

IASCP 2002 Biennial Conference

Panel proposal:

Transcending barriers: The role of networks in natural resource management

For the “New Analytic Tools for Common Property Resource Management Sub-Theme”

Panel Organisers

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Panel Abstract

The panel addresses networks and specific networking initiatives related to natural resource management (NRM). Based on specific case studies, the panel will illuminate the increasing emphasis on networking between stakeholders on various societal levels, from project and sector to the global level. It aims at shedding light on how they operate; including constraints and incentives, and in this way contributes to understanding their role and impact.

Networks have always existed as loose connections of like-minded professionals who communicate, share information and experiences on a regular basis. The development of networking programmes has largely resulted out of the need to concretise relations between individuals, institutions, and programmes and to develop advocacy channels.

The increasing globalisation has led to a search for new ways and modes of communicating between people. The advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has, largely, provided an answer to these new communications needs. Networking and networks have, as a result, taken new forms, and have also presented opportunities for the ‘mushrooming’ of networks.

There are several such modern-day networks operating within NRM today. They differ in various respects, including in terms of geographic coverage, topic matter addressed, intensity and type of activities and services offered, and in their degree of reliance on ICT. What they have in common is the fact that they are all threading unfamiliar territory, are doing mistakes and learning from those mistakes. What many of them also have in common is the fact that there is not much contact between them.

Beside electronic means of advancing networks, other means have been initiated. These include sector and thematic based individuals who decide to continue sharing information and exchanging experiences beyond the meetings and creating concrete structures of channelling the information generated and agreed upon. Others include building advocacy coalitions, which then lobby for certain policy and legislative changes. The sustainability of these networks has been possible largely due to participants maximising opportunities and getting something to bring home.

The panel will address these issues through three selected case studies of important networking activities that are currently being implemented. They are: (1) the CBNRM Support Programme in Botswana, (2) the CBNRM Net, a global knowledge management network in the area of CBNRM, and (3) the CASS/PLAAS CBNRM Network and the Africa Resources Community Outreach Programme in Southern Africa.

The cases will be prepared following the same framework, in order to facilitate discussion, comparison, and learning. Attention will be given to a critical analysis of the impact that different networks have. Incentives and constraints, as well as failures and successes, in relation to intended audiences and goals will be addressed.

Papers and Abstracts

Paper 1: CBNRM Support Programme in Botswana: Implementation challenges and opportunities

Author and Contact Information: Nico Rozemejer, SNV/IUCN CBNRM Support Programme, Botswana. Email address: <information@cbnrm.bw>.

Abstract: The CBNRM Support Initiative is based on the Netherlands Development Association (SNV)'s field experiences in the implementation of CBNRM initiatives in Botswana, and also on the World Conservation Union (IUCN) Botswana's information sharing, documentation of project approaches and the establishment of dialogue among various stakeholders on a national, regional and international level.

The initiative has three main objectives:

- To establish a focal point for CBNRM in Botswana through support to the Botswana Community Based Organisation Network (BOCOBONET),
- To make an inventory of, and, further develop CBNRM initiative approaches and best practices, and disseminate knowledge regarding implementation of CBNRM activities through the provision of information and technical advice to CBNRM actors, and
- To improve dialogue and coordination between community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, private sector and government.

Activities to achieve the above objectives have included hosting a website where information on CBNRM practice is posted, publications which are sent to regional organisations involved in CBNRM implementation and organising workshops.

This paper discusses the opportunities that have been offered in the implementation of this programme from a networking point of view and also the challenges faced both in documenting information, and in bringing different stakeholders together.

Paper 2: CBNRM Net: Knowledge management and networking for the global CBNRM community of practice

Author and Contact Information: Lars T Soeftestad (for contact information see above)

Abstract: CBNRM as a separate focus of inquiry and practice is growing fast. Its attraction would appear to lie in its marrying of – and dialectic between – theory and practice, and its focus on locating itself in the real political-economical and social-cultural contexts within which the constraints – as well as incentives – to optimal and sustainable community-based NRM is located. It is this long-term and realistic approach that has led to CBNRM being accepted as a realistic approach and model for local-level change mechanisms.

CBNRM Net is, at one and the same time, a corollary of these developments and is, in turn, contributing to furthering this agenda. The paper briefly spells out the history of CBNRM Net, before addressing its rationale and mode of operation.

CBNRM Net was established to address expressed needs to develop and manage adequate networking capabilities, as voiced by members of the global CBNRM community of practice. Given the characteristics of this community of practice, the only feasible way of creating and maintaining such a networking capability was through use of the Internet, and a dedicated CBNRM portal web site was established. At the same time, due to idiosyncrasies of the membership, reliance on the Internet alone would have been very limiting. Thus a regular Newsletter is a key element in the overall networking and communication strategy.

The rationale for CBNRM Net's operation is built upon a few key principles: (1) Management and sharing of CBNRM knowledge, (2) Use as well as production of CBNRM knowledge, and (3) A decentralized management structure. CBNRM Net is currently in a pilot phase. Although the coverage is global there is at present a special focus on Africa.

The exposition is divided in two, as follows: (1) CBNRM Net as a network with a specific local agenda, and (2) CBNRM Net as a network of networks. The former is exemplified by CBNRM Net's evolving agenda in Francophone and Anglophone West Africa. A major factor preventing networking across borders, sectors and issues is the two languages found here. CBNRM Net is, in collaboration with other initiatives both within the sub-region as well as from the outside, working to address this.

However, a major problem is that the networks discussed in this panel are defined – strategically and operationally – within specific geographic, thematic or other contexts. This creates barriers to the kind and amount of communication and networking that is possible. CBNRM Net aims to address these problems by linking these networks and, in effect, becoming a network of networks.

Paper 3: Networking for natural resource management. Reconciling the technology gap between rural communities and urban decision makers in Southern Africa

Author and Contact Information: Webster Whande (for contact information see above)

Abstract: Various networking activities are underway in Southern Africa. Two of these include the Community Outreach Programme (COP), an initiative that uses theatre and the arts as a means of networking. The second one is the CASS/PLAAS CBNRM programme of analysis and communications.

1.) The COP aims to take policies and legislative messages from decision and policy makers to communities and similarly, communities' responses, views and perspectives to the decision makers. It also takes messages across Southern African countries, offering a platform for the sharing of messages across the region. Results indicate that the success of this programme depends on applying local languages and portraying messages in a 'fun' way when communicating policies. The programme has been implemented through various activities including field activities in which facilitators interact with communities as well as inter-country exchanges of community natural resource management initiatives and regional tours targeting decision makers in the urban areas.

2.) The CASS/PLAAS programme is a research and communications programme that uses electronic means of communication. This programme appeals to an exclusive applied research and practitioner audience as compared to the COP. Its approach is also varied in that it has combined electronic means of networking with field research projects where regional participants get an opportunity to visit other CBNRM initiatives in the region and share experiences. Research materials are shared with stakeholders in the region through newsletters, website, regional meetings and networking visits. The combination of the activities from practical field research to electronic means of communications has contributed to the success of this programme.

This paper discusses these two initiatives on a comparative basis. In this comparison I conclude that any single approach cannot be sufficient in communicating the complex messages on natural resource management. Aspects of the two different initiatives need to be combined if effective applied research on the impact of policy on natural resource management, community perspectives and views and also feedback to decision makers are to be achieved.