

Evaluating International Social Change Networks: A Conceptual Framework for a Participatory Approach

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1. Introduction³

During the 1990s, networks became an increasingly important means of social synergy and for some a central characteristic of the world today.⁴ By 2000, one calculation was of 20,000 transnational civic networks active on the global stage.⁵ These formal or informal structures bring together diverse social actors to enable them to pursue actively common goals. In a globalising world with increasingly effective means of communication, a network offers unique political and organisational potential. Social change networks can influence economic, political and cultural structures and relations in ways that are impossible for individual actors. In these networks, the members are autonomous organisations—usually NGOs or community based organisations—and sometimes individuals. Furthermore, when the network is international, its aims and activities reflect the heterogeneous contexts represented by its members.

An international social change network typically performs a combination of two or more of these functions⁶:

- Filtering, processing and **managing knowledge** for the members.
- **Promoting dialogue, exchange and learning** amongst members.
- **Shaping the agenda** by amplifying little known or understood ideas for the public.
- **Convening** organisations or people.
- **Facilitating action** by members. Addressing global problems through knowledge of their local, national and regional contexts.
- **Building community** by promoting and sustaining the values and standards of the group of individuals or organisations within it.

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- **Mobilising and rationalising the use of resources** for members to carry out their activities.
- **Strengthening international consciousness**, commitment and solidarity.

Nonetheless, there are limitations to what networks can do and accomplish:

So although networks have become much more important to the way we live, we do not live in a world dominated by networks. Networks are extraordinary ways of organising knowledge, co-operation and exchange. They are far more effective means of sharing learning than hierarchies and generally better at adapting to change. But they remain poor at mobilising resources, sustaining themselves through hard times, generating surpluses, organising commitments, or playing games of power. This is why, for example, the interesting feature of the anti-globalisation movement is its weakness not its strength, and why Al-Qaeda can inflict huge damage but cannot create.⁷

Therefore, in an evaluation of an international social change network, stakeholders and evaluators alike face unique challenges in assessing the functioning and achievements. First, the context in which these networks operate is a globalising world of dynamic, complex, open environments. In this environment, demands on members and the network itself to change course, often dramatically and at short notice, increasingly overrun planning, monitoring and evaluation processes and procedures. In these circumstances, conventional means for evaluating operational effectiveness and efficiency and progress towards goals, are not simply difficult but often useless.

Second, an international social change network is loosely organised and non-hierarchical, with authority and responsibility flowing from and around autonomous members. Accountability is highly diffuse for what happens, what is achieved and by whom. Within the network, all but a few accountabilities constantly shift. This is further complicated because networks share accountability for many actions with allies outside the network.

Third, attribution of impact is thorny in all social change endeavours but especially so in international social change networks. Their political purpose is to influence the structure, relations and exercise of power, from the national (and sometimes the local) to the global. These achievements rarely are attributable solely to the activities of the network. Usually they will be the fruit of a broad effort with other social actors. Frequently, results will be collateral and unintentional. Therefore, establishing reasonable links of cause and effect between a network's activities and the political results it aims to achieve is of another order of attribution than that faced by the organisations that make up its membership or for evaluators accustomed to assessing other types of organisations.

1. The operational complexity of an international social change network⁸

All social change organisations operate in complex, open and dynamic systems. For an international network, a characteristically voluntary and diverse membership and geographical spread multiply the complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability. Thus, the management of these types of networks is special.

Participation is central to the uniqueness of networks: As one group of network thinkers say, “We have a profound belief that participation is at the core of what makes a network different to other organisational/process forms.”⁹ Working solely from these criteria of participation, Chart 1 highlights the differences between networks and other organisational types.

The motivation of the principal actors—the members—in joining a network is wide ranging. Some may be more interested in receiving information or the tools it generates while others join for the political spaces and relationships a network offers. Many but perhaps not all may wish to be institutionally associated with the common, larger purpose or community. In situations of social or political conflict, the motivation may be simple protection. The conviction that they cannot achieve meaningful political objectives by working alone drives some network members. In sum, the strength and sustainability of a network depends to a significant extent on its usefulness to its members, who may very well have different interests and needs in belonging to the network.

