



NeRO:
Participation of Decision-Makers in
Networks for Knowledge Sharing



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Participation of Decision-Makers in Networks for Knowledge Sharing

Study Report

Report of the Study “Involvement of Decision-Makers
in Networks for Knowledge Sharing”

On behalf of

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Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
KM4Dev	Community of international development practitioners interested in knowledge management and knowledge sharing issues and approaches
NeRO	Networking and Information/Knowledge Management by Regional Organizations in the Field of Natural Resources Management
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NRM	Natural Resources Management
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEAFDEC	Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre

1 Introduction

1.1 Challenges in the Field of Natural Resources Management

With raising awareness of the cross-border environmental dimensions of natural resource management (NRM), networking as a mechanism to engage in a regional policy dialogue is becoming an essential prerequisite for holistic decision making. The exploitation of natural resources is often associated with huge adverse impacts, environmentally, socially and economically. Often not only one but several countries are affected and the negative effects increasingly jeopardize development. Finding sustainable solutions to these problems is a challenge as various economic, social, and ecological interests collide. Moreover, local, national and regional interests often diverge.

Sustainable natural resources management (NRM) has not only to consider the cross-border dimension, but also the multiple stakeholders that are involved on various levels, as one actor alone cannot solve the enormous problems. Increasingly, governments, the private sector, civil society, NGOs, international and multilateral organizations and institutions become aware that pluralistic mechanisms are required to coordinate their actions, to support informed decision making, to enable the different actors contributing to problem solving based on their mandates, roles and strengths.

1.2 Networks as Facilitators for Action

More and more networks are acknowledged as effective information, communication and coordination mechanisms and as catalysts for building up relationships and commitment among the multiple public and private stakeholders involved in NRM on the local, national, regional and international level. To cite Creech and Willard (2001): "Relationships build the trust necessary to bridge the gap between knowledge and action for sustainable development. Relationships, not information, are at the centre of all communications".

Trustful relationships are the basis for sharing information and knowledge and for joint learning and capacity building. In addition, networks among the multiple stakeholders will reduce the repetition of mistakes, the reinventing of wheels and therefore lead to more effective and sustainable solutions for the management of natural resources.

Networks also enable the different network members to "speak in one voice" as they allow the coordinated creation of information. In this way they have a higher impact on policy issues, in particular to position regional organizations in the international policy context.

Last but not least networks contribute also to joint action. There is a vast amount of information and expertise available on natural resources management and often it is basically not the information or knowledge that is lacking but the gap between knowledge and action. By building up relationships among the relevant stakeholders networks function as facilitators for action.

1.3 Participation of Decision-Makers

Among the various stakeholders that are involved in networks, the decision-makers in business, governments, multilateral organizations and the civil society play a crucial role for joint action as they have the authority to coordinate and formulate policies and to take decisions on the management of natural resources. It is therefore important for networks to understand how the awareness of decision-makers for sustainable management of natural resources can be raised.

Decision-makers and the various other possible stakeholders of networks face different incentives and constraints. The business sector, for example, has recognized the potential of an improved knowledge sharing earlier as other sectors as the high competition has forced companies to become more efficient, to innovate constantly and to avoid risks. Because of the competitive environment they are in, however, they are hesitant to share information and their knowledge with others. Government organizations, in contrast, face less competition but other constraints like political interference, power struggles, contradicting policies, or little cohesion among policies. Civil society and NGOs again are very close to day-to-day problems and are doing advocacy for improvements in natural resources management.

In order to bring the various stakeholders and decision-makers together it requires that the involved parties understand each other, are convinced that the agreed objectives of the network can be achieved, and that joint problem solving creates benefits for all. In an intergovernmental context in addition rules and procedures are necessary to promote compliance within information sharing mechanisms and networking.

1.4 Objectives and Target Group of this Study

Objectives

This study focuses on the decision-makers and their participation in networks. The objectives are to understand and document the factors how decision-makers or their representatives within governments become aware of formal networks and their benefits, how they use networks, how they get involved, and in which way they can contribute to the achievement of the network's objectives.

The specific research questions that will be addressed in the study are:

- What are the preconditions that decision-makers participate in networks?
- What are the incentives that decision-makers participate in networks?
- What are hindrances that decision-makers participate in networks?
- What are successful ways to build up relationships with decision-makers?
- What are successful ways to communicate with decision-makers so that their message is heard or read? What doesn't work?
- How are decision-makers from governments and multilateral organizations practically involved in networks for NRM?

Target groups

Target groups of this study are networking practitioners interested in the involvement of decision-makers in networks. The results of the study will serve as an input to a networking guide for practitioners to be published by the project “Networking and Information/Knowledge Management by Regional Organizations in the Field of Natural Resources Management” (NeRO) funded by the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ).

Specific target groups are therefore:

- NeRO members that are involved in facilitating intergovernmental organizations in NRM;
- Other facilitators of bilateral and multilateral organizations and NGOs, who are interested in networking with governments in NRM;
- Individuals in ASEAN Member Countries who are interested in networking to solve regional/international issues in Natural Resource Management.

1.5 About this Study

This study is part of the project “Networking and Information/Knowledge Management by Regional Organizations in the Field of Natural Resources Management” (NeRO) funded by the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ). One of the goals of this project was to provide a “neutral” platform for exchange of information and knowledge management approaches and instruments between regional organizations focusing on the NRM sector.

Emerging from this “How to do it” approach a careful attempt is made to share selected information contents, the “What”, based on a network approach. In line with this approach targeted information products on needs identified by the NeRO participants are developed. The involvement of decision-makers and governments in networks for knowledge sharing was defined as one of the topics to be covered.

The study was carried out by Urs Karl Egger from the Skat Foundation in Switzerland in close collaboration with the Natural Resources Unit of the Bureau for Resources Development of the ASEAN Secretariat and Georg Buchholz from the GTZ ASEAN-German Regional Forest Programme.

1.6 Methodology

For this study a methodology was chosen that considers the perspective of the decision-makers, and the perspective and experience of those who work with or for decision-makers. Three methods were applied:

- *Literature review*: review of existing publications on networking and involvement of decision-makers in networks;
- *Interviews and surveys*: interviews and surveys including network managers and decision-makers to analyze the involvement of decision-makers in detail. In addition, two surveys were conducted on the occasion of meetings of two networks;
- *Electronic survey*: a general electronic survey was conducted to collect in particular the experience of collaborators and stakeholders of decision-makers.

1.6.1 Interviews and Surveys

For the study four interviews with network managers and decision-makers were conducted. On the sidelines of one of the Meetings of the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC) and the ASEAN Genetically Modified Food Testing Network, questionnaires were distributed to the participants to get more insights about participation of decision-makers. The interviews and the two surveys added valuable results to the study. An overview and a summary of insights are given in the Appendix in section 6.1. The most important insights are included in the text of the report.

In addition, a brainstorming session was carried out with experienced senior professionals of Skat, a Resource Centre and Consultancy in Switzerland that have longstanding experience with setting up and managing international networks.

1.6.2 Electronic Survey

An electronic survey addressed a wider group of decision-makers and their collaborators and stakeholders. Addressees of the survey were the members of the NeRO community, the members of KM4Dev, a community of international development practitioners interested in knowledge management and knowledge sharing issues, selected professionals of the Swiss Development Cooperation interested in networks and selected members of networks involved in natural resources management issues in Asia.

Even if the feedback about the quality of the electronic questionnaire was positive, only 31 responses were submitted. This low response rate limited the explanatory power of the survey. Yet the results of the survey confirmed the insights from the literature analysis and enriched the study by adding interesting facets about the involvement of decision-makers in networks. For a summary of the electronic survey see section 6.2.

1.6.3 Confidentiality Issues

During the conduct of the electronic survey, the surveys and the interviews concern on confidentiality was raised by some participants. It was therefore stated that all information provided by the respondents will be treated confidentially in a way that contact details will be recorded only for the purpose of internal reference.

The examples mentioned by the respondents were therefore made anonymous with the view of formulating suggested approaches in moving forward without omitting interesting results.

In one of the analyzed questionnaires no answers were given to questions addressing problems or challenges of networks. It could be a small coincidence but may also reflect on the reluctance of exposing problems faced by networks. Networks may optimize their performance by starting to put aside some of the hesitation to share their challenges and learn from their failures and experiences. There is no “silver bullet” for this problem but a few possibilities how this could be done are described in this report.

2 Understanding Networks and Decision-Makers

2.1 Networks

There are many different types of networks and numerous definitions. This study focuses on *formal networks* that are defined for this study as follows (see also Skat Foundation, 2004):

“Formal networks are formalized or institutionalized and often cross-regional partnerships between several institutions or organizations and may even take the form of a legal entity. The network partners are autonomous and contribute their resources voluntarily. They share a common vision, objectives and rules. The network partners have a set of common activities and regular events are organized.”

For a detailed overview of different types of networks see Creech and Willard (2001).

2.2 Decision-Makers

2.2.1 Definition

For this study decision-makers are defined as persons working in organizations who dispose of authority to take decisions in their area of competence. Typically, decision-makers work on the executive level as Managing Director, Executive Secretary, Executive Director, Secretary General or Senior Official in larger organizations.

Depending on their position and function also managers on the operational level and technical experts can be important decision-makers. They often prepare the decisions to be taken at the upper level and suggest topics to be taken up or activities to be initiated. In addition, they have in many cases a large flexibility in the implementation of decisions.

