NETWORKS FOR COMMUNICATION IN DEVELOPMENT:

THE CASE OF WEDNET

by

Caroline L. Newton

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APPROVAL

NAME: Caroline L. Newton

DEGREE: M.A.

TITLE: NETWORKS FOR COMMUNICATION IN DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF WEDNET

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

      CHAIR: Dr. Roger Howard

Dr. Robert S. Anderson
Professor
Senior Supervisor

Dr. Patricia Howard
Assistant Professor
Supervisor

Dr. Ivan Head
Professor
Law and Political Science
University of British Columbia
External Examiner

Date: 7/28/94

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Caroline L. Newton
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ABSTRACT

Networks For Communication in Development:

The Case of WEDNET

International development research has been criticized for (among other things) its bias toward Western science, its lack of accountability to the subjects of research, its lack of attention to women and to indigenous knowledge, and its failure to disseminate and utilize its results broadly. One response to these criticisms has been to organize research in the form of networks. These, it is believed, serve the multiple purposes of greater administrative efficiency, improved research dissemination and utilization, and the creation of a critical mass of information on specific issues. One such issue is women's knowledge of natural resource management.

This study analyzes a research and communication network: the Women, Environment, and Development in Africa research project (WEDNET) of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). It focuses on the internal and external dynamics of the network and assesses its success in meeting its explicit and implicit communication goals. The author also examines communication as both relational and informational construct at both empirical and theoretical levels.

The study of WEDNET took place over three years (1990-1993) and required three field visits (one of them extensive) to Africa. It is based also

in published and unpublished documents and in the secondary literature, particularly in critical writing on international development, on network communication, and on research utilization.

The author concludes that the use of networks to organize international development research partially addresses the concerns of critics. Conflict between explicit and implicit communication goals, particularly if implicit goals are unacknowledged, may affect negatively the capacity of a network to achieve its objectives. Preexisting power differences, resulting in struggles are reconfigured in networks and remain a factor in the networks' ability to challenge dominant research paradigms and to democratize access to information. The study recommends that the goal of communicating research results be fully integrated and supported from the earliest stages of the research project. Recognizing that to achieve this goal specific skills and organization are necessary, the study recommends several modifications to the standard research network approach. The study recommends areas for future research in communication and development.

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This work is dedicated to Mama Cassan of Bo, Sierra Leone
and to the memory of my grandmother
Paula Wiegand Hanstein

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List of Major Acronyms

ELCI- Environment Liaison Centre International, Nairobi, Kenya

IDRC - International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada

WEDNET - Women, Environment and Development Network

NGO - Non-government Organization

GAD - Gender and development

ISD - Information Sciences Division, of the International Development Research Centre

YCR - Young Canadian Researcher Award, from the International Development Reseach Centre

PREFACE

A great deal of energy is currently being expended in criticism (discussed more fully in Chapter I) of the representation of peoples—non-whites, non-males, non-heterosexuals—who do not form part of the hegemonic culture. Clearly, such criticism derives from the political imperative (which I accept) to end exploitative relationships between individuals, groups, and nations. For me, however, this creates a logical tension: how does one support the need for and right of oppressed groups to represent themselves, while simultaneously obeying political principles that may require taking a position of advocacy for or alliance with oppressed groups? In the thesis I will address the issue from several related perspectives—critical theory, practical example, and choice of methodology.

I must stress the diversity of the sources from which I draw my data and working assumptions. My experience and my studies combine to cause me to agree that the evidence for the failure of "international development" cannot be ignored; neither do I wish to continue to represent Third-World[1] peoples as mere objects of our First-World constructs. On these subjects I hope to contribute (here and elsewhere) to the critical discussion. However, I must also acknowledge that, having become part of the "international development" process, I am emotionally

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[1]. I am fully familiar with the acrimonious debate surrounding use of this term. It is used here in acknowledgement that it is part of the negative construct held in the North concerning peoples of the South. The reader should insert the words "so-called" each time it is used.

and politically engaged. To participate <u>solely</u> as critic does not suffice for me; I remain a practitioner. As practitioner, one acts as consciously and as conscientiously as circumstances allow—but act one must.

My experience of research in and engagement with an array of development and communications issues has had its moments of challenge and discovery; also of confusion, frustration, and pain. The discomfort is not mine alone. The questions I have begun to explore are those (it seems to me) that all academics must confront if they wish to contribute to emancipatory practice while retaining the ability to monitor their own professional probity. From the critical literature on development[2] I have begun to understand something of the relationship between theory and practice—and I have begun to understand how both kinds of investigation have the potential both to emancipate and to restrict.

Patricia Stamp, who has written extensively about gender in Africa, describes a paradox which at times seems unsurmountable:

> Given our immersion in the Western system of knowledge, it is hard
>
> to recognize the degree to which what is known about Third World
>
> peoples, how it is known, and how much is known is not what they
>
> have known about themselves. The very categories we employ, the

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[2] See for example: Wolfgang Sachs, ed.: <u>The Development Dictionary</u>, Graham Hancock: <u>The Lords of Poverty</u>, Frederique Apfel Marglin and Stephen A. Marglin: <u>Dominating Knowledge: Development, Culture and Reistance</u>.

systematization and generalization of knowledge about them, are

products of our will for knowledge, rather than theirs. This

knowledge is, moreover, a product of the power relations between

the West and the Third World, and is a shaping force in those

relations. [3]

I spent ten months in West Africa several years ago (1986-1987) and was obliged to reorder my world and my personal relationships within it; I am still learning from the experience. In part I am still responding to the shock I felt at finding myself in a country, Sierra Leone, which (I felt) had nothing to do with the history of the world, or at least the world I had known to that point. All my reading before I left for Africa started with "colonialism," with the "discovery" of Sierra Leone by the Portuguese. Now, however, the reality of the African people and the African land forced me to see the entire world, including myself, differently. The "Third World" scaffolding I had unknowingly created now collapsed. Since that time I have thought of my life as "before Africa" and "after Africa." Although I do not imagine I am very important to anyone there, I remain deeply connected to West Africa and to some of its people; and I try to honour the friendship and patience of people who allowed me to transform myself in their presence.

The other "lived experience" on which the thesis is based is rooted in the "how to" side of communications. Originally hired as a summer

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[3] Patty Stamp, Technology, Gender and Power (Ottawa: IDRC,1988), p 147.

student, I worked at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) for two years after my return from West Africa, and after spending four months in Cuba and Nicaragua. IDRC was for me a place of great intellectual ferment, a place of great learning. I was fortunate that despite my very junior position many people generously gave me their time and attention. I worked in the publishing unit of the communications division. At that time IDRC published much of the research it funded and distributed its books to a huge mailing-list worldwide. One of my first tasks was to compile the results of a survey of what happened to the books after IDRC sent them to the names on the list. The results gave a strong indication that the dissemination of IDRC results through the publishing and distribution of books reached only a very few people. Once the books left IDRC, there was little effort made to assess who was using the information and how.

