



“Guidelines for Establishing & Managing a Network”

Guidelines for Establishing & Managing a Network consist of accumulated experience on how to make networks more effective. Networks come into existence for a specific purpose but often the management of the network itself is underestimated resulting in reduced success.

The tools address starting up a network, how to establish and run it. There are specific lessons and examples which draw specifically on capacity building networks but many of these are also applicable to other networks and partnerships formed for a different purpose. The information presented here is intended to assist the start up group and network managers to reflect and make informed decisions on the establishment and developing of a network. This document will be of use for anyone considering offering support to networks in order to address capacity building in IWRM, and will be complemented and updated on a regular basis.

The following is the structure of this document:

1. [Do we need a network?](#)
 - [*Why establish a network?*](#)
 - [*What will be the purpose of the network?*](#)
 - [*Who should be members of the network?*](#)
 - [*The network as an organisation*](#)
 - [*Building commitment*](#)

2. [Establishing a network](#)
 - [*Starting up*](#)
 - [*Strategic position of a network*](#)
 - [*Membership strengthening*](#)
 - [*Management for establishing*](#)
 - [*Secretariat*](#)
 - [*Legal and institutional status*](#)
 - [*Operational guidelines/ Constitution.*](#)
 - [*What should be in there?*](#)
 - [*Examples*](#)
 - [*Funding*](#)
 - [*Delivering capacity building*](#)

3. [Further reading](#)

1. Do we need a network?

Networks and partnerships are spoken of frequently as good tools to deliver capacity building. But is it the right instrument? The following section presents guiding points to be addressed when deciding to establish a network for capacity building.

Thinking at the outset about the reason for the formation of a network and what it is expected to achieve, provides a clearer understanding of the expectations, the necessary conditions and the potential members. This will provide the basis for discussion, gaining consensus and commitment before moving into establishment.

[back](#)

Why establish a network?

Networks are usually informal linkages between people and institutions that have a common interest in working together and see some benefits emerging.

A network can be defined as a group of actors or members (individuals or institutions) who contribute resources or time in a two way exchange or communication, interacting to achieve common objectives. Networks can be structured in different ways, but the existence of a secretariat or a managing or facilitating body is considered as a prerequisite to be defined as a network.

Therefore reasons to establish a network have to be considered from the view of the members, as well as from the external environment.

Any one benefit may be enough to make a network effective and as long as the benefits are being gained then the network will remain together. As soon as benefits are not being felt then the network will start to fall apart.

Using the example of capacity building networks for Integrated Water Resources Management, benefits can be divided into those of the members and those of society (See Box)

From the perspective of society it may be a good thing that the network is in place but if the members themselves do not see the personal benefit then the network will not be sustained.

Obtained benefits are the "glue" of the network. They maintain the commitment and are the ultimate objective of the member. Being part of a network not only gives benefits, it requires investment in time and resources.

Benefits of networking for capacity building on IWRM

Benefits to society

- ✓ Overcome weaknesses of individual institutions or individuals
- ✓ Improve delivery capacity by combining skills from different professions
- ✓ Sharing of resources
- ✓ Economy of scale
- ✓ Enhanced impact

Benefits to members

- ✓ Linkage and exchange with peers
- ✓ Access to resources
- ✓ Access to new information and experience
- ✓ Financial gain
- ✓ Access to more work
- ✓ Earn influence and prominence
- ✓ Practical support to capacity building delivery
- ✓ Lessons learned (sharing experiences)

Different members can have different interest and look for different benefits from the network. Network managers need to consider this for planning and management purposes.

Networks are often inward looking and are like clubs of members with a common interest (like football). However in the case of capacity building the benefits should also be searched outside by the improved delivery of quality and timely capacity building from a better informed, able and motivated group.

Thus for capacity building in water:

1. Networks can create the multidisciplinary base necessary for the introduction and support of complex approaches, like integrated water resources management.
2. By combining scattered strengths of institutions into a critical mass networks can maximise use of local skills and enhance local ownership and relevance of capacity building.
3. By sharing knowledge and expertise through communication and collaboration, networks combine strengths, and each member becomes stronger. Networking develops in a learning environment.
4. Networks enhance the impact of the delivered products by coordinating and making use of other members' capacity, skills and experience.

