

# Networking for ASP: A Practical Framework

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## **PART I – A background to networking: the importance of networking, types of networks and the functions of networks**

### **Introduction**

In principal, most people agree that the idea of networking is good. Networks can help people and organisations achieve more if they work together than if they work alone. For example, social services networks, such as the Non-Formal Education Network, can:

- Enable organisations to share resources such as educational materials, knowledge and expertise, staff and financial resources.
- Help organisations develop coordinated programme and project plans that avoid duplicating each other's work.
- Communicate more effectively with other people and organisations.

Establishing and sustaining an effective network, however, is difficult. Many networks do not work effectively at all, which has led some people to refer to networks as “*notworks!*” This, unfortunately, has led to a belief by some people and organisations that networking is impractical, foolish and a waste of resources (Ashman 2004).

### **Why is networking important?**

Development objectives can often be achieved more effectively through coordination and cooperation than if individual organisations and people work independently. This is the main reason why people and organisations network (Ashman 2004).

Most people have their own network of family, friends, colleagues and professional contacts. Take a moment to think about the people in your own personal network. Some people such as members of your family and your friends will be in your network because of bonds of friendship, love, family ties and mutual respect. Other people will be in your network because they help you achieve your own goals (which you may be required to reciprocate). We can learn important things about why inter-organisational networking is important by using examples from our own, personal network. Here we will look at the aspects of efficiency, effectiveness and reciprocation.

### **Efficiency**

Your own, personal network probably includes shopkeepers who sell fresh vegetables, meat and other food items. Imagine if these people didn't exist and, instead of buying the food items you need, you had to grow your own vegetables, raise your own chickens, and keep cows for milk. It would be terribly inefficient.

In the same way, an inter-organisational network can help each member be more **efficient**. For example, an organisation that already has staff that can produce literacy materials could be mobilised by the network to develop learning materials that can be used by other members. Another organisation that has a lot of staff in the field could be mobilised through the network to run literacy classes.

### Effectiveness

While the focus of efficiency is on using making better use of scarce resources, the focus of effectiveness is on achieving goals and objectives. As in the previous example, imagine there are no shopkeepers in your network who sell food. It would make it very difficult to feed your family and help them stay in good health, which is a goal common to most families.

In the same way, the members of a network can help each other be more **effective**. For example, the NFEC can make policy recommendations to the Minister, which will help the other network partners achieve their goals without interference, network members with skills in advocacy can help other network partners secure funding by advocating for their cause.

### Reciprocation

Reciprocation is another important principal we can learn from our own, personal network. **Reciprocation** in a network simply means that each member should receive benefits from being in the network in exchange for the time, expertise and resources they contribute. For example, the reason why the shopkeepers in your personal network are willing to give you food is because you give something back to them that they value – money.

Organisations that contribute to the network, but receive nothing in return will soon leave the network. For example, if one member contributes time to organise a network meeting, they could reasonably expect to receive something of value in return, such as new knowledge of best practices, an opportunity to publicise their work or the opportunity to contribute in policy discussion.

### What is a network?

We have looked at reasons why networking is important, but what is a network? A network is a group of people and organisations that collaborate to achieve a common goal. Networks usually consist of a relatively large number of people and organisations whereas other collaborative structures, such as partnerships, only consist of a few people and organisations (Leibler & Ferri 2004). For example, in most cases, just two or three organisations work together to run ASP classes in a village (this is a partnership), whereas the National Non-Formal Education Network Network, for example, has many members (this is a network).

The concept of networking is not new to Nepal. There is a long, historical and culturally embedded practice of networking in Nepal's indigenous communities (Bhattachan 2008). For example

The **Bheja** is a multipurpose voluntary organization of the Magars of Western Nepal. It is a network of households that work together to perform functions that relate to religion, agriculture, resource management, entertainment and conflict management.