Fascinated though I was by the process by which research was transformed from idea through administration to a finished academic text, I began to have a nagging sense of: "Is this all there is?" Questions concerning "What happens to research results?" began to gel. In fact, the issue of research utilization was arousing attention within IDRC at the time. IDRC officers were attempting to deal administratively with the problems being identified; I absorbed as much as possible of the discussions.

At IDRC, through an ongoing infomal seminar organized by the coordinator of the Gender and Development (GAD) Unit, I became very

interested in issues of international feminism. I had long considered myself a feminist; the GAD Unit now gave me the opportunity to expand my understanding. Both the chance to learn about issues and projects, and the interaction with women with significant and varied experience meant a great deal to my development.

From IDRC, it seemed a natural step to a university setting to explore these questions—How is development related to research? to feminism? What is the role of communications in this formula? Thus I found myself at Simon Fraser University (SFU).

Through the GAD program I had become acquainted with the Women Environment and Development Network (WEDNET). It was, I understood, meant to be an antidote to conventional development research projects, as I then understood them. Given my interest in and concern for African women, I was determined to do my research on a matter I thought politically relevant and one I cared about personally. As a feminist I wanted to do useful research, research that would reveal elements of women's lives that remain hidden to non-gender-sensitive researchers; research that was active and had transformative potential. I wanted to research the role of communication in development and I wanted to practice it. In WEDNET my desiderata flowed together: I believed research on WEDNET would allow me to explore, from a feminist perspective, a positive example of the relationship between development, research, and communication.

Study and research at SFU have added other dimensions to this project. A collision took place between the concept (which I had absorbed at IDRC) of communications as a "how to" issue and the theoretical/cultural questions raised within the university. With colleagues in the Communication Department I explored the issues of "voice" and "identity." What did I think that I, a white Canadian woman, was doing, researching and writing about Africa? This was a painful question, from which I learned a great deal. My attempts to answer this question led me, finally, to choose a particular disciplinary methodology—ethnography—which I discuss in Chapter Two.

The fierce criticism of development that came from cultural-studies quarters challenged me to explore other points of view. I had held the typical liberal position that engagement with people in other parts of the world was good because my motives were good; now I was challenged to examine that position as perceived by peoples of the South. I read feminist texts—This Bridge Called My Back, works by bell hooks, Audre Lord, and other women of colour—to learn how to expand feminism beyond white consciousness. I tried to find a way to honour my connection with and commitment to progressive work on international issues (development among others) and yet to listen to voices that said unequivocally that development was destructive. My experiences are multiple and contradictory; I acknowledge that learning and action are often contradictory.

As my association with the WEDNET project is now several years old, I try to reproduce my own learning curve during the course of my research and my attempts to evolve my methodology accordingly. My work has been carried out over three years and as many field trips. It is impossible to account for all my meanderings of learning. Inevitably, this is a work in progress. I must also note that throughout my association with WEDNET I have sought the guidance of WEDNET women in directing my investigation to areas where they themselves identified a need. The purpose of my in situ research required me to ask how WEDNET could become interactive and participatory in its research communication; I have attempted to incorporate that ethos into my work at every stage. I have learned that this ethos is conceptually attractive, operationally complex, and often frustrating. Therefore this work is the product of as much discussion and reflection as I could experience, given geographical and cultural factors, and the result of many acts of generosity and kindness. It belongs very much to WEDNET, whatever WEDNET is now or will become.

Nevertheless, my priority at the moment must be to meet the disciplinary standards of my department and university. Thus the norms chosen here are not necessarily appropriate for all the audiences with whom I feel an obligation to share this work. That challenge awaits me.

As the reader will have noted, the choices I made are the outcome of diverse and conflicting experiences. For many reasons it has taken me much time to complete this work. I have introduced the questions that framed the research and the circumstances in which I defined them. I want also to mention the emotional aspect of doing research with real living people. I changed, everything changed, as I did this work. It proved physically exhausting and intellectually and emotionally complex. I needed distance from my own experiences with WEDNET before I could communicate them to anyone else. This is a not uncommmon experience among researchers of human subjects, one that should be acknowledged. Research never finishes. It is rooted in one's past and throws its weight into the future. Research, I learned, is not "objective." It is felt in the bones.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about a way of engaging an international development research project—and more specifically, an international development research project for women—from within the discipline of communications. As I construe it, the thesis is not merely about <u>looking</u> at the problem in the sense of passive contemplation, neither is it a prescription for a plan of action. It is, rather, an attempt to get inside a project intellectually and to make visible and dynamic the role communications plays in its creation and realization.

The discipline of communications is a realm of tense interaction between theory and praxis. Much of it arises from the question: "what is a communications problem?" If one defines a communication problem as one that can be solved by the application of communication or information techniques, then many of the problems described here are not strictly communications problems. Rather, they are issues of organizations and management, of networks and people, that utterly transform the nature of the communication. Further, they occur within a context fraught with competing cultural voices and competing communications issues. For me one of the greatest problems. in doing this work has been precisely the conflict among the principal ways of describing "international development" as a "communications problem." One such approach is analytical-critical: it treats international development as an intellectual-cultural construct

created by one part of the world (the "developed" part) and imposed, usually with devastating consequences, on the other (the "undeveloped" or "underdeveloped" remainder). This is very different from an approach to "communications" which treats the latter as a set of strategies and techniques for disseminating information in the most efficient way possible under given circumstances. Proponents would probably consider it operational. Critics, however, might well consider both approaches normative—the one because its practitioners are so obviously rooted in ethical judgments, the other precisely because its practitioners have conditioned themselves to avoid them. It speaks to the difference between communication as an informational and a relational issue - a theme to which I shall return often in this work.

I discuss how I chose to combine these approaches in this thesis in the chapter on methodology which follows. My decision has been dictated by the contradictions and paradoxes I experienced while working in international development—theoretically at the university, administratively in an international development research agency (IDRC), and *in situ* in Africa. The need to internalize these contradictions—this *fact of experience*—has affected me strongly. Therefore, despite considerable pressure to become a partisan of one approach or the other, I propose, rather, to integrate the two—or at least, when circumstances may dictate, to hold one respectfully in suspension while applying the other with the maximum effectiveness.

I chose to do my research within an ongoing research project with which I had become interested and connected. I wanted to research a dynamic, multi-faceted project within which my own work might contribute modestly. That project is WEDNET, the Women, Environment and Development Network. It was funded in 1989 by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada. The Environmental Liaison Centre International (ELCI) was chosen as the host administrator of the project which was originally funded for three years. The project was designed with the purpose of strengthening and legitimizing women's indigenous knowledge about the environment. It had the additional purpose of creating a network of interested researchers and activists, and disseminating the results of the research to policy-makers and other groups. A total of seventeen researchers in ten African countries ultimately participated in the research. While the original phase has concluded, both IDRC and ELCI are continuing, in different ways, with the WEDNET project.

