

SESSION FIVE: BUILDING NETWORKS AND COALITIONS

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the elements of an effective network
2. Identify the risks and rewards of working in advocacy networks and coalitions

TIME

1 hour, 45 minutes

SESSION OVERVIEW

- A. Weaving a Network (45 minutes)
- B. Risks and Rewards of Working in a Network (1 hour)

MATERIALS

- Flipchart and paper, markers, tape
- 1 ball of yarn for each participant
- Small group discussion questions on a flipchart

HANDOUTS

- 5A—Elements for Forming and Maintaining Networks
- 5B—Organizational Structures for Advocacy Networks
- 5C—Skills/Resources Inventory

PREPARATION

Prior to the session, collect 4 skeins of yarn in different colors. Take the yarn and roll it into balls of approximately 2 inches (or 5 cm) in diameter. You will need one ball of yarn per participant.

A. Weaving a Network (45 minutes)

STEP 1

Review the learner objectives for the session.

STEP 2

Tell participants that this session will focus on the role of networks in the advocacy process. Ask if they are currently members of any networks (or less formal alliances) that conduct advocacy activities. Elicit examples from the participants. Point out that in recent years, non-governmental and community-based organizations have begun to join together around mutual interests to increase their influence on formal decision-makers. Ask participants for examples they know of (i.e., the NGO Forums at the Cairo and Beijing Conferences).

STEP 3

In this exercise you will look at the dynamics of working together as a network. Ask the participants to stand up and form a circle with everyone facing the middle. If the training room is small, this exercise can be done outside.

Give each participant one ball of yarn. Ask them to tie or loop the loose end of yarn around one of their fingers. They should hold onto the loose end throughout the exercise.

STEP 4

Now that participants have spent several days together and have gotten to know each other, they are going to weave a network symbolic of their group. Ask them to look around the circle and think about the resources their colleagues have to offer. Have they discussed any future collaboration with other workshop participants?

STEP 5

After participants have had a moment to reflect, ask them to move toward persons with whom they have made plans to collaborate after the workshop. As they approach these colleagues, they should state the nature of the collaboration. For example, they might say:

- *We discussed sharing resources on girls' education*
- *I'd like to learn more about your service delivery model*
- *Let's exchange information about funding sources*

The proposal for working together need not be formal. The point is for participants to see how many “connections” they have made during a short period.

STEP 6

The participants should pinch and hold onto the yarn of each person they approach and vice versa. After naming the area of collaboration, both are free to move on to someone else while maintaining hold of the string of those they have spoken with already.

STEP 7

Encourage participants to continue weaving their web for 10 minutes or so. When everyone is well connected, ask them to return to the circle formation. If the exercise has gone well, there will be a complex spider web that interconnects the participants. The web symbolizes the networking that has taken place during the workshop.

STEP 8

Ask the group to describe some of the areas of collaboration they identified. What were the connections (i.e., information exchange, joint programming, sharing resources, planned advocacy activities)?

STEP 9

Have the group imagine that they are going to take on an advocacy issue together and function as a network. What are some of the benefits of working as a network rather than as individual NGOs?

Possible responses:

- *More credibility and visibility due to numbers*
- *Sharing resources allows for greater cost-effectiveness*
- *A network represents a larger constituency*

STEP 10

Ask the group to list some challenges or risks involved with networks.

Possible responses:

- *The agenda of one NGO may dominate the others*
- *Extra time involved with meetings, communications, etc.*

STEP 11

While all participants hold their yarn connections tight, ask one participant to drop all of his/her strands. Ask the group to imagine that this member has dropped out of the network because he/she no longer saw a benefit for his/her NGO. Ask the participants what happens to the network when a member drops out.

The yarn let go by that member should sag and you can show how his/her departure leaves many weak links in the network. Perhaps the network also loses resources and continuity in activities that person was working on.

