they are poor makes these peoples’ voices weak and disparate. Networking – both horizontally and vertically – can help to consolidate and strengthen this vital evidence (Church et al., 2002; Narayan and Shah, 2000; Nanavaty, 1994; Farah, 2003; Bebbington et al., 1997).

v) Packaging of evidence

EEPSEA (2000) highlights the overall importance of careful packaging of the outputs from a research network. In particular, credibility may derive from emphasising the fact that the evidence derives from relevant grassroots input (Farah, 2003; James, 2002). At the same time, grassroots testimony itself comes in a language that may differ from the academic discourse of high-level policymakers, and as such it risks being overlooked. Networks face the challenge of how to translate this evidence in such a way that it is understood by policymakers and yet remains true to its original meaning (Narayan and Shah, 2000; Edelman, 2003a).

vi) Sustainability

Networks may help to sustain CSO action over both time and space – although achieving such sustainability presents a considerable challenge. For example, Edelman (2003b) showed some of the vulnerabilities of networks by arguing that they may be prone to rise and fall in periodic cycles. Networks often need to sustain pressure on governments over a long period of time before seeing any tangible results, and in such circumstances it is difficult to maintain member enthusiasm.

A key way to strengthen a network's capacity to sustain action is to guarantee a stable source of funding. This refers both to research networks (Bernard, 1996; Kirton and Bailey, 2003; Stone and Maxwell, 2004) and in particular to Southern networks, where funding is often short term, insecure, or inflexible but communications costs may be particularly high (James, 2002; Karl, 1999; Niombo, 2003; Tilley, 2002; Uganda Debt Network, 2003). A second key factor in maintaining member involvement is the facilitation role played by an innovative and efficient network coordinator.¹⁷

vii) Presence of key individuals

Granovetter (1963) observed that the possession of links to actors beyond one's immediate close-knit cluster¹⁸ can greatly increase access to opportunities. In the context of CSOs seeking to influence policy, this is particularly true if those actors are powerful figures in the policy arena. A large number of authors highlight the importance of involving influential individuals in the network (Bernard, 1996; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999; Church et al., 2002; Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

viii) Making use of informal links

By making use of informal personal ties among diverse actors, networks can help to: overcome stalemates (Börzel, 1997); increase learning within the network (Behringer, 2003); and transmit innovative and subaltern ideas into the formal policymaking process (Bernard, 1996; Karekezi and Muthui, 2003). Furthermore, Wapner (1997) argues that by operating in informal arenas, NGOs are empowered to act beyond inadequate governments, and to practise a form of 'world civic politics'.

ix) Complementing national governments

Many authors refer to a growing role for civil society in collaborating with governmental actors at all stages of the policy cycle. By networking across sectors, CSOs can take advantage of this opening and use their links to channel evidence and expertise into the policy arena. This is particularly relevant to the service provision role in the implementation stage of the policy process (see Clark, 2003a; Brown et al., 2000; Krizsán and Zentai, 2003; Kickert et al., 1997; Nanavaty, 1994; Kern, 2003; Young, 1997; Callaghy et al., 2001).

x) Improving communications through ICTs

A key underlying theme in the literature is that modern ICTs are opening up vast new potential for CSO networking. CSO networks are increasingly able to communicate both internally and with external actors across the world. Important points relating to the effective use of ICT include: developing IT capacity for Southern networks; for North-South networks, sensitivity to the 'digital divide' and the need to operate at a level that is accessible to all members; and the importance of developing trust through digital communications (see Rutherford, 2000; Niombo, 2003; Rondfelt et al., 1998; Pal, 1997; Governance Network, 2003; Soeftestad and Kashwan, 2004; Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

¹⁷ This point was stressed by participants at the BOND Southern Advocacy Group meeting (London, 14 January 2001) where CSO representatives discussed their experiences of using networks to influence policy.

¹⁸ The term cluster is commonly used in network analysis to refer to a close-knit subset of a wider network.

4.3 Gaps in the literature

In the previous section, we were able to identify a number of emerging themes in the existing literature. However, there are still several areas in which more research is needed if we are to clarify exactly why and how CSO networks can influence international development policy. This section will suggest several key subjects for further practically oriented research.