The relationship of women and environments is of critical importance. It is increasingly recognized that the management of the earth cannot be continued without the decisive involvement of women. The failure of international development is most starkly apparent when questions about both women and environment are raised. Women and the environment have been victimized by the process of development, yet many women have proved to be good

stewards of the earth even when faced with overwhelming obstacles. The research that WEDNET has done seems to me to be of the utmost significance in this debate. It offers evidence for the micro- and macro-strategies of women in a number of sectors in Africa for resisting and adapting to the environmental degradation they are experiencing while demonstrating the desperation of their situation. Indeed, there is strong evidence that women often enhance the environment through their interventions.

This thesis is, however, not about women and the environment in Africa, per se. Rather it is about WEDNET's attempt to create a development project - one that, rather than building a dam or introducing a new crop for export, would emancipate women's knowledge and make it stronger. It would do so by creating a kind of critical mass of researchers and activists - through information-exchange, dissemination, and utilization. By interrogating communications practices and beliefs that attended WEDNET's birth and functioning, I challenge notions of communication in development in general. Specifically, I raise the need to disaggregate the assumptions inherent in both the conceptualization and the operation of information-sharing and communication activities. This requires a sifting of the varied and confusing uses of the terms "communication", "dissemination" and "utilization". I offer an expansion of the definition of a "communications" problem from that of a problem that can be solved by more information to one which

requires understanding of and action within the social matrix in which communications activities take place.

My original inquiry addressed participatory communication and research- dissemination and -utilization issues only as activities that occurred once research had been completed. For a number of reasons, however, I was forced to rework my questions. I had to return to the project design to identify the elements that would determine the direction of the communications component of WEDNET. This proved to my advantage because I was forced to reconceptualize my understanding of the communication processes involved in network research. I recognized that conventional assumptions about communications in a development research project need to be pulled apart and questioned. Thus I have included an analysis of the design of WEDNET which is of course intimately connected in the analysis with the praxis of WEDNET. Institutional culture and the resultant organization of research also emerged as a critical element.

I believe that the work I have done is necessarily an aspect of the wider issue of international development as a clash of knowledge systems. If efficiency is the primary goal of development communication, then the potential for information which denigrates or is destructive of indigenous practices to be communicated is increased. A new definition of efficiency may need to be adopted. I believe it is always necessary to ask questions not only about the

efficiency or effectiveness of development communications, but also about the relationships involved or created and the content implicitly conveyed. This is for me also a communications question. Much of this thesis is dedicated to at least a partial answer to this last question. While I cannot fully evaluate all communications relationships, I endeavor to suggest to the reader where the questions might lead.

PURPOSES OF THE THESIS

Statement of the problem

How can the traditional model of development research, as implemented by IDRC and other institutions, be transformed so as to expand both in number and kind the groups who have access to research results? What role did the explicit and implicit assumptions about communication and organizational culture play in WEDNET's attempt to transform this model?

The first purpose of the thesis is to describe the creation of the network and its operation during the period of my research. The second is, with description and analysis, to answer two sets of simple questions concerning WEDNET: (a) how does it function? what are the internal dynamics of this network? and (b) what and how does this network communicate to the world around it? I shall discuss the effects of internal and external dynamics upon each other and shall attempt to

demonstrate that they are interdependent in ways not always immediately apparent.

THE WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

That the achievement of WEDNET's *explicit* communications (information sharing, dissemination and utilization) goals is dependent on the project's design (conceptualization) and praxis (functioning) is self-evident. My working proposition, however, is that both the design and the praxis of the project also reflect significant *implicit* communications assumptions. Further, dimensions of the project that do not overtly incorporate communications may nevertheless impinge significantly upon communications and therefore utilization issues. I will attempt to demonstrate the polyfunctional nature of the interaction of all these factors in (a) the network's internal communications, (b) the network's external *circularity* - the ability to share its information and techniques through engaging, learning and collaborating with external groups; (c) the tension between implicit assumptions about communications embedded in the culture of the primary organizations involved in WEDNET and the formal expectations they verbalized, and (d) the difficulties experienced by communications specialists and development planners alike in distinguishing between informational and relational issues in communication.

The further purpose is to demonstrate that issues of the communication and utilization of research must be addressed within the design of the research from the outset. The conceptualizing of communication as an end-of-research activity will be shown to be problematic and insufficient. My contribution is to point, in a modest way, to areas of future theoretical and practical study on this topic.

THE LITERATURE

There is not a unified body of literature that pertains to this question. I have had to bring together works on communications planning, network analysis, organizational communication and research utilization with the critical literature on women, environment and development, especially that sector which describes development as cultural genocide. I have chosen therefore to develop my review of the scattered literature in the footnotes as the issues are brought forth from my analysis.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Immediately following this Introduction, I discuss the background of the WEDNET project. Then I discuss the epistemological and methodological issues involved in my research. The next major section examines the case of WEDNET in four parts: a narrative of my field work and three chapters of analysis. These consist of: the internal nature of the network itself, the circularity in the

external communications to and from WEDNET, and institutional and organizational issues. I place these categories of analysis on a continuum from what is most explicitly related to communication (the network itself) to that which is most implicit (the impact on communications of particular institutional cultures). Finally, in Chapter Seven, I draw some conclusions about the relative contributions of the design and its implementation to WEDNET history, draw some broader conclusions about research networks and make both policy recommendations and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER ONE
Background to WEDNET

Introduction

In this chapter I introduce several components in the background to WEDNET which I will refer to in my analysis. First, I want to present the context for the support of networks within WEDNET's donor institution, IDRC. I will use IDRC's own documentation and analysis of its experiences with networks. Second, I will present WEDNET's official project document from which I draw my understanding of the formal purposes and activities of WEDNET. I will highlight the anticipated information-sharing and communication activities and make some comments on the budget.

IDRC-funded Networks

The IDRC Office of Planning and Evaluation published IDRC Networks Reference Materials in 1991. It is a particularly useful document because it gives a summary of the literature related to the evaluation of research networks and it reveals some of the thinking in IDRC about its network activities at the time. It contains a discussion of approaches to network policy and evaluation, an extensive list of studies of research networks, and a detailed guide to sources, including an annotated bibliography. It is a primary source of information for my analysis of networks at IDRC.

Terry Smutylo of the Office of Planning and Evaluation at IDRC also wrote an accompanying paper with a very valuable summary of IDRC's experiences with research networks: "Notes on IDRC's Experience with Research Networks." I will recount the important elements of his paper in order to demonstrate how networks were perceived by evaluators at IDRC and begin the process of separating the different purposes of networks, especially with regard to information sharing and research utilization. IDRC has a long and broad experience with networks.

> IDRC has come to see networking as an indispensable tool in the efficient pursuit of scientific research and technological adaptation for development purposes; and has found networks to be a highly adaptable mechanism for linking and meeting the needs of researchers in developing countries. [1]

In its first ten years (1970-1980) forty-three percent of IDRC's program budgets were associated with network activities. In the last decade it has funded more than seventy-five networks globally. The majority have been in what was then known as the Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Sciences Division and the Social Sciences Division. The use of networks was pioneered in national agricultural systems research and the model has subsequently been adopted by most other research disciplines.