The **Dhikur** of the the Thakalis, Gurungs and Bhotes of the Western Himalayan and hill region is a voluntary credit association, which is used to raise capital to run businesses. The participants in the Dhikur network pool their contributions, which are given to one household, usually beginning with the most needy household in the community. The recipients use the money to conduct business and repay the loan to the Dhikur, which is then recycled to other households.

The **Guthi** system of the Newars is a network of households that are formed based on clan, lineage or territory. The households work together for the purpose of improving agriculture, preserving culture, managing philanthropic endowments and running businesses such as oil processing cooperatives. As households may join more than one Guthi, the Guthi may become a network of networks.

## Types of networks

What do these indigenous networks have in common with the more recent move to establish inter-organisational networks for development? Traditional networks and recent networks share some common characteristics; they can be formal or informal, they may exist for a general or a specific purpose, they may exist for a specified time period or for an indefinite time period, they may have a centralised or a decentralised structure. These characteristics are described below.

### Formal and informal networks

In practice many networks are partially formal and partially informal. For the purpose of comparing formal and informal networks the following table illustrates the differences.

Formal Networks	Informal Networks
<b>Members must formally apply to join the network and often pay a registration and/or a membership fee.</b>	Organisations people become part of the network when they have a common interest or are doing similar work to other organisations, which leads to cooperation and information sharing.
<b>A formal network has a formal structure that defines roles and responsibilities in the network. For example, the NNN has a secretary (the Director of the NFEC) a technical partner (CERID) and other clearly defined roles.</b>	Roles and responsibilities are not defined. Different people or organisations might take on different roles and responsibilities at different times, depending upon the changing needs of the network.
<b>The network operates according to explicit rules and guidelines.</b>	There are no explicit rules or guidelines. The way the network operates evolves to meet the changing needs of the network.
<b>Lines of communication are clearly defined. For example, communication with network partners might be channelled through the secretariat in the form of newsletters or official mail.</b>	Partners communicate with each other whenever and in whatever way is necessary.

Table 1: Characteristics of formal and informal networks.

It is important to note, that neither formal nor informal networks are better than each other – they simply serve different purposes at different times.

According to the criteria outlined above, the NNN is a formal network. It has formal membership requirements, a formal structure, CERID is producing a guideline to direct the operation of the network and formal communication is directed through the network's secretariat. However, some of the organisations, who are members of the NNN, also have their own informal networks of organisations and partners that they work with to achieve their own organisation's goals and objectives.

### **General purpose and specific purpose networks**

Some networks exist for a very specific purpose. For example, the network of people and organisations involved in the implementation of the National Mass Literacy Campaign is a network with a specific purpose. Other networks have a more general purpose such as to share knowledge and expertise between network members, to facilitate mutual learning in an area of common interest, to develop and share best practices or to deliver services.

Every network should have a purpose, which gives it a reason to exist. People and organisations will never commit their time, effort and resources to sustaining a network that has no purpose. The NNN is primarily a general purpose network. The main challenge to sustaining a general purpose network, such as the NNN, is to ensure that members value the benefits they receive in return for the time, effort and resources they commit to the network.

### **Time-bound and enduring networks**

Some networks are time-bound; in other words, some networks exist for a specific period of time, then they are dissolved. Other networks are supposed to continue indefinitely; these networks are "enduring" networks.

The NNN is an enduring network; its members intend the network to continue indefinitely. It is a challenge to sustain an enduring network, because the interest of the members to participate in network-related activities must be maintained indefinitely. This requires strong leadership to facilitate regular communication and sustain the network's activities.

### **Centralised and decentralised networks**

Centralisation refers to the degree to which decision making processes, direction for the network and communication is maintained by a person or organisation or is spread throughout the network's partners (Church et al 2002).

Decentralised networks are not necessarily better than centralised networks and vice versa – the most appropriate structure depends upon the needs of the network and its members. However, it is important that in a relatively centralised network structure, like the NNN, that the network members are given an opportunity to give their input into decisions and can communicate effectively with other members of the network.

## **Functions of a network**

So far this paper has explained why organisations choose to participate in networks and what form networks take. Now, we look at how networks actually operate in three key areas; communication, resource sharing and mobilisation and coordinated planning and implementation.

