



Canadian International  
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de  
développement international

# **Review of the Network Support Pilot Project**

## **Executive Report**

**January 2004**

Canadian International Development Agency  
200 Promenade du Portage  
Gatineau, Quebec  
K1A 0G4

Tel: (819) 997-5006

Toll free: 1-800-230-6349

Fax: (819) 953-6088

(For the hearing and speech impaired only (TDD/TTY): (819) 953-5023

Toll free for the hearing and speech impaired only: 1-800-331-5018)

E-mail: [info@acdi-cida.gc.ca](mailto:info@acdi-cida.gc.ca)

**Canada** 

## Table of Contents

Management Response .....	i
Proposed List of Agency Networks and Expert Groups .....	iii
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Knowledge Management and CIDA .....	1
2.1 Terminology.....	1
2.2 Knowledge Management .....	2
2.3 CIDA's Knowledge Networks Prior to the NSPP .....	2
2.4 Knowledge Management Initiative and the NSPP.....	2
3. Methodology .....	4
4. Network Results .....	5
4.1 Factors Affecting Results .....	7
5. Overall Assessment and Conclusion.....	9
6. Lessons Learned.....	10
7. Recommendations .....	11
7.1 To the Executive Committee .....	11
7.2 To Policy Branch.....	12
7.3 To the Knowledge Management Secretariat .....	12
7.4 To the Networks .....	12
Appendix I - NSPP Fact Sheet .....	13

## **Management Response**

In February of 2001 CIDA initiated an Agency-wide pilot project to put in place a number of communities of practice, which we called knowledge networks, as a tool to assist in the sharing of knowledge among Branches. The knowledge networks built on the Agency tradition of CIDA-wide expert groups and expanded this to include any staff interested in the issue in question. Policy Committee approved 12 networks for participation in the pilot under the umbrella of the Network Support Pilot Project (NSPP). These networks were to submit simple annual work plans and be granted modest budgets based on these work plans. While the networks were not attached to any formal Agency structure, the Knowledge Management Group in Policy Branch funded and provided technical support to them.

In the summer of 2002 the NSPP was reviewed by PRB. The review noted that there were 496 staff participating at some level in the networks and that overall staff were very positive about the role that the networks were playing in cutting across Agency silos. There were several recommendations on how networks could be improved. One of them was that the networks should be clearly embedded in the management structure of the Agency.

## **Proposal**

- A two tiered-system of networks be established for the Agency consisting of formal and informal networks which have as their prime objective the generation and sharing of knowledge on a specific topic:
  - Formal networks will be established in areas in which the Agency has substantial programme and policy interests. Membership is open to all Agency staff and is voluntary. Responsibility for the current set of proposed formal networks will be transferred from the Knowledge Management Secretariat to Policy Branch. Policy Branch will be responsible for providing adequate funding for these networks, for reviewing the network work plans and for maintaining the network extranets. Responsibility for network coordination will be clearly reflected in staff work descriptions and individual work plans. The formal networks which the Agency will officially support are those listed in Annex B to this note.
  - The work plan and budget for the formal networks are developed by the members and agreed by the Manager responsible. Formal networks can be engaged in Agency policy initiatives, asked to comment on documents and organize consultations. It is, however, important that they remain primarily an opportunity for CIDA staff to come together voluntarily around key issues. They would not normally be tasked by the Manager and must remain a space for open two-way dialogue.
  - An informal network is also open to all CIDA staff but is more experimental in nature. It may be formed around an issue that is just starting to become important or around an issue of interest to staff and related to CIDA's mandate but which is not a current priority. The Knowledge Management Secretariat will continue to be responsible for providing support to informal networks, in addition to chairing the network leaders group, developing policies and sharing best practice around networking and providing coaching for workshops and training events related to networks. The list of currently active informal networks is included in the Appendix to this note.

- By way of reference, a working group or 'core group' is not a network as defined here, in that membership is not open to all CIDA staff and is often not voluntary. These groups are equally important to horizontal work in CIDA. A core group may decide to expand to form an Agency-wide network and apply for formal status. The current list of core groups is also included in the Appendix to this note.
- A small 'network board' will be set up consisting of two members from Policy Branch one member from the Knowledge Management Secretariat and one member from a Programme Branch. The 'board' will meet twice a year to review the number of networks, remove networks from the formal list if necessary and add networks if requests have been made by informal networks to be formalized, on the basis of preselected and transparent criteria.
- It is important that Executive Committee ratify this plan if it is to be successful, since active networks require that Branch Heads encourage and promote the participation of their staff in networks and recognize this participation in work plans and staff performance evaluations.