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[1] Terry Smutylo: "Notes on IDRC's Experience with Research Networks" (IDRC Ottawa: Office of Planning and Evaluation, 1991)p.1

Smutylo describes four types of networks:

> 1) horizontal linking institutions with similar interests working in the same general field of research
> 2) vertical linking institutions working interdependently on different aspects of the same problem
> 3) information networks to provide centralized information management services to members and users enabling them to contribute and share information as needed
> 4) training networks which provide training and supervisory services to participants working independently in their own research areas.[2]

Notice that a utilization or dissemination focussed network typology does not exist. The information network seems to refer to information sharing within the network and to unspecified users but does not specifically address research utilization (although such networks might facilitate this process). He also highlights the major policy issues for networks based on limited consultations with IDRC program staff. [3] The emphasis is clearly on research and knowledge building and sharing within the network. Important policy issues for networks are highlighted.

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[2] Ibid., p. 2

[3] From review of a report by B. Nestel and J Hanchanlash, and H. Tono prepared for OPE in 1980 entitled: "IDRC Project Networks: An Appraisal of Past Strategy and Recommendation for the Future"
Discussion of the life cycle of networks yielded the following problem and recommendations:
> - the required life span is not always easy to identify at the inception of a
> network as the performance of various components is hard to predict
> - IDRC does not appear to have a policy guideline relating to one off versus
> permanent networks.
> - When IDRC networks are initiated it is often unclear what will become of
> the network when IDRC support terminates
> - It is recommended that any document relating to a network project should
> clearly state what degree of permanence the network is expected to have.

Network policy issues:

- Contribution to National Research Capacity
- Contribution to National and/or Regional Development Effort
- Contribution to fostering Interdisciplinary linkages
- Contribution to fostering South-South linkages and Collaborative Research
- Effectiveness in meeting network objectives
- Efficient use of Centre (IDRC) Resources
- Sustainability of the network
- Effective dissemination and utilization of research issues
- Mechanisms for networking
- Information flow [4]

The inclusion of research utilization as a policy issue and criteria for evaluation is not given the same emphasis in subsequent discussions in this work.

Smutylo emphasizes what IDRC has learned about networks and categorizes the advantages and disadvantages of networks. He argues that the advantages of research in a network are: comparative research, specialization in a research area, methodological development, economies of scale, transfer of knowledge from advanced to less developed countries, and institutional surrogates in countries where research institutions are weak. The disadvantages to network research are: Coordination in financial and human resource terms may be too costly, (coordination is daunting and requires careful identification of an appropriate individual and institution); non-productive networking activities can proliferate; networks may displace national research capacity rather than enhance it. [5] Again,

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[4] Ibid., p. 3
[5] Ibid. p.4

from my perspective, it is useful to note that research utilization and policy influence are not specifically mentioned as advantages of research networks in this document. Obviously some people at IDRC might consider networks advantageous in this regard, but it is significant that in this evaluation of networks at IDRC, this element is not mentioned.

In discussing the recommended components for a successful network, Smutylo introduces a number of aspects which pertain more closely to the issue I am addressing - the internal and external network factors which contribute to participatory research communication and utilization.

> - Process for network development is most important to establish early because the precise shape of the network cannot be predetermined...
> - Membership is crucial in particular a long-term commitment and technical skill...
> - Coordination must be undertaken by an experienced individual within a small secretariat or institution:"... it must tread a fine line between providing control and direction while, at the same time, being accountable and providing service to the network membership"...
> - Direction leadership and steering committee should be flexible to enhance maturity and trust through the use of "participatory governance" and "feedback and communication mechanisms"...
> - Structure and organization a strong management administrative structure is necessary and the roles of members and responsible units well-defined, in particular that of the coordinator. Flexibility and participation are necessary so roles and responsibilities can evolve...
> - Donor Support networks can take up to ten years to mature. Donor support is essential for at least 2-3 years to begin to function at a primary level of integration[6]

These recommendations are all potential contributors to a utilization strategy for networks and I elaborate on them in later

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[6] Ibid., pp. 4-6

chapters. However, in this formulation dissemination and utilization are not specific considerations. I suspect evaluation based on research utilization is not mentioned because the evaluation criteria are based on the original mandate of the network which is generally the production of high quality research. In recent years, IDRC has had a greater focus on utilization. Utilization as a primary criteria for evaluation would have to be based on a transformed set of priorities for network project funding. It is difficult to generate information on the potential networks have for research utilization since it has not been explicitly addressed. I believe it should be; one of the minor purposes of this thesis is to open a space for discussion and research in this area.

I will now turn to an examination of WEDNET's original project document looking particularly at information sharing, communications and budget allocations.

PART II: WEDNET'S BEGINNING

Founding

The WEDNET project arose from a conference at York University in Toronto in May 1988. A small group of researchers from Africa and Canada gathered to share ideas and concerns about women's role in natural resource management.

> The point of departure for the meeting was that women's knowledge about natural resources systematically has been overlooked by researchers and

> policymakers dealing with environmental issues in Africa....Specifically, the meeting aimed to overcome the limitations of a sectoral approach, by tackling both concrete and theoretical questions about women and natural resources in the context of a synthesizing conceptual framework. [7]

The participants were in general agreement that to achieve success in national development, planners had to build on the knowledge and expertise of grassroots women. They further agreed that previous efforts to impose Western, technology-intensive knowledge systems were largely faulty - both in their specific aims and in their planning philosophy. The participants argued for new strategies grounded in traditional modes of interacting with the environment. At this conference the decision was taken to create a research network that would give systematic attention to the questions raised about women and natural resource management in Africa.

In January 1989 IDRC, through the GAD Unit, funded the creation of the Women, Environment, and Development Network (WEDNET). The full project document, IDRC 3-P-88-0200, is the comprehensive design for WEDNET; it includes both the conceptual design and the plan of operations. The objectives presented below -- the general objectives of WEDNET as well as those pertaining to the network qua network, information sharing, and communications -- are taken from it. The other project-design issues of concern here are the choice and role of the institutions involved, methodology, network meetings and the role of the coordinators. The official

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[7] Rathgeber, Eva M., ed. <u>Women's Role in Natural Resource Management in Africa</u>, IDRC-MR238e, *International Development Research Centre*, Ottawa. 1989 p.(i)

objectives for each of these areas are quoted below: (A copy of IDRC 3-P-88-0200 is found in Appendix 1.)

WEDNET Objectives

The general objective of this project is to highlight women's knowledge about the environment by providing support for a set of studies on women and natural resource management in Africa. The specific objectives are as follows:

i)   to develop a network of concerned researchers and grassroots groups in different parts of Africa who will share information and research findings and undertake research within a common framework of analysis;

ii)   to support research on a) spheres of knowledge about the environment, b) household strategies for coping with environment degradation, and c) innovative strategies for sustainable resource management;

iii) to forge links between researchers and policy makers through joint participation in research and in meetings and seminars; and

iv)   to produce a set of policy recommendations for more effective resource management which take into account women's insights and experiences.