### **Communication**

In a network, communication is both a means to coordinate network activities and an end in itself as effective communication supports democratic processes.

Coordination is impossible without communication. Network members need to share plans, monitoring and evaluation reports, directions and work instructions and knowledge with each other in order to coordinate activities.

Communication is also necessary to ensure that every member has the opportunity to give their input into decisions. Decisions cannot be made democratically without communication between network members.

Communication between network members can take many forms. Most networks will use one or more of the following ways of communicating between members:

- A network newsletter (either online or printed)
- An online discussion forum (such as a BBS)
- A network website
- Meetings, workshops and seminars
- Memos, letters and circulars
- Telephone/fax
- Radio or television programmes

### **Resource Sharing and Mobilisation**

When resources are shared through a network, it enables each member to do their work more effectively and efficiently. It avoids duplication of efforts, which wastes resources, and helps organisations focus on the work they are best at.

Some of the resources that can be shared through a network include:

- Teaching and learning materials
- Staff with special skills
- Knowledge, such as knowledge of best practices and results of research.
- Financial resources

### **Coordinated planning and implementation**

Developing and implementing activities using coordinated plans also helps reduce wastage of scarce resources and helps mobilise each member to do the jobs they are most suited to. For example, by

implementing coordinated plans it can help reduce the problem of having many organisations that work in a single district, such as Rupandehi, but few organisations working in neighbouring districts.

## **PART II - The role of networking in the CASP project**

Networking was the third strategic output of the CASP pilot project. The rationale for including networking in CASP was to improve the sharing of knowledge and resources between stakeholders in ASP (Tsubouchi, pers. comm. 2009). Building on the framework above, this section of the report will review the output of the networking component of the CASP Pilot Project including:

- The type of networking used as part of the CASP Pilot Project
- The activities that were used to facilitate communication, resource sharing and coordinated planning
- The extent to which these activities contributed to the efficiency, effectiveness and benefits derived by the stakeholders will be assessed

This will lead to the identification of challenges, counter-measures and opportunities in Part III

The information for this section is derived from CASP's annual reports and other internal documents, case studies and information gathered from participants through workshops.

### **Network Structure**

Three separate, though loosely interconnected, networks existed during the CASP pilot. The three networks corresponded with the three main levels of project implementation:

- There was a network of people at the **community level** that existed to support and provide resources for the local ASP classes. This network was closely related to the Community Mobilisation activities of the CASP Pilot.
- There was a network of people and organisations at the **district level** that existed to provide support and access resources for all the ASP classes in the district.
- There was a network of people and organisations at the **central level** that existed to plan ASP activities, formulate policy and develop project guidelines.

The structure of these three networks was quite different. Using the framework defined above, the characteristics of the three networks can be identified (see Table 2 below).

	Community Level	District Level	Central Level
<b>Network Formality</b>	<p><b><u>Informal network</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No formal membership requirements</li> <li>• Roles not explicitly defined and changeable</li> <li>• No formal rules or guidelines for operating the network</li> <li>• Lines of communication are informal with no formal secretariat</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Semi-formal network</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No formal membership requirements, but participation in the network determined by partnership agreements (eg. With NGOs) and position in Government institutional structure (eg. Resource Person).</li> <li>• Roles in the network loosely defined by societal position or job title, eg. district level networking led by DEO because of position in education system.</li> <li>• No formal rules or guidelines for operating the network at the district level.</li> <li>• Lines of communication determined by pilot project structure. Eg. Facilitator reporting to CMC, CMC reporting to DEO.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Semi-formal network for CASP (linked to the NNN, which is a formal network)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No formal membership requirements, but participation in the CASP network determined by position in the Government institutional structure. CASP also participated in the NNN, which is a formal network for NFE in Nepal.</li> <li>• Roles in the CASP network loosely defined by job title and function.</li> <li>• No formal rules or guidelines for operating the network at the central level, but regular formal meetings were held for members of the CASP network.</li> <li>• Lines of communication defined by institutional structure of the government.</li> </ul>
<b>Time-frame</b>	<p><b><u>Enduring</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People at the community level committed local resources including land and buildings to support ASP. They have indicated their interest to support future ASP classes.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Time-bound with enduring practices</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While the network for CASP may cease at the end of the pilot, some of the practices such as DEO distributing regular newsletters will continue.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Time-bound for CASP pilot</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unless further instructions given by NFE Director/Ministry of Education, the CASP network will not continue after the pilot. However, the institutionalised network within the government system and the NNN will continue.</li> </ul>
<b>Centralisation</b>	<p><b><u>Somewhat decentralised</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The CMC acted as a central forum for discussion about ASP classes, but did not have a formal role in channelling information through the community level network.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Somewhat centralised</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given the nature of government institutions in Nepal and the design of the project, communication in the district level network occurred through the DEO in meetings and other central activities.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Centralised</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication about CASP centralised through CASP office and NFEC and CASP initiated most of the networked activities.</li> </ul>