## **Proposed List of Agency Networks and Expert Groups**

### **Formal Networks**

1. Capacity Development Network
2. EdNet (Education Network)
3. EnviroNet (Environment Network)
4. HPN (Health, Population, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS Network)
5. InNet (Indigenous Issues)
6. ICTs for Development Network (formerly Knowledge for Development)
7. Poverty Reduction Network
8. Programme-based Approaches Network
9. Trade and Development Network
10. Child Protection Network
11. Human Rights and Democracy Network

### **Informal Networks**

1. WatNet (Water Resources Network)
2. Energy Net
3. Private Sector Development
4. Microcredit
5. Conflict and Security Network
6. Agrinet (Agriculture Network)
7. Civil Society Network
8. Fair Trade Network
9. CFAN (CIDA Forestry Advisers Network)

### **Core Groups/Expert Groups**

1. Gender Equity Core Group
2. Governance

## **1. Introduction**

In the fall of 2000, the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) Policy Committee approved a knowledge management initiative (KMI) designed to improve the Agency's capacity to become a more knowledge-based organization. As part of this, the Network Support Pilot Project (NSPP) was initiated to test a structured approach to supporting knowledge networks and to evaluate the impact of this support on network performance and value added to CIDA.

The pilot project began in October 2000, and remains ongoing. As stipulated in the terms of this project, Universalia was mandated with the task of performing a review of the NSPP based on the following six themes:

- 1) Assess the logic and rationale of the NSPP;
- 2) Outline the evolution and function of networks within CIDA and their categorization according to typology – 'experts', 'networks' and 'working groups';
- 3) Track and assess the results of the NSPP;
- 4) Provide useful and relevant information to CIDA stakeholders on how to improve networks;
- 5) Identify elements that were supportive of the NSPP, those that hindered the initiative, and to the extent possible, outline key success factors for knowledge networks; and
- 6) Make recommendations to CIDA stakeholders with respect to the NSPP.

The NSPP Review began in March 2002 and was completed in August 2002. It was designed to capture the project's results and benefits by assessing the contributions of the knowledge networks on the work of CIDA officers, their units, and the Agency as a whole. Though the request was for an evaluation of impact, this was not feasible given the timing of the review (the pilot project had been running for only 18 months when data collection began). Thus PRB downgraded the initiative to an assessment of shorter-term results.

The following report summarizes the main findings of the NSPP Review.

## **2. Knowledge Management and CIDA**

### **2.1 Terminology**

A variety of terms are used to describe knowledge networks and other groups of individuals. In this paper, the following definitions are used:

- Working groups are groups composed of appointed members that are tasked to address a specific topic/need and convene only for the purpose of fulfilling this mandate.
- Communities of practice, or networks, are groups of people who voluntarily share a common interest and purpose and convene to learn and to share knowledge, insights, tools, good practice and lessons. When communities of practice are exclusively composed of specialists in the domain, they are sometimes referred to as expert groups.

## **2.2 Knowledge Management**

The 1998 World Bank Report entitled *Knowledge for Development* is widely considered to be the initial thrust to institute knowledge based policies, practices and structures within the organizational settings of aid agencies (King and McGrath, 2002). As non-governmental organizations, donor and lending agencies increasingly move toward a more knowledge-based aid approach (King, 2000), the need to develop and implement effective and efficient means of acquiring, using and transmitting knowledge is essential. In this context, leading development agencies are recognizing that knowledge networks or “communities of practice” (Wenger, 1998 and 2002) are an important part of their knowledge management strategies. Through communities of practice, participants engaged in the achievement of organizational results can pool their resources on the issues that affect them all and consolidate their efforts to develop innovative solutions. The success of knowledge networks rests with their ability to improve communication linkages, foster debate and learning, reduce the duplication of efforts and enhance organizational effectiveness.

## **2.3 CIDA’s Knowledge Networks Prior to the NSPP**

CIDA has enjoyed a long history of engaging in knowledge sharing activities. For more than 10 years prior to the NSPP, horizontal thematic networks existed in CIDA that promoted the exchange of knowledge and experience<sup>1</sup>, while the sharing of lessons learned in both formal and informal venues has always been part of the Agency. When the NSPP began in October 2000, there were approximately 30 thematic/sector networks with a membership of about 200 persons. These networks varied from active (AGRINET, Education Resource Network) to dormant (Energy, Transport, Capacity Development).