Important information and communication components have been added to this project. They will ensure that information is shared effectively and systematically amongst participating researchers and research institutions and that final reports and papers are prepared in such a way as to provide maximum dissemination opportunities not only to national policymakers, international agencies and the international research community, but also to grass roots groups working on environment issues in Africa.[8]

Specific outputs which were envisioned were based on the information sharing component, particularly the creation of a critical mass of information shared by a wide group of researchers and institutions. It was expected that this interaction would facilitate the goal of influencing policy. The networking aspects were emphasized and the coordinators were designated as the executors of this goal.

Information Networking

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[8] WEDNET Project Document: IDRC 3-P-88-0200, p.5

This proposal presents an idealized, experimental model for the sharing of information in this research network. The model is a starting point for building a working information system, dependent on the actual structure of the research network and its evolution, and on specific decisions with regard to costs and possible benefits. It will be reviewed regularly by researchers and information professionals.

The model has four goals:

i)   to provide the ongoing possibility of direct communication between the various coordinating links and the researchers in the network;

ii)   to build on existing strengths by using documentation centres that are already established or have been awarded funding by other donor agencies;

iii)   to facilitate and, in some cases, to establish links between these centres; and,

iv)   to ensure the strategic and broad dissemination of network data, particularly through the creation of linkages with other active research and information networks.[9]

It was specifically a strategy of empowering the women undertaking gender-sensitive research in an under explored area.

> This information activity will enable participants to access research proposals and documentation on research in progress generated by network colleagues, as well as background materials essential to the research studies undertaken within the network. It will include traditional services such as SDI and, where possible, the use of the newer information technologies to support electronic mail and teleconferencing, the cooperative development of joint research presentations and the conduct of peer reviews, referral services to appropriate information sources at national, regional and international levels, on-line searches, and the development of network databases on participating researchers and their work.[10]

This element was also intended to make visible and accessible the work of WEDNET researchers which is often overlooked and under supported within their own institutions. Provision was made in the budget for equipment, training and services for the electronic networking component of WEDNET (I will return to this issue).

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[9] Ibid., p.8

[10] Ibid., p. 9

The importance placed on the information-sharing activity is summarized in this appraisal by staff of IDRC:

> The information-sharing capacity will support the ultimate objective of the network which is to establish direct links with policymakers and to develop a set of policy recommendations for the sustainable management of natural resources that will draw on women's knowledge and experience of their own environments.[11]

The success of this component rested heavily on the technical functioning of the electronic network and support within the WEDNET secretariat both institutional and organizational. Further capacity was built into the project through a communications activity which was to be largely supported by the Communications Division of IDRC.

The Communication Activity

> In addition, the Communications Division will support activities which will strengthen the ability of the network participants to communicate the results of their research to the broader scientific community by assisting in strengthening skills in scientific publishing. At the same time the Division will support a review of the strengths and weaknesses of the network's internal communications mechanisms and an analysis of how the results of the research can be widely diffused, beyond the research community.

> Researchers in developing countries frequently experience difficulty in getting the results of their research activities published and disseminated. This is due in large measure to a lack of training in analyzing, preparing, writing, and editing material for scientific publications.

> In recognition of this problem, time will be allocated at each workshop to training in this area. At the first workshop, 1 day will be devoted to analyzing, writing, and preparing research results for written and oral presentation. In advance of the second meeting, participants will submit their papers to the resource persons for review and analysis and time will be made available during the workshop for the resource persons to meet with each author to discuss ways to improve the presentation of her research findings. One day will be devoted to training in rewriting, editing, and dealing with publishers and printers.

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[11] Ibid., p. ii

During the second year of the project activities, a communications consultant will review the network communication components, of the research and information networking activities, and recommend changes, if necessary. The same consultant will draw up a plan for a complementary project activity for the dissemination/utilization of research results to be funded by the Communications Division. It is envisaged that the consultant will carry out a thorough analysis of potential target audiences for information generated from the network, and will recommend strategies for reaching and influencing those people.[12]

Some of the other objectives contained in the project document are relevant to the further questions I have posed. I will not quote them directly but will extract only that which is necessary. I refer the reader to the Appendix for their full context.

Network Meetings

The project document makes provision for two meetings. The first was to take place shortly after the creation of the network.[13] Its chief purpose was to maximize information-sharing through the creation of collegial ties among researchers from across Africa. At the second meeting, to be held two years later, the final research results were to be presented. Policymakers were to be invited to both meetings. During each of the meetings, a day was to be set aside for communication activities, including preparation of publications for

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[12] Ibid., p.11
[13] The project was launched at the first full meeting of WEDNET at Nyeri, Kenya in 1989. See Environment Liaison Centre International, WEDNET: Women, Environment and Development Network, Report of the First Meeting (Nyeri: 26-29 June 1989) (Nairobi, Kenya, 1989).

academic journals, focused reports for policy makers, and popular information materials.[14]

Roles of the Coordinators

Local coordinator (LC): Some of the relevant activities envisioned for the Local Coordinator were: to correspond regularly with researchers, to assist researchers with information-sharing and acquisition of relevant literature, to coordinate preparation of the newsletter, and to undertake any other network-related activity as agreed in discussion with the Executive Director of ELCI and the Gender and Development (GAD) coordinator at IDRC.

Canadian Coordinator (CC): Based in Toronto at the Faculty of Environmental Studies of York University. The responsibilities were essentially the same as the local coordinator's. The Canadian Coordinator was to have greater responsibility for bibliographic support, while more of the daily administration was to be undertaken by the Local Coordinator.[15]

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[14] Ibid., p.11-12

[15] Ibid., p.12

Institution

> The network will be based at the Environmental Liaison Centre International in Nairobi. The ELCI has the advantage of being an institution with three official languages (English, French and Spanish) which will be of importance in a network involving both anglophone and francophone researchers. The ELCI is a global umbrella organization of environment and development NGOs with objectives loosely linked to those of the network. They are to i) help empower grassroots forces; ii) influence policy that impacts on environment and sustainable development through strong NGO involvement in the planning and policymaking process; and iii) promote and facilitate South-South and North-South networking. The ELCI currently has programs in Women, Environment and Development, Food Security and Forestry, Sustainable Development, Industrialization and Human Settlements and International Economic Relations. Its activities are carried out in affiliated offices around the world but its headquarters are in Nairobi, where this project will be based within the Women, Environment, and Development program.[16]

The Executive Director of ELCI was named Project Leader for WEDNET because of her extensive experience as a social scientist, her administrative experience, and her knowledge of women and environment issues.