FROM EXPERIENCE: *Three main reasons to establish the network are the strongest:*

1. *Strengthening the knowledge of capacity builders in IWRM, and*
2. *Increasing capacity building support to water sector reforms.*
3. *Acknowledgment of the existence of a critical mass demanding capacity building*

[back](#)

What will be the purpose of the network?

The reasons to establish the network shape the purpose and membership of it. The clear definition and understanding of what is the final goal to be reached provides the answer to this question. Starting from an understanding of the problem situation and the definition of the vision, goal and objectives a network may be identified as the appropriate instrument to achieve the goal.

1. Understanding the problem situation is a basic input for the required network planning and the definition of activities to accomplish
2. Definition of the network purpose, including the vision, objectives, principles and values to be adopted.
3. The network is not the end goal, but a mechanism to deliver project objectives.
4. The purpose of the network may also define its geographic limits, whether global, regional or national.
5. The purpose definition sets the network timeframe.

WaterNet vision

"To enable the people of Southern Africa to efficiently and effectively manage their water resources, WaterNet seeks to enhance regional capacity in Integrated Water Resources Management through training, education, research and outreach by harnessing the complementary strengths of the region."

Networks for capacity building are a vital tool to support water sector reform but individual members must see the benefits of networking or it will fail. Local ownership, relevance and sustainability can be increased through capacity building networks.

LA WETnet Latin American Water Education Training Network Objectives

Development Objective

The common development objective of all network members from the Latin American countries is to enhance human resource development for Integrated Water Resources Management and improve better access of water and sanitation for all.

Immediate Objectives

- i. To strengthen the capacity of regional capacity building institutions enabling them to deliver Integrated Water Resources Management training and education activities within the region.
- ii. To strengthen the overall human and institutional capacity within water sector institutions and water resources management related institutions in the region in order to contribute to an integrated and sustainable use of water resources.

[back](#)

Who should be members of the network?

The purpose of a network shapes the membership. A network on groundwater will have groundwater specialists and a network on capacity building in water should have capacity building and water specialists. Capacity building networks should have the purpose to improve capacity building skills of a target group then it may be considered how the target group and clients are to be involved in the process – either as members, as advisors, or in a regular consultative mechanism.

When deciding on who can to be a member, several considerations must be made in order to provide a membership suitable for the network purpose. It is important to do this at an early stage so that the right target group are involved from the outset:

1. Specify the target membership on the basis of the network purpose e.g. capacity building institutions and individuals.
2. Will it be a closed/ exclusive membership or an open/ inclusive membership?
3. Is there a geographic limitation or focus which will affect membership?

FROM EXPERIENCE: *Membership needs to be broad enough to include all the multisectoral skills in integrated water resources management. Open and inclusive networks make maximum use of local expertise.*

[back](#)

The network as an organisation

Networks usually start as informal associations of people with a common interest. It is usually better to allow the informality to continue for a time until experience can support the critical decision whether to move for a formal legal status or not. The informality phase gives time to the newly formed links between members to become more strong and also it is a period where commitment to networking on behalf of the members can be felt. Further discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of legalisation will take place in the next section.

A host institution is usually essential at the beginning and may be associated with the champion behind the network or an interested and committed institution in the sector.

FROM EXPERIENCE: *Start off informal but look around for a host institution with influence and willing to give most backing to the network. Commitment of one or two individuals as drivers is critical to establishment.*

[back](#)

Building commitment

By definition a network is not just one person. Therefore the vision has to be shared amongst a group of like minded people. At what point does this happen? How does the network actually start?

Networks for capacity building have emerged as a result of:

- Demand for capacity building support from Regional Water Partnerships;
- Interest of professional capacity builders in the water sector.

However the idea has to be 'sold' and this can be done by:

- Bringing some key regional or national respected institutions into the planning,
- Drawing a critical mass of capacity building institutions or individuals into the planning group;
- Having a sound financial planning
- Making the benefits clear and attractive for potential new members
- Having a relevant purpose, linked to the reforms in the water sector.