STEP 12

After discussing the departure of a member, ask another member to pull tightly on his/her strands and take several steps backward, away from the center of the circle. Ask the group what happens when one member’s interests become dominant over the others? Perhaps

s/he wants to influence the network to move in a new direction and this distracts the network from its common focus.

As s/he pulls away from the center, the circle loses its shape. This can have a negative effect on shared leadership, group decision-making, etc. How would the group resolve this situation?

STEP 13

Finally, ask the participants if they have any other observations about the dynamics of working in networks. Did they learn anything new about building networks as a result of this exercise?

When the discussion has ended, everyone can return to their seats or tables.

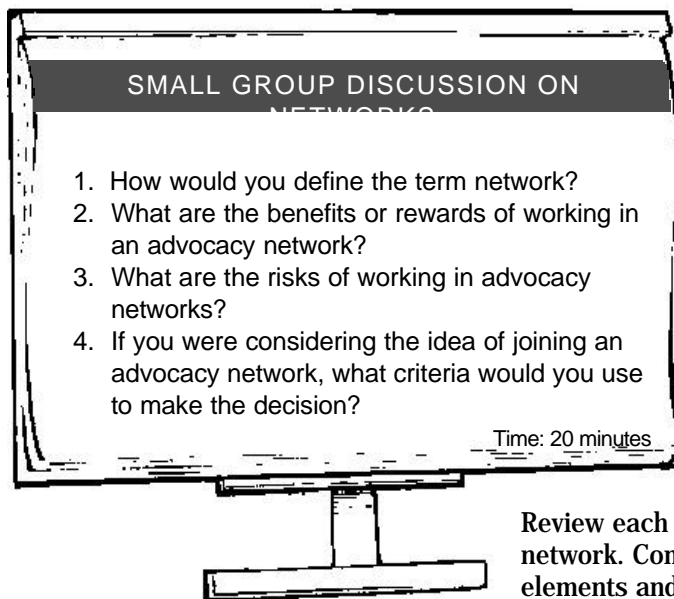
B. Risks and Rewards of Working in a Network (1 hour)

STEP 1

At this point it will be helpful to document and expand on the lessons learned from the yarn exercise. Ask the participants to count off by three and organize into three discussion groups. (As an alternative, you can keep them in their issue teams, especially if they are already seated in that formation.)

STEP 2

Ask each working group to respond to the following questions (see flipchart):



STEP 3

While the groups are working, post four pieces of flipchart paper on the wall around the room. Write the following terms across the top of the paper, one term per sheet:

- Definition of Network
- Benefits/Rewards
- Risks
- Criteria for Joining Networks

STEP 4

After the groups have completed their work, have them write their responses on the flipchart paper using a marker.

Review each set of responses beginning with how to define network. Compare the various definitions looking at common elements and differences.

Ask the group to adapt their definitions to fit the advocacy context; how would they define the term advocacy network?

If the group struggles with defining *advocacy network*, you can use the following sample definition:

Advocacy Network: A group of individuals and/or organizations working together with a common goal of achieving changes in policies, laws, or programs for a particular advocacy issue.

STEP 5

Continue by reviewing the benefits and risks of working in a network and how people decide whether to join a network.

Criteria for joining a network often include:

- A clear match between the network's mission and my NGO's focus
- Good leadership and a diverse membership
- An opportunity to have a voice in the decision-making
- Reasonable expectations of members (i.e., work load, frequency of meetings, etc.)

STEP 6

Distribute and review Handout 5A—Elements for Forming and Maintaining Networks.

★ NOTE TO THE TRAINER:

You have reached the end of the skills-building units of the advocacy curriculum. The session that follows is focused on action planning and future steps. If the participants are considering forming an actual advocacy network with the workshop participants as members, it works well to divide them into three groups to discuss different aspects of network functioning. You can refer back to Handout 5A and assign discussion topics as follows:

Group A: Organizational Issues

Group B: Leadership

Group C: Meetings/Documentation

Then ask each group to review Handout 5A and generate a list of recommendations for the advocacy network. It will be impossible to make decisions about all of these issues during the workshop. Nevertheless, the group can keep a list of items to be decided at upcoming meetings. For example, the development of a network mission statement or a skills inventory can be covered at future meetings.