Decision-makers can be found in all organizations and sectors: in private companies, in public administration, on the political level as members of parliaments or as representatives of the government, in development agencies, international organizations, trade unions, and in NGOs. This study focuses mainly on decision-makers who work in public administrations.

To simplify matters the masculine noun is used for decision-makers in this report. It is however not the intention to suggest that only men are decision-makers – in contrary. Fortunately, also women get more and more into the position of decision-makers and can bring in their perspectives.

2.2.2 How Decision-Makers Work

For the involvement of decision-makers in networks it is important to understand the context decision-makers are working in, how their daily working life looks like and what their constraints are.

The daily work of decision-makers is dominated by meetings, informal networking, giving strategic comments, taking or delaying decisions, getting support for initiatives, or preserving their power. Often, the calendar of decision-makers is overloaded with meetings that serve also to maintain their informal networks. Because of their busy life it is difficult to get an appointment.

Exposed to power struggles

Their status gives decision-maker power and influence. At the same time, decision-makers cannot govern independently. They are embedded in a dense network of relationships and dependencies, exposed to power struggles and they have to form alliances all the time. Their superiors, their staff and interest groups exert pressure on decision-makers and try to influence them. If decision-makers are undergoing regular reelections or reconfirmations of their position they will be interested to show the results they have achieved through their work.

Filtered information

In general, decision-makers have good access to information. They use information as a strategic asset; they will forward or keep back information in a selective way and according to their interests.

At the same time also the counterparts of decision-makers behave in a strategic way. Thus decision-makers receive information often in a *filtered way*, be it because their support staff keeps information back for some reasons or because other units of an organization or institution are not willing to forward information. This creates insecurity, which information is valid and trustworthy and which is not.

In addition, decision-makers often suffer from *information overload*. As many decision-makers are generalists and not technical specialists it is difficult for them to select important information and to assess the quality of information.

Importance of support staff or desk officers

Networks have to consider that decision-makers possess not only much power but they also work in a difficult context. Being at the top and exposed to power struggles leads also to loneliness as decision-makers are not sure anymore whom they can trust.

Their junior staff, support staff or desk officers play therefore a very important role. They are looking for useful information, help decision-makers to filter information, give them feedbacks, they prepare speeches and reports. Support staff knows not only the strength and weaknesses of their superiors and their agendas, but also how they have to be contacted. **Support staffs are therefore key persons for the involvement of decision-makers and networks should strive to establish good relationships to these valuable entry points to decision-makers.** Network managers, however, have to be aware that also support staff of decision-makers is often overburdened with work as they are fully exposed to the hectic work at the decision-maker level.

3 Preconditions and Incentives for Participation

For the involvement of decision-makers in networks it takes two to tango. First, the network has to be attractive and interesting for the decision-maker. Second, the decision-maker would like to get a benefit from the participation and he needs the necessary resources to participate in the network.

3.1 What Makes Networks Attractive for Decision-Makers?

What are preconditions of a *network* so that a decision-maker would gladly participate? A number of preconditions are discussed in the following. The surveys and interviews have clearly shown that it is particularly important for decision-makers – as well as for their collaborators – that networks are well managed in a transparent way.

3.1.1 Well-managed Network

Good management of the network is not only important for its success; it is also of high priority for decision-makers and their collaborators. They will only participate in networks if they can see that they are managed in a professional way by a committed team. However, what is a good an effective management? Often an effective management has much to do with simple things but still all too often exactly these simple things are neglected. The box below gives an overview of the basics of effective management (See Malik, 2003).

Basic principles of effective management

- Focus on results
- Keep in mind the whole network and contribute with your work to the overall goal
- Concentrate on a few but essential activities
- Make use of the strengths of the network
- Build up trustful relationships
- Think in a positive and constructive way

Basic tasks of an effective management

- Providing clear objectives
- Organizing the network activities
- Decision taking
- Controlling
- Develop and promote the potentials of people

Tools of an effective management

- Conducting meetings (in particular also good preparation and follow-up)
- Writing concise reports
- Job design and assignment control
- Mastery of working methodology
- Budgeting
- Assessment of performance
- Regular tidying up

3.1.2 Transparency

The interviews and surveys confirmed that transparency is an important precondition for the participation of decision-makers in networks. Decision-makers need to understand quickly what the network is doing. Thus networks need a mission that is understood easily and a clear strategy. An easily recognizable name and attractive logo will contribute further to the perceptibility of the network.

The organization of the network has to be transparent as well as decision-makers would like to know how the network is organized, who is involved, who has which influence, and from which source the network funds its activities. If decision-makers feel that something may be hidden or if the mission of the network is not clear and simple enough they won't trust the network and hesitate to participate. Networks are therefore well-advised to present them on their website, in their flyers and brochures in a simple and transparent way.

Sometimes however, also certain discretion may be indicated. Decision-makers may perhaps not want to be associated with some of the members of the network or the network itself, even if they value the information provided by the network.

3.1.3 Trust

Trust is the basic lubricant for networking and knowledge sharing. Decision-makers will only become involved in networks if they trust in the network and true knowledge sharing will only take place if people trust each other.

Networks should therefore build up trustful relationships with decision-makers (See section 4). Trust is created by a whole set of different factors that are discussed in this paper like a good personal relationship, reliable and consistent communication or transparency.

An effective way to build up trust is to involve personalities with a widely recognized good reputation who share the mission of the network. As Honorary Members or as members of the Committee of Patrons they are mostly not actively involved in the day-to-day business of the network but they contribute with their acknowledged prestige also to the reputation of the network.

3.2 What Motivates Decision-Makers to Participate in Networks?

What makes *decision-makers* participate in networks? First, it is important to understand that there are different degrees to involve decision-makers in networks. Second, most decision-makers – or their assigned staff – will only participate in networks if they get a personal benefit. Third, decision-makers and their staff also need the necessary resources like time and money to participate in networks.

3.2.1 Different Degrees of Participation

The surveys and interviews have shown that there are various degrees of involvement of decision-makers in networks. Decision-makers often don't have or take the time for being directly involved in the activities of networks or they are hesitant to expose themselves. The study showed for example that decision-makers are rather hesitant to participate actively in email discussion groups (See section 4.3).

Nevertheless, they keep *indirectly* involved in the network by following passively email discussions, by sometimes participating in workshops or conferences or by being a member of the advisory board. Last but not least decision-makers keep indirectly involved in networks through their staff by sending them to network meetings and workshops or by assigning them to participate in discussion groups, to provide and retrieve information, to facilitate discussions or even to run the secretariat.

3.2.2 Benefits from Participation in a Network

The strongest incentive for decision-makers to devote a part of their scarce time for networks or to assign their staff to do so is receiving a *benefit or added value*. Some decision-makers may participate in networks for altruistic reasons or just for their personal interests but in general, decision-makers will join a network if there is a win-win-situation.

To involve decision-makers managers or facilitators of networks should strive to identify *common ground* among the objectives of the network and the objectives of the decision-makers and take overlapping goals as starting point.

Experienced decision-makers know that building up a network and generating a *return on the investment takes quite some time*. Yet network managers or facilitators should tell this again and again to decision-makers and explain why this is so.

By participating in a network decision-makers can get a variety of benefits. The most important benefits mentioned in the surveys and interviews are getting access to information and know-how, increase the personal network and build up partnerships. Other benefits are also evident although they are often not mentioned like for example increasing the reputation of decision-makers.

Benefits for Decision-Makers

1. Get access to information and know-how
2. Increase personal network
3. Facilitator for partnerships

Other benefits

- Gaining power of persuasion
- Being involved while remaining independent
- Test new ideas and innovative solutions
- Multiplier for resources
- Benchmarking
- Increased reputation
- Other personal benefits like having fun

Get access to information and know-how

One of the strongest incentives to be involved in networks is getting access to information, know-how and new ideas that might be valuable for the work of decision-makers. According to the surveys and interviews many participate in the network because the goal of the network is in line with their job description and they are therefore personally interested to get access to relevant information. Networks have thus an important role in collecting, filtering, validating, creating access and disseminating high-quality information for decision-makers.

Interesting information for decision-makers

- Technical data, information and know-how;
- Experiences and good practices;
- News, trends and information about events, workshops and conferences;
- Information about network members and experts;
- Ongoing activities and projects;
- Feeling what others do and think.

Decision-makers will not access all information in the same way. Technical information will be retrieved mainly through their support staff. “Softer” information like getting a feeling what others do and think or collecting new ideas and alternative options for action will be collected during workshops or conferences.

Increase personal network

Many decision-makers would like to be involved in networks because this is a unique opportunity to enlarge their personal network. Good relationships to working colleagues within an organization as well as with other professionals, friends and relatives are one of the most valuable resources for effective and efficient work.

In particular regular meetings or the participation in workshops and conferences organized by networks are good opportunities for decision-makers to build up and cultivate the personal networks. At the same time these events are also a good occasion for the network managers or network members to get in direct touch with decision-makers.

Facilitator for partnerships

Networks are catalysts for building up and maintaining personal networks. They are also a unique and often informal way to collaborate or to build up partnerships with other governmental organizations on the local, national or regional level, with private companies, with NGOs, or the academia. In the setting of a network decision-makers of governmental institutions might find a platform to interact with external parties such as NGOs in a more informal way what can be easier than formal meetings.

Gaining power of persuasion

Power has often a negative connotation. However, to achieve informed choices, action and change requires sometimes power or influence. Access to validated information and knowledge through networks empowers decision-makers to work towards achieving their goals.

A network can give a decision-maker strong arguments for his or her political discussions. If the decision-maker can say that his opinion is not only his own opinion but also the opinion of all network partners this will give his arguments considerably more weight and power of persuasion.