Chart 1 – Participation in different types of organisations

	Networks	NGOs	Membership organisations*
Who?	Both organisations and individuals can participate in networks. But, the participants in networks are characterised by their diversity, including geographical diversity, as well as cultural, lingual, and at times also ideological diversity.	Only individuals participate in NGOs and they are culturally and ideologically relatively homogenous.	Individuals who want to be members join voluntarily because of a common interest.
How?	The way actors participate in networks is very diverse, ranging from voting in elections to participating in campaigns. Participation in networks is sporadic; at times very intensive, at times non-existent. Independent and autonomous social actors have equal but limited authority and responsibilities in the network.	Participation in NGOs is regular, often daily, and more regulated, usually involving fixed, full-time employment relationships.	Membership has strictly defined responsibilities to the organisation, and when large, is organised into chapters. Regular meetings and group activities. Participation of members is similar in intensity and frequency. Participation is an “extracurricular” activity.
Why?	Participation in networks occurs for a variety of reasons, including combining forces to make a stronger statement, legitimacy, learning, potential access to funds, and the pooling of resources.	Participation in an NGO is usually based on personal reasons of self-interest. Reasons include sharing the philosophy and ideals of the NGO, making a living, and other personal benefits. Career-oriented employment.	Common interest in a limited or specific problem or purpose to which they want to contribute and benefit.
For how long?	A network may cease to exist once it reaches its goals, or the goals may be so broad and far-reaching that there is no reason for it ever to stop existing. Participation in a network will last as long as the members remain committed.	Employee-employer contracts	Until the individual loses interest in the problem or purpose.

*From co-operatives, professional associations and unions to fisherfolk and peasant leagues

Source: Ricardo Wilson-Grau and Fe Evelyn Garcia

Another unique feature is that the principal actors in the network are autonomous organisations and the individuals that participate on their behalf, but not employees or managers, as is the case in other types of organisations. Thus, networks operate more through facilitation and co-operation around the activities of its organisational components than by directing programmes and executing projects. The management bodies of a network generally consist of a general assembly, board of directors, and secretariat. Nonetheless, the

structure of a network is not hierarchical; commonly, the secretariat assumes responsibilities for communication, co-ordination and organisation to catalyse and carry-out activities. This is to say that in a network the scope of authority is restricted. Procedures for command and control common to NGOs, grassroots groups, corporations, government bodies, professional associations and other forms of organisation rarely work in a network. Consequently, a network requires different processes for evaluation.

1. A conceptual framework for the functioning of a network

For the functioning of a network, there are four qualities of a network crossed by three operational dimensions to take into account. The **qualities**¹⁰ are:

Democracy - In addition to being a recognised value, democratic management is a necessity in a network. Success depends on equity in the relations and exercise of power within the network. The members are autonomous organisations. In a network, when its members participate in taking a decision, that is the best guarantee that the decision will be implemented.

Diversity – A unique strength of a network resides in the variety of its membership because of their distinct social, economic, political and cultural contexts. Part of the genius of this organisational form is that its members share common values and a collective purpose but beyond that have different conceptions and strategies to achieve change. The challenge is to enable each one of these heterogeneous actors to make a creative and constructive contribution.

Dynamism - The network promotes and is nourished by the enthusiasm and energy characteristic of a voluntary membership. It maintains dynamism to the extent the network is able to balance the diverse contributions of members with joint, sustained collaboration. For this, the leadership must stimulate and strengthen democratic internal processes, the active participation of all members and effective work in alliances. A network must enhance interaction between its members. It facilitates rather than directs innovative proposals for action.

Performance – The relationships between organisations and individuals engaged in purposeful action characterises a network. The quality of the interaction is a result of the quality of how the network operates.