Influence of the specific or macro-level context

The main gap in the existing literature relates to both specific and macro-level context. The RAPID framework describes policy as resulting from the interplay of four key dimensions – context, evidence, links and external influences. There is some work on the interplay of links (in this case, we refer specifically to networks) and evidence; there have been plenty of recent works on networks operating in the global context. However, there remains a significant lack of understanding as to how specific or macro-level contexts (especially in the South) may influence the role of networks in the policy process.

Some of the key issues are:

- Corruption and weak governance contexts: how do CSO networks influence the policy process in specific situations of very weak governance? (see Baga, 2002; Yang, 2000). What can networks do in order to prevent themselves from perpetuating poor governance or corruption?
- Conflict and post-conflict situations: how can CSO networks influence policy in conflict and post-conflict situations?¹⁹
- Gender: how do cultural norms relating to gender affect the functioning of the network and its capacity to influence policy? How do men and women behave within networks and what are the advantages and disadvantages of single-sex networks in certain contexts? (see Foster and Meinhard, 2004). How can a transnational network reconcile conflicting perceptions of gender among its members?
- Religion: how does the policy-influencing capacity of religious networks vary according to factors such as political climate, policy issue, or the specific religion?
- ICT capacity: in reality, to what extent can ICTs be used by various forms of network in the South? What communication tools are used in networks with little or no ICT capacity? To what extent does ICT capacity improve a network's chance of influencing policy in a given context? How can transnational networks overcome the problems associated with the 'digital divide'?

Incentivising cooperation of individual actors

Clark (2003b) and Robinson et al. (1999) both emphasise the significance of cooperation as a highly productive modus operandi that is particularly suitable for the public goods produced by the civil society sector. However, in order to cooperate successfully – in this case, through networks – it is necessary for individual CSOs to feel that there is a real benefit to sharing their knowledge and resources with other actors (Provan and Milward, 2001; Struyk, 2000). The opposing incentives towards competition are all too apparent, for example among NGOs bidding for contracts (Cooley and Ron, 2002). But even if members acknowledge the inherent advantages of cooperation (Rocha de Mendonça et al., 2004), there still needs to be a tangible set of incentives to persuade members to

¹⁹ An example of a civil society networks implementing policy in a post-conflict situation is provided by evidence from ActionAid in Somaliland: in a situation where much of the physical and political infrastructure of the country has been destroyed, networks of community-based organisations have worked through traditional institutions (councils of elders and codes of conduct governing negotiations) to build the foundations of a new political and economic system for the country (see Hassan and Qaasim, 2001).

commit themselves to overall network objectives. More systematic work is needed to identify these incentives, which link into issues such as power relations, funding, evaluation, and representation.²⁰

Legitimacy and representation

The literature identifies representativeness as one of the keys to success for networks aiming to influence policy. However, networks are inherently fluid structures characterised by informal links among diverse actors (Castells, 1998). Especially in the case of networks operating at grassroots level (such as some religious networks), there is still very little understanding of how to evaluate network legitimacy and representation.

The broader implications of this issue relate to the view that civil society networks themselves have the capacity to become governance structures. This view raises various questions regarding legitimacy and accountability. For example: what are the dangers of a democratic deficit if international networks such as transnational advocacy networks bypass normal political processes? And what are the dangers that certain constituencies within politically powerful networks might not diversify the agenda, but rather saturate the policy discourse with ideas based on their own exclusive interests?

Power dynamics and hierarchy

Much of the literature paints networks as non-hierarchical systems, in comparison with more traditional vertical management structures. The degree of vertical structure will vary according to each individual network, ranging from the loosely structured (flatter) networks, to those that are highly formalised (more hierarchical). But even in those networks with a loose structure, which establish little or no formal hierarchy among their members, it is nevertheless inevitable that power will be distributed somewhat unequally because of the differing status of actors in the hierarchical outside world within which the network operates. This is particularly evident in the case of transnational networks such as global knowledge networks or INGO networks. But complex power dynamics will also develop in any network where the membership is diverse. McNeill (in Stone and Maxwell, 2004: 57–71) introduces the broader relevance of this issue by questioning how it is that certain ideas come to be adopted as the dominant thinking in international development policymaking bodies. Referring to the Global Development Network established by the World Bank, McNeill asks how various actors will interact, and whether this will lead to ‘the dominance of one world view, or two major competing alternatives, of perhaps ‘a thousand flowers blooming’ (ibid.: 70). More work is needed to explore the implications of the discrepancies of power existing among network members in terms of representativeness, communication and the overall policy-influencing capacity of the network.