A decision-maker is always looking for arguments to justify his decisions and actions to his various stakeholders. By participating in a network decision-makers learn what others are doing and he gets arguments to justify his actions. In this way he can use the effect that many people are more willing to accept something if many others are doing it already.

Being involved while remaining independent

Networks are characterized by the independence of their members or partners. This is an advantage for decision-makers as they can participate in a network and keep at the same time their independence. In this way they do not threaten the traditional more hierarchical structured organizations decision-makers often work in. This independence, however, also means that the decisions taken by the network members are not binding for decision-makers unless they are written down in a formal agreement.

Test new and innovative solutions

Networks offer an informal platform for decision-makers to discuss and test ideas and new innovative solutions. Networks serve therefore as a testing ground and to carry out reality-checks before decision-makers go public with their ideas. In particular email discussion groups are a good way to get feedbacks from peers.

More sensitive ideas will however rather be tested in informal talks during meetings or workshops. A more structured way to get feedbacks is a *peer assist*. This is a meeting or a session during a workshop or conference that brings together a group of peers to get feedback on a problem, an idea, or a project. The meeting seeks to learn from the participants' knowledge and experience.

Multiplier for resources

A decision-maker is bound to his institution and the available and often scarce financial and personal resources. A network can be a multiplier of the resources of decision-makers as he can pool his resources with those of other network partners to realize a common solution or to launch a project or initiative together.

In formal networks it is quite common that the network partners bundle their resources, e.g. to build up a common information platform or a clearinghouse mechanism (See Buchholz et al., 2005).

Benchmarking

For decision-makers it is often quite difficult to know how well their organizations are doing. Do their organizations work in an efficient and effective way? A Network can help decision-makers to compare their work in an informal way with the work of others and therefore to identify areas where improvement is possible.

Increase reputation

Another incentive for participating in networks is that decision-makers can increase their reputation. This is particularly the case when the network has a good reputation in the public opinion. In this case being a member of this network becomes some sort of "collecting medals for the uniform".

Personal benefits

By participating in networks, decision-makers also get personal benefits that are not directly related to their job. Network events are an opportunity to meet new friends and to have fun. Network meetings often take place in a pleasant surrounding in an atmosphere that encourages socializing and the enjoyment of pleasant amenities like good food and drinks. So it is quite common that conferences with an attractive venue are often fully booked.

Finally, network meetings and events are also appreciated because they offer an opportunity to escape of the daily routine of work.

These personal benefits contribute to the motivation of the network members. They are an important part of networking and help to create a positive working atmosphere. Network managers and facilitators should therefore actively create such personal benefits but take care that they do not dominate the agenda.

3.2.3 Resources for Participation in a Network

Decision-makers not only have to see a benefit from the participation in networks, they also need the resources – time and money – to participate in a network. Both resources are scarce commodities for decision-makers. They are busy people and often they have only *very little time* available for participating in networks. Decision-makers will only do so if they perceive the participation in the network as a priority over other engagements and for this they have to be really convinced of the benefit.

Depending on the country and status the organizations *budget* may also be a limiting factor for the involvement of decision-makers in networks. This was in particular confirmed by the surveys where the respondents mentioned several times that the access to the Internet or the participation in meetings, workshops and conferences is too expensive.

So it might be necessary that networks cover the expenses of decision-makers for their participation in networks. However, a few points have to be considered that will be addressed in section 4.5.5.

4 Participation of Decision-Makers in Practice

How are decision-makers from governments and multilateral organizations practically involved in international networks? Experience shows that it is generally not enough to send them from time to time some information about the network.

First, the network should establish a personal relationship towards the decision-maker. This relationship should be based on mutual understanding. Second, the relationships with decision-makers have to be cultivated continuously. Various tools and ways of communication will be helpful for building up and maintaining these relationships.

4.1 Building-up Relationships

Decision-makers are people with a full calendar and often they are not aware of a specific network. How can a network get in touch with decision-makers and start to build up a relationship?

How to start relationships with decision-makers

- Get in touch with the decision-maker by
 - writing a formal letter;
 - contacting him in an informal way during a workshop or conference;
 - finding a messenger or a door opener who knows already the decision-maker and who is willing to introduce you;
 - contacting the support staff of a decision-maker as a door opener.
- Arrange a first meeting with the decision-maker.
- Plan a careful follow-up.

Sending an email does often not work as decision-makers receive lots of emails every day and they have to be very selective in reading and answering their emails. If somebody from a network contacts a decision-maker for the first time by email he will hesitate to answer it because he does not know the person or the network. A more successful way is to contact a decision-maker by a *formal letter and a follow-up phone*.

Another way is to contact the decision-maker on the occasion of a workshop or a conference in an informal way. Sometimes it may also be appropriate to find a *messenger or an intermediary*, somebody who knows the decision-maker already, and who could act as a door opener. In particular in the Asian context it is advisable to look for a messenger who could make a first contact and establish a link between the network and the decision-maker. Finally, also support staff can serve as door openers to decision-makers.

Once the contact is established and the decision-maker is willing to receive somebody from the network a *face-to-face meeting* should be held, if possible together with the messenger. At this first meeting high-level representatives of the network should be present and introduce themselves. They should explain the mission, the objectives, the activities and the services of the network in a simple way. The first meeting should also be used to carefully explore the interests of the decision-maker, to bring forward convincing arguments for an

involvement and to show the added value of the network. Last but not least practical ways for a possible involvement of the decision-maker in the network should be investigated.

After the meeting a professional *follow-up* has to be made. It is helpful to summarize briefly the discussion, to write down what has been agreed on and to note the next steps as for example a next meeting or a participation in a workshop. This should be sent altogether to the decision-maker.

As with many other things the first step will be the most difficult one: to involve the first decision-maker in the network will be quite a challenge but as soon as several decision-makers are on board the *snowball principle* will work and it will become easier to involve more decision-makers. This is also the reason why it is advisable for networks to have a committee of patrons or well-reputed honorary members.

4.2 Maintaining Relationships

Once a relationship with decision-makers is established it is essential to cultivate these relationships, so that the decision-makers develop ownership for the mission and activities for the network. According to Creech and Willard (2001) a “well-managed relationship not only helps to achieve the network’s goals directly, but also provides access to additional relationships and a broader funding base”. So it is worthwhile for networks to manage relationships with decision-makers in a systematic and coordinated manner. To maintain relationships seven principles are essential.

Seven principles for maintaining relationships with decision-makers

- Understand the decision-makers
- Include decision-makers in processes
- Keep it short and simple
- Facilitate conversations actively
- Contact decision-makers regularly
- Allow plenty of time for socializing
- Create private spaces

Understand the Decision-Makers

Maintaining a good relationship with decision-makers requires that networks understand their behavior, their interests, needs and priorities, their availability, and finally also the best way to stay in touch with them. Networks should approach decision-makers with the attitude of a learner, enter into a dialogue, try to identify their needs and develop tailored services with a real added value for decision-makers. So it will often be more appropriate to prepare a short policy-brief for a decision-maker than a lengthy report that might end up collecting dust in the shelves.

It almost goes without saying that blaming decision-makers for their statements or activities is very counterproductive. This will stop the relationship immediately and destroy trust that has been built up. It will be much easier to find ways to address sensitive issues in a careful way and also to find solutions together once a network has established a trustful relationship with decision-makers.

Include Decision-Makers in Processes

People develop ownership for a network when they feel that they are integrated in decision-making processes, that their ideas and suggestions are appreciated and taken serious. Thus it is important to give decision-makers the *opportunity to participate in decision taking processes* of the network, and to encourage them to bring in comments and suggestions. This may happen in a consultative way or by including them in a working group or a consultative board. Even if they do not respond – and this may often be the case – they should at least get the documents and reports.

The involvement of decision-makers in the processes is also important for another reason. Formal networks are generally not an end in itself but they strive for change within a sector or region. Networks have to be aware of the fact that change often goes along with insecurity. Power relations may change, some stakeholders may loose power, and others get more. These changes often create fear and resistance. Only in the best case networks are able to create a win-win situation so that all involved parties benefit from the change. By involving decision-makers right from the beginning into these change processes it will be more likely that the frictions can be at least reduced.

As mentioned in section 2.2.2 the *support staff or desk officers* are very important for the involvement of decision-makers. So it might be appropriate in some situations to receive a general agreement for collaboration by the decision-maker and to work out afterwards the mode of collaboration and concrete steps with the support staff or desk officers. In this case, however, they have to make sure to keep the decision-maker up-to-date.

Keep it Short and Simple

In the end, knowledge sharing only takes place if everybody understands the message. Decision-makers often are generalists and they do not have in-depth technical knowledge. Therefore, in the communication with decision-makers technical jargon should be avoided. Email, letters and documents from the network should be written in an appropriate style: a simple and concise language, which avoids abbreviations and technical slang so that it is attractive to read.

Facilitate Conversations Actively

A good communication in networks and in email discussion groups needs a skilled, active and caring facilitation. In particular in networks with a focus on technical solutions this is often neglected. The responses we got in the surveys and interviews clearly confirmed the need for a careful facilitation. Otherwise discussions are likely to become unstructured, confusing and not useful for the participating members. Most discussions will even stop. Even if decision-makers often do not actively contribute to email discussion groups they follow passively the discussions and the way the discussions are facilitated will also form their impression of the network.

Be aware that the facilitation of meetings or workshops and of email discussion groups is similar but not exactly the same. In the box below a few essentials of good facilitation are summarized.