With the dissolution of the Professional Services Branch in 1993, the senior sector specialists in Policy Branch were tasked to create sectoral and thematic networks (Energy, Transport, CIDA Forestry Advisors Network). In many cases, the purpose of these “networks” was to develop and/or implement a specific CIDA policy (e.g., Poverty Reduction network). They were mostly internal to CIDA and most functioned as working groups composed of specialists, except for a few which operated as networks (communities of practice), such as the Human Rights and Democracy network. In general, these networks met on an ad hoc basis and were uneven in quality, unstructured, and with a few exceptions, inaccessible to CIDA field staff.

Despite some notable achievements, few attempts had been made to provide a structured approach to knowledge networks within CIDA prior to the NSPP, and perhaps more importantly, few attempts were made to link networks to CIDA’s priorities or to improve its aid effectiveness. Consequently, these networks were never made widely known within the Agency and their value was never clearly articulated to CIDA management.

## **2.4 Knowledge Management Initiative and the NSPP**

In September 1999, the President appointed a Director General of Knowledge and Change Management within the Human Resources and Corporate Services Branch to lead this issue. In

---

<sup>1</sup> Pétilion, Y. (1999). *CIDA: Moving Toward Learning, Knowledge-Based Organization. Analysis and Preliminary Proposals.*

April 2000, the KMI was proposed with the intent of supporting CIDA in becoming more of a knowledge-based learning organization: an agency-wide approach that aimed to connect people, tap into their tacit knowledge, facilitate its flow, create new knowledge and provide incentives for learning and sharing. The initiative was approved by Policy Committee in October 2000 and was consolidated around seven components, the most prominent of which was the NSPP.

Although knowledge-sharing networks were established in CIDA prior to the NSPP, the latter was the first Agency-approved effort to implement a knowledge management (KM) approach. The NSPP sought to provide support to a limited number of networks that corresponded to CIDA priorities and new directions. It was intended to provide access to human, financial and technological resources such as:

- Facilitators to support their operations;
- Funds to enable the implementation of knowledge creation, sharing and learning activities;
- Intranets and web sites.

Twelve networks participated (see Exhibit 2.1) in the pilot project (nine were originally proposed). For the most part, these were either “networks” (communities of practice) or “working groups” composed of appointed specialists. Beyond this immediate categorization, networks tend to develop independently as a result of the interest and commitment of the members, the efforts and leadership of the coordinator and the need or opportunity to address Agency priorities.

Exhibit 2.1 Networks in the NSPP

NETWORKS	
• Capacity Development Network	• Innet (Indigenous Network)
• Civil Society Network	• Knowledge for Development Network
• Ednet (Education Network)	• Poverty Reduction Network
• Environet (Environment Network)	• Swaps Network (Sector Wide Approaches Network)
• Gender Equality Core Group	• Trade and Development Network
• HPN (Health, Population, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS Network)	• Watnet (Water Network)

The project was initiated through a number of consultations with the leaders (coordinators/chairs) of the selected networks with the intent of creating a concerted and systematized effort to manage, coordinate, plan, implement and monitor network activities. Moreover, pilot networks were required to consolidate their activities in the form of results-oriented work plans that were conditional to the allocation of KM funds. The work plans drafted for the NSPP were focused on three generic network objectives, as set out in a Network Leaders Workshop held on April 3, 2001:

- Facilitating individual and collective informal learning;
- Influencing policy development and facilitating policy mainstreaming;
- Problem solving and mutual support among members.



While the NSPP was being implemented, the KM unit underwent a number of leadership changes. In June 2001, the KM Director General at the time departed on posting, and although a replacement was appointed in August, the new Director General did not take up the assignment until January 2002. Along with the changes in leadership, the KM unit was relocated in January 2002 from Policy Branch to the Senior Vice-President's office.

With respect to financial resources, the KMI initially requested \$600,000 to support its activities, of which \$480,000 was earmarked for the NSPP (\$40,000 per network x 12 networks). Of this original request, the initiative received \$155,000 for all its activities (i.e., disbursement to the networks and support for the KMI).

The services the NSPP provided included technical assistance (for intranets), network support (work planning, network leader meetings, consultations and coordination) and a sense of a role or presence within the Agency.