Budget Allocations

A very important study of the political economy of WEDNET could be undertaken to reveal issues I will leave unaddressed in this more brief summary of WEDNET's budget. In my field research I did not undertake a forensic accounting; it would not have been appropriate.[17] In my concern with communications however, I tried in a very general way to determine i) if sufficient funds had been allocated for these activities and ii) if the funds allocated were being used for the

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[16] Ibid., p. 13

[17] Financial matters are always sensitive and I did not wish to pry into a matter not directly connected to my original question.

projected purposes. At this point the examination of some financial details will prove illuminating.

The funding of WEDNET's first three years was very generous. Extensive financial commitment to the information-sharing and communications components is evident. The following figures are the totals for the three year project.

For micro-computers, computer equipment and software training	$34,000
For consultants to assess telecommunication linkage and inventory of equipment, information network progress assessment and for four resource persons	$26,000
For information networking costs	$30,000
For the publication of the newsletter	$24,000
For a communications consultant (in year two only) including travel	$11,140
For Information Sciences Meetings in East and West Africa	$9,300

The total is $130,240 out of a total project budget of $770,560.[18] It represents approximately seventeen percent of the total budget. This does not include the cost of the coordinators' and director's time which was allocated to information-sharing and communication. It is a significant amount of financial support.

What I find striking is the intensity of the initial allocation and work to get the network going. In terms of longer-term support, the

[18] Ibid., p.15-16

very fact of the budget's generosity might impede WEDNET's ability to draw future funding.

My purpose in presenting these large sections from the original project document is to set the scene for WEDNET in the words of the creators of the project themselves. The latter include the Program Officer from IDRC's GAD Unit, the Project Leader from ELCI, the Canadian coordinator, and participants from the York University meeting. Two other divisions at IDRC contributed to the project: the Information Sciences Division and the Communications Division. They contributed financially and were involved in the design of their respective sections of the project document. Provisions for coordinating their work is detailed in the full document, some aspects more fully than others.

This document is the basic template with which I assess WEDNET's functioning. The key descriptions from this document concern: i) the explicit and implicit information-sharing and communications goals, ii) the implicit contribution of the direction, coordination, and organizational/institutional factors to communication in the network, and iii) the implications of budget allocations.

While information-sharing and communication are given particular and explicit attention in the project document I draw

attention to some important issues. The allocation of responsibility for implementation of the explicit communications goals I believe is left somewhat vague. The design of the network is very centralized and might encourage a tendency toward exclusivity, particularly because the design depends heavily on ELCI as a conduit to other groups.

I sense an ambiguity about how far the goal of communication and, further, utilization of the research was to be integrated and implemented in this phase of the project. The comments of the Director of the Communications Division indicate that a future complementary activity was envisioned. The planned for communications consultancy also indicates a future complementary activity was planned. I raise this issue to draw attention to the implicit assumption that the communication of research is something that takes place largely after the research is completed and is not an integral part of the research process from its inception. The network provision for information sharing between researchers from the beginning of their work within WEDNET is an exception to my assertion. I argue, however, that such information sharing between researchers is only a small step in the direction integrating communication into research and further is a fairly standard academic practice.

The budget indicates a concentration of funds for establishing the electronic network, which was clearly a risk, and further indicates that the fulfillment of many of the information sharing and

communication goals would depend on the success of this one endeavor.

Having presented WEDNET's project document, in the next chapter I present my own research plan and discuss some of the epistemological and methodological issues which arose.

CHAPTER TWO
Methodology

This is an account of how I went about my research and of the choices I made; it includes discussions of both epistemological and methodological issues. There are three parts to my discussion. First, I discuss the epistemological dilemmas I had in choosing my analytical frame for studying WEDNET and why I chose as I did. Second, I discuss my choice of feminist ethnography as a method by examining some specific critiques of this approach from various feminist writers. Third, I reflect on how I used these ideas in my own work. I recognize that I am truncating some of the important issues in the debate in critical feminist epistemology and method, but this thesis is not the place for an extensive discussion. I hope that the interested reader will follow some of the suggestions for further reading in the footnotes.

I would like to return to the different approaches to communication in development that I raised in the Introduction which could be described as "doing the right thing in communication" and "doing the thing right in communication." My purpose in raising this dilemma is to provide the problematic context in which I chose the epistemological framework for this thesis.

How communications can empower communities with the autonomous capacity to choose the means and the messages they

exchange and absorb as opposed to exploiting the power of communication techniques and technologies to promulgate means and messages designed for them is a fundamental tension within the field. The paradox of development communications is for me that the greater the concentration on effectiveness and efficiency in communication, the more likely it is that the subversive potential for communication is lost - that is, the potential for subversion of a Western-defined development, not the subversion of indigenous, endogenous culture and development. I can illustrate my concern by quoting from a recent book by Bernard Woods, Communication, Technology and the Development of People. Woods argues that the key component that has been left out of development is communications. [1] He creates a new framework wherein the potential of the information revolution and the communications sector transforms the approach to other sectors such as health and education.

> Success in development to date has been partial. Many technical, physical, economic and financial objectives have been achieved, but solutions for human and social objectives, and for alleviating widespread poverty and debt, remain elusive. This book examines a fundamental and pervasive problem underlying the persistency and consistency of this problem, and describes solutions that will introduce a new era of development.[2]

Despite Woods' efforts to focus on people and their communities, it remains a 'new and improved' version of the development project ostensibly liberated from its failures by

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[1] Significantly, the foreword of the book is written by John Sculley, Chairman and CEO of Apple Computer, Inc.

[2] Bernard Woods, Communication, Technology and the Development of People, preface ix

information and communications technologies. Communications, as a
set of techniques to increase the exchange of information, however,
cannot be a solution to the failure of development, any more than it is
responsible for it. It is a contested arena wherein a constant struggle
takes place.

I developed a series of assumptions to guide me through
WEDNET. I assume 1) that the critics of development such as Sachs
and Shiva (and many others) are correct in their assertion that
development ("monoculture" as described by Shiva) results in harmful
effects up to and including the earth's destruction[3]; 2) that
communications techniques and technologies are not value free as
applied to development and; 3) that communications can make

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[3]Within the vast body of recent critical literature on development, these books have shaped
my thinking most decisively: Wolfgang Sachs, ed., The Development Dictionary: A Guide to
Knowledge as Power (London: Zed Books, 1992). This is a unique collection of essays which
takes apart the terms which compose the development apparatus. Writers such as Ashis
Nandy, Arturo Escobar, Majid Rahnema, Ivan Illich, and Sachs himself analyse ideas such
as: 'State', 'Planning', 'Participation', 'Needs', 'One World', and 'Development'. It is an
extraordinary book; an explosion of the myth called development, which is revealed piece by
piece to be a kind of cultural imperialism - worse - genocide. From this book, one learns to
be wary of 'new solutions' to development problems, or accounts for why it has failed and how
to fix it. Women and development and sustainable development both fit into this category. It
is through reading this book that I recognized the depths of the contradictions of my position
as a practitioner. Also critical to my understanding are works by Vandana Shiva, particularly,
Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development, (London: Zed Books, 1989) and
Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology (London: Zed
Books, 1993) Shiva has become a leading figure in the struggle for the protection of
indigenous knowledge, particularly women's knowledge. Her position, described as eco-
feminism, ascribes special power to women in the stewardship of the earth. It is a complex
position, a distinctly Southern view. Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity
and Biotechnology links the struggle to protect bio-diversity to cultural survival. I have
understood from this book, amongst others, the need to connect what is known by indigenous
groups to how it is known. Her books are, in that sense, very much about communication
issues.