Essentials of good facilitation

Facilitation in general

- Clarify background and context of discussion;
- Ensure a good understanding;
- Look for concrete and practical examples
- Activate silent participants
- Try to distill essential issues of the discussion
- Stimulate the discussion by asking questions
- Summarize discussions
- Address differences or potential conflicts
- Remind people about the rules of conversation
- Address or show feelings

Facilitation of face-to-face workshops

- Visualize the discussions
- Admit people to the floor
- Carefully stop people who talk too much
- Give feedbacks to the participants
- Ensure a good time management
- Conduct a review of the workshop

Contact Decision-Makers Regularly

Another important principle for maintaining relationships with decision-makers is getting in touch with them regularly. What does “regular” mean? How often should decision-makers be contacted? As already stated decision-makers are busy people and they are glad if they don't have to participate in too many meetings. A good rule of thumb is a minimum of *one to two face-to-face contacts every year* to maintain a good relationship. Otherwise, the relationship tends to decay and will sooner or later come to an end. These regular contacts with decision-makers are very time consuming for networks but they are indispensable for maintaining good relationships. Depending on the function of the decision-maker more meetings may be necessary. Meetings with decision-makers should always be well prepared. If one knows what has to be achieved it is more likely that the meeting is successful.

In this study decision makers have indicated that in addition to face-to-face meetings regular emails containing news and updates are appreciated. These emails should be sent about 5 times a year.

Allow Plenty of Time and Space for Socializing

A relationship will be more lasting if it has not only a technical but also a personal connotation. Networks should therefore nurture their relationships with decision-makers by establishing a personal relationship. Enough time and space during meetings, workshops or conferences for informal socializing and gathering is therefore essential. Possibilities for

socializing are for example a joint lunch or dinner with the decision-makers or splitting up longer meetings and workshop into two days so that the participants have the possibility to gather in an informal way in the evening.

Create Private Spaces

For maintaining and cultivating relationships with and among decision-makers facilitators or managers of networks may also create private spaces for two reasons: to share and develop potentially sensitive ideas and to learn from mistakes or failures.

New ideas and innovative joint actions are in not developed from scratch but follow in most cases a typical process. First the new ideas are mentioned casually in informal discussions. If the ideas get a positive echo a core group of interested people will hold closed room meetings and formulate first strategies. The next step will be the formation of alliances with partners and supporters of the idea and only when the alliance is large enough the idea will be announced publicly. Networks can play an important role in this process by creating private spaces where decision-makers can share their ideas or develop new ones in a confidential way without being cited in the newspaper the next day.

Another reason to create protected spaces for decision-makers is the need to learn from failures and mistakes that are a valuable source for learning. For this, however, cultural factors have to be considered. Most people do not like to share their lapses. In some cultures, however, admitting mistakes even means losing the face or leads to punishments. In other cultures people do rarely feel responsible for any problems. In addition, in particular decision-makers will be hesitant to share failures or mistakes in public due to their status. By creating private and protected spaces networks can contribute a great deal to learning and knowledge sharing.

To summarize, the creation of private spaces can be an effective way to involve decision-makers to develop ideas and to learn from mistakes. This has nothing to do with conspiracy but it is a way to cope with the context decision-makers are living in. They have to be very careful about what they say and they have to ponder every word. Like small seedlings also new ideas have to be protected sometimes so that they can blossom.

4.3 Communication

Communication is the lifeblood of all relationships and networks. Therefore networks have to pay great attention to the communication among the members and with decision-makers. Most of the communication among human beings is non-verbal. In the following it will be discussed what this means. Secondly, various ways and tools for communication will be outlined.

4.3.1 Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

In the communication between human beings non-verbal expressions play an important role. Verbal but in particular non-verbal expressions often vary a lot among different cultures and also the different hierarchical levels within the organizations.

Typical examples for *non-verbal communication* are:

- Body language: should I bow my head if I welcome somebody? In some cultures this is quite common, in others too formal or even ridiculous.
- Sound of the voice: how loud should I speak with somebody? In some cultures it is usual to talk in a low voice; in other cultures you will get nowhere if you don't speak up.
- Facial expression: should I smile while I talk? This is quite usual in Asian cultures even if you are angry. In other cultures you show with your face how you really feel.
- Distance: what is the right talking distance to your counterpart? In some countries it is common that you approach the other very closely; in others a certain distance is appropriate (Just imagine what happens if two people with a different cultural background for distance start to discuss in a closed room).

Symbols and rituals also influence communication. Examples for symbols are expensive cars or clothing, flags or emblems, a round table for negotiations symbolizing that nobody is a the top, or a podium at a conference.

Rituals are standardized behavior patterns that have often a ceremonial touch, e.g. the audience of a conference is standing up when the President enters, an opening ceremony of a workshop, dancing or singing a special song.

Networking practitioners should pay attention to non-verbal communication as well as to non-verbal symbols and rituals, in particular if they would like to involve high-ranking decision-makers. A better understanding of non-verbal communication will help to build up an effective communication with decision-makers.

In particular in international networks the cultural dimension of non-verbal communication has to be considered as well. International corporations, for example, started in the last years to train their staff in intercultural communication. Networking practitioners, in particular network facilitators, are well advised to develop these skills.

4.3.2 Tools and Ways for Communication

Nowadays, various tools and ways for communication support the interaction with decision-makers. There is no golden rule which tool should be used. People think, share, learn and communicate in different ways. Some prefer using "traditional" means like phone calls, face-to-face contacts or writing letters so that statements can be prepared carefully. Others favor more modern means of communication like email. In spite of the new information and communication tools, face-to-face contacts will remain important, in particular to create trust or to discuss issues in more depth.

The appropriate ways and tools for communication depend also on the objective, the circumstances and the nature of the relationship. Networks should therefore use a mix of communication tools for their interaction with decision-makers. The choice of communication should be adapted to the individual case. Network managers also have to consider that many people are still not that familiar with electronic communication tools and the less hierarchical way of email interaction.

Not every tool and way of communication involves the same costs. In the surveys it was mentioned several times that the access to the Internet is still quite expensive in some places and the participation in workshops and conferences is often too costly.

Way or tool for communication	Objective	Prerequisites	Costs Involved
Letters	For formal enquiries or statements	Good writing skills	low
Telephone	For follow-ups, short information, to clarify personal or confidential issues	Access to telephone	quite low (if local calls)
Emails	Short information, queries, maintaining relationships	Access to the Internet	low
Email discussion groups	Discussion of topics, collection of ideas, get feedbacks and support from peers	Access to the Internet, skilled facilitator	quite low
Electronic newsletter	Short information on news and events	Access to the Internet, good editor	quite low
Website	General information, portal to databases	Budget for establishment, access to the Internet, capacity for updates, maintenance, editing and administrator	high
Print publications	In-depth information about certain topics	Good writing skills, editing, distribution channels	high
Stories and practical examples	To illustrate messages and to convince people	Good writing skills, editing, distribution channels, if told: good narrator	quite low
Workshops and conferences	For formal and informal discussions, building up and maintaining relationships	Good organization and facilitation skills	very high
Events	Raise the attention of a wider public	Good organization skills; fundraising skills for fundraising events	very high or low (fund-raising)
Field trips	Visualize problems, creation of ownership	Good organization skills	very high
Media	Raise the attention of a wider public	Experience in handling of media press kits	fair

Emails

Emails have become a widespread means for communication and have even replaced in many cases other means like letters. Emails are an excellent possibility for cheap and quick interaction, to disseminate information or to collect feedbacks. Communication by email, however, also faces several problems. Decision-makers may be hesitant to use emails as their statements are written down and can be forwarded very quickly to a large audience. For formal messages or statements they therefore prefer traditional letters. Another disadvantage of emails is their anonymous character. If decision-makers don't know the sender they will be generally be hesitant to answer the email.

Moreover, many people have increasingly difficulties to handle the growing number of emails they receive every day. Spam –promotion emails – flooding the inboxes aggravates this problem. Nevertheless, once a relationship with a decision-maker has been established, emails can be an effective means to stay in direct touch.

For a smooth email correspondence the basic rules of good letter/email writing like a short informative subject line, a short and structured text and a signature with address and phone numbers should be observed.

Email discussion groups

Many networks also use *email discussion groups* for the communication among their members. Emails are sent to a server that distributes the messages to all subscribed members. In this way everybody who is involved in a network can follow the discussions. A disadvantage of email discussion groups is that they often generate numerous emails that aren't read. For this reason a skilled facilitation of email discussion groups is advisable to ensure discussions of high quality.

In email discussion groups it is quite common that only a few participate very actively. The remaining members – also called lurkers – participate passively by reading the contributions. Nevertheless, also these lurkers play an important role as they might disseminate the outcomes of the discussion for example in face-to-face meetings. Some may also become active participants as soon as they are familiar with the community participating in the discussion group.

In email discussion groups Decision-makers often remain lurkers. They don't participate actively in email discussion groups but rather delegate their support staff to do so. One of the reasons is that in particular government officials are hesitant to participate in electronic discussion fora since their postings are archived and visible. Nevertheless, some decision-makers follow email discussions passively and keep up-to date in this way. The impact of this passive lurking should not be underestimated.

Websites

Websites are an effective way to provide information to a large audience. Access to the Internet still grows very rapidly – especially in developing countries – and many people increasingly use the Internet to gather information about various issues, to get information about institutions and organizations, or for shopping. Nevertheless, networks have to consider that Internet access is still not available in many places or very slow.

