February

2009

PANE

ECS

EIFDDA

NEWA

Research Policy Networks in Ethiopia: Agents of Change?

Gweneth Barry and Enrique Mendizabal

Abstract

This paper is the synthesis of case studies of four Ethiopian civil society networks; the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat, the Ethiopian Interfaith Forum for Development, Dialogue, and Action, the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations and the Poverty Action Network Ethiopia. The networks used the Network Functions Approach developed by the Overseas Development Institute to analyse each other through a peer review process and draw conclusions about their roles, form and functions. The paper highlights key differences between the networks in terms of structure – finding different models and approaches to decentralisation of power. It also finds that the role of networks can shift over time as the membership grows and changes. The paper also looks at the influence donors had on networks and their members, making recommendations on strategies for funding networks. The four networks now face a new challenge as new legislation has been passed in Ethiopia placing restrictions on the activities of externally-funded organisations. This paper considers how the Network Functions Approach featured could help networks adapt to this new context.

Support for organisational strengthening in key civil society networks in Ethiopia

European Commission Civil Society Fund in Ethiopia

TRÓCAIRE Working for a Just World

CAFOD just one world

SCIAF

INTRODUCTION

Coming together in formal networks is a relatively new phenomenon among civil society organisations in Ethiopia. Therefore, the appreciation and understanding of the benefits that networks may bring is relatively underdeveloped within the country. Four important Ethiopian networks have been considering this question in their own work and through participation in a joint project entitled "Organisational strengthening in key civil society networks". The Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat (ECS), the Ethiopian Interfaith Forum for Development Dialogue and Action (EIFDDA), the Network for Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) and the Poverty Action Network Ethiopia (PANE), funded by the EC Civil Society Fund and Trocaire-CAFOD, have worked together to improve their capacity to engage in policy dialogue and represent their members more effectively.

Research into how the networks function has formed an important part of this process. To look at this, the four networks linked up with the Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) group based in London. This group is undertaking a long-term study on networks and the roles they play in linking research and policy. The main objective of ODI's networks research is to provide networks with the necessary knowledge to tackle internal and external challenges more effectively and improve their capacity to use research-based evidence to influence policy processes in their own contexts.

In order to help networks do this, the ODI has developed the Network Function Approach (NFA), to consider which functions networks can fulfil better than individual organisations. The ODI introduced this methodology to the four networks, who have since conducted four case studies through a peer learning process. This paper is the synthesis of those case studies and aims to draw out the lessons from them.

Since the research started, the context for civil society in Ethiopia has changed substantially. New proposed legislation may mean that certain activities will not be possible under present funding arrangements. It is hoped that by focusing on the functions that networks have performed, this paper can also help inform the debate about what shape those networks could take in the new context.

This synthesis paper is structured in the following way: first, we describe the methodology used and the approach followed in the research. Then we provide a short assessment of the context faced by civil society in Ethiopia and networks in particular. In the next section we present a brief background of the networks and key findings from the research. Then we draw out some of the wider themes seen across the different case studies which emerged during the course of the research. The final section looks at the conclusions and recommendations from the findings.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process took as its starting point the network functions approach developed by the ODI and outlined below. Over three days in May 2006, the members of the networks and their secretariats' staff were introduced to this approach and discussed its relevance for their networks. What followed was a process of 'peer learning' in which one member of each network investigated and developed a case study of one of the other networks.

The concept of 'peer learning' was inspired by processes such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), part of the NEPAD process, which aims to build accountability from within rather than depending on external actors. The approach also helped to ensure mutual learning, as each network could make a direct comparison between itself and one other.

Being studied by peers, however, presented some inherent challenges that were particularly strong in the Ethiopian context. Ethiopian culture has long been characterised by a tendency towards hierarchy and secrecy which makes open discussion rather counter-cultural. The research process needed to recognise this, as it could lead to resistance from the interviewees in providing an open account of their organisation's affairs to someone within their field.

There was also a possibility that this problem would be exacerbated by the management styles prevalent within the country. The practice of *gimgema,* which has permeated all Ethiopian organisational culture, also made the concept of an investigation into organisational structures more challenging. Gimgema refers to the method of evaluation used by the resistance movements during the struggle to overthrow the Derg[1], and draws its roots from Marxism stating that 'our strengths are with us – we need to address our weaknesses'. During the struggle, fighters were required to go through a very auto-critical review process. This has developed into a style of management within government with a constant focus on criticism and negativity which has made people fearful of any kind of evaluation. This has also permeated into the civil society sector due to the high levels of staff cross-over. A study process like this one thus has the undesired effect of making people reluctant to open up to a researcher, for fear that the intention will be to judge their organisations based solely on their weaknesses.

The networks involved bravely discussed these underlying issues and worked to develop a process that would not be constrained by these cultural traits and could proceed openly. The initial workshop process, and the context of the overall project, helped to build trust between the networks and the potential pitfalls were openly discussed. During the research process, trust-building efforts had to be revisited when new actors were incorporated into the project.

Part of this discussion included the introduction of the principles of the 'appreciative inquiry' approach. This research process aims to 'seek out the best of "what is" to help ignite the collective imagination of "what might be"' (Gem et al 2007). Hence researchers were encouraged to approach the task with, at least, a mindset of appreciative inquiry, in order to uncover positive aspects of the networks rather than focusing on the negative or critical. Researchers made an effort to phrase their questionnaires in a positive light ('tell me about a time when the network as worked well') rather than a negative one ('what are the weaknesses you perceive?').

The concept of peer learning was also taken forward into the research process. The four researchers who were developing the case studies met regularly to discuss the work and the problems they had faced. A common email account was set up where researchers could share thoughts and

---

[1] The Derg was a communist military junta which ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1987

observations on the process. This was used to discuss the process of approaching people in an appreciative format and using the NFA. This reflective style of working helped the four researchers to forge strong links initially, although this has been challenged by staff changes.