Table 2: Characteristics of the CASP network at different levels of implementation.

## Networking Activities

CASP conducted a number of networking activities while implementing the Community-based Alternative Schooling Project. These activities are recorded below and categorised according to their networking function; communication, resource sharing and coordinated planning.

### Communication

- CASP produced a regular newsletter to share information about the CASP project with its partners and other stakeholders. The newsletter was produced in Nepali and English. Altogether, CASP produced and distributed 19 editions of the newsletter.  
*(2004 – 2009)*
- CASP published a PR brochure about the Community-based Alternative Schooling Project and printed a calendar to share with network partners.  
*(2004 – 2005)*
- Meetings were conducted with stakeholders involved in Primary School Dropout Children (PSDC) to share information about new programmes for PSDCs.  
*(2004 – 2005)*
- Sharing workshops were held regularly to share information with stakeholders about progress on the CASP Pilot.  
*(2004 – 2009)*
- Additional stakeholders, such as the Department of Education Planning Officers, were invited to participate in Technical Team Meetings  
*(2004 – 2009)*
- In January 2008, a workshop targeting relevant organisations (donor agencies, NGOs and INGOs) on “Sharing Best Practices on Networking NFE Children” was held. Participants shared best practices concerning NFE for children at the field level and confirmed follow-up activities for strengthening the network.  
*(2008)*
- A discussion forum system (BBS) was developed to facilitate communication between network partners.  
*(2008)*

### Resource Sharing

- ASP classrooms were prepared and equipped and conducted as a result of networking/coordination among the community, VDC and partner NGO.  
*(2005 – 2006)*
- PSDC implementation manual and Training manual for EP of PSDC after the PSDC workshops in central level and field level were conducted by CASP/NFEC  
*(2005 – 2006)*

- In Dhading, school uniforms were provided to ASP children with the collaboration of the community, DEO, and CASP. DEO and CASP provided financial support and communities contributed to improving the class environment such as toilet construction, planting fruit in the vicinity of classes, and providing bags and slippers.  
*(2006 – 2007)*
- In Kathmandu, as a result of networking with local bodies, an SOP class received funding to refurbish its classroom and field with the cooperation of the local VDC and community. This class is currently petitioning for formal school after ASP is terminated.  
*(2007 – 2008)*
- CASP produced an ASP Guideline to help stakeholders implement the Community-based Alternative Schooling model of ASP. The Guideline was disseminated widely as a resource for other organisation to use.  
*(2008 – 2009)*