What is valid for print publications is also true for websites: the information must be provided in an attractive way. The website must have a simple structure, texts have to be written in a concise way, and the content has to be updated regularly. According to the surveys and interviews not updated websites are one of the major problems of networks. Website managers are well advised to keep the information updated and to send reminders to encourage other members of the network to publish information themselves. Websites have become the “business cards” of networks and should be cared for accordingly.

Decision-makers also increasingly use websites to gather information although it is mainly their support staff that does the searching. Many companies nowadays structure their websites according to the needs of their target groups: customers, suppliers, investors, and

media. Networks can help decision-makers to find information more quickly if they provide specific sections on their website that are tailored to the decision-maker's needs.

Some websites have also become portals to powerful databases providing consolidated information for decision-making. Some of these electronic information systems are also referred to as *Clearing House Mechanisms (CHM)* (See Buchholz et al., 2005). They can be defined as systems that serve to discover, collect, advertise, access, and disseminate data and information held by all parties that are involved in an international agreement by using the decentralized capabilities of the Internet. The collected and consolidated data form a common and transparent basis for joint decision-making of the involved parties. Even if decision-makers rarely consult these CHM databases themselves, they often provide important information for their collaborators and support staff. CHMs can therefore, in an indirect way, act as a knowledge basis for decisions taken.

Print publications

Print publications are a widely used format by networks to provide information about their activities. Print publications still enjoy a *high credibility* but the abundance of publications has led to a situation that many aren't read anymore. Still, print publications are a useful way to bring information in more detail to decision-makers. Many decision-makers, however, will not have the time to read lengthy reports. Therefore, it has to be considered that print publications are written in a concise and understandable manner, technical language and abbreviations must be avoided and the text should be illustrated with examples, graphs and pictures.

There are a large variety of print publications: books, reports, fact sheets, brochures, leaflets, policy-briefs, flyers, newsletters, or manuals and guidelines. Decision-makers prefer short documents, brochures, fact sheets, policy-briefs or newsletters that quickly inform them. A good rule of thumb is two pages. Longer reports should always contain an executive summary highlighting the most important messages of the publication.

Finally, it is in many cases recommendable to provide also *electronic versions of publications*, e.g. as PDF-Files that are available for download on a networks' website. This way of dissemination is quite cheap and interested people can download the publications any time.

Workshops and Conferences

Workshops and conferences can be excellent ways to address decision-makers and to involve them in the activities of a network. For networks, workshops and conferences are a good opportunity to present their ideas to decision-makers. At the same time conferences can also provide a platform where decision-makers can present themselves and their ideas. This opportunity is often an attractive incentive for their participation. An important side effect of workshops and conferences is the possibility to establish new contacts and to approach decision-makers in an informal way.

Time for in-depth discussions at conferences and conference sessions or workshops is often limited due to the large audience. A more effective mechanism to build up relationships and also to get to the level of joint action are stand-alone workshops including a smaller circle of participants. This allows for more intensive interaction and discussion. The participation of decision-makers in workshops of networks makes it possible to explore issues in depth, to

work on case studies, and to collect ideas during brainstorming sessions. Last but not least, during smaller workshops participants get to know each other quite well.

Field Trips

Field trips and excursion are a very effective means to show practical examples of good practices or problems, to raise the awareness and ownership of decision-makers towards the common goal, and to convince them of possible solutions. During field trips decision-makers are confronted directly with reality and no long introductions to the matter are required. In this way field trips often produce quicker results than lengthy discussions or reports.

Example

Switzerland is a transit country for traffic and the transportation of goods between Northern and Southern Europe. Several highways are crossing the Alps – a very popular and well frequented one is the Gotthard highway. This road is quite steep and curvy, so that heavy trucks are limited to low speeds. Because of that, the Gotthard Highway is prone to heavy traffic jams and frequent congestion. In addition, the trucks are very noisy and pollute the air of the Alpine valleys. A more environment-friendly and effective alternative exists: transports on the already existing and well-functioning railways. In order to achieve a shift of transportation modes from road to rail, support from the European Commission was necessary. In the decision making process one of the Swiss Federal Councilors invited the European Transport Minister and her team. During a helicopter excursion the Swiss showed the group the narrow valleys and the traffic jams. They made a stop at a narrow passage so everybody could experience the traffic jam with all senses - hear the noise and smell the polluted air. Only after this field trip the European Commission started to understand the scope of problems that results from excessive road transport through the Alps.

Events

In particular for fundraising an increasingly popular approach to trigger the attention of decision-makers is to organize cultural events like concerts, art exhibitions or performances. The organization of events is therefore another possibility networks should take into consideration to get closer to decision-makers. Events can provide networks with a double benefit: Firstly events offer the opportunity to approach decision-makers in an informal way. Secondly events are also an excellent fundraising opportunity.

Practical Examples or Stories

In many situations, organizations or networks are lacking hard facts or statistical data which prove their impact and influence. Network managers often experience this lack of obvious correlation as a challenge when they have to justify their activities. Stephen Denning, the former Knowledge Management Programme Director of the World Bank faced a similar challenge when he had to convince the decision-makers that the World Bank must improve its knowledge management. He discovered that telling success stories highlighting what knowledge management can achieve is a very effective means to convince decision-makers.

Storytelling can also be an effective way for networks to provide decision-makers with practical insights and examples what they are doing and what they have achieved. For this, networks should systematically collect success stories, write them down and use them to convince decision-makers. Denning argues, that for different situations stories have to be written in a different way and gives many helpful comments how to do this (see e.g. Denning, 2001; 2004).

Example

AGUASAN is a community of practice of Swiss professionals working for improved water supply and sanitation in developing countries. Some members have participated regularly in international conferences and presented their practical experience and concrete examples. In various cases they have influenced the international water and sanitation policy and agenda of bilateral and multilateral agencies in development cooperation by storytelling - ,even if they haven't done it in an intentional or planned way (See SDC, 2004).

Media

Television, radio broadcasting and newspapers are very effective means to deliver a message to large audiences, to raise public awareness and to mobilize the population and decision-makers to take action.

Particularly in the case of large disasters the media plays an important role to mobilize the public as the recent example of the Tsunami disaster in Asia in December 2004 shows. In a short time, the whole world was informed about this catastrophe and shocking pictures led to one of the highest volume of charitable donations ever spent for disaster relief.

The flip side of the coin is that networks have to raise the attention of the media first and this can be difficult as many silent catastrophes with no media coverage proof. Instead of organizing mere press conferences it is often more effective to raise media attention by combining a press conference with an event like a workshop, a conference, or an excursion and field trip. Professional media handling, the nurturing of relationships with media professionals, well prepared press releases and statements will further increase the positive impact of media.

The coverage of a networks activities in newspapers, television or radio broadcasts will also be an incentive for decision-makers to participate in these events since it provides them with an opportunity to display their commitment in public. Experienced conference visitors know that attendance at conferences increases sharply as soon as television or radio teams switch on their flood lights and microphones. Good results can also be achieved if networks place an article or even a series of articles in a renowned newspaper that is read by decision-makers.

4.4 Status in Governance Structure

Most formalized networks have i some kind of governance structure like a board or steering committee, a secretariat, an executive secretary or managing director and consultative committees or working groups. The status of the decision-maker in this governance structure depends on how the network would like to involve him.

If decision-makers are considered as the *target group* that has to be convinced of the mission of a network, classical instruments of advocacy like campaigns, the distribution of flyers, demonstrations, etc. can be applied. The relationship between the network and the decision-maker will be mainly unidirectional from the network to the decision-maker.

The second and often more effective way to involve decision-makers in a network is to consider them as *partners*, to build up and maintain a mutual relationship (See section 4.1 and 4.2.) and to offer them a position in the governance structure of the network. In most cases, decision-makers will not have the time to take over an operational role. Therefore,

decision-makers would rather like to be involved in the network as a member or president of the board, a member of an advisory committee, a member of a committee of patrons or as a resource person.

4.5 Challenges

Networking and involving decision-makers in networks goes along with several challenges that should be considered carefully.

4.5.1 Language

One of the biggest constraints in international networks is language. Nowadays, English has become a widespread and common language in Asia and many other parts of the globe. But only too often it is forgotten that English is not the mother tongue of many people and that many are not able to speak English at all.

If somebody is not very fluent in a foreign language he will be hesitant in discussions and he will have difficulties to express his opinion clearly. He will also abstain from writing letters or emails. In particular in the Asian context people are apprehensive of making mistakes and will therefore refrain from writing something. Potential contributors are not willing to risk losing their face on a public communication platform.

During the study we came across an example of an electronic information platform in Asia that was set up in English language. The visits to this platform only increased considerably when information was also provided in national languages. The conclusion is clear: international networks that would like to have an impact also on the national and local level have to consider providing information and means for communication like email discussion groups in local languages as well.

4.5.2 Power Plays

Networks might also be confronted with power plays of their members or by decision-makers. So it may happen that somebody will try to push the network in a certain direction, use the network for its own purposes or even sabotage the network by stopping funding or spreading wrong information.

These power plays can't be avoided. Networking practitioners can control these power plays in the following ways:

- Clear definition of responsibilities and decision rules;
- Precise idea of the goal of the network;
- Keeping a good relationship and close contact with decision-makers;
- Proactive management of the network;
- Clear Code of Conduct for Members of the Network;

4.5.3 Job Rotation

Decision-makers working in administrations or government institutions change quite often their position because of frequent political changes or a career move. In addition, job rotation is quite common in many organizations, in particular in bilateral or multilateral development organizations.