THE APPROACH

The Networks Function Approach: function and form

Traditional definitions of networks do not necessarily respond to the vast diversity that exists. These definitions make assumptions about what different types of networks should be like, rather than embracing their difference. Instead of focusing on fixed definitions, the Networks Function Approach focuses on what networks do. By describing networks according to their functions, it is possible to incorporate a much broader number of organisational arrangements, which carry out very different functions and roles to achieve similar objectives (Mendizabal 2006a). Looking at the functions that networks can best achieve can help focus the activities and the structure of the network; considering the areas where networks have a specific advantage over individual organisations can help show the benefits of networks. In a context where networks may need to change the way they operate, the NFA can help focus on which activities may be carried forward and which may have to be removed.

Roles

Among research policy networks (i.e. networks that aim to use research to influence policy processes) there can be many fundamental differences. While some networks are constituted or act as agents of change, others provide their members with the necessary support that they need to pursue their own change strategies (Mendizabal 2006a).

On one extreme of the spectrum of roles, 'agency' networks denote organisations that have been given the responsibility to bring about change on behalf of their members. The diagram to the right illustrates the relationship between the members and the network secretariat: resources (funding, skills, staff, knowledge, connections, etc.) flow from the members to the secretariat. Members may also carry out their own policy influence work, but on some key issues they have

entrusted the network to represent them. An example of the agency role would be a network representing members at a meeting with government bodies.
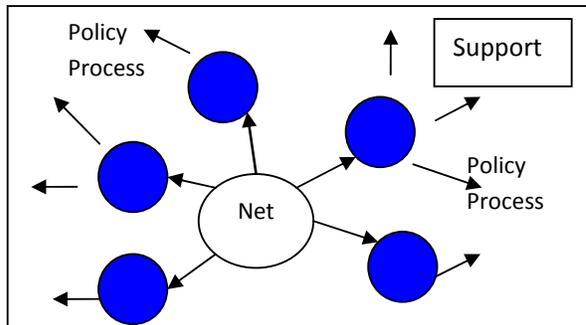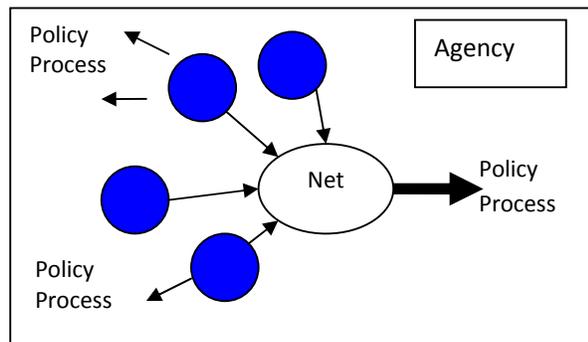
The 'support' role works in the opposite direction. In this case, the network itself is not the main agent of change, but supports its members by providing them with the necessary resources to influence policy and practice. An example would be the network providing training to develop its members' skills to conduct their work.

In practice, most research policy networks have some characteristics of both and lie somewhere in between. Nonetheless, it is important to consider the relative importance of these roles for the network and its members as it constitutes their raison d'être. It is often the case, as in at least one of the Ethiopian networks studied, that the members and the secretariat hold conflicting views of the network's role –with negative consequences for its development.

The life-cycle of a network

It is also important to note that networks may focus on one or other role depending on their stage of development. Networks can be set up by various forces or for various reasons and develop in different ways. Their initial stages are usually focused on attracting new members and resources – hence their role is likely to be one of support. But once membership is stable and resources are secure, a network may shift its attention towards outward initiatives. There is not, however, a 'right' balance for a network that can be used as a bench-mark.

Functions

It is within these roles that networks can fulfil a number of non-exclusive functions. The NFA (Mendizabal, 2006a from Portes and Yeo, 2001; Yeo, 2004; Yeo and Mendizabal, 2004) suggests:

- **Filtering**: To 'decide' what information is worth paying attention to and to organise unmanageable amounts of information. An example of this is research work, which is a process of filtering relevant information from the reality of the study area, but could also include sorting through information such as government decrees and sharing with members the most salient points.
- **Amplify**: To help take little-known or little-understood ideas and make them more widely understood. An example of this is advocating for particular issues by presenting the views of members to policy makers. It could also include promoting ideas internally to the members of the network.
- **Invest/Provide**: To offer members the resources they need to carry out their main activities. This could be in the form of material resources such as funding or skills through training.
- **Convene**: To bring together different people or groups of people. These may be people who would not normally interact such as academics, civil society and government. Networks are able to do this as they can unite these groups under shared goals, while ensuring they are all able to fulfil their own different objectives.
- **Community building**: To promote and sustain the values and standards of the individuals or organisations within them. Bringing members together through meetings or joint plans helps to foster this sense of community.
- **Facilitate**: To help members carry out their own activities more effectively. Examples of this could be providing meeting spaces or providing services such as recruitment websites.

These functions describe types of activities that networks undertake. They provide a detailed account of their objectives and the manner in which they aim to achieve them. Research and experience working with networks suggest that agency networks would dedicate more resources towards outward-looking functions such as amplifying and convening; support networks would emphasise community building, investing and facilitating.

The NFA does not suggest that these functions can only be carried out by networks. In fact, it argues that they can be undertaken by many types of organisations like think tanks, NGOs or even specific programmes or projects. Networks are desirable when the objective of the initiative includes

building or supporting a community among its members and learning through the generation, translation and sharing of knowledge (Mendizabal 2009).

The form of networks

Having defined the portfolio of functions that networks can fulfil, Mendizabal (2006b) suggests that the next step in developing a network is to determine the structural characteristics (organisation, skills, resources, etc.) that it needs in order to fulfil these functions. For existing networks, once they have established which functions they are focusing on, the issue is to consider if their structure provides the best possible arrangement to deliver those functions. Some of the key questions to ask at this point are:

- Where should the network be based? Should it have a centralised or decentralised structure?
- What kind of skills do the staff need to deliver these functions?
- What funding structure would best deliver these functions?
- Does the network have the appropriate internal and external communications competencies for the desired functions?
- Is the network capable of managing changes and shocks in the internal and external environment?

