CDWG Minutes: **Building alliances: The importance of networks to capacity development.**
Time: 10:00 to 12:00
Date: 21 March, 2012
Location: **VUFO-NGO Resource Centre**
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The CDWG hels a panel discussion on **Building alliances: The importance of networks to capacity development.**

Summary:

The meeting looked at aspects of networking such as:
* Why are networks important?
* What are the attributes of a successful network?
* How does one start, build and sustain a network?
* How do networks respond and adapt to change?

Speakers:

* Matthew Tiedemann, PACT Vietnam: The attributes of a successful network and a methodology for analysing their strengths
* Pham Kim Ngoc, GENCOMNET: How to build and maintain a network? A case study from a successful, long established network dealing with gender equality.
* Dang Van Tao, Disaster Management Working Group: How does a network respond to unanticipated challenges and events? Views from the "front-line"

Panel discussion:
* The importance of networks and how they can be strengthened in the context of Vietnam?
* Challenges and opportunities?

Minutes

Speakers:
* Matthew Tiedemann was unable to attend and sent apologies.
* Presentations are available on the INGORC CDWG Website

    http://www.ngocentre.org.vn/webfm_send/3259
    http://www.ngocentre.org.vn/webfm_send/3260

Panel Discussion: Discussion was broken out into small groups on focus topics with brief reports and comments in the larger group.

Focus topic 1: Attributes of a successful network.

Key points:
- Network members should have a common purpose.
- Have and umbrella or legal status that provides recognition
- Commitment of members
- Good Governance
- Financial Sustainability

Comments:
- The larger the network the less important 'common purpose' becomes and is replaced or clarified with 'clear purpose' to allow a diverse membership.
- Financial sustainability is challenging- options include membership fees, fee for service (e.g. network let trainings, resources etc), direct fundraising by the network.

Focus topic 2: Challenges and opportunities for networks.

Challenges:
- Finding a common, clear purpose
- Sustaining commitment of members
- Transparency and accountability to members
- 'Big Fish' syndrome- larger organizations dominating and also benefiting the most from networks

Opportunities:
- Donors want to see bigger organizations (greater absorptive capacity; greater reach) and networking and joint works can benefit from this opportunity
- Voice- networks add strength to the members through collective advocacy and action
- Capacity building is enhance through mobilizing opportunities across the network for training, sharing learning etc

Comments:
- In the context of VN we need to consider legal status- networks exist but we need a legal framework to support them to be effective.
- Stages of development are important- no need to immediately formalize. If members are weak, the group can be informal and and forum based and then, as members strengthen, the network evolves and may become legal or more formalized.
- Legal process is long and complex (e.g. one experience of taking 3 years to register)
- We can have a range of types of networks- e.g. small and informal leading over time to more formal legal networks

- Financial sustainability is challenging in VN with a long history of donor funded actions, communities don't feel the need to self fund collective actions and networks. Need to change this for a long term strategy of networking.
- Government participation in networks- if government officials are present they are not civil society and are seen as the 'backyard play ground' of government rather than community.
- Local NGOs are grant driven/funding based and therefore not member based. Need to be clear that these are not representative of communities.

Focus topic 3: How to make more effective networks

- Structure:
  - o Chair/board (must be Vietnamese)
  - o Core Group (committed members)
  - o ToR and annual workplan
  - o Financial commitment of members

Comments:
- Networks don't need to be registered e.g. Disaster Management Working Group has operated for many years as a collaboration of registered organizations but is not registered separately. Members share the financial and administrative functions.

Unfortunately the entire conversation can't be recorded. The dialogue was very lively and informative and the members collectively hold a great wealth of knowledge and experience, contributing to a very rewarding experience.

The INGORC Capacity Development Working Group

The CDWG aims to reduce vulnerability by helping local organizations to improve through a forum for exchange between different stakeholders, creating dialogue and mutual learning on organizational capacity development by:

- *Coordinating and sharing initiatives and knowledge in organisational development in order to mutually learn, maximise impact and minimise overlap.*
- *Creating an interface between NGOs and their counterparts, including the Government, donors and the private sector, for dialogue and advocacy on civil society capacity development.*
- *Ensuring that NGOs, civil society organisations and self help groups in Vietnam have access to information, training, events and funding opportunities relating to capacity development and support.*

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