These four quality criteria run through **three sets of operational dimensions** that contain the six principal components of a network's functioning.

Political purpose and strategies - This is the arena in which the network nurtures consensus amongst its membership on its reason for being and the best avenues to follow for fulfilling that purpose. The political purpose answers the questions: What social change does the network aim to achieve? What values motivate its members? For other types of organisations, the answers are in their "mission statement" or "institutional objectives".

The strategies refer to the approaches the network employs to achieve its political purpose: How does the network propose to generate results that will fulfil its purpose? Since an international network is composed of organisations rooted in the reality of different countries, the strategies necessarily are of a general nature. Nonetheless, the relevance or not

of the strategies that a network develops is one of the elements that determines if its activities will have impact.

Organisation and management - A network operationalises its strategies through systematic, continual processes that produce results on different levels and of varying importance, all of course to fulfil its purpose. Sometimes referred to with terms such as “lines of action” or “tactics”, they are similar to programmes and projects in other kinds of organisations. Responsibility for the activities is more dispersed than, for example, in an NGO. The organisational units—the members individually or collectively, as well as the secretariat—operate with higher degrees of autonomy than do departments and employees. There are four components to organisation and management in a network: structure, operational management, institutional capacity, and communication.

Within a network *structure*, instead of an executive office there is a body whose function is co-ordination and facilitation. This entity steers the network’s strategies and actions, articulating them with the activities of individual members. The operation of this secretariat may include projects. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that the local activities, and the changes they bring about, are principally the responsibility of the individual members.

In contrast to other types of organisations, in a network *operational management* focuses on enhancing collective, democratic, horizontal and diverse activities of members rooted in specific local realities. Management is guided by the common purpose, which is the basis for trust and gives coherence to the multiple activities. Consequently, the secretariat, as the key component of operational management for the network, generally co-ordinates more than it administers programmes.

As in any organisation, the *institutional capacity* of a network depends to some extent on the people in positions of responsibility. Furthermore, the institutional capacity of a network relies on the capacity of its members. Decision-makers should be qualified for their specific tasks, just as the material and financial resources should be appropriate for the activities of the network. Consequently, a network strives to empower and strengthen its members through training, exchange of information and mutual support. It develops and takes advantage of the resources and energy of all its organisational components, thus multiplying and compounding the effect of individual efforts.

For every social organisation, *communication* is important; in a network, it is vital. A network is essentially a complex of human relations and they determine success. Due to its character, a network promotes social mobilisation, generates technical, political and financial support and involves external actors. Therefore, it must create complementarity, synergy and strategic alliances. Consequently, communication is as much an organising and management function as it is one of information exchange. Furthermore, an international network is intercultural, requiring understanding across great distances and social and cultural differences. For all these reasons, the communication function is central to success or failure in a network.

Leadership and participation - For a network, everything related to leadership and participation is as important as its political purpose, strategies, organisation, and management, because democracy, diversity and dynamism are intrinsic to its nature. A network aims to be more than an association of like-minded organisations. Common

agreement on the strategies is as important as selecting the right strategies. Similarly, the network action should be more than the sum of the individual activities of its members. To achieve this “added value”, decision-making processes must be characterised by a democratic leadership and the active involvement of the members. Also, there must be many opportunities for all members to participate in the activities of the network and collaborate with each other. More concretely:

- Decision-making requires as much agreement about *who* should participate in *which* decisions as it does broad participation in making specific decisions.
- The participation of those who make up a network is fundamental for its sustenance and endurance; it is a source of enrichment and strengthening the network. Effective participation depends on a mix of different factors—the opportunities, funding, time available, interest, commitment and above all trust.
- Co-ordination is basic to a healthy network that generates synergy. This depends heavily on a leadership that enhances internal management and the presence and influence in the wider world.