In summary, when planning, form should follow function.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND NETWORKING IN ETHIOPIA

Before looking at the networks in the light of the NFA, it is important to consider briefly the civil society sector in Ethiopia. Ethiopian civil society can be divided into two sectors – traditional organisations that have always existed and NGOs that have developed in recent times, partly influenced by external forces.

Institutions such as 'iddir' funeral societies or 'ekub' saving and credit clubs have traditionally provided ways for citizens in Ethiopia to come together around a common need (Jones 2008). This sector has existed outside of formal government systems and has not sought to engage in policy influence. These institutions have coexisted alongside a growing NGO sector which has developed in recent decades. The development of the NGOs began with international and religious organisations responding to the humanitarian crisis in the 1980s, and continued when Ethiopian NGOs began to emerge at the beginning of the 1990s. Their numbers have accelerated rapidly in the last 20 years: there were 24 Ethiopian NGOs officially registered in 1990 and 1,742 in 2007 (Rahmato et al 2008), In this period, the sector has shown a gradual progression from relief to service delivery, and to service delivery with increasing elements of advocacy.

Networking in Ethiopia

Although traditional institutions show that individuals have experience of working collectively, networking between organisations has been relatively weak in Ethiopia. When NGOs were establishing themselves, the oppressive regime made collective action difficult. In this context, one organisation, the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA), managed to develop. The CRDA was established to coordinate the delivery of relief aid and its development has followed the same pattern of civil society moving from a purely relief function to a more recent focus on

advocacy[2]. CRDA has provided the main forum for NGOs to act collectively and has been an advocate for their rights. Its membership comprises over two thirds of the NGOs in Ethiopia, including large international NGOs as well as local organisations.

For many organisations, CRDA has come to represent the model for networking[3]: it has provided training and funding for its members – developing an almost paternalistic role; it has also provided protection for members – first, in the hostile environment of the Derg era and later through advocacy around the proposed NGO legislation (see below for further discussion). However, the sheer size of CRDA has altered the nature of the functions it performs due to the perceived distance between members and the secretariat.

Since 1991, more NGO networks have registered officially in Ethiopia. The latest mapping from CRDA estimated that there were around 17 official networks, but more exist unofficially. Most of these networks focus on a particular sector or interest such as HIV/AIDS, gender, youth or disabilities. These new organisations have often been more directly involved in advocacy and usually have a small core of founding members. However, the imprint of CRDA has directed how some NGOs engage with networks and the idea of the 'network as provider' (the support role) is felt very strongly in the minds of some network members.

The influence of external donors has also affected the nature of NGO networks in Ethiopia. Multilateral and bilateral donors were unsure about how to engage with the growing civil society community and considered that networks were the most straightforward entry point. International NGOs have also been keen to support networking and have provided the resources to help found many networks among their local partners as well as being active participants in existing ones. This has helped promote the concept of networks within Ethiopian civil society but has also influenced some organisations' motives for joining up – for instance, as a way of increasing their chances of attracting funding (investing/ providing) rather than for other functions on which the secretariat may be trying to focus. As the sector moves from one with a single network representing civil society to one with many networks, often competing with each other to represent the same organisations, the notion of who is representing whom becomes increasingly important.

Donors are also increasingly looking to channel resources through networks as a way of distributing funds. Although this could help networks develop their investing functions, it also means that the requirement to monitor their members' use of these funds may change the relationship between the secretariat and members and place extra demands on the secretariat. In order to make informed decisions about how to present themselves to potential donors, networks' secretariats need to promote a network-wide common understanding of the functions they will provide and prioritise.

The proclamation for the registration and regulation of charities and societies

The operating environment for civil society is about to undergo a radical shift in Ethiopia. At the time of writing, a draft law regulating civil society has just been passed. This legislation will restrict all work related the promotion and protection of rights by organisations that receive more than 10 per cent of their funding from sources outside Ethiopia. As this covers most NGOs and most networks, it would substantially alter the activities these organisations can undertake. Networks would be particularly affected as the advocacy work they have developed would no longer be possible. The implications of this proclamation are considered at the end of this document – reflecting on the results of the study.

---

[2] http://www.crdaethiopia.org/html/missionandfunctionsCRDA.php
[3] In discussions with the PANE membership on how it should organise itself, CRDA was a frequent point of reference

NETWORK PROFILES

During the peer review process, researchers from each of the networks discussed the Network Function Approach with the staff and members of the networks they were studying. The key findings from the four case studies are presented in this section.

The Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat

The Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat (ECS) is part of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia and was founded to initiate, facilitate, promote and coordinate its social and pastoral activities. Its mission is to promote integral human development, a concept based on Catholic social teaching that emphasises not just economic development but also social and spiritual aspects. The ECS is the coordinating body for the diocesan social development and pastoral development wings which act independently and work out their own plans and schedules. They are linked together through their shared Catholic identity and the ECS based in Addis Ababa. Therefore, although they are technically all part of the same body, the different dioceses act together as a network.

ECS serves the dioceses' development programmes in various ways. It provides them with capacity building and leadership and formulates policies and guidelines on social and pastoral activities. It also represents the Church at a national and international level and links with the national government and other faith-based groups.

Focusing on support rather than agency
In terms of its role as a network, the objectives of ECS point towards it having more of a support than an agency role. These objectives focus on assisting the dioceses' development wings, building their capacity and ensuring that they are aware of policies and issues that will affect their work. All these objectives aim to ensure that the dioceses can function better. However, ECS is also tasked with representing the dioceses to the government and international fora. Here ECS adopts an agency role in speaking out on behalf of and representing the dioceses.