Several handouts are attached in case the group wants to move forward with launching a new network or consolidating an existing network. These resources include:

Handout 5B—Organizational Structures for Advocacy Networks

Handout 5C—Skills/Resources Inventory

The first handout can be used to compare several organizational structures taken from existing advocacy networks. The second handout can be used to inventory the individual members' skills as well as the institutional resources of each member/NGO. The trainer can then tally the results and circulate the skills/resources inventory as a matrix.

HANDOUT 5A

ELEMENTS FOR FORMING AND MAINTAINING NETWORKS

A. FORMATION STAGE

- Establish a clear purpose or mission
- Involve individuals and organizations that share the mission
- Build a commitment to participatory process and collaboration

B. MAINTENANCE/GROWTH STAGE

Organization

- Define clear, specialized roles
- Establish a loose or fluid organizational structure; vertical, hierarchical structures don't build stronger networks
- Compile a skills inventory including the skills/expertise of individual members and institutional resources (fax, internet, meeting space, etc.)
- Prepare to fill expertise gaps by recruiting new members
- Establish a communication system (i.e., telephone tree)
- Create an NGO member database (name, address, organization's mission, type and focus of organization, etc.)

Leadership

- Share leadership functions (i.e., rotating coordinating committee)
- Set realistic goals and objectives
- Divide into sub-groups/task forces to take on specific tasks according to expertise
- Spread responsibilities across all members to avoid burnout
- Promote participatory planning and decision-making
- Foster trust and collaboration among members
- Keep members motivated by acknowledging their contributions