1. Assessing a network’s qualities – From evaluation indicators to organisational strengths and weaknesses

Every evaluator will have her or his own approach to assessing. We will share with you an instrument that we have found helpful (next page). It is a matrix with evaluation criteria that pretend to be exhaustive. That is, we suggest that these 56 indicators cover all aspects of a network that potentially should be considered in an evaluation. Also, we have tried to spell them out in plain English. The precise meaning of the words, however, will no doubt vary from network to network and person to person. Furthermore, individual evaluators and each network should decide if they require additional indicators, and evaluators should take care to customise the wording.

We have placed the criteria in the quality/operational quadrants where they appear principally to belong. This is to say that each one may also be relevant for another quality criteria or a different operational dimension. This explains why similar indicators are in different quadrants. Gender equity appears explicitly in three indicators and indirectly in several others. Arguably, however, the principle of gender equity should be present in virtually all the indicators.

Once you have agreement on the indicators and where they go in the matrix, the matrix may be used in different ways. For example, Rick Davies suggests that the indicators can be used as a menu of potentially relevant performance attributes which network participants can respond to:

- Which do they think are most-to-least important (as objectives)?
- Which are more “means” and which are more “ends”?
- Which do they think are most-to-least present in the existing network (or present versus absent)
- Which of these attributes best defines the difference between this and other networks they are or have been participating in

GENERIC CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING
INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL CHANGE NETWORKS

O P E R A T I O N A L D I M E N S I O N S

	Political purpose and strategies	Organisation and management	Leadership and participation
Democracy*	<p>1. <i>All members share vision and mission.</i></p> <p>2. <i>Individual members have a sense of ownership of the network</i></p> <p>3. <i>Gender equity is a shared value of all members.</i></p>	<p>19. <i>The members contribute and have equitable access to the resources (people, funds, goods and services) and reputation of the network.</i></p> <p>20. <i>The structure is neither hierarchical nor gender-biased.</i></p>	<p>39. <i>The network members consider the decision-making process is just, inclusive and effective.</i></p> <p>40. <i>All the network members have the opportunity to collaborate in activities that make best use of their skills and contribution.</i></p> <p>41. <i>The network emphasises building relationships of trust internally and externally.</i></p>
Diversity*	<p>4. <i>The diversity of members is appropriate for the network's purpose and strategies.</i></p> <p>5. <i>The strategies of the network reflect the range of political positions in the network.</i></p>	<p>21. <i>The range of opinions and ideas of the members about what the network should do have a place in the activities of the network.</i></p> <p>22. <i>The human and financial base of the network is sufficiently broad to avoid the dependence of many members or individuals on a few.</i></p> <p>23. <i>Conflicts do not paralyse the network's capacity to act.</i></p>	<p>42. <i>Significant numbers of the network members contribute to the implementation of the strategies.</i></p> <p>43. <i>Members interact creatively, constructively and in a gender sensitive manner. Members are enriched by the difference.</i></p>
Dynamism*	<p>6. <i>There is a balance between strategic reflection (are we doing the right thing?) And action (are we doing it right?).</i></p> <p>7. <i>Goals are pursued seizing the opportunities and adjusting to obstacles without losing sight of the political purpose.</i></p> <p>8. <i>Achievements serve as a basis for reformulating the strategies.</i></p>	<p>24. <i>The division of responsibility and authority of the Council, the secretariat and national member organisations change with the circumstances.</i></p> <p>25. <i>The structure is light, facilitative and supportive. The rules are minimal.</i></p> <p>26. <i>The resources of the network expand and contract, quantitatively and qualitatively, according to the strategic needs.</i></p> <p>27. <i>Organisational culture is in tune with network principles – the network 'thinks' and 'acts' as a network, not an institution</i></p>	<p>44. <i>The members take initiative and influence the development of the network.</i></p> <p>45. <i>The members effectively co-ordinate their activities.</i></p> <p>46. <i>The network co-ordinates effectively with other networks on common action issues.</i></p> <p>47. <i>All the members contribute to and benefit from organic and political outcomes.</i></p> <p>48. <i>The operational outputs of the network are more than the sum of the activities of the individual members.</i></p>