When we consider the functions ECS performs, as expected with a support-focused network we find that it concentrates on more inward-looking functions such as facilitating members' own work and investing in them. It does this through services such as arranging work permits and imports. Investment takes the form of capacity building around developing programmes and strategic planning. ECS also carries out a filtering function. This has been interpreted in an inward sense by filtering information on work permits and regulations coming from government for the members' benefit.

Community building still needed
One might expect the community building function to be unnecessary, as all the dioceses under the umbrella of ECS are part of the Catholic Church. The Church structure provides a common value system to which they all can adhere. However, all the dioceses are geographically diverse and have historically developed their plans independently, leading to different approaches and levels of knowledge. ECS has thus had a role in building a community among the dioceses by bringing them together for conferences and allowing them to communicate and share learning as one group. Therefore, some of their activities include a community- building function.

Moving to an ideal balance between the functions

The secretariat staff discussed what they felt to be the current balance between the functions (in terms of the percentage of time spent in each) and what they felt was the ideal for the future (see box below). In the current situation the secretariat felt that they spend the highest proportion of their time facilitating the work of their members. In the future they continue to see this as important but would like to shift more towards investing in the dioceses and amplifying their common voice. This might see a shift in focus from doing work for the dioceses towards giving them the ability to do the work for themselves. Providing a voice for the dioceses however retains a strong emphasis. If this were to be carried out it would impact on the network's structure; for example, more staff would be needed with skills in capacity building and training and less in clerical administration.

Function	Current	Ideal
Investor/provider	30%	20%
Amplifying	20%	30%
Facilitate	20%	30%
Community building	15%	5%
Filtering	10%	5%
Convene	5%	10%
Total	**100%**	**100%**

Discussions with the members revealed a range of different ideas about what should be the direction of ECS. Most members seem to feel that community building, investing and convening were important functions for the future. However, there was no clear consensus from the members on the direction they wanted ECS to take. This may be due to a lack of familiarity with the concepts, meaning further dialogue would be beneficial and may generate a consensus.

The Ethiopian Interfaith Forum for Development Dialogue and Action

The Ethiopian Interfaith Forum for Development Dialogue and Action (EIFDDA) was established to promote the role of Ethiopian faith-based organisations (FBOs) in conflict prevention and peace building, development, poverty reduction and the fight against HIV and AIDS. The forum has a dual purpose of bringing together different faiths – which helps to establish common ground and enables them to approach differences with respect and tolerance – and promoting the visibility of faith-based organisations and allowing them to dialogue with other actors as one. This builds on the influence that FBOs have with the government and the community, while recognising their strength in solidarity.

Before EIFFDA was formed, efforts to bring the different faith groups of Ethiopia together were initiated by external organisations such as the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) based in Nairobi. The role of the WFDD inspired faith-based groups in Ethiopia to organise themselves and set up EIFDDA in 2002.

The original purpose of the network presents a mix between the support and agency role. EIFFDA is intended to help its members come together in solidarity – supporting their work – while also promoting faith-based groups as a whole to the outside world – an agency role.

The membership of EIFDDA is drawn from the different faith organisations or their development wings. It represents the three major faiths in Ethiopia – Orthodox Christian, Protestant and Islam, with the Catholic Church and the Bahai faith as active members. All the members are the national-level organisations of the particular faiths but represent constituencies that are spread across Ethiopia.

Emphasis on community building
Given the variety of different faiths represented and the diversity of perspectives they bring to the network, the early part of EIFDDA's work has understandably concentrated on community building. Finding a way for all the different faiths to come together and work as a single entity has required discussion and harmonisation to avoid misunderstandings and ensure a common perspective. This spirit of cooperation has been continued outside of the formal network activities with actions such as financial support from the Orthodox Church to the Muslim community for a new mosque. EIFDDA's achievements such as creating a dialogue among faith-based organisations on national development issues and religious border conflicts, promoting transparency among FBOs and developing joint work on task forces such as the HIV and AIDS task force illustrate this early commitment to community building. Members have suggested that EIFDDA takes this further and should not be afraid to challenge the different faiths to ensure that deep-seated issues are addressed and not glossed over. They advocate the tackling of issues such as:

- FBOs' treatment of the beneficiaries of different religions and any possible discrimination due to faith;
- issues that divide the religions such as plural marriages or the prevention of HIV and AIDS;
- identifying the causes and signs of religious fundamentalism.

Handling such issues presents a challenge to EIFDDA as working on them could also create division among FBOs who sometimes hold opposing views. However, the fact that the members themselves raised the issues highlights their willingness to address the core of the problems rather than simply focus on easy areas of agreement. If the community that EIFDDA has built is strong enough, then it should be able to foster greater unity by tackling these difficult issues.

Divided views on decentralisation
Members also discussed the problem of how to take the work of EIFDDA to different levels of the country. While FBOs have developed good relations at a national level, this is not always the case in every locality where there may be fewer communication links and attitudes may be more entrenched. Opinion was divided on how to reach sub-national levels. Some members felt that regional chapters or offices would be useful, while others felt that EIFDDA should use its members to promote its work at lower levels. A model of less formal structures will provide fewer costs and overheads and will keep EIFDDA flexible, however this would require members to ensure that they take the work forward to different levels, which will demand commitment and new capacities.

New focus for the future
Now that EIFDDA has established a joint way of working, its focus is on other functions for the network, although its continual existence will help reinforce community building. The strategic plan (2003-2007) highlighted the investing and amplifying functions as the most important ones. The discussions with staff in the workshop and with members in the later part of the research revealed a similar vision for the future. Members saw investing, community building and convening as important; while staff focused on facilitating, investing and community building. Both felt that filtering was the least important. Members placed a slightly higher value on amplifying than staff.