### **3. Methodology**

Due to the relatively recent introduction of formal knowledge-based activities within organizational settings and the crosscutting nature of horizontal initiatives, the NSPP Review was built upon an iterative approach that queried data from a wide array of sources. The design and work plan of the Review were produced in a participatory manner with direct and active involvement of the network coordinators and members. Moreover, key issues for the Review were derived from a preliminary study of stakeholder interests that sought to identify expectations regarding the NSPP as the project was being implemented in 2001<sup>2</sup>. Subsequent to this exercise, the NSPP Review formulated appropriate data collection tools that resulted in a network leader focus group, close to 50 interviews with network leaders and Agency managers (from PM5 and 6s to VP levels), four case studies, document reviews and a survey questionnaire completed by close to 150 CIDA staff. The findings presented herein were derived from the triangulation of multiple data sources and were further refined through ongoing discussions with CIDA's PRB, as well as two draft report presentations that were jointly hosted by the PRB and KMS. Original data collection for the Review occurred between May and August 2002.

Considering the fluid and highly variable nature of knowledge management practices within organizational settings, the considerable variations in their basic assumptions, resources and information needs, attempts to use benchmarking indicators from assessments in other agencies proved to be unrealistic. Nevertheless, anecdotal and comparative observations of similar exercises, methodologies, and some fundamentals of best practice of knowledge management in organizational settings were considered in the NSPP Review.

While interviews were conducted with network leaders who were not involved in NSPP, no attempts were made in this review to compare networks that were part of the NSPP with those that did not receive support. Finally, as per the Terms of Reference, the review did not assess individual networks and their activities. This review focused exclusively on the NSPP as an organizational innovation.

---

<sup>2</sup> A preliminary study focusing on the information needs of CIDA's major stakeholder groups was conducted between June and July of 2001. Over 110 people were interviewed in this study.

#### **4. Network Results**

Respondents to our survey<sup>3</sup> and interviews support the proposition that CIDA's knowledge networks added value to their work and the Agency. While there was some disagreement on the importance of the networks to CIDA by senior management, the majority of respondents in this study agreed that knowledge networks are an essential tool for helping the Agency move toward its goals and priorities. (The first bullet in the following section expands on this point.)

It should be noted that given the timing of the Review (the NSPP had been underway for only 18 months when data collection began), it was difficult to obtain quantitative data that demonstrated that all network objectives had been met. Nevertheless, most respondents felt that the networks were on the right track and were positively contributing to such objectives.

Eight main findings summarize our analysis of the NSPP results:

- More than 90% of those interviewed and surveyed perceived networks as an effective means of sharing/disseminating knowledge relevant to the work of CIDA staff. Networks were also perceived as focused on the Agency's ODA priorities. In this context, the NSPP was largely seen as having increased awareness of horizontal issues through a results-oriented workplanning approach that was coherent with CIDA's priorities.
- An overwhelming 95% of survey respondents perceived knowledge networks as a value-added initiative for CIDA and 83% of respondents indicated that network participation was an effective use of their time. This is illustrated by statements such as networks are "very important, very useful and entirely relevant to my role and responsibility at CIDA".
- The clear majority of those interviewed during the Review and more than 79% of survey respondents perceived networks as important catalysts for helping the Agency break down both horizontal and vertical communication barriers as well as for facilitating/stimulating greater communication across all levels of the organization.
- By contributing to the recognition and accessibility of networks in CIDA, the NSPP was perceived by interview respondents to have noticeably increased the legitimization and visibility of networks within the Agency.
- On the less positive note, of the 53% of survey respondents who indicated some familiarity with the objectives of the NSPP, only 33% agreed with the statement that the NSPP had met its objectives. Similarly, the majority of interview respondents expressed a lack of clarity on the objectives and skepticism regarding the NSPP's success in reaching these. Yet, despite this skepticism, the NSPP was largely perceived as a good initiative and given its short lifespan, succeeded in meeting some of its objectives.
- The NSPP was recognized by the majority of interview respondents as having contributed to a more structured approach to networks through results-oriented work planning and the establishment of a supportive function. Despite this accomplishment, tremendous variations were noted in the individual network workplans with respect to their clarity on objectives, activities and outputs – a finding that concurs with the fact that only 34% of survey respondents thought networks adequately implemented their workplans.

---

<sup>3</sup> Full survey results are available on request.