	Political purpose and strategies	Organisation and management	Leadership and participation	
Q U A L I T Y C R I T E R I A	Effectiveness	9. <i>The network focuses on the essential—fulfilling its political purpose.</i>	28. <i>The network is autonomous—it decides on and defines its own paths.</i>	49. <i>The different components of the network—Council, secretariat and members—are accountable to one another and to external stakeholders.</i>
		10. <i>The network pursues clearly defined impact—structural, long-term political changes.</i>	29. <i>Policies on how the network should and should not function are followed.</i>	50. <i>Members participate as much as they desire in decision-making processes that are solid and generate trust.</i>
		11. <i>The strategies are based on an up-to-date analysis of the environment in which the network operates nationally and internationally.</i>	30. <i>The council members' qualifications correspond to the requirements of the position they hold.</i>	51. <i>There is sufficient opportunity to participate in the network's activities, and their contribution is recognised.</i>
		12. <i>The strategies and lines of action are coherent with the social changes the network seeks.</i>	31. <i>The assets—material or immaterial—are appropriate for the requirements of the strategic lines of action.</i>	52. <i>Through the network, the members become more competent and committed humans rights protagonists.</i>
		13. <i>The network has a clear organisational identity for members and for external actors.</i>	32. <i>The financial function—raising, spending and accounting for money—is well structured.</i>	53. <i>The leadership successfully dialogues and negotiates with other social actors in building alliances that contribute to the implementation of the lines of action.</i>
		14. <i>The network achieves organic and political outcomes at the national and international levels.</i>	33. <i>The network pursues a financial strategy and adequately manages its financial resources.</i>	54. <i>Alliances lead to the formulation of new strategies.</i>
		15. <i>The balance between organic and political outcomes corresponds to the purpose and strategies of the network.</i>	34. <i>The network has a communication strategy designed to promote social mobilisation, generate technical, political and financial support, and involve external actors.</i>	55. <i>Leadership combines co-ordination, facilitation, new ideas, and encourages innovation, and focus.</i>
		16. <i>The network is a key player in the work to achieve structural, long-term change.</i>	35. <i>Internal and external communication is effective.</i>	56. <i>Leadership is not just vested in the co-ordination function but emerges around the network where appropriate to activities or issues</i>
		17. <i>The division of responsibility and authority of the Council, the secretariat and national member organisations works.</i>	36. <i>The network understands what qualities and skills are needed in the co-ordinating function and the qualifications of the staff of the network's secretariat are suited to their responsibilities.</i>	
		18. <i>Work is planned, monitored and evaluated.</i>	37. <i>People working in the network are able to fully apply their skills and qualities..</i>	
			38. <i>The network learns from everyone's experience; learning is a basis for innovation and improved performance.</i>	

Source: Ricardo Wilson-Grau and Martha Nuñez, Marcie Mersky and Fe Evelyn Garcia, with suggestions from Madeline Church and PA Kiriwandeniya.

basis for them venturing into conclusions and recommendations on the network's functioning.

2. Assessing results in an international social change network

The reason for being of a network is to contribute to change. Therefore, it is of fundamental importance for a network to identify and comprehend both its internal and external achievements. There are four types of achievements for an international social change network:

Operational outputs – The products and services that are an immediate result of the activity of the network.

Organic outcomes – The changes in the behaviour, relationships, or actions of the network's members that strengthens and develops their collective capacity to achieve the network's political purpose. The changes are a result—partially or fully, intentional or not—of the activities of the network.

Political outcomes – These are changes in the behaviour, relationships, or actions of individuals, groups or organisations outside of the network involved in activities related to the network's political purpose. The changes are a result—partially or fully, intentional or not—of the activities of the network.

Impact – Long-term changes in the relations and exercise of power in society as expressed in the political purpose of the network.