Meetings/Documentation

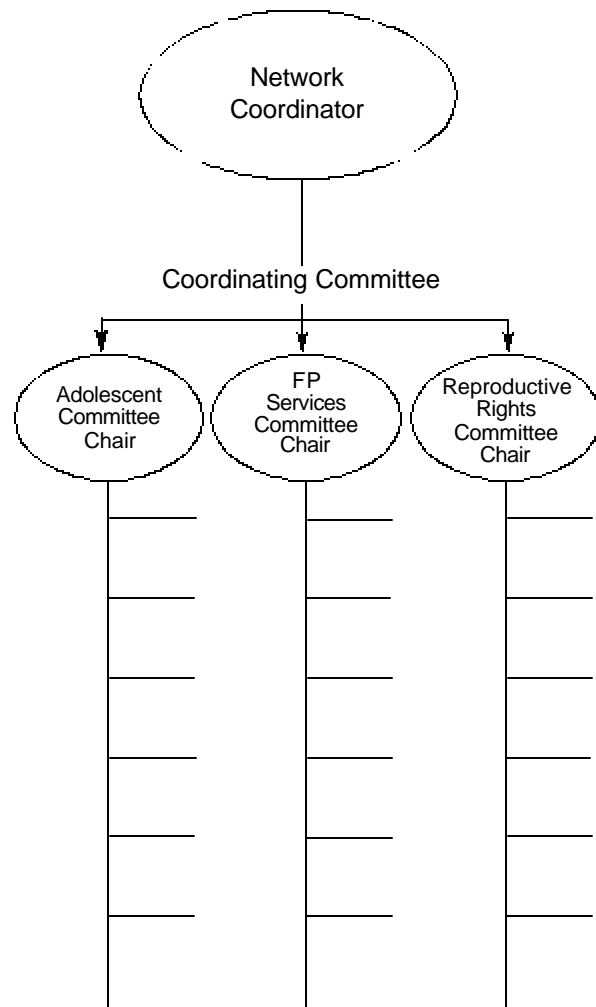
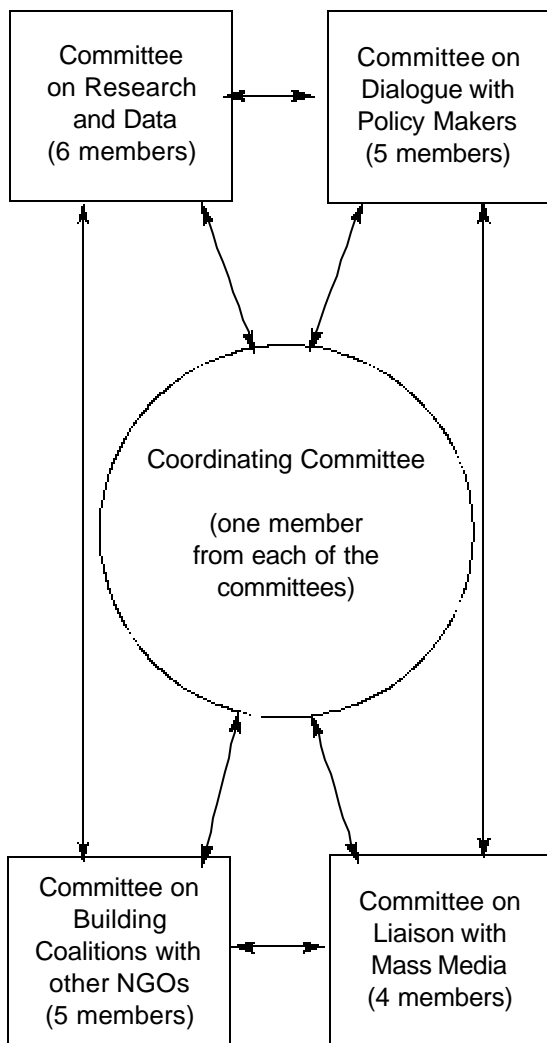
- Meet only when necessary
- Set a specific agenda and circulate it ahead of time; follow the agenda and keep meetings brief; finish meetings on time; rotate meeting facilitation role
- Keep attendance list and record meeting minutes to disseminate afterwards
- Use members' facilitation skills to help the network reach consensus and resolve conflict
- Discuss difficult issues openly during meetings
- Maintain a network notebook to document network activities, decisions, etc.

HANDOUT 5B

SAMPLE NETWORK MODELS

The members of this network divided themselves into four committees or teams, according to individual expertise or interest. The committees are organized according to audience or function. The network developed a vision, a mission, and an action plan, and each committee implements the action plan among its stakeholder group. The coordinating committee consists of four members, one leader from each sub-committee. The members of the coordinating committee rotate on a yearly basis. In the case of this network, members organized themselves into thematic teams according to

the network's key areas of advocacy. Each "issue team" is responsible for doing its own data gathering, communications plan, and action plan. An elected chairperson represents each issue team on the coordinating committee. A single network coordinator was elected by the network to coordinate activities, facilitate communication flow, and organize monthly network meetings.



HANDOUT 5C

ORGANIZATIONAL/MEMBER RESOURCES INVENTORY

	COMPUTER	PRINTER	SCANNER	INTERNET	WEB PAGE	EMAIL	FAX	COPIER	OFFICE SPACE	MEETING ROOM	VEHICLE	MEMBERSHIP LIST
ORGANIZATION/MEMBER												
1												
2												
3												
4												
5												
6												
7												
8												
9												
10												
11												
12												
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14												
15												

HANDOUT 5C

MEMBER SKILLS INVENTORY

	WORD PROCESSING	DATABASE MANAGEMENT	TRAINING	RESEARCH	FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	LEGAL/REGULATORY ISSUES	POLICY ANALYSIS	FUNDRAISING	MEDIA	PUBLIC SPEAKING	GRAPHICS AND DESIGN	LANGUAGE:	LANGUAGE:
MEMBER NAME													
1													
2													
3													
4													
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