- Network intranets are seen as repositories of useful information by 55% of survey respondents but according to both interview and survey respondents; they lack adequate filtration, organization and up-keep (maintenance). An analysis of intranet contents revealed that little attention has been paid to crosscutting issues.
- Examples of outputs of network workplans are shown in Exhibit 4.1. Based on the information obtained from the networks, it remains difficult to differentiate those results that are either directly or indirectly attributable to the NSPP and those that are not. While there is some consensus that results obtained from network activities directly funded by the NSPP should be attributable to the latter, interviews with network coordinators and chairs of both supported and non-supported networks indicate that while financial resources were helpful, it was not always the deciding factor. The forum and support convened by the NSPP for such things to occur were likewise contributing factors to the achievement of network results. The supportive environment fostered by the NSPP was often cited as beneficial in the achievement of network results.

Exhibit 4.1 Results of the NSPP Networks

Some Results of the NSPP Networks
<p>The Gender Equality Core Group successfully completed a number of important accomplishments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publication of tools and resources such as the “Culture, Gender and Development Co-operation: Some Questions” paper (2000)</li> <li>• Advice on corporate communications tools such as web site on “Gender Equality at CIDA” (2000)</li> <li>• Launch of “Promoting Gender Equality: An Online Learning Course” (2002)</li> </ul> <p>The Capacity Development Network was involved in a number of key areas including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contributions to discussions of policy and procedures impacting on CIDA's ability to engage successfully in CD approaches and initiatives</li> <li>• The swaps network accomplished activities such as:</li> <li>• Contributions to discussions of policy and procedures impacting on CIDA's ability successfully to implement swaps and similar approaches for improved aid effectiveness</li> <li>• Review of “Current RBM and Accountability Practices in CIDA” (May 14, 2002)</li> <li>• Publication of “RBM and Accountability and for Enhanced Aid Effectiveness: Ten Principles for CIDA Staff” (May 20, 2002)</li> <li>• Sharing perspectives and lessons on swaps with other agencies, with external network members and with developing country representatives</li> </ul> <p>CIDA's interest in becoming a more active player in international environmental agreements was supported by the environet through such activities as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiations on environmental agreements where environet is used as a key feedback mechanism to develop input for policy-setting, develop positions and contribute to the Agency's ability to remain on the cutting edge in negotiations</li> <li>• Playing an active role in revising the Agency's Policy on Environment and Sustainability</li> </ul>

#### 4.1 Factors Affecting Results

The Review explored factors that either supported or inhibited the results of the NSPP. These are grouped under management, KMI unit, leadership, participation and financial resources.

##### Management

- There was a significant gap between the expectation generated by the strategy papers and slide presentations announcing the KMI (and NSPP), and the ability to plan and carry out the ideas. There is little evidence to suggest that senior and middle managers integrated the written strategies into practice or that they adequately supported the initiative (the financial and operational expectations that were raised were not delivered, and the initiative was considerably weakened by the overall lack of support, commitment and leadership).

- While the development and implementation of the NSPP as a tool for improving the Agency's performance was supported at the concept level, analysis indicates that senior and middle managers made little effort to integrate the NSPP into the living strategies, operations and plans of the Agency.

### KMI Unit

- Although the KMI unit provided valuable assistance to the networks, they lacked the human, financial and moral support needed to bring the objectives of the NSPP to fruition. The overall lack of an articulated organizational support for the KMI was a problem that adversely affected the performance of the NSPP.
- The early departure of the NSPP's original champion, and the gap between naming a successor and the latter taking on the new position (creating a six-month period where the NSPP lacked a Director between June 2001 and January 2002) seriously hindered the NSPP.
- The NSPP was hindered by the absence of a recognized operational strategy. As a result, the pilot lacked a clear planning process, an identifiable results chain, a clear statement of the objectives and/or mandate and an outline of the key implementation steps.
- As a result of the relocation of the NSPP (from Policy Branch to the Executive Vice-President's Office) some confusion was created on the exact nature, role and responsibility of the KMI unit (and later KMS).
- Despite the effort that was put into the initial drafting of the approved network work plans, the ensuing lack of funding and organizational support resulted in the reduced ability of networks to carry out their planned activities.

### Leadership

- The success attained by CIDA's networks hinged upon the leadership, commitment and time of the assigned coordinators and chairs. Yet, network leaders were constrained by a general lack of time that adversely affected their ability to plan, implement and monitor network activities. In this respect, the reluctance of management to allocate time and space for network participation should be regarded as an Agency issue.