Function	Strategic plan	Staff – future	Members - future
Filtering	10.4%	10%	10%
Amplifying	20.7%	10%	15%
Facilitate	13.8%	30%	15%
Investor/provider	27.5%	25%	20%
Community building	13.8%	20%	20%
Convene	13.8%	15%	20%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

The staff preferences show a focus on the inward-looking functions of the network – suggesting more of a bias towards the support role. This is also shared by the members of the network, although they would prefer a further increase in convening activities.

The Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations

The Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) promotes the economic, social, political and legal rights of women. It has two main objectives: to link up women's associations to provide a collective effort for achieving gender equity and to serve as a platform to campaign for women's rights. To do this, it has adopted a twin strategy of networking and capacity building along with research and advocacy. It has been active in policy debates and produced reports such as an assessment of the implementation of the 'Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women'. It provides training for members and allocates funds from Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) to selected organisations within the network.

NEWA was established on the initiative of the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association that brought together 13 organisations working on gender issues for a series of discussions in 2001. Current membership has increased to 35 organisations, including representative bodies of professional women such as the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association and the Ethiopian Media Women's Association, alongside grassroots initiatives and NGOs working on gender issues. Mass-based organisations such as the Addis Ababa Women's Association and the Tigray Women's Associations are also part of NEWA. The size of the members also varies greatly – the Ethiopian Medical Women's Association has 130 members whereas the Addis Ababa Women's Association has 73,000. The size of the NGO members' programmes also vary, thus providing a wide range of interests and capacities. The members work across Ethiopia and some are based in the regions, although NEWA's secretariat only has a presence in Addis Ababa.

Moving from agency to support
When NEWA was established, the intention was to bring the voice of women's organisations into the policy-making process. NEWA's role therefore seemed to be very much on the agency side – promoting the views of the member organisations. However, as the membership expanded, new demands appeared. The smaller or institutionally weaker members were not able to feed into NEWA to help it develop policy positions. Therefore, the network decided that it also needed to take on a support role for those members. The chance to offer umbrella funding provided by a donor meant that NEWA could move further in this role and some members now rely on NEWA for their funding. The implication of this was a shift in power between the secretariat and its members with different expectations between the smaller members – who strongly value the support role – and the larger members, who are more interested in the agency role. This is a dilemma that the secretariat needs to resolve.

Clear focus in the balance between the functions

Looking at the functional balance for NEWA, these dual roles come out strongly. When it was discussed in a workshop setting, most of NEWA's activities focused around amplifying and investing – fulfilling their dual mandate to support members and advocate for their issues. Looking at NEWA's existing plan, these two activities come out as the highest, although there is more emphasis on other activities such as community building and filtering. When activities that have actually been delivered are reviewed, the balance is slightly different. Much more of the network's time seems to be taken up with amplifying the messages from its work and there is less focus on investing – although this may be biased towards the number of activities rather than the time spent. NEWA's ideal balance as discussed by members of the network in the workshop was also to focus on the two areas – amplifying and investing – perhaps even to the extent of specialising further.

Function	Current	Ideal	Plans	Activities
Amplifying	35%	40%	29.03%	45.65%
Investor/provider	30%	40%	27.42%	19.57%
Facilitate	15%	10%	8.06%	4.35%
Filtering	10%	-	14.52%	-
Community building	10%	10%	14.52%	13.04%
Convene	-	-	6.45%	15.22%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**98%**

This reflection on the tasks of the network may raise some interesting questions in terms of staff for NEWA. At the time of the research most of the staff were project officers. This may reflect the internal organisation of the work but does not suggest that staff are being recruited according to the needs of the network. If the need is really to amplify messages, then specialist advocacy and communications staff are needed.

Facing the challenge of the proclamation

However, considering the proclamation on NGOs, NEWA may need to reform its strategy. Capacity building of its members would be allowed, so NEWA could expand this area of work. It may also be possible to amplify messages from members, but only with the objective of sharing learning about the issues they work on, rather than direct advocacy. This could be done through further development of fora such as the 'gender talk' which also helped to convene different groups. With its smaller members, NEWA needs to identify how it can continue to invest in their work and build their capacity. For the larger members, the discussion needs to focus on which issues can be openly debated. If lesson-sharing is to be an objective for NEWA, then the network would need to look at filtering, amplifying and convening as its key functions. This would require staff who are able to communicate well between members and external actors. Establishing specific communications positions would facilitate this.

The Poverty Action Network of civil society in Ethiopia

The Poverty Action Network of civil society in Ethiopia (PANE) was established to help civil society engage in the poverty reduction strategy process of Ethiopia. However, it is now broadening its scope to help members engage in the whole policy process and facilitate citizens' engagement. It conducts research with its members, helps build their capacity and advocates for changes in poverty legislation in addition to providing spaces for members to advocate.

PANE originated as a task force within the umbrella organisation CRDA, established to respond to the government's first Poverty Reduction Strategy or the Sustainable Development and Poverty

Reduction Plan (SDPRP). The task force coordinated the views of CRDA members and responded to the SDPRP. Members of the task force found this a useful forum and continued to meet after the production of the SDPRP. However, the position of an ad-hoc task force within an umbrella organisation created some problems, not least around membership, as CRDA only represents NGOs. In 2004, PANE members decided to re-invent the taskforce as an independent network, which allowed the participation of a wider range of actors – such as research institutes and professional organisations – and gave the network a higher profile, independent from CRDA.

PANE's membership
At the time of its foundation, PANE had about 45 members. Today the number is well over 70, but some members have joined in name only while others are active in several of the core groups. The membership ranges from large international NGOs to local organisations which may only have one or two staff. Mass-based organisations engage with PANE but mainly at a regional level (such as the Women's Association in Benishangul Gumuz and Tigray). Research organisations such as the Forum for Social Studies and the Ethiopian Economics Association are also members. Members engage with PANE through core groups that focus on issues or activities such as monitoring of policies and research. PANE has also formed regional chapters in the majority of regions of Ethiopia where local NGOs come together to work on PANE's issues from a regional perspective.