"development" more efficient, and at the same time it can and should be subversive of a Western-defined development.

I am describing a series of paradoxes. The first proposition, in a sense, gave birth to WEDNET. It owes its origins to the recognition, on the part of many, that a major cause of environmental destruction has been international development's failure to address other ways of knowing and interacting with the earth. The creators of WEDNET accepted the urgency of legitimizing women's knowledge and placed it within an institution of development research. In a sense, WEDNET was created in part to transform, or subvert, the primary institution of its origin - IDRC. However, some would argue that it is an example of the domestication of a radical idea within the apparatus of a Western-defined development. An analysis of WEDNET based on an investigation of these propositions would also have been within the discipline of communications.

I will argue in this thesis that communications issues must be taken more seriously in development research. I argue that indigenous knowledge is intimately connected to indigenous communication, that communication must be systematic and creative, must be participatory, must be viewed as relational not just informational. Why then do I object to Woods' book? Why have I chosen to look at the micro-issues of communication in WEDNET? In a sense I contradict myself. If I am so concerned that the emphasis on improving the techniques of communication can lead to domination by elites, why do I not then

analyse WEDNET as a contribution to the discourse of domination? Women do make progress by trusting what they know and how they know it. I hold to the strategy of small steps. This is why I have chosen to make my investigation into what I will call micro-empowerment. This brings me to the proposition within which I locate my work.

Participatory communication is generally small-scale, relies on informal practices, especially those of women, and is often to do with local problems. Patricia Stamp makes this insightful comment on women and communication:

> While the word of women is absent in the world of male discourse, it is not in their communities' life where they are actively engaged in the physical, social, and cultural reproduction of their families and communities. This active participation of women is particularly strong in communication activities... women are never silent or passive to each other, or to their communities. Rather women play vital communicative functions of information-exchange, transmission of knowledge, and in systems of self-help. To explore and empower women's communicative functions, gender and cultural perspectives must be applied.[4]

I urge that planners become more aware of these practices, and yet I am fearful. The more effective some dissemination technique is, the more likely it is to have some resonance with the culture of the

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[4] Patricia Stamp, Technology, Gender and Power in Africa, IDRC, Ottawa, 1989, pp.6 Stamp's book is invaluable as an introduction to conceptual issues in the study of women in Africa. It contains an excellent review of theory and case studies, and of conceptual and practical gaps in research about women, science, and technology in Africa. Significantly, it has a very thoughtful essay -- following Foucault -- on the relationship between power and knowledge, and provides a framework for Western academic research in Africa.

community. Sophisticated advertisers and social marketers, for example, use focus groups and ethnographic research methods, but the larger question of the good of the community is not examined. Do these communities want the message and the larger apparatus of development from which it springs? We cannot protect communities and ask them to stay untouched by modern communication as in the "salvage paradigm" critiqued by ethnographer James Clifford.[5] Some may choose to accept certain messages and others not but how much control do they have over the apparatus? The paradox is that even asking communities for greater participation leaves them vulnerable. Participation and control are not the same thing. It is within this arena that I located my investigation. In focussing on the details of communication within and from WEDNET I hoped to find the openings for subversion and transformation.

The dilemma I have described ironically, or perhaps predictably, led me to a different problem. If I were to undertake the fine sifting of communications practices to see what women could and would do, I would have to find a way of doing so within the context of emancipatory practice to avoid the trap of extractive research and communication to which I so vigorously object.

Ethnography is epistemologically based in field work. Knowledge emerges from direct interaction with people, although that

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[5] James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988).

knowledge is never definitive. The construction of reality is based in social interaction and therefore all knowledge is socially derived.[6] Meaning is negotiated between the researcher and the participants in the study during the course of daily activity. It is therefore based in the lived experiences both of the participants and of the researcher. Self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher is a key concept. The researcher inevitably brings biases and assumptions to the work and has an impact on what she studies. Making those assumptions explicit is central to the study, although there is debate both about the manner of presenting this material and the extent of explication necessary.[7]

Ethnography rejects the positivist notion of a world knowable scientifically by an objective scientist.[8] Claims of scientific neutrality are seen to mask or mystify the inherently ideological nature of research and to obscure issues of race, class, and gender. Ethnography is particularly useful for both cross-cultural and feminist research for these reasons, although it is not without criticism from people affected in both these categories.

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[6]P.Berger and T.Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality, Garden City, NY. Anchor, 1966.
[7]John Van Maanen, Tales of the Field, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988.
[8]For further discussion see James Clifford 1988, van Maanen 1988, Hammersley and Atkinson 1983.

FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHY

Shields and Dervin provide a critical exposition of feminist methodologies; they describe feminist research as having the following perspectives:

- Value is placed on women's experience, including that of the researcher.

- Gender and gender roles are recognized as social constructions.

- Attention is given to two related concepts: gender reflexivity and intersubjectivity. The first places the researcher on the same plane as the researched, the second is the reciprocal sharing of knowledge and experience between researcher and researched.

- Research for women must be emancipatory; its purpose is to end social and economic inequality.[9]

For Patti Lather consciousness-raising and empowerment are key concepts. She operates from three assumptions: 1) that a definitive critique of positivism has been established; 2) that ways of knowing are inherently culture-bound and perspectival; 3) that in order to develop an emancipatory social science research, approaches that both empower the researched and contribute to the development of change-enhancing social theory must be developed.[10] The aim of feminist research is to

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[9]Vickie Routledge Shields and Brenda Dervin. "Sense-Making in Feminist Social Science Research: A Call to Enlarge the Methodological Options of Feminist Studies" in *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol.16, No.1, p. 66-67.

[10] Patti Lather: "Feminist Perspectives on Empowering Research Methodologies" and Patti Lather: "Issues of Validity in Openly Ideological Research: Between a Rock and a Soft Place", *Interchange* Vol.17. No.4 (Winter 1986) 63-84

correct both the distortion and invisibility of women's experience so as to bring about a change in the unequal social relations of power. [11]

VALIDITY

In the article "Issues of Validity in Openly Ideological Research: Between a Rock and a Hard Place," Lather is specifically concerned with issues of validity:

> My central argument is that new paradigm researchers must begin to be more systematic about establishing the trustworthiness of data. Reducing the ambiguity of what we do does not mean we have to deny the essential indeterminacy of human experience.... But if we want illuminating and resonant theory grounded in trustworthy data, we must formulate self-corrective techniques that will check the credibility of our data and minimize the distorting effect of personal bias upon the logic of evidence.[12]

This article is the starting point for the development of my methodology. Lather points to the need for rigorous self-awareness in research designs that emphasize the dialogical and dialectical educative encounter between the researcher and the participants.