### Participation

- Seventy-four percent (74%) of survey respondents indicate that they spend less than 10% of their time on network related activities<sup>4</sup>. This will be an important issue to resolve if the Agency chooses to pursue and formalize its support to knowledge networks since members currently find time for networks is insufficient. The concern is that if networks are to become more accountable for the activities they carry out and resources they use, members will likewise require more time to engage in these processes.
- Network participation at both the membership and leadership levels was found to be relatively equal between men and women. Sex ratio amongst network coordinators was found to be equal at 50%, whereas the sex ratio amongst chairs weighed heavily in favor of

---

<sup>4</sup> Survey respondents were asked how much time they devoted to network activities per week: 0%, ≤10%, ≤25%, ≤50%, ≤75% & ≤100%.

males; 10 chairs are men and only 2 are women. With respect to the most active survey respondents, these were found to be only slightly different than that of the Agency mean (CIDA's population sex ratio is 57% women/43% men, whereas the NSPP Review queried responses from 53% women/47% men).

While response differences between men and women in the most active user survey were deemed minor, a few noteworthy exceptions were found. Men tended to agree in greater numbers to the statements that cross-cutting issues are adequately addressed in network activities (44% of men compared to 30% of women agree that gender equality is adequately addressed; 50% of men agree that the environment is adequately addressed compared to 23% of women; and 74% of men agree that poverty is adequately addressed compared to 51% of women).

With respect to extranet use, 10% more women tend to use these to find and post useful information when compared to men, while 22% more men find intranets to be user friendly.

- More than 450 people belong to one or more of the 12 networks in the NSPP. Despite this, there is a general concern that the networks are not representative enough and do not cater to important groups such as project officers (this is less the case for young project officers than for older project officers<sup>5</sup>) and field staff. With respect to the occupational categories of the most active users, it was found that policy staff and specialists are more represented than project staff. While analysts, specialists and project/program officers comprise more than 60% of the one hundred (100) active members, participation by program directors and consultants was equal at 7%. Advisors and those who stated "others" represented 12%. 2% of active members were at the Director General level.

### Financial Resources

- Financial resources disbursed through the KMI for the NSPP were substantially less than expected by the pilot networks, reducing the extent of the planned activities completed by the networks. In the end, only \$155,000 was allocated for the KM initiative as a whole. The funding requested by networks varied substantially (\$24,000 to \$71,000), as did the actual funding (from none at all to more than \$60,000). Although the decision-making processes leading to the funding was done on a first come first serve basis (based on work plans), the process was not perceived as clear to the networks.

In response to these circumstances, many networks took proactive steps toward finding other sources of funding prompting some network leaders to state that the most important limitation they faced was not financial but rather one of adequate human resources. While some networks revised their work plans to reflect the changes in funding, most worked with their existing plans and simply completed those activities that could be funded.

## **5. Overall Assessment and Conclusion**

The value added of networks, as perceived by survey and interview respondents on the work of CIDA and its staff, stands as a dominant finding of this review. The overwhelming support cited and perceived by review respondents for sustaining and developing CIDA's networks is largely

---

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that we were unable to do analysis of the members by experience in CIDA.

based on the important benefits that networks are seen to bring to individuals, their work and the Agency as a whole.

The NSPP played a role in redefining CIDA's networks from groups of specialists and experts to communities of practice. It contributed to the status of knowledge networks within the Agency by profiling and highlighting their potential, including opening membership to all CIDA staff (membership rose from 200 to 600 during the course of the project). Finally, with the implementation of network work planning and activity monitoring processes, there is now more transparency than before.

A question left unanswered by the review relates to medium and long-term results expected from CIDA's knowledge networks. The relatively brief duration of the project at the onset of the review (18 months) and the lack of clarity regarding its objectives have provided difficult circumstances for establishing a causal relationship between support for an organizational knowledge sharing exercise and the identification of specific factors leading to achievement of results and the identification of how to measure performance.

While there is agreement that improvements to the networks and their management in general is both possible and desirable, the modalities of support are more contentious. It was found that a substantial perceptual gap existed between network participants and non-participants, especially in the operational branches<sup>6</sup> and at the senior management level.

Although the review data that support knowledge networks is proportionally significant, management had mixed expectations and understanding of what networks could do and gave muted support at best. The caveat of views expressed by those in management positions show that these believe less in the value of networks, which marks a clear split in the consensus that networks represent a useful tool for supporting Agency initiatives, target areas and priorities.