Operational outputs are common to most types of organisations and therefore not exceptional. The “outcomes”, however, require more explanation, especially since we propose that the evaluation focus on them as the bridge between the activities, services and products of a network and the impact it desires. Since ultimately social change is brought about by social actors working within and influenced by the network, we use the concept developed by IDRC in which the core idea is that outcomes are changes in their behaviour, actions and relationships.¹³

The *organic outcomes* refer to the changes in the members and staff of the network. One of the principal results of great validity and importance is the network's existence and permanence over time. We know that this is an unconventional criterion for results evaluation. A for-profit business can rarely justify itself by the number of employees it hires; its margin of profit and return on investment is the principal measurement of success. Sometimes the major achievement of a government may be simply to have finished its term of office, but usually its results are evaluated in terms of the quantity and nature of its contribution to the common good. An NGO does not exist to exist; the NGO must benefit other people.

Networks, however, are both a means and an end in themselves. Admittedly, this is an inherent contradiction but also a challenge: “There is a tendency for networks to focus not on tangible impacts, but rather simply on the exercise of validating their own existence.”¹⁴ Nonetheless, if the network functions effectively and efficiently, it strengthens and develops the web of relationships that are at its core. That is, the existence of the network is an interactive, innovative process with added value for its members. The concept of organic

outcomes resolves this dilemma of ends and means. The evaluation focuses on the changes in behaviour, relationships, or actions of the members of the network themselves, as they reinforce each other and advance together with joint strategies to achieve their common purpose.

Ultimately, the success of a network depends on its external achievements, the end results, or enduring, structural *impact* in society. Impact is, at the end of the day, a network's political reason for being. Since a network is an association with the aim of changing relations of power and made up of diverse national organisations with their own missions and objectives, the problems in evaluating impact are double-edged. First, how do you measure changes in the structure and relations of power in societies characterised by complex, dynamic and open systems? Specifically, these changes occur in heterogeneous contexts, are indefinite in time, and depend on the actions and decisions of many more actors than the members of the network. Second, when there is a change that represents impact: Who can assume credit for the change? Who is accountable for what changes (and does not change), and to whom and how?

What we have found most useful is to focus on *political outcomes* because social actors bring about the long-term changes in the relations and exercise of power in society. Thus, the evaluator seeks to identify the verifiable changes in what individuals, groups or organisations do that relate to the political purpose of the network. For example, here are three evaluation questions designed to identify political outcomes to which a network contributed:

- Human rights network: In 1998-2004, what were the verifiable changes in the behaviour, relationships or actions of Asian national governments, the UN Human Rights Commission or its members that resolve cases of involuntary disappearances, prevent recurrence, and end impunity in Asia?
- Development network: Since 1999, what changes can you identify in the behaviour, relationships or actions of transnational corporations or their executives, or of civil society actors that influence them, that had potentially positive impact on sustainable community development in Africa?
- Environmental network: In the past five years, what changes can you identify in the behaviour, relationships or actions of civil society organisations or leaders that enhance the environmental security of people?

Organic and political outcomes must be specific and verifiable. The formulation of outcomes that have been achieved should be sufficiently concise and concrete so that someone outside of the network will be able to appreciate and verify them. ^{**} Outcomes must describe

^{**} We recognise that we are begging the question of how to assess achieved against expected results. We are doing this for two reasons, one practical and the other theoretical. In our experience, international social change networks plan lines of action clearly aimed at influencing change in the behaviour, relationships and actions of other social actors, including their own members, but they do not predefine those outcomes. If they predefine any Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound results, these are the outputs they will produce in the process of pursuing those political goals. Furthermore, in our evaluation experiences, we have discovered that networks contribute to organic and political outcomes although they have not been predefined. This, of course, does not prove that predefining outcomes does not lead to even greater achievements. We are convinced it will, however, and this leads to our more theoretical reason.

Again in our experience, for international social change networks the context is too complex, open and dynamic to plan synergies between desired outcomes and the activities to achieve them. The number and levels of relationships between social actors is enormous, as is the influence of factors such as different national

(although not explain) what changed, who changed, when, how and where as specifically as possible. Quantitative and qualitative aspects of the outcome should be specified.