FROM EXPERIENCE: *The backing of influential institutions speeds acceptance and access to broader support.*

[back](#)

2. Establishing a network

Having gained commitment to the idea of a network, how is it actually established? As networks are largely informal, it may be said to be established as soon as two or three people start to work together! However the process of establishment may be a long one and the transition from establishment into implementation is often blurred because network activities are means to build commitment and strengthen links in development between members.
[back](#)

Strategic position of a network

According to its coverage networks can be classified as local, national, regional or global. It is also defined by its focus of activity e.g. capacity building. In addition to this the network needs to clearly determine the type of activity it will engage in and how it will fit into the existing framework of interests. This is a strategic decision, which may affect its future success, and how it will be perceived.

There are some key points to be considered:

1. The network should not compete with its members and should look for complementarity, building on the strengths of the members.
2. Networks can bring benefits of scale, knowledge and skills together for sharing facilitating activities that may not be feasible by individual members.
3. The network can provide a focal point for exchange with the international community accessing international knowledge and resources.
4. An open network allows a member to join and also to leave when it considers that appropriate.
5. Open and inclusive networks enhance commitment, local ownership and leadership through participation and decentralisation.

FROM EXPERIENCE: *If networks decentralise activities and use the strength of their members this avoids competition and increases network performance, network benefits to members and output.*

[back](#)

Starting up

In several cases capacity building networks have started up with a meeting or workshop of one form or another. Usually with a mixture of capacity builders and the users of capacity building services – the implementers. This gives a better understanding of the benefits of networking and the rationale for forming a network.

In other cases a project proposal has originated first and then been used as a basis for 'selling' the idea further. Whatever the case, whenever a group have decided that a network is necessary and identified a small 'working group' to pursue then it can be said that the network is born.

Three key areas need to be considered immediately:

- **Membership strengthening.** Attract new members. What benefits can be brought to potential members in terms of information, training, exchange and development of skills.
- **Network management.** How will the network be managed and administered. Where will it be located and how will it recruit and communicate with members. Where will it get the operational funds, what will be the operational guidelines to be followed? These are some of the aspects to be addressed and are mainly covered in these tools.

- **Delivering capacity building.** How will it work to increase delivery capacity building to water managers and other water stakeholders? Work planning, target groups, main focus areas and strategy of the network, linkage with the target group.

FROM EXPERIENCE: Start up can be slow unless there is a well motivated person in charge, preferably with some seed money to enable some activities to begin. It is important to demonstrate the network is alive as soon as possible by raising visibility through one or two activities.

[back](#)

Membership strengthening

The success of any network depends upon commitment and interest of members. The benefits of membership were mentioned earlier as key motivating factors for this commitment. Now, as the network moves into establishment further clarity is required as to who to include, or exclude, as members. Selection criteria should bring in the right kind of members to achieve the goals and objectives of the network.

However, for capacity building in integrated water resources management, one of the main reasons for forming a network is to assemble the skills and knowledge that is otherwise scattered across many different institutions and disciplines. For this reason the network needs to be open and inclusive to try to draw the skills of other professionals (e.g. lawyers, economists, environment, social science) into the water sector.

The following should be taken into account when building membership:

1. The focus area of the network (Capacity building requires capacity builders as members).
2. The geographic scope of the network.
3. The need for multidisciplinary skills to address integrated water resources management.
4. There is a choice to be made, between individuals and institutions as network members. Each option has advantages and disadvantages and a blend of the two is usually desirable. (see box)
5. Role of international agencies. Participation in meetings can be beneficial although they should not have a special place in relation to other members.
6. Understanding the capacity building institutions and available skills in the geographic area of the network is key to identifying members and also gaps in available skills.
7. Difference in capacity among members in terms of information, knowledge and expertise should be recognised and used to determine strategy for strengthening member competency.
8. The better the match between the goals and working methods of the network, and the aspirations and capacities of its members, the more sustainable and successful the network will be.