## **6. Lessons Learned**

- The development of a strategic, focused and results-oriented approach to knowledge networks requires clearly delineated horizontal structures and strategies to guide activities at the outcome level. Thus, the results of the Pilot Project are in part linked to CIDA's difficulties in clarifying its expected results and accountabilities toward its horizontal themes.
- Agency-wide initiatives have higher probability of success if they are articulated in written strategies and operational plans that are aligned with senior management objectives.
- The diversity of networks increases the probability of ensuring a wide knowledge base that can support a well functioning organization. By encouraging a diverse set of networks to flourish, the Agency will provide a place for a multiplicity of viewpoints, for innovative thinking and for a more progressive/change oriented staff with imaginative problem-solving and effective decision-making skills, and a proactive stance at fostering organizational learning.
- The conflict arising from competing expectations regarding network activities and required resources can be greatly reduced if the results are well specified/formulated at the onset of the work planning phase and agreed upon by the senior managers responsible for the

---

<sup>6</sup> Significant differences were mostly noted at the PM5/6 levels of the operational branches.

thematic area within which the network operates. Statements of intended results and expectations, formulated at the outset of work planning can reduce the conflict from competing expectations regarding network activities and resources. Through this process, “formal networks” should be identified as those that take on specific roles, responsibilities and accountabilities with respect to their objectives and planned activities vis-à-vis Agency priorities, whereas “informal networks” should be regarded as interest groups devoted to sharing knowledge and information on a particular subject of interest without obligation to account for planned activities<sup>7</sup>.

- The credibility of the Knowledge Management Secretariat (KMS) increases when it provides concrete technical assistance that can help the knowledge networks function more effectively and efficiently.
- The use of intranets is directly proportional to ease of use, relevance and practicality. Few users will want to spend time and energy if the process becomes complex and laborious.
- When participatory processes are used by networks, involving as many network members as possible, to design and develop their own results statements and indicators, members are more likely to be committed to and engaged in monitoring achievement toward those results. (This lesson emerged in an earlier phase of the review process (spring 2001), when PRB and the evaluators provided technical support to networks to develop results-oriented work plans.)

## **7. Recommendations**

### **7.1 To the Executive Committee**

- 1) The Executive Committee should endorse a coherent institutional framework for the management of networks as part of an Agency-wide change management effort with clear reference to the specific role of networks. Policy Branch and the KMS should develop this framework jointly. The framework should address the following issues raised in the Review:
  - The need to formally recognize knowledge networks;
  - The appropriate assigning of responsibility for networks (to Policy Branch) and the Knowledge Management Secretariat (under the direction of the Senior Vice-President) within CIDA’s organizational structure; and
  - The allocation of adequate human and financial resources to knowledge networks, to reflect the roles and functions approved for them.
- 2) CIDA should ensure that the Agency strategy and plan for managing knowledge and for supporting a diversity of knowledge networks is fully integrated into the Agency’s overall management objectives and priorities.

---

<sup>7</sup> While formal agreement on the use of a network typology based on “formal” and “informal” criterion remain unresolved, these are used in this report for lack of a better terminology. “Formal” network is used to describe a network aligned with CIDA’s current priorities and “informal” is applied to those networks that are not directly linked to the latter.



## **7.2 To Policy Branch**

Within the Agency's framework for the management of networks, and following the restructuring of Policy Branch, Policy Branch should clearly identify its roles and responsibilities for knowledge networks, and allocate sufficient human and financial resources to support these duties and functions. Formal responsibility and funding for networks should be under the accountability of the Vice-President, Policy Branch.

## **7.3 To the Knowledge Management Secretariat**

- 1) While the NSPP should no longer continue as a pilot project, the KMS should develop an operational strategy that establishes a new management approach incorporating all of CIDA's networks. This strategy should be articulated in a paper for Executive Committee approval and further referenced in the 2003 KMI work plan as an output.
- 2) Within the Agency's knowledge management framework, the role and function of KMS should be clearly defined. Some specific topics to be included are responsibilities for:
  - Providing technical assistance to knowledge network chairs and coordinators on how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of networks and how to support intranets or other web links;
  - Monitoring networks in collaboration with Policy Branch;
  - Defining the level of resources required for formal and informal networks in collaboration with Policy Branch; and
  - Conducting further research on such topics as extending membership of CIDA networks with its partners and disseminating good practices.
- 3) The KMS and PRB should take the lead in developing an Agency-wide approach to monitoring and evaluating KM (both secretariat and networks). Furthermore, the output of this activity should be identified as outputs within the work plans of both groups.