Funding

Many Southern CSO networks complain of a lack of funding. Karl (1999) linked the need for effective funding to the need for thorough self-evaluation of networks. It would be helpful for both Southern-based networks and donors alike if there were some further systematic work on the most effective modes and methods of funding. For example, in many ways, pro-poor business networks are self-funded – how can lessons from this sector be transferred to other more ‘not-for-profit’ sectors? Equally, it would be useful to carry out a comparative analysis of the funding systems

²⁰ A further interesting issue may relate to the recent research trend regarding the wider applications of the ‘open source’ model of information sharing pioneered with software such as *linux*. E.g. *Demos* has developed an agenda for applying open source principles to revolutionise democracy: ‘What would happen if the ‘source code’ of our democratic systems was opened up to the people they are meant to serve?’ (Rushkoff, 2003). Similarly, the field of medical research is examining the potential advantages of adopting an open source model (*The Economist* 10 June 2000). It is equally possible to examine how open sourcing would function within the context of research for international development, for example through the model of SciDev.Net (www.scidev.net).

behind existing success-stories, such as the SEWA network. However, it is also important to note that the issue of securing funds relates first and foremost to maintaining the function of individual actors. For example, many Southern universities struggle even to pay the salaries of their researchers. Seen in this context, the prospect of establishing networks can be seen as a very useful but nevertheless non-essential priority.

The language of grassroots testimony

When the grassroots testimony of poor people links into the policy arena by means of a network, it risks being understood out of context, and it may even be even ‘lost in translation’. In order to help policymakers to digest this evidence, there is a temptation to repackage it in language resembling research from an academic source. However, as is argued by Narayan and Shah (2000), to do this would be to change the nature of the evidence fundamentally.

As states are increasingly forced to collaborate with civil society over pro-poor policy, it is necessary for government policymakers to develop their ability to understand the voices of the poor without translation. In other words, a global or regional public policy network will be most effective if it can develop a communications protocol that is not dominated by the norms of those who hold the most power. This issue has been addressed by some studies – especially Keck and Sikkink (1998: 163) and Narayan and Shah (2000). However, more work is needed to develop practical capacity-building advice for networks containing such vertical linkages.

Box 11 The importance of trust and respect

ODI-GDN case studies: Implications of research on policy reforms in the forestry sector in India: joint forest management (JFM)

For any research to be able to feed into policymaking processes, the findings, besides being scientifically sound, need to be communicated and accepted in networks where not only are policymakers members, but also there is the ‘factor of trust and respect’ among them. In fact, networks have played important role in strengthening JFM in the country, by bringing the voice of the marginalised closer to the decision-making and policy levels.

In the initial stage of JFM, national level networks such as the SPWD (Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development), the National JFM (Joint Forest Management) Network, and the WWF-India Foresters JFM Network had provided direction by holding national-level discussions on JFM. These forums enabled local level issues to be discussed and debated so as to strengthen JFM policies in the country. However, as there was no institutional ownership of this body by the MoEF, these institutions petered out after a while.

Meanwhile a wide range of marginalised stakeholders expressed the need for a neutral forum to influence policymakers to come up with more people-friendly policies. The MoEF was also looking for an institutional mechanism to monitor the progress of JFM. Responding to these needs, a neutral stakeholders’ forum – Resource Unit for Participatory Forestry (RUPFOR), was initiated with support from the Ford Foundation. It is at present housed in Winrock International India.

Since its formation in 2001, RUPFOR has had considerable success in making the policymaking process a more participatory and inclusive one. However, it cannot be ignored that this is a relatively new experiment that is still very much a work-in-progress.

Source: www.gdnet.org/rapnet/research/studies/case_studies/Case_Study_38_Full.html

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