Institutions Vs Individuals as network members:

Individual

- + Commitment
- + Informality
- + Flexibility
- + Influence

Institution

- + Permanence/sustainability
- + Influence
- + Resource contribution
- Bureaucratic
- Lack of commitment

FROM EXPERIENCE: Committed individuals get the network moving and sustain the activities. Institutions are valuable as supporters and influencing resource allocation. Entry and exit of members should not be complicated.

[back](#)

Management for establishment

There are four specific areas to be attended to urgently:

- Secretariat
- Legal and institutional status
- Operational guidelines
- Funding

[back](#)

Secretariat

The secretariat is an important component of a network and needs to be carefully addressed. At the outset it may be committed individuals who give the time to the start up. This is especially true for capacity building where networks are made up of persons already employed as capacity builders and so this may be seen as part of their work and a means by which they can do their work more effectively. For this reason it may be possible to argue for an institution to support the network and the secretariat at low or no cost.

Experience has shown that network secretariats should be facilitators of activities and the activities themselves should be anchored in one or more of the network members wherever possible. This means that the secretariat may be very small and consist of the manager plus secretarial support.

Some considerations:

- Link the size of the secretariat to the actual work to be done;
- Local staffing increases sustainability;
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the available locations for the secretariat, or else its rotational location.
- Decentralise work to the extent possible to network members;
- Consider sustainability of the secretariat when making decisions about the size, remuneration and type of staff.

Rotational secretariat

Advantages

- ✓ Improves capacity at local level
- ✓ Strengthen participation
- ✓ Increases decentralisation
- ✓ Brings new ideas

Disadvantages

- Lost "momentum" each new period
- Program continuity can be affected
- Institutional memory tends to become scattered
- Communication changes according to the management style and capacities
- Uncertainty for staff continuity

FROM EXPERIENCE: *Keep the secretariat small and build commitment to the network by sharing responsibilities and benefits across the members.*

[back](#)

Legal and institutional status

Networks are often informal associations of people and institutions with a common interest. It may not be necessary or desirable to establish the network as a legal entity. Certainly this decision is not advisable at the beginning and should be deferred until the network and its members have enough experience to make an informed decision about

the most appropriate legal and institutional status. Some considerations when making this decision:

1. At the start up of a network it is necessary to have a host institution and to use the host as the legal, administrative and financial umbrella for the network. It may be possible to find a host which provides this support at low, or no cost.
2. The network can be rooted inside an institution, be an independent structure or adopt a mixed condition. The most adequate institutional framework for a network is the one that gives more advantages for its operation in terms of support and autonomy. Clear definitions of roles for operation (network/institution) are needed.
3. Giving the network a legal status can make it rigid, and reduce its capacity to adapt to changes. On the other hand, it gives backing and can be an advantage when it comes to activities that require a legal representation, like fundraising and contract signing.
4. Member's commitment to networking is required for sustainability and impact. This cannot be granted through a legal agreement. The binding element in the network are the benefits to be obtained.
5. Some of possible legal status for a network: Trust, consortium, Non profit organisation, Association. The selection should be made based on the appropriateness in the national and regional setting.

Whatever the eventual legal arrangement it is essential at the outset to establish a clear set of operational guidelines that clarify key modalities and characteristics of the network. If felt appropriate then the network members may be asked to formally sign that they agree to abide by these.

FROM EXPERIENCE: Use operational guidelines for the first year or two before deciding about legal status. If faced with institutional overhead charges ask around other institutions about hosting opportunities.

[back](#)

Operational guide / Constitution.

The operational guide may include most of the items identified in the box below. A constitution, being a legal document needs to be structured according to the principles followed in the location of the network. However the substance of the content will need to address all of the items in the box below.

The operational guide and the network constitution is the document that defines the network's niche through its vision, mission, objectives, target group, activities, membership, governance structure, institutional framework, rules and principles by which the network is governed. This is important to reduce the potential for conflict between members and to improve the smooth and effective operation of the network.

[back](#)

What should be in there?

The following is based on a review made among networks in the water sector and outside of it as well.