When two or more people work together to identify and formulate outcomes, there will generally be two or more different perspectives and sets of interests involved. They are challenged to achieve consensus without resorting to agreeing on the least common denominator. Thus, writing clear outcomes requires ample time and language ability to craft solid results in a language that can be readily understood by all readers. To complicate the challenge, the participants in a network do not always use the same language; and of course even when they do, the vocabulary they use may have different meaning even amongst the staff and members.

Therefore, we have found that in international networks the identification and formulation of outcomes to which they have contributed is best done in two stages. First, we ask stakeholders to draft answers. Then, we comment on the drafts and follow-up with a capacity-building working session during field visits to craft the final products.

Depending upon the time and money available, the evaluators can pursue four other questions:

- What evidence is there that the changes actually occurred and that the network contributed to them?
- What was the role of other social actors and contextual factors?
- To what extent was the outcome intended to be achieved by the network, whether formally planned to be achieved or not?
- Were there other political outcomes that were intended to be achieved, or should have been achieved, but were not? What were they and why were they not achieved?

Depending on the purpose of the evaluation, these additional points may be optional or not. For example, regarding the second point, Rick Davies points out that a wider focus on the role of other actors, and the context, can help generate knowledge that would help make the outcomes more replicable elsewhere.¹⁵

3. The case for a participatory process

Lastly, we suggest that a network evaluation be as participatory as possible. When successful, a participatory mode of network evaluation promises a variety of significant advantages:

- Identifies achievements more comprehensively.
- Enhances learning about success and failure, more than serving as a mechanism of operational or budgetary control.

economies and political systems. Those relationships are fluid and permeable, reconfiguring as new actors and factors enter or leave or play larger or smaller roles. Furthermore, all those relationships are constantly changing, often very fast indeed. Nailing down SMART outcomes beforehand can tie down the capacity of an international social change network to respond and innovate, above all when the network commits itself to achieving those predefined results to demonstrate success to its donors.

- Appraises collectively the progress towards the political purpose and the development of the network itself.
- Serves as a mechanism for accountability to internal and external stakeholders.
- Preserves the historical memory of the common processes that gave birth to and sustain the network.
- Does justice to the core qualities of democracy and dynamism and strengthens democratic internal processes.

As Michael Quinn Patton of IDRC says, “participatory evaluation means involving people in the evaluation — not only to make the findings more relevant and more meaningful to them through their participation, but also to build their capacity for engaging in future evaluations and to deepen their capacity for evaluative thinking.”¹⁶ This is not simply recognition of the core values of an international social change network but in our experience greatly enhances the validity and cost/benefit of the evaluation. The participatory approach is uniquely suited to evaluating international social change networks where democracy and participation are treasured.

The involvement of external evaluators facilitates the process and ensures checks, balances, and the objectivity of the evaluation. We find that the greater the involvement of the network’s staff, members, allies and donors, and the more the evaluators serve as “facilitators in a joint inquiry rather than experts wielding 'objective' measuring sticks”,¹⁷ the greater will be the quality and validity of the evaluation. Perhaps most importantly, through participation the stakeholders, and especially the membership, develop the understanding and the commitment to implement the conclusions and results.

Participation begins with the network leadership working with the evaluators to design the process. Then, they mobilise the other stakeholders to assess the network’s functioning and identify, formulate and provide evidence of organic and political outcomes, usually through questionnaires and interviews with the evaluators. The analysis of the information and drawing conclusions should also involve stakeholders, for which workshops with the membership is another effective mechanism. They may not all be mutually agreed but through the participatory process mutual understanding, learning and communication is enhanced between internal and external stakeholders.

In conclusion, international social change networks are growing in importance. As with other civil society actors, they are under great from pressure within and without to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness in generating results. In our experience, understanding and evaluating them presents a fresh new challenge to all the stakeholders involved. The voluntary and diverse membership and geographical spread multiply the complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability of what they do and achieve. We have found that effective and useful evaluations of networks engage stakeholders and thus enhance learning, as well as inform the internal and external decision-making processes.