This is a major challenge for many networks as there is no continuity if their contact persons on the decision making level change frequently. With every change a new relationship has to be built up and the successors have to be informed from scratch about the vision, mission and goals of the network. This regular renewal of contacts can be quite time consuming.

Practical ways to deal with the handing over from one decision-maker to another are:

- A meeting with the decision-maker and his successor to share the most important information. This joint meeting can also help to ensure the commitment of the successor.
- Careful documentation and archiving of working procedures, the activities carried out by the decision-maker, and his contacts.

4.5.4 Cultural Differences

In particular in international networks encompassing various countries special attention has to be paid to cultural aspects. Often, it is not very convenient to talk about this unpleasant side of networking. Experience shows however, that in particular cultural issues are crucial for the involvement of decision-makers.

Seniority

In Western corporations the hierarchy has become more flat in the last years and the primacy of senior staff has been reduced. There is even the tendency that younger managers rank higher than senior staff.

In more hierarchical organizations like administrations, bilateral and multilateral organizations seniority is still very important. This is also the case in many Asian countries. Elder people are never to be openly criticized and in particular teachers and professors enjoy a high reputation that has to be respected.

If networks would like to get in touch with senior decision-makers they have to respect this hierarchy and find their way via a messenger. To discuss new ideas or learn from failures the creation of private spaces (See section 4.2) might be a way to cope with the situation. Another way is to find another senior person on peer level who supports the view of the network. To enrich the discussions in a network it might also be helpful to invite an external expert who is not directly linked to the network or the cultural context and who is thinking “out of the box” and offering independent views on relevant issues to the network.

Racism and Social Discrimination

Networking practitioners have to be aware that they might be exposed to explicit or subliminal racism during their work. In some countries there are also clear demarcations between the different social classes. This can even mean that people from one social class do not talk or work with people from another social class.

Unfortunately, racism and social discrimination may affect the work of a network and also the collaboration with decision-makers. The consequences of this scourge may be that somebody refuses to collaborate, neglects or disrespects members of a network.

Feeling of Superiority

From some international networks it is known that the self-confident perception of some countries does not facilitate the collaboration and exchange in networks on the same level with other countries. Some countries may also consider the issues discussed in the network as not relevant for them. Networks have to deal carefully with this situation and shouldn't blame the non-participating countries. A better way is to stay in touch; to keep the communication channels open, to provide information, and to convince key persons in a sensitive way. Sometimes a political change may be necessary unless outsider countries join the network.

Competitive Thinking

In the private sector competition is an incentive for continuous innovation, efficiency and minimization of risks. In some cases, however, competition can also lead to negative consequences. If networks would like to include decision-makers from the private sector they have to be aware that private companies are working in a very competitive environment. Their self-interest will always have first priority. Nevertheless, several examples show that private companies might want to collaborate with networks or give financial contributions, if the goal and the activities of the network are in line with their overall corporate strategy (See for example Buchholz et al., 2005)

4.5.5 Reimbursements

The respondents of the surveys mentioned that the participation in network meetings, workshops or conferences is often too expensive. How should networks deal with this situation? Should decision-makers being reimbursed for participating in network meetings, workshops or conferences and for other work they do for networks?

Particularly international networks sometimes have to deal with the fact that salaries and living costs vary a lot among the involved countries. It can happen that daily allowances paid to participants of workshops and conferences are higher than their salary. This is even occasionally the case on the level of decision-makers. Reimbursements can create therefore a strong incentive to participate in workshops and conferences and this is not always to the good of the network.

There is no best solution for this problem and every network has to find its own way to fund the participation of network members and decision-makers in meetings, workshops and conferences. Suggestions to deal with this situation are:

- All participants get the same allowances although this might create undesired incentives. In this case the network secretariat has to find funding from donors who support the participation of network members;
- All participants have to find funding for their participation themselves. Experience shows that many participants find ways to fund their participation if they are really interested in the conference or the workshop and if they can expect concrete personal benefit for their work;

- A combined model is chosen whereby the network funds the participation of network members from poorer countries and the network members from richer countries have to fund their participation themselves.
- The secretariat organizes a competition. The interested participants have to hand in a paper and only the participation of the authors of the best papers is funded. This option, however, will not work in most cases with decision-makers.

5 Resources

5.1 Literature

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5.2 Weblinks

Website of the Knowledge Management for Development Community of Practice

www.km4dev.org

Networks Page of the International Institute for Sustainable Development

<http://www.iisd.org/networks/>

Skat Foundation – Foundation Promoting Knowledge Sharing in Development Cooperation

www.skat-foundation.org

Bellanet – Resource Centre Supporting Collaboration in the Development Community

www.bellanet.org

SurveyMonkey.com – an Internet based tool to conduct surveys

www.surveymonkey.com

6 Appendix

6.1 Surveys and Interviews

For the study four interviews with network managers and decision-makers were conducted. On the sidelines of one of the meetings of the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC) and the ASEAN Genetically Modified Food Testing Network questionnaires were distributed to the participants to get more insights about the involvement of decision-makers. The interviews and the two surveys helped very much to understand how decision-makers can be involved in networks and added many valuable insights to the study.

6.1.1 Surveys

Name	Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre
Short Name	SEAFDEC
Website	www.seafdec.org
Agreement / Initiative	Autonomous intergovernmental body established as a regional treaty organization
Goal	Promotion of fisheries development in Southeast Asia.
Objectives	Develop the fishery potentials in the region through training, research and information services to improve the food supply by rational utilization and development of the fisheries resources.
Services and Activities	Website containing general information, web links, news section, publications, announcement of workshops, conferences, events; various activities and programs
Member Countries	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam
Structure	Council of Directors, policy-making body to provide directives and guidance on activities of the Center; Secretariat as its administrative arm; four technical Departments: Training Department (TD), Marine Fisheries Research Department (MFRD), Aquaculture Department (AQD), Marine Fishery Resources Development and Management Department (MFRDMD); National coordinator to coordinate issues and activities with SEAFDEC and within the country.
Cooperation with other Institutions	Autonomous intergovernmental body established as a regional treaty organization; Close collaboration with member countries.

At a meeting of the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC) in December 2004 questionnaires were handed out to the participants. 24 questionnaires were completed, one third by decision-makers.

Name	ASEAN Genetically Modified Food Testing Network
Short Name	ASEAN GMF Testing Network
Website	Under development
Agreement / Initiative	The Work Plan of the ASEAN Genetically Food Testing Network
Goal	Update the current status of GMO regulations and current capabilities of testing and level of expertise in ASEAN Member Countries.
Objectives	Establish reference methods and reference materials for use in GM food testing in ASEAN which should be validated and internationally recognized; Conduct of training programme based on sharing of resources and exchange of expertise within ASEAN as well as with external agencies.
Services and Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Update the current status of GMOs regulatory systems and GM testing capabilities, and expertise in ASEAN Member Countries; 2. Collate and publish a compendium of analytical methods (validated and un-validated), related expertise and GM testing laboratories providing services in ASEAN; 3. Establish guidelines for methods validation and proficiency testing in accordance with internationally accepted performance criteria for validation; 4. Establish a depository for reference materials for use as positive and negative samples in quality control and methods validation; 5. Establish a molecular register which contains sufficient molecular detail for the purposes of GMO testing in ASEAN; 6. Plan and organize training workshops and exchange programmes to address technical needs in ASEAN
Member Countries	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
Structure	Lead Country is Singapore; Hosting of Meetings is rotated among Member Countries.
Cooperation with other Institutions	Genetic Modification Advisory Committee (GMAC) Singapore, Veterinary Public Health Centre of Singapore,

At a meeting of the Genetically Modified Food Testing Network questionnaires were handed out to the participants. 10 questionnaires were completed.

6.1.2 Interviews

Six interviews were held with the following persons working in the Bureau for Resources Development at the ASEAN Secretariat:

- ADR Raman Letchumanan, Head of the Environment Unit
- Dr. Puji Pujiono, Expert on Disaster Management
- Adelina Kamal, Senior Officer, Head of the Haze Unit
- Wendy Yap, Senior Officer, Environment Unit, Manager of various networks
- Dr. Azmi Mat Akhir, Director of Bureau for Resources Development
- Dr. Somsak Pipoppinyo, Head of Natural Resources Unit

The interviews added valuable insights to this study.

6.1.3 Summary of the Surveys and Interviews

The first step to be involved in a network is to become aware that this network exists. A majority of the respondents in the survey and the interviewees answered that they come across networks at meetings, workshops or discussions, whereas flyers and brochures are less important. Obviously, word-of-mouth recommendation is an effective way to raise attention for networks. Several respondents also stated that their superior has assigned them to join the network.

Motivation to Join a Network

Why do decision-makers and their collaborators join a network? The views differ. For the decision-makers the following points are crucial for an active participation of network members:

- The network should be in line with the overall vision of a region;
- The network should be organized in a transparent way;
- Members should know each other beforehand and be like-minded;
- Members should participate actively;
- The provided information on the website and databases should be relevant for the practical work, complete, updated regularly, accessible at any time and presented in a user-friendly way;
- The secretariat or network members should answer questions quickly.

The stakeholders and collaborators of decision-makers mentioned in particular the following points as important for an active participation:

- Information should be useful and concise including necessary links;
- Information should be provided in a user friendly way so that it can be accessed and easily retrieved any time;
- Latest information should be available and reminders for updates should be sent;
- Discussions in the network should be encouraging and motivating;
- Decision-makers should communicate regularly with other members and reply;
- Decision-makers should know their responsibilities.