Elements in an operational guide or constitution

1. Network name
2. Location and network coverage (countries/region)
3. Purpose definition:
 - a. Justification (why to establish it?)
 - b. Principles to be adopted
 - c. Goals/objectives
 - d. Type of network
 - e. Institutional framework
 - f. Activities/means to achieve the goals
4. Membership
 - a. Criteria and procedures for Joining, leaving & dismissal
 - b. Type of members/categories? (e.g. Associate, supporting, regular)
 - c. Voting rights & rules for decision making
 - d. Legal representation
5. Governing/administrative bodies:
 - a. General assembly (duties, quorum, frequency (incl. special meetings), place)
 - b. Steering/ Management Committee (Composition, tenure, duties, eligibility, quorum, remuneration, vacancies, removal)
 - c. Secretariat (Composition, tenure, duties, eligibility, quorum, remuneration, vacancies, removal, meetings frequency, filing).
 - d. Auditors (Election & eligibility, tenure, duties, remuneration, vacancies, removal)
6. Ownership of assets
7. Financial resources. (How money will be managed. Consider legal –tax implications)
8. Network dissolution (how to dissolve and what to do with the assets, property rights -if they exist- ownership)
9. Modifications of the constitution (who can propose one, procedure)

[back](#)

Examples

[Waternet](#) (sample constitution)

[LA WETnet](#) (sample operational guidelines)

[Inacap-net](#)

FROM EXPERIENCE: *The preparation of an operational guide is a valuable process for building consensus about what the network is for and what it will do.*

[back](#)

Funding

Some funding support is required from an early stage to enable the network to begin operations. In some cases there may be project funding and in others access to some seed funding. However the funding strategy for the network and its sustainability is very important and needs to be developed from an early stage.

Seeking funding support through project proposals may take two years or more and so it is better to also look for short term, small, levels of support to get started.

The following are guiding points for funding

- Initially use commitment of members and host institutions for start up activity;
- Identify sources for seed money;

- Identify capacity building opportunities which the network members can carry out for a fee;
- Establish partnerships with other funded programmes where the network can bring added value in return for funding.
- Prepare project proposals to address network management; strengthening of members; and delivery of specific capacity building programmes.
- Plan for the secretariat cost

FROM EXPERIENCE: Consider all options for funding and don't be surprised when it is slow to emerge. Success breeds success. Focus on funds/ payment for delivery of activities not on core support at the beginning.

[back](#)

Delivering capacity building

Networks are established for a specific purpose and they need to address those objectives as soon as possible to demonstrate the value of the network to the members and other interested parties. In the case of capacity building networks for water, capacity building support to the water sector is a high priority. As quickly as possible the first activities should take place this has the benefit of:

- Increasing the visibility and apparent relevance of the network;
- Demonstrating to members the benefit of the network;
- Bringing to some members the opportunity to participate in network activities;
- Raising some revenue to cover network costs;
- Attracting new members.

Activities can be identified through contacts with donors, water managers, members etc or can be sought using the opportunity assessment tool (reference?). The process of identifying and delivering capacity building will be built into the work planning of the network and its shift into full operation which is covered in the next section.

[back](#)

3. Further reading

Cap-Net , [Lessons Learned from WaterNet](#). Summary report. , 2002. A concise report drawing the main lessons from the operations of WaterNet, a capacity building network for water. The lessons are expected to be useful to other networks and address management and operational issues. Drawn from the full report by H Krugman and Low Kwai Sim.

Krugman H., Low K.S., ['Lessons Learned' from WaterNet](#) , 2002. A review study of WaterNet, a network of 18 University departments and training institutes from 10 countries in Southern and Eastern Africa. Aim of the study is to transfer lessons and providing guidance to other regions.

Cap-Net , Capacity Building for Integrated Water Resources Management; [The importance of Local Ownership, Partnerships and Demand Responsiveness.](#), 2002, Cap-Net, Delft, 8pp, DOC, 48 KB

Cap-Net , [Networks as Instruments for Scientific Capacity Building](#), 2003, Cap-Net, Delft, 6pp, DOC, 80 KB