The role of PANE
Like NEWA, PANE started out with an agency role – presenting the views of its members on the SDPRP. However, as the network grew it also developed more support aspects in terms of capacity building of its members and providing access to funding. Despite the original purpose of PANE, some members do expect it to play a strong support role. They seem to model their expectations of networks on the role that CRDA has played, engaging heavily in capacity building and even paying for the staff of some member organisations. Sub-granting is also seen as a desired activity for some members but others fear it could alter the relationship between the secretariat and the members. Given these conflicting views, a thorough discussion of the correct balance between the support and agency roles needs to be held with members.

Challenges for the community building function
Given PANE's large and diverse membership, there are challenges around the community building function. At PANE's outset this function featured strongly. The founding members worked closely together – often putting in long hours – and in this way developed a personal attachment to the network and close ties with each other. However, as PANE has grown and diversified, these links have understandably weakened. Members come from different places, and a much larger pool of membership means that individual members are less engaged and not so in touch with PANE's objectives. Members also have different reasons for joining PANE. Some organisations do so at the encouragement of donors, in the belief that they would be able to access funds through the network, rather than because they share a commitment to PANE's values. There has also been the case of directors of organisations joining PANE but not communicating this to their staff, leading to a weak overall commitment from the organisation.

Community building, therefore, represents a challenge to PANE. Different fora, such as regional chapters and core groups, provide a mechanism for community building as members meet and engage with each other on a regular basis. PANE has also worked on this area since the original research for this case study, by speaking with members and trying to establish a clearer direction. However, with a wide and growing membership this will be a continual challenge. Ensuring consistency of purpose across all members needs to be a priority for PANE.

The balance between different functions
The functional balance developed by the secretariat members highlighted amplifying as the key function for PANE – both in terms of current and future work. Those members who had been more engaged with PANE felt that their issues had been well communicated, suggesting that active engagement in the network pays off. Many members were keen to see a wider range of communication mechanisms and target groups. The importance of regional communication in local languages was also highlighted.

In terms of the balance between the functions, there are a range of opinions between members surveyed. The Basic Education Association (BEA) felt that convening was a priority for them whereas the Forum for Social Studies disagreed. The Family and Children Integrated Development Forum felt that investing was the priority, but the BEA felt this should be given the least attention. This range of responses probably reflects the range of PANE's members' needs. A modal average (showing the frequency of responses) ranked investing and filtering as low priorities but equal weight to other functions – suggesting that PANE can still perform a wide range of functions for its members and needs to keep the diversity of its activities going.

Modal functional balance – from members' responses

Function	Current	Ideal
Filter	20	15
Amplify	20	20
Convene	10	20
Facilitate	10	20
Community Build	15	20
Invest	5	10

Functional balance:

Function	Current	Ideal
Amplifying	35%	25%
Facilitate	20%	20%
Community building	15%	20%
Filtering	10%	15%
Investor/provider	10%	5%
Convene	-	5%
Representation	*10%*	*10%*
Total	**100%**	**100%**

ANALYSIS OF THE FORM AND FUNCTIONS OF ETHIOPIAN NETWORKS

One of the objectives of this particular study was to try to understand better the four networks under analysis in the hope of identifying some patterns or relationships between function and form among networks in Ethiopia. We recognise that it is difficult to draw general conclusions from four examples and that, in any case, these examples respond to a particular external environment. However, we still think it is worthwhile to detail some relationships between form and function that might be relevant for other networks in Ethiopia and elsewhere, in similar contexts. These reflections also draw on lessons learnt in previous studies done by ODI's RAPID programme.

Centralised vs. decentralised

Relationships between members and with the secretariat suggest different patterns of network centralisation. However, there does not seem to be a particular relation between outward functions (such as amplifying) and the degree of centralisation of the networks. Centralisation, however, would have an effect on inward functions such as investing/providing or community building.

Decentralisation, however, can take place in many forms. PANE offers a particularly effective way of doing so: their independent regional chapters empower regional members to develop more relevant and context-specific strategies. ECS represents an even more decentralised model. Dioceses are very independent and the relationship between the secretariat and the various dioceses has been negotiated to maintain the latter's autonomy within the larger structure of the Church. This has resulted in some innovative work, such as a recent 'sharing across the diocese' conference, with an emphasis on bringing different experiences to the table; this has provided more of a focus on community building than is experienced elsewhere.

Another form of decentralisation is illustrated by EIFDDA's membership. This convening network is an example of what could be described as 'ideological decentralisation'. Members have different and non-negotiable core values or principles, developed independently from those of the others. Nonetheless, they work together on a shared area of interest, but in doing so they maintain complete control over their own constituencies.

In other networks, members whose core values or principles are similar or flexible could find it very difficult to maintain control over their own memberships or constituencies. By increasing the possible linkages between members, networks tend to promote the centralisation of power around those who had the most linkages to begin with. As a consequence, many members find that the secretariat of their networks becomes increasingly powerful with respect to them and their own members or partners. In Peru, the CIES network experienced some tensions between the members and the secretariat after a very successful political engagement process led by the latter. In the view of the members, the secretariat focused too much on communications and on developing an agency role, when they should have been strengthening its support role.[4]

Hence, promoting alternative centres of power like regional hubs, strengthening individual members' gravitational pull or clearly defining the boundaries of the sphere of influence of the network can help promote a healthy balance between the need for centralised and decentralised agency and support.

Research

One of the main interests of RAPID's study of networks is to find out what role research plays. It is quite clear that for most networks, the use of research-based knowledge can be central to their image, credibility and strategies. The existence of research capacity, however, seems to affect the content of the functions rather than their individual importance.

The adoption of research activities within the network requires specific resources and skills. Larger and stronger secretariats tend to be able to carry out research. Smaller or weaker ones depend on members' research capabilities. This does not so much affect the functions as the form of the network: stronger research partners will probably challenge the centrality of the network thus

---

[4] Interviews with members of the CIES secretariat and staff of member organisations.

decentralising its power; stronger research secretariats, on the other hand, will probably reinforce the centralisation of the network.