### **Coordinated planning and project implementation**

- A workshop (concerning PSDC) was held at central level with stakeholders involved in NFE for children, to develop a new programme for school drop-out children  
*(2004 – 2005)*
- A first meeting was held of the Network for NFE for children and was followed by continuing networking activities such as working meeting among stakeholders.  
*(2006 – 2007)*
- Following discussion by MoES, NFEC, DoE and target DEOs in an Intensive Workshop, issues were summarised and a proposal to improve the ASP was presented to concerned organisations, including donors, during EFA missions in June and December 2006.  
*(2006 – 2007)*
- NFEC planned and conducted a workshop in June 2006 for discussion about ASP collaboration and coordination among MoES, NFEC, DoE and concerned DEO staff.  
*(2006 -2007)*
- PSDC Monitoring workshops in District Level and Central Level were conducted by the CASP/NFEC, resulting in ideas for the “Education Promoters’ Handbook”  
*(2006 -2007)*
- Following discussion by MoES, NFEC, DoE and target DEOs in an Intensive Workshop, participants summarised issues and presented a proposal for improving ASP to concerned organisations, including donors, during EFA missions in May and December 2007  
*(2007 – 2008)*

### **Impact of networking activities on the CASP Pilot Project**

From the outset, it should be noted that it is difficult to assess the true impact of networking in the CASP pilot project. In lieu of a comprehensive study about communication, resource sharing and coordinated

planning/implementation, case studies will be presented here to illustrate how networking benefited certain aspects of the CASP project and the communities that hosted ASP classes based on the CASP model.

### **Communication**

Communication between participants in a network is a critical part of achieving joint goals and cooperating to implement effective projects. Communication through the CASP network was achieved through regular meetings at the community, district and central level. Information about the CASP Pilot was also disseminated through newsletters that were produced by the District Education Offices and the CASP Office as illustrated by the case example below.

#### ***Case Example***

Through the support of CASP, the District Education Offices in Dhading and Kathmandu began publishing and distributing a monthly newsletter about education in their respective districts. Altogether, the Dhading DEO produced 20 newsletters and distributed about 200 copies per edition. The Kathmandu produced 8 newsletters and distributed about 300 copies per edition. The Dhading DEO, in particular, found the newsletter was an important tool for sharing information about the CASP pilot in VDCs without ASP classes. They were motivated to continue producing the newsletter. Now, it has been recognised as regular/institutionalised work and will be sustained after completion of the CASP pilot.

Similarly, the CASP Office in Saano Thimi produced a regular newsletter to share information about CASP at the central, district and community levels. CASP produced 18 newsletters in English and Nepali and printed 200 copies and 400 copies respectively. These were distributed among network partners and the general public at Education/Literacy Day, workshops, meetings and other events.

### **Resource Sharing**

Throughout the CASP pilot, network participants, particularly at the community and district levels, supported ASP classes by providing resources (in the case of communities) or securing resources through official channels (in the case of the DEOs). This is illustrated in the following case example from Chainmale VDC in Kathmandu District.

#### ***Case Example***

Initially, ASP classes were held in a small rented room. However, the room did not have enough light or enough space. Additionally, the class was closed each time there was a religious ceremony in the owner's house. People and organisations in the community decided a dedicated classroom should be constructed in the village. Mr Suk Bahadur Bhomjan, a member of the Chainmale community, agreed to provide land at no cost to construct a classroom. The work of building the classroom and fitting it out with furniture was coordinated and supported by the VDC. In this way, the network at the community level worked to share resources to support ASP.

### **Coordinated Planning**

Coordinated planning is important because it helps reduce duplication of work, which is inefficient and wastes resources. It also helps ensure the people and organisations with the right skills can be deployed in the right way to make programmes more effective.

### *Case Example*

**<Note: I STILL hope we can find a better case example than this one. Is there a case example of the writing of a coordinated plan for the EFA mission?>**

In June 2006, the Technical Team of NFEC initiated talks in a form of a workshop with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Department of Education (DoE) regarding issues concerning the ASP. At this workshop, participants examined issues of the policy and operation of the program, suggested and discussed measures. This process helped the participants become more aware of the problems in the field level reality. However, no practical counteraction was drawn up during the course of the event. An “action plan” reflecting the outcome of this networking was generated by the concerned parties but misses such specifics as who is responsible and what s/he is responsible for.