Involvement of Decision-makers

How should decision-makers be practically involved in formal networks? Most stakeholders and collaborators of decision-makers agreed that the decision maker should be directly involved in the network. The answers of decision-makers, however, are fifty-fifty. The reason for these ambiguous results might be that the relevant question is not whether but *how* decision-makers are involved.

In an interview we got the feedback that decision-makers are seldom directly involved in networking because they don't have time. Decision-makers also often lack specific knowledge to participate actively in networks. This might also be one of the reasons why in particular government officials are hesitant to participate in electronic discussion fora since their postings are archived and visible. In particular when the public sees their comments no participation can be expected.

Nevertheless, it is a common practice of decision-makers to follow email discussions *passively*. In this way they can keep up-to-date to some extent. Once a relationship to network members is established decision-makers are also willing to give feedback to enquiries by email – also when sent to them directly. If decision-makers would like to be more present in networks they act mainly through their desk officers.

Tools and Ways for Communication

The new information and communication technologies have become a familiar tool for communication, information and knowledge sharing in networks. Yet the surveys and interviews have shown that the application of these tools is *not without pitfalls*. It starts with the challenge that for several respondents Internet access is not available in the office, access to websites is too slow or Internet services just too expensive.

Nowadays most networks offer a wealth of information on their *website*. To present this information in a user-friendly way, however, is not that easy. During our study we consulted several websites and we sometimes noted that access speed was too low. In addition, the navigation of some websites was confusing, the information not concise or not up-to-date. This impression is confirmed by the interviews and the surveys. Many perceive it as a major challenge to keep a website up-to-date. This might also be the reason why the importance of a skilled and neutral moderator and editor of a website was emphasized several times. This moderator should as well remind members to update their information.

The results of the surveys and interviews show that there is *no best way to communicate* in networks. The way or tool for communication has to be chosen according to the objectives, the circumstances of the communication and the nature of the relationship. *Emails*, for example, have become a widespread means for informal and quick communication. Most respondents would like to meet members of a network in advance before they use email for communication. Once a contact is established also decision-makers indicated that they are willing to give feedbacks by email in short time. This shows that a trustful relationship has to be built before a smooth communication via email is possible.

Email discussion groups are a specific way for interaction and to discuss certain issues in a more intensive way. The survey and the interviews have confirmed that a skilled and neutral moderator is necessary for the facilitation of email discussion groups. As someone stated in the interviews: communication in email discussion groups without facilitation does not work!

Nevertheless, *face-to-face meetings* remain important as they help creating the necessary trust for virtual email communication. Workshops and conferences are also a more promising way to involve decision-makers directly in discussions.

As a successful way to *enrich discussions* in networks it was suggested to invite selected external experts who think “out of the box” on an ad hoc basis and offer independent views on relevant issues to the network.

We got no clear answer what an *appropriate frequency of communication and interaction* is. Again this might depend on the way of communication. One conference or workshop a year might be enough whereas email communication should take place at least one to five times a month. For a coordination committee of a network it might be necessary to meet face-to-face about three or four times a year.

Networks have to Provide an Added Value

Last but not least many respondents underlined that they are only interested in networks if they get a *benefit or added value*. Decision-makers as well as their collaborators stated that they have sometimes difficulties to obtain useful data, relevant information or the most recent news.

Bridging this gap is according to the majority of the respondents' one of the most important tasks of networks. They appreciate science-based information of high quality that is provided at best in regularly updated and easily accessible databases. In addition, they are interested in newsletters and relevant updates.

6.2 Electronic Survey

6.2.1 About the Survey

In order to collect insights about networking from decision-makers, their collaborators and stakeholders an electronic survey was carried out.

Addressees of Questionnaire

The following groups were invited to answer the electronic survey:

- Members of the KM4Dev community (581 registered members);
- Members of the NeRO community (37 members);
- Selected professionals of the Swiss Development Cooperation who are interested in networks (16 professionals);
- Selected decision-makers and professionals working in or with the ASEAN secretariat.

Electronic Survey Tool

For the electronic survey a common and reliable Internet based survey tool provided by the company SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) was chosen.

Response Rate

Even if the feedback about the quality of the electronic questionnaire was positive we got only 31 responses. One explanation is the generally very low response rate of surveys. That is especially the case for electronic surveys. However, through the electronic survey we also received feedbacks not only explaining partially the low response rates, but also giving interesting insights into the thinking of decision-makers and their collaborators as well as in cultural habits.

Some respondents were unfamiliar with electronic surveys and therefore hesitant to fill in the questionnaire. Another issue was the confidentiality of the survey. Some decision-makers were concerned that their answers will not be treated in a confidential way and somewhere published on the Internet. Interesting enough, also the name of the Internet Company – SurveyMonkey – led to confusion. It is not unusual that Internet companies or Internet services have funny or strange names. When we started the survey we didn't think about this. Some respondents, however, were unsettled by the name and they were not sure whether they can trust an electronic survey on a website called "SurveyMonkey". The fact that a monkey is an animal that is associated with various and ambiguous meanings in different cultures might also have influenced the reaction of the respondents.

Explanatory Power

Often there are not enough answers to draw significant conclusions and the results of the survey should not be over interpreted. There may also be a bias in the answers. There may be, for example, no demand for chat rooms, as some respondents just didn't have experience with this way of communication.

Nevertheless, most answers confirmed the insights from the literature review and gave a couple of ideas and hints about the involvement of decision-makers in networks. Some respondents also added comments to their answers that confirm in most cases the general statistics.

Nature of respondents

Most of the respondents are members in one or several networks. A majority works in international organizations and is involved mainly in administration, research and development.

About 80 percent of the respondents are from the KM4Dev community. Only 6 members of the NeRO community – basically the community behind the NeRO project! – answered the questionnaire. Obviously, in particular these two groups are interested in networking and also have the time to fill in questionnaires. A couple of respondents are also from bilateral and multi-lateral development and donor organizations.

6.2.2 Summary of Electronic Survey

The two most important reasons for joining a network are clearly the personal interest of the respondents and to get access to information and know-how. Important was also the wish to expand the personal network.

The most important objectives of the respondents' networks are the provision of information and expertise and collaboration to solve problems. The respondents do not consider networks as service organizations as this point was mentioned in few cases only. The reason for these answers might be that a majority of the respondents are members of the KM4Dev community, a loosely structured community of practice moderated by Bellanet (www.bellanet.org) but without a strong secretariat. The networks among ASEAN countries analyzed by this study, however, rely more on a strong secretariat.

In most cases, the participation of the respondents in networks is in line with their personal job description or terms of reference of the organization they work for. This indicates clearly that people do participate in networks not only because of their personal interest but because these networks contribute to their actual work. This is also confirmed by the fact that 95 percent of the respondents answered that they get a positive impact on their work from the networks they are involved in. Without over-stretching the results the reverse can be drawn that they wouldn't participate if they don't get a positive return.

The most significant positive impacts of networks for the work of the respondents are to obtain useful information and news, to meet people and to increase the collaboration with others to solve problems. Several respondents also answered that they use the network to validate, reflect on and test ideas.

Communication is the lifeblood of networks. In the electronic survey clearly face-to-face meetings, workshops and conferences, mailing lists and electronic discussion forums are

considered as the most preferred ways to communicate in networks. There is no preference for electronic or face-to-face communication: both seem to be equally desired for interaction. One respondent specified that the best ways of communication depends on the task at hand.

The number of contacts for communication varies and there is no clear answer. Most respondents communicate more than once a month with other networking members some even 10 times and more, and they are satisfied with the frequency of communication.

To involve decision-makers in a network it is important to understand their needs and their thinking. Unfortunately, only a few decision-makers answered the questionnaire. This doesn't contradict at least the assumption of the study that decision-makers are busy people or act through their staff. Those who answered the questionnaire would like to be involved in networks by being invited to events organized by the network and involved in discussions.

Important preconditions for their participation are a good management and transparency. These concerns are confirmed by their answer that the most frequently encountered problems are badly managed networks. A hindrance for their participation is also the often too costly participation in international workshops and conferences.

According to the survey decision-makers prefer face-to-face communication be it at meetings, workshops or conferences. They also consult websites of the networks and sometimes participate in electronic discussion forums that should be actively and carefully facilitated.

The survey shows that collaborators and stakeholders of decision-makers work in slightly different ways even if their views do not always differ very much. For example it is equally important for collaborators and decision-makers that the network is well managed in a transparent way. Interestingly it is rather unimportant for collaborators and stakeholders of decision-makers to have support from their superior to participate in the network.

In contrast to the decision-makers, collaborators and stakeholders tend to use electronic means for communication as much as face-to-face communication. From their perspective, the most important services of networks are electronic discussion forums, the website and a member database. The online discussions, however, have to be well facilitated so that the content is not "unspecific and fuzzy", "esoteric" or just "information glut" as some of the respondents answered. Face-to-face meetings, workshops and conferences, however, still are considered as quite important. Clearly lower is the demand for chat rooms on the website or study tours and field trips.

Time constraints seem not only to bother decision-makers but also their collaborators and stakeholders. For a clear majority of the respondents this is the most frequently encountered problem while they have been working in networks. As somebody regretted, this might also be the reason for the low participation in networks of those who could make the most valuable contributions. Other difficulties are the too expensive participation in workshops, conferences and events and not updated websites.

The responding collaborators and stakeholders of decision-makers seem to know their clientele well. The best way to involve decision-makers is according to their experience to invite them to events, workshops or conferences. Other effective ways are to inform them regularly, to involve them in discussions of the network, e.g. as resource persons or to appoint them as a member of the advisory committee of the network.