This can then have an effect on the networks' functions: a secretariat with research and advocacy capacity will need less from its members, thus carrying out fewer filtering, amplifying or community building functions. A more decentralised network will probably have to engage more often with its members and hence carry out more filtering.

In any case, research needs to be considered by the network from the offset. Is the network going to seek legitimacy through research-based credibility? And who will carry it out – the secretariat, its members or both?

In all the cases studied, research is present, but is not necessarily central to the strategies of the networks. NEWA and PANE have stronger research-related filtering functions but others such as community building, investing/providing (capacity development), amplifying and facilitating seem to receive more attention. For PANE, research (which is carried out) is particularly important, as it draws from it most of its legitimacy in the policy process. It also attempts to help build the capacity of members by engaging them in research such as the Citizen Report Card Process. This was very much driven by the board, but is now moving towards being more led by members. PANE still provides the forum for bringing them together.

Agency or support?

It is interesting to note that the balance between the agency and support roles of the networks has shifted as the networks have developed. Looking back at the description at the beginning of this paper, it is interesting to note the flow of resources: in an agency network the flow of resources is into the network – members give the network the information or funding in order for the secretariat to go and represent them; in a support agency the flow is reversed – resources flow from the secretariat to the members.

In the cases of NEWA and PANE, the networks were originally developed to fulfil the agency role – to promote the views of members on a particular issue (Gender or the PASDEP). However, as their membership developed, the secretariats also took on a supporting role – building the capacity of the new members. This was a response to the need of the expanded membership who did not have the capacity or information to engage at the same level.

However, the secretariats in their development were also able to attract funds. This has led to a situation where the flows of support are reversed. The secretariats are not dependent on their members, but are able to support them with resources in the form of grants. This has changed the dynamic in some ways and may result in some members joining networks in order to access those resources rather than for the original purpose.

Networks can provide a valuable role in ensuring resources can reach those organisations which cannot access them. However, the shift in the role to one of support needs to be recognised. The networks should examine this dynamic and the membership as whole has to be aware of and agree on the balance between the two roles. The form of a support network may be different from an agency network. When trying to support a network, more staff need to be focused on distributing funds, disseminating information or providing training. However if the main role is agency, there should be more staff focused on amplifying work.

External pressures and the responsibility of the network

The experience of the four networks studied in this project brings out a key issue that is rarely discussed. It is clear that many of the changes that the networks have undergone, and that have caused tensions and undesired shifts in the relationships between the secretariat and the members, have to do with the incorporation of grant-making or funding activities (investing or providing function) by the networks. These activities have been promoted by donor's own policies of working through networks rather than directly supporting local NGOs, as well as by the network's own interest in attracting members and funds.

Thus, in a way, both donors' and networks' strategies have contributed to the current situation in which many networks find themselves. PANE and NEWA, for example, have allowed weak or small organisations to join them. This has created a situation where the networks' secretariats are simultaneously providing resources to some members while demanding them from others.

Networks need to make a number of choices – many of them difficult. They must, for example, decide whether the network should attract new members, the rate at which they may accept them and the criteria or minimum standards they require for membership. If networks attract members as a way of signalling to donors that they can be a good NGO funding channel, then they must be ready to manage those funds in a way that does not undermine other functions or the relationship between members and between the members and the secretariat.

Attempting to do too many things – or to be useful for too wide a range of actors – can be counterproductive and damage the chances of the original membership. If this is the case, networks should consider closing down or explicitly changing their objectives.

These choices are more difficult for networks with no clear membership boundaries. It would be impossible for EIFDDA or ECS to incorporate new members with significantly different characteristics from the existing members. As a consequence, there are fewer differences between what their members and secretariats expect of the networks.

A direct implication from this observation is that donors, secretariats and members must be responsible in their demands and decisions in relation to the future roles and functions of the networks they support, manage or are part of. Any pressure or decision to change, coming from any of these key actors, can have significant effects on the network and no actions can be taken in isolation. More specifically:

- In designing civil society support strategies, donors should consider the effects that these policies will have in existing organisations. They should meet with NGOs, networks and other organisations to discuss the effects of their policies on their roles and functions, and how this will affect their structures and sustainability.
- In setting up a network, members and their funders ought to consider how joining a network might affect their organisation's engagement in other networks or alliances. New networks should, ideally, be fulfilling roles and functions that are in demand, rather than increasing the degree of competition between the networks for a limited pool of members.
- In developing projects to be implemented by the networks, donors and networks' secretariats should consider whether the members would be capable of undertaking the activities, as well as which are the most appropriate mechanisms to encourage member leadership and participation. Developing projects that the members cannot deliver might put the members at odds with the secretariat – which would then have to find non-members to carry out the work. It would be equally cumbersome and counterproductive to

develop projects or to offer grants that cannot be appropriately allocated among the members, thereby creating feelings of distrust towards the secretariat.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE 'PROCLAMATION FOR THE REGISTRATION AND REGULATION OF CHARITIES AND SOCIETIES'

Since this research was begun and the majority of the work carried out, events have radically changed the context in which Ethiopian networks work. It is therefore important to reflect on what this research tells us about the new directions networks will need to take. As discussed above, at the time of writing (February 2009), the Proclamation on Charities and Associations has just been passed by the Ethiopian Parliament. This bill permits NGOs and associations to conduct advocacy and human rights work only if at least 90% of their resources comes from domestic sources.

The actual implications of this for the four networks in the study are as yet unclear, since there is a one- year implementation period. Work on the promotion of human rights, gender rights, interfaith dialogue and peace-building work would all fall under the areas restricted for those organisations with more than 10% of external funding. As the networks and many of their members are mostly externally funded, they would be affected by the ruling. Faith-based organisations are exempt from the law, but it is not clear if this extends to their development wings or their networks.