## **7.4 To the Networks**

- 4) In accordance with the approval by Executive Committee of a Knowledge Management Strategy for CIDA, networks should be required to define their purpose, function, expected use of Agency resources and intended results.
- 5) Network activities and results should place higher priority on the integration of CIDA's two crosscutting themes – gender equality and the environment – and to incorporate more fully the Agency's poverty reduction policy. In addition, networks should work toward the ultimate goal of improved development effectiveness. Efforts should be made to attract more operational staff and to resolve challenges, in collaboration with IMTB, of involving field-based personnel.

### Appendix I - NSPP Fact Sheet

NSPP Networks, Membership and Resources Received (FY 2001-2002)

NETWORKS	MEMBERSHIP	RESOURCES RECEIVED	
		AMOUNT	DESCRIPTION
Capacity Development Network	103	\$7,500	• Co-op student
Civil Society Network	55	\$1,577	• Travel and honoraria for two events
Ednet (Education Network)	44	\$ 0	
Environet (Environment Network)	105	\$7,346	• Scoping of International Environmental Networks to make contacts and identify closer partners
		\$3,650	• WBI course on environment and economics
Gender Equality Core Group	10	\$8,236	• Publications
		\$1,800	• Events
		\$980.23	• Retreat
HPN (Health, Population, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS Network)	63	\$1,500	• Workshops on HIV/AIDS
Innet (Indigenous Network)	44	\$8,240	• One-day retreat and follow up
Knowledge for Development Network	35	\$63,472	• IDEAS Forum in Stockholm and CIDA workshop
Poverty Reduction Network	78	\$4,620	• Coordinator assistant
		\$20,110	• Third round table on poverty reduction
Swaps Initiatives Network	199	\$7,980	• Co-op student
		\$3,500	• Forum on accountability
Trade and Development Network	77	\$0	
Watnet (Water Network)	47	\$0	

### Network Leadership

NETWORK LEADERSHIP	DATA
Coordinators	Sex ratio: 6 male and 6 female Branch: 11 Policy and 1 Canadian Partnership
Chairs	Sex ratio: 10 male and 2 female Branch: 9 Policy, 2 Americas and 1 Canadian Partnership

### Network Participation Rates

NETWORK PARTICIPATION	DATA
Total number of individuals	496
Number of memberships	810
Number of networks participants belong to	1.6
Most active user sex ratio (based on the NSPP Review purposeful sample)	53% female and 47% male
Average amount of time spent on network-related activities per week:	Less than 10%.
Participation per Branch: <sup>8</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Africa and Middle East</li> <li>• Americas</li> <li>• Asia</li> <li>• Canadian Partnership</li> <li>• Central and Eastern Europe</li> <li>• Human Resources and Corporate Services</li> <li>• Multilateral Programmes</li> <li>• Performance Review</li> <li>• Policy</li> <li>• President's Office</li> </ul>	27% 10% 10% 13% 8% 2% 2% 1% 25% 1%

---

<sup>8</sup> Figures represent the percentage of the total population of participants in NSPP; there is a 1% rounding error.

## Network Intranet Use (January 1 to March 31, 2002)

INTRANETS USES	CD	HPN	SWAPS	T & D	ENVIRONET	GENDER	AVERAGE
Average hits per day	21	24	47	25	37	23	29.5
Median visit length per network (minutes)	1:30	3:43	1:58	2:49	2:43	1:59	2.14
Average number of visits/day on weekdays	4	8	10	8	16	5	8.5
Average number of hits/day on weekdays	33	36	68	37	54	36	44
Most active day of the week	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu
Number of hits on most active date	160	282	193	239	320	413	267.8
Number of hits on least active date	1	3	2	1	1	1	1.5

## Types of Activities

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Extranet moderator and maintenance</li><li>• Workshops, seminars and events (mostly brown-bag lunches, round-tables and guest speakers)</li><li>• Training sessions</li><li>• Monthly meetings (policy discussions, networking and sharing lessons learned)</li><li>• Research, best practice, concept papers, policy reviews</li><li>• External linkages and collaborations with similar agencies and support to field staff</li></ul>