> Through dialogue and reflexivity, design, data and theory emerge, with data being recognized as generated from people in a relationship.[13]

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[11] I found myself drawn to these ideas and wanted to find out what happened to them when they are put into practice by ordinary mortals.
[12]Ibid. p.65
[13]Ibid., p.69

As a means of neutralizing the distorting effects of the biases of

researchers who undertake openly ideological research, Lather offers the

following guidelines:

> Triangulation: this includes multiple data sources,
> methods, and theoretical schemes.
> Construct Validity: a systematic reflexivity which shows
> how the guiding theory has been changed by the logic of
> the data.
> Face Validity: this area is stressed in establishing data
> credibility. The results of the research are regularly carried
> back to the participants and refined in light of their
> comments.
> Catalytic Validity: this argument is "premised not only on
> a recognition of the reality altering impact of the research
> itself, but also on the need to consciously channel this
> impact so that respondents gain self-understanding and
> ideally self-determination through research
> participation."[14]

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

Although Shields and Dervin agree with general principles of

feminist ethnography, they are troubled by issues in collaborative

research, namely i) establishing a collaborative project with a

community may be very difficult because of differences within it; ii)

collaborative research assumes the relational level of peers which may

be uncomfortable for both the respondents and the researcher; iii) the

time lag between data collection and production of the final report can

be problematic, especially if the research is problem-oriented.[15]

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[14]Ibid. p. 67
[15]Dervin and Shields, p.70-71

Judith Stacey has identified further problems in the artificial leveling of hierarchies and the assumption of equality between the researcher and the participants. She argues that participants are at great risk of exploitation because of the subjective and emotional engagement between the researcher and the participant. Further, there is the risk of betrayal and abandonment. There are two levels to the problem. One is at the level of process, the other at the level of product -- the latter because the ethnography, once written, is an authoritative document produced by the researcher who assumes responsibility and, in effect, ownership. Stacey argues for a far greater degree of self-reflexivity and an acknowledgment of the partiality of the "truth" of what is produced. [16] In this she and Lather are in agreement.

Some of the most powerful critiques of feminist ethnography have come from women of colour, both within and outside the academy. Racism is a particularly contentious issue. As Barbara Smith has said:

> The reason racism is a feminist issue is easily explained by the inherent definition of feminism. Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of color, working class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women - as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women.

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[16]Ibid.

Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism but merely female self aggrandizement.[17]

One of the most prominent critics, bell hooks, has urged white women to examine their own complicity in the racist status quo.[18] She challenges the white feminist researcher to avoid assuming that doing work with feminist intentions necessarily eliminates the experiences of oppressive social structures that are the product of a gendered racism.[19] Collaborative research is therefore a particularly contentious area and the ongoing negotiation of the relationship between the researcher and her collaborators can become *the* central issue in the research. There is no easy solution.

Shields and Dervin also point to questions raised by Janice Radway on a very different issue. How does one do collaborative research when the subjects of the research are as powerful as the researcher if not more so? In other words how does one collaborate with elites?[20] She suggests that a different set of collaborative tools must be developed in order to identify political dimensions. Is the researcher being used as a conduit for a political strategy by the informant? Why should the informant

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[17]Gloria T Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds. All the Women are White, all the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies, New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1982. p. 49

[18]bell hooks, Yearning London: Zed Books, 1989.

[19]Gloria Anzaldua, and Cherrie, Moraga eds. This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour, New York: Kitchen Table, 1981.

[20]Radway, Janice: "Ethnography Among Elites: Comparing Discourses of Power" Journal of Communication Inquiry, Vol.13 No.2. 1989 pp.3-11

not use the researcher for her own or the community's needs? Sondra Hale in a fascinating and forthright article describes the contradictions she experienced interviewing a very powerful Sudanese feminist and political activist. The conflictual levels of power and cultural difference make the attempt at collaboration both uncomfortable and unsuccessful in the eyes of the researcher.[21] A collaborative research undertaking necessarily involves complex, ongoing and potentially difficult negotiation of power relations. Stacey, Dervin and Shields, Smith, and Hale have all pointed out the need to approach any collaboration cautiously.

SENSE-MAKING

I turned to Dervin and Shields ' concept of "sense-making" as a compatible addition to feminist ethnographic methodology. It assumes that:

> ...communicating behaviours, both internal and external, are behaviours by which humans bridge ever present gaps...Sense-making "hows" focus on how people define situations (which sense-making calls situation defining strategies) as well as how they conceptualize the cognitive gaps they face and how they make ideas which allow them to bridge these gaps...Thus sense-making offers the gap idea as essential to the study of communication phenomena.[22]

[21]Hale, Sondra, "Feminist Method, Process, and Self-Criticism: Interviewing Sudanese Women" in Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History, Berger Gluck, Sherna and Patai, Daphne, eds. Routledge, New York, 1991

[22]Dervin and Shields, p.74

What is different about the 'sense-making' approach is that it attempts to develop a generalizable interviewing approach that so far as possible, gets the interviewer out of the interview. The intention is to give the participant more control over the conversation and also to require the interviewer to use a systematic and comparable set of queries which allows the participant the freedom and power of self description and explanation. The possible questions could be something like these, although not necessarily in this order, as described by Dervin and Shields:

> What happened in this situation? What was important? What was difficult? What led you to see it this way? What questions did you have? What answers did you get? Where they what you were looking for? What understanding did you get? How did this help you? What ideas did you create? Did they help or hinder? Did they change your action... feelings... behaviour... thinking?[23]

The participant can tell her story in linear, episodic, cyclical or any other form, whichever allows the truest self-expression.

Sense-making as a technique makes significant assumptions about the relationship between the researcher and the research participant. Dervin and Shields argue that no matter how much alike people may seem or in fact be, difference is always present. Initial acknowledgment of this may actually strengthen the process of communication. Where emancipation for women is seen to be the goal of research, to acknowledge explicitly that each person is different, and

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[23] Ibid. p.74

dynamic in that difference, makes the determination of political goals more complex. If one assumes the basis for political action to be unity, then the negotiation of that unity, including the period of time when an alliance will exist, is potentially very difficult.

Yet Dervin and Shields believe that sense-making is compatible with a feminist perspective in the following ways:

- Women's experience: sense-making is actor-centered, it does not impose reality on its subjects: "It is assumed that the interviewer does not have an a priori understanding of the respondent but rather develops this understanding in communication...."[24]

- In sense-making the research question must be important to the respondent.

- Sense-making accepts that gender is social and cultural construction

- Sense-making has an emancipatory potential:

> Unlike "conscientization" as conceptualized by Freire and held up as the model in much feminist research ... sense-making does not set out to overtly "give" subjects tools to overcome