Meeting decision-makers face-to-face is clearly more successful than contacting them by other means. Nevertheless, contacting decision-makers can be quite difficult. Their collaborators and stakeholders stated in the survey that the most important problem to get in touch with decision-makers is that they have no time or they are just not interested. Some even indicated that decision-makers actively resist participating in networks since they do not encourage knowledge sharing.

6.2.3 Questionnaire

1. Welcome!

This survey is a part of the project "Networking, Information and Knowledge Management by Regional Organizations in the Field of Natural Resources Management (NeRO)" funded by the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ).

With this survey we would like to identify the best ways to enhance and sustain the active participation of decision-makers and their stakeholders in international networks for knowledge sharing, in particular in Natural Resources Management in South East Asia.

All data will be treated strictly confidential, only used for the sake of the survey and deleted once the project is finished. The data will be used in the report of the study only in an aggregated way so that it will not be possible to draw any conclusions who has provided the data.

The data of the survey will be analyzed by Dr. Urs Karl Egger, Senior Knowledge Management Specialist, working for the Skat Foundation, an independent not-for-profit organization based in Switzerland.

It will take you about 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. With the buttons "prev" and "next" at the bottom of each page you can move forward and backward. In the upper right corner you have always the possibility to exit the survey.

If you have any questions concerning the NeRO project or this survey please don't hesitate to contact me: Urs Karl Egger, Email: urs.egger@skat.ch, Phone: +41 71 228 54 54

2. Introduction

1. *What type of organization do you work for?*

- International organization
- Regional organization
- Government
- Private company
- NGO
- Other (please specify)

2. *What is the nature of your organization?*

- Administration
- Regulatory
- Educational
- Training and extension
- Consulting
- Project implementation
- Research and development
- Other (please specify)

3. *Do you participate or are you involved in one or several networks, partnerships or communities for knowledge sharing?*

Yes / No

3. Networks in natural resources management and other networks

4. Please mention the name of the networks you participate in

- ASEAN Fisheries Post Harvest Technology Network
- ASEAN Food Safety Network
- ASEAN IPM Knowledge Network
- ASEAN Disease Surveillance Network
- ASEAN e-Farmers Programme
- ASEAN Occupational Safety and Health Network
- ASEAN University Network
- Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC)
- Agriculture and Natural Resources Decision Network
- Conflicts over Natural Resources Network
- Envirolink
- Food Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network
- Forest Action Network
- Natural Resources Information Network.
- NeRO
- KM4Dev
- Other (please specify)

5. Please select one the networks of all you have mentioned above that you wish to refer to when answering the remaining questions of this survey

- [Networks enumerated in question 4]
- Other (please specify)

4. Involvement in network

6. How long have you been involved in this network?

< 1 year / 1 year / 2 years / 3 years / > 3 years

7. Why did you join this network?

Keep up-to-date

- Get access to information and know-how
- Increase my network
- Assigned by superior
- Personal interest
- Join forces with others
- Personal initiative to get support for my work
- Other (please specify)

8. *What is your status in this network?*

- Administrator / Secretary
- Moderator / Facilitator
- Member
- Member of the Board
- Member of the Advisory Committee
- Chairperson
- Other (please specify)

5. Objectives of network

9. *What are the objectives of the network?*

- Provide information and expertise
- Provide news
- Provide services to members
- Collaboration to solve problems
- Other (please specify)

10. *Is the objective of this network in line with your personal job description or terms of reference in the organization you work for?*

Yes / No

11. *Does the network have a positive impact on your work?*

Yes / No

6. Positive Impact

12. *What positive impacts has this network given to you in doing your work?*

- Obtained useful information or data
- Increase collaboration with others to solve problem
- Received relevant news
- Received services
- Other (please specify)

7. No or small impact of network

13. *If this network only has no or a small impact, why do you participate in the network?*

- Have access to news
- Increase my personal network
- Keep me informed by getting access to up-to-date information
- Other (please specify)

8. Communication with and within the network

14. *In which ways do you prefer to communicate and to be involved in the network?*

- Video conferences
- Personal emails
- Letter or fax
- Face-to-face meetings
- Discussion forum on website of network
- Chat room on website of network
- Workshops and conferences
- Field visits and excursions
- Phone calls
- Mailing lists
- Other (please specify)

15. *How often do you communicate with members of the network?*

1-5 times in a year / 1-5 times in a month / 5-10 times in a month / Other (please specify)

16. *Do you think the frequency of communication you indicated above is sufficient?*

Yes / No

9. Frequency of contact

17. *In your opinion what would be a good frequency for contacts and communication?*

1-5 times in a year / 1-5 times in a month / 5-10 times in a month / Other (please specify)

10. Specific questions for decision-makers and stakeholders

In the following a few specific questions will be addressed to decision-makers and their stakeholders or collaborators.

Decision-makers are defined in this survey as persons working in an organization, an administration, a company or in politics who have the authority to take decisions in their area of competence.

Stakeholders or collaborators of decision-makers are defined in this study as those who work for or collaborate with decision-makers.

18. *Do you consider yourself as a decision-maker or rather as collaborator of decision-makers or stakeholder?*

Decision-maker / Collaborator of decision-makers or stakeholder

11. Questions for decision-makers

19. *Which is the best way to involve you as decision-maker in a network?*

- Involve me in the discussions of the network
- Inform me regularly
- Invite me to events organized by the network
- Participation of my operational staff is already sufficient
- Appoint me as a member of the advisory committee
- Appoint me as a member of the board

- Other (please specify)

12. Preconditions and Services

20. *How important are the following preconditions so that you would gladly join a network?*

[For all answers below the respondents had the following options: Very important / Rather important / Rather unimportant / Unimportant]

- I have to know the members of the network
- A friend or colleague recommends the network
- Network has a good reputation
- Network is well managed
- Network is managed in a transparent way

21. *How important are the following services of networks for you?*

[For all answers below the respondents had the following options: Very important / Rather important / Rather unimportant / Unimportant]

- Active facilitation of discussions in the network
- Database with information about experts
- Database with information about members of network
- Question and answer service
- Workshops and conferences
- Study tours and field trips
- Database with technical information
- Website
- Face-to-face meetings
- Newsletter
- Electronic discussion forum
- Publications, fact sheets, case studies, manuals, guidelines
- Chat room on the website

13. Problems with networks

22. *What are the most frequently encountered problems while you have been working with networks?*

- Internet access is expensive
- Lay-out and structure of website are not user-friendly
- I don't have enough time to participate in the network's activities
- Internet access is not available in my office
- I don't get the data or information I need
- Website is not up-to-date
- Participation in workshops, conferences and other events is too expensive
- I don't understand or speak the language very well used by the network
- Internet connections are too slow
- I don't get feedback to my questions

- Network is not well managed
- Other (please specify)

14. Questions for collaborators and stakeholders

23. How important are the following preconditions so that you would gladly join a network?

[For all answers below the respondents had the following options: Very important / Rather important / Rather unimportant / Unimportant]

- Network is well managed
- Support by my superior
- A friend or colleague recommends the network
- Network is managed in a transparent way
- Network has a good reputation
- I have to know the members of the network

24. How important are the following services of networks for you?

[For all answers below the respondents had the following options: Very important / Rather important / Rather unimportant / Unimportant]

- Query and answer service
- Website
- Active facilitation of discussions in the network
- Face-to-face meetings
- Study tours and field trips
- Electronic discussion forum
- Database with technical information
- Publications
- Chat room on the website
- Database with information about members of network
- Newsletter
- Database with information about experts
- Workshops and conferences

15. Problems with networks

25. What are the most frequently encountered problems while you have been working with networks?

- Internet access is not available in my office
- I don't have enough time to participate in the network's activities
- Internet access is expensive
- Internet connections are too slow
- Participation in workshops, conferences and other events is too expensive
- I don't get the data or information I need
- Lay-out and structure of website are not user-friendly
- I don't understand or speak the language very well used by the network
- I don't get feedback to my questions

- Website is not up-to-date
- Network is not well managed
- Other (please specify)

16. Involvement of decision-makers - view stakeholders

26. What are the most effective ways to involve decision-makers in a network?

- Invite decision-makers to events organized by the network
- Appoint decision-makers as a member of the board
- Inform decision-makers regularly
- Participation of operational staff of decision-makers is sufficient
- Involve decision-makers in discussions of network
- Appoint decision-makers as a member of the advisory committee
- Other (please specify)

27. What are the most effective ways to communicate with decision-makers?

- Chat in the chat room of the network's website
- Mailing lists
- Send a letter or fax
- Write an email
- Invitations to workshops and conferences
- Invitations to field visits and excursions
- Discussion forum on the website of the network
- Call by phone
- Video conferences
- Meet them face-to-face
- Other (please specify)

28. What problems did you encounter to get in touch with decision-makers and to involve them in networks?

Decision-makers had no time

- Decision-makers were inaccessible
- Decision-makers were not interested
- No problems to involve decision-makers
- Other (please specify)

17. Further comments and email address

29. Do you have any further comments or suggestions about the involvement of decision-makers and their stakeholders in networks or about this survey? Please let us know.

30. Are you interested in the results of this survey and the NeRO project? If yes, please indicate your email address.

18. Thank you!

Thank you very much. Your kind participation in completing this questionnaire is highly appreciated. All information given will be kept confidential.

For further information or if you have any questions concerning the NeRO project or this survey please don't hesitate to contact me:

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