If the law is strictly applied, then networks and their members will need to consider how to respond and how they will have to adjust their functions. Amplifying issues will probably not be permitted under the proclamation, but the other functions of the networks should be allowed. Investing in organisations, developing their capacity and building communities of organisations are not considered illegal activities under the proclamation. These could become the focus for the networks but this will have implications for their purpose and role which members will need to consider. According to the Network Functions Approach this would mean that functions such as investing and facilitating would be permitted by formal registered networks. For organisations such as ECS which previously focused on the support role, a clear mandate still exists. The other three networks face difficult choices around adapting their mission or funding structures.

Hopefully, networks may be able to continue to support their members – or they could decide to change their focus on a temporary basis in hope that the Proclamation is eventually changed or relaxed.

If networks in Ethiopia decide to undergo strategic review processes, the Network Functions Approach might provide a framework for members and secretariats to follow. The members of each network need to look at the functions they require of a network. The ones that are permissible could then be continued by a formal network structure – albeit one with a possibly restructured staff to address its new functions. Those areas that are not permitted through registered structures may have to be undertaken in different ways by individual citizens. In other African countries, concerned citizens have come together in entirely self-funded social movements to pursue an issue where individuals felt strongly enough that they needed action. An example of this is the group formed to push for the budget to be passed in Malawi in 2007[5]. This could provide a model for Ethiopia.

---

[5] As described by Chiko Malunga during the INTRAC Conference 'Whatever Happened to Civil Society?', December 2008. (Conference report upcoming)

Whatever changes and structures are suggested, however, they must focus on the needs of members if they are to be sustainable. A discussion around the functions of the networks can help focus minds on the needs rather than on the existing structures themselves.

CONCLUSION

The current proclamation presents a real challenge to networks in Ethiopia. Hopefully the Network Functions Approach provides one way to think through these challenges. Restructuring and rethinking the way networks operate will be necessary. However, space still exists for many of the functions the networks are performing, suggesting they still have a valid role to play in Ethiopian civil society. Engaging in research such as this may help all networks in Ethiopia establish where the value lies and what networks can deliver in a more efficient way than individual organisations. This research shows that attracting resources (investing), facilitating the work of members (facilitating) and bringing different groups together to create a common agenda (community building / convening) are all conducted by networks in Ethiopia today

The research has also revealed other insights into the roles and organisation of networks. Clear shifts can be seen in the roles of some of the networks from agency to support as they responded to a growing and changing membership. Different models of structuring networks are also demonstrated with different levels of centralisation. Thinking about the implications for the functions of the network is a key point for the management of the network.

The process of conducting the research has also provided some insights. The use of peer review has generated an alternative to usual methods of research based around external consultants. This method has provided strong links between the organisations and helped develop trust. The Network Function Approach has also provided an alternative model for looking at networks, which may become useful for networks as they attempt to reformulate their work in the current context.

Each of the case studies developed its own recommendations but a few general ideas for all networks can be drawn out:
- Given the current context, all networks need to consider what functions the networks perform and how these can best be supported in the new environment. Networks can provide a range of functions and these may not always be the ones originally conceived.
- Establishing the real needs of the members is a useful first step in deciding what kind of structures should support those needs in the future. This will help build sustainable networks or show members what they need in order to come together to perform outside of formal structures.
- Each network should consider the needs and directions of its membership at the current time. The role of the network can move and adapt as it grows and its membership base changes.
- Networks can be organised in different ways but decisions around organisation will affect the delivery of the work. The most appropriate structure for what the network needs to deliver needs to be found.
- The peer learning approach can be used as a methodology for generating knowledge within civil society in Ethiopia but it requires a period of developing trust between the different actors before it is undertaken.

REFERENCES

Chekol, A., Loul, B., Abebe, T., Chapman, C., Long, G., Sinclair M. (2004), *Mapping of Non-State Actors in Ethiopia - A Research Study Commissioned by the European Union and the Ministry of Capacity Building, Ethiopia*

CRDA (2006), *Assessment of Operating Environment for CSO/NGOs in Ethiopia* www.crdaethiopia.org

Danso, Elijah, Kyeretwie Opoku and Elvis Adikah (2005), 'Understanding Civil Society Networks in Ghana: Constraints and Opportunities for Evidence-based Policy Influence', report to ODI

http://www.crdaethiopia.org

GEM Institute, PACT Ethiopia and Innovation Partners Ethiopia (2007), 'Appreciative Inquiry: a definition' in *The 2007 GEM Certificate Programme in Appreciative Inquiry for Development Leaders in Africa Course Materials*

Jones, B., (2007) *A Civil Society Story in Tigray – Opening a door to know ourselves better.'* Trocaire-CAFOD-SCIAF Working Together in Ethiopia, unpublished paper

Mendizabal, Enrique (2006b), 'Building Effective Research Policy Networks: linking function and form', ODI *Working Paper* 276

Mendizabal, Enrique (2006a), 'Understanding Networks: the functions of research policy networks', ODI *Working Paper* 271

Mendizabal, Enrique (2009), 'Supporting Networks: Ten principles', ODI *Opinion* 105

ODI (2005), 'CSOs, Evidence and Policy Influence', *Lessons Learnt from the Africa, Asia and Latin America Consultations*, February to September

ODI RAPID programme website: www.odi.org.uk/rapid

Perkin, Emily and Julius Court (2005), 'Networks and Policy Processes in International Development: a Literature Review', ODI *Working Paper* 252

Portes, R. and S. Yeo (2001), *Think-net: the CEPR model of a research network*, CEPR http://www.cepr.org/aboutcepr/CEPR/CEPR_think.pdf

Vaugh, S. and Tronvoll, K. (2003), *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life,* SIDA Studies

Yeo, Stephen (2004), *Creating, Managing and Sustaining Policy Research Networks,* preliminary paper

Yeo, Stephen and Enrique Mendizabal (2004), *Evaluation of the Secretariat for institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa (SISERA),* Ottawa: IDRC