## **PART III – Challenges, counter-measures and opportunities**

**Stakeholder analysis is an essential foundation for building strong networks and should be done prior to planning future CASP-based activities.**

The project stakeholders include any person or any organisation that can influence the implementation of the project or will be affected by it. For example, institutional members, children in the community (both in and out of school), the children’s families, local business owners, other members of the community, political party members, donors and others should all be included in the stakeholder analysis.

A stakeholder analysis should be conducted in a participatory manner to give as many stakeholders as possible the opportunity to state their relationship to and interest in the project. The stakeholder analysis is more than a list, it should also tell us about the precise nature of each stakeholder’s relationship to the project, the resources they command, identify potential conflicts of interest and each stakeholder’s relative power and influence over the project.

A thorough stakeholder analysis is an essential foundation to networking. It not only tells us who should be included in the network, but also tells us what they can contribute to the network and how they will relate to other members of the network.

At the community level, a stakeholder analysis was conducted as part of the CASP Pilot’s Community Mobilisation activities. It helped identify the key people and organisations that could be mobilised as part of the community-level network to help plan, implement and provide resources.

At the district and central levels of the project, stakeholders were identified. Their relationships to each other, and to the project were mapped on a relational diagram. However, a thorough analysis of their roles, responsibilities, command of resources and potential conflicts of interest were not identified. For example, the need to include VDC-level politicians and officers in the network was not identified until a VDC-level workshop was held in 2009, though they could have been valuable members of the network.

### **The reason for using networking should be clearly defined.**

Networking was identified as one of the three strategic outputs from CASP pilot, but the reason for networking was not very clear. Future implementations should clearly define how the network will perform these activities and who will perform them.

### **In the CASP pilot, a *networked approach* to project implementation was used, appropriate methods/approaches to improving *networking* were not used.**

There is a difference between using a *networked approach* and improving *networking*. In the case of CASP, a networked approach was primarily used to achieve project objectives. Less emphasis was given to improving the capability (or the desire) of member organisations to participate in coordinated planning and project implementation. However, the examples where CASP did focus on improving networking had excellent and sustainable results. For example, CASP support to the DEOs to produce a regular newsletter has become an institutionalised part of the work of the Kathmandu and Dhading DEOs.

In future, tools, such as a website for communication, sharing of educational materials and participating in coordinated planning, should be adopted by the Government of Nepal to improve networking.

### **The Discussion Forum system, that was developed by CASP, has not been utilised by the network partners.**

There are two reasons for this:

- The NNN, which is a formal network led by the NFEC, exists in name only. The results of a recent workshop with NNN members clearly indicates that the network is not currently operational. Therefore the Discussion Forum system (BBS), which was designed for the network, is not being utilised.
- The Non-Formal Education Centre needs to improve communication between network partners. For this, ICT-based communication (such as the Discussion Forum system) can play a strong role in building a strong network for NFE in Nepal.

Lack of support for utilising new technologies to strengthen networking for NFE in Nepal, limits the capacity of all NFE-related networks, both formal (the NNN) and the informal inter-organisational networks to communicate, share resources and participate in coordinated planning.

The Non-Formal Education Centre should establish and use a web-based system to support networking for NFE in Nepal. The NFEC must consider this to be of prime importance, rather than sidelining it as a mere novelty.

## **Conclusion**

Networking is more than just a passing development fad. Rather, it is a vitally important mechanism for inter-organisational cooperation to achieve development goals. However, the concept of networking is often poorly understood and poorly implemented which leads people to believe that the idea of network is, in itself, flawed.

Networking needs to be included in the scale-up and replication of CASP. However, the reason for networking and the means of networking needs to be clarified in advance, a thorough stakeholder analysis should be conducted at all levels of the project, the capacity of members to participate in the network should be improved and tools, such as a web-based networking website must be developed to support networking processes. This will help organisations in the network communicate with each other more effectively, share and use resources more efficiently and cooperate to develop joint plans and activities, which will have long-term benefits for the people in Nepal who rely upon the NFE system for their education.

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