END NOTES

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³ This paper is based on Martha Nuñez and Ricardo Wilson-Grau, *Towards A Conceptual Framework for Evaluating International Social Change Networks*, April 2003. Since we continue to receive requests to reprint the original, and since that document is seriously out-dated, we decided to write this new version that we trust will be more useful to fellow practitioners.

In 2005, we worked with the methodology and made considerable changes, especially in the last two sections on assessing results and participatory evaluation. Thus, again we are indebted to the experience of our evaluation work for the Dutch development agency HIVOS. Specifically:

- Martha Nuñez y Ricardo Wilson-Grau, *Evaluación de los Efectos Directos del Programa de Apoyo de HIVOS a Contrapartes del Movimiento Ambientalista en América Latina 1999-2004*, marzo de 2005
- Mersky, Marcie and Wilson-Grau, Ricardo, *Informe Final: Facilitación - Evaluación Interna de CIFCA*, abril de 2005
- Briones Garcia, Fe and Wilson-Grau, Ricardo, *Final Report: Participatory, Capacity-Building Evaluation of the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances*, September 2005

⁴ Manuel Castells considers that we live in a 'Network Society "made up of networks of production, power and experience, which construct a culture of virtuality in the global flows that transcend time and space". Castells, M. *The information age: economy, society and culture* Vols. I and II, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

⁵ Edwards, M. and J. Gaventa, *Global Citizen Action*, London: Earthscan and Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.

⁶ Adapted from Richard Portes', Steven Yeo's and Wolfgang Reinicke's functions classification: Yeo *Creating, Managing and Sustaining Policy Research Networks*, preliminary paper, 2004; Yeo, Evaluation of the SISERA network for IDRC, Preliminary report, 2004; Portes and Yeo (2001) *Think-net: the CEPR model of a research network CEPR*. (Prepared for Workshop on Local to Global Connectivity for Voices of the Poor, 11–13 December 2000, World Bank, Washington, D.C), 2001; Reinicke et al, *Critical Choices: The UN, Networks, and the future of global governance GPPI*, Global Public Policy Institute, 2000.

⁷ "Connexity revisited" by Geoff Mulgan in McCarthy, H., P. Miller and P. Skidmore eds, *Network Logic: Who Governs In an Interconnected World?* London: Demos, 2004.

⁸ For additional recent information about civil society networks, see www.NGOConnect.net, www.impactalliance.org, <http://www.iisd.org>, <http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/projects>, www.euforic.org, www.MandE.co.uk.

⁹ Church, Madeline, et al, *Participation, Relationships and Dynamic Change: New thinking on evaluating the work of international networks*, Development Planning Unit, University College London, 2002

¹⁰ The first three are based on Madeline Church, et al.

¹¹ Comments on and reactions to *Towards a Conceptual Framework for Evaluating International Social Change Networks*, by Rick Davies, Sunday, April 27, 2003.

¹² See *Evaluating Global Networks For Social Change - Reflections of the IPHC evaluators*, March 2004, paper by Leon Bijlmakers and Leontien Laterveer; available from l.bijlmakers@etcnl.nl or crystal@etcnl.nl.

¹³ See *Outcome Mapping - Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*, Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo, International Development Research Centre, 2001.

¹⁴ Riles, A. (2001) *The network inside out*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

¹⁵ See comments of 17 December 2005 on “The ‘Attribution Problem’ Problem”, at <http://www.mandeneews.blogspot.com/>.

¹⁶ Lisa Waldick (2002-02-08), “In Conversation: Michael Quinn Patton”, *IDRC Reports* (http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-30442-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)

¹⁷ Paul Engel, Charlotte Carlsson and Arin van Zee , “Making evaluation results count: Internalising evidence by learning”, in *Policy Management Brief Policy Management Brief*, No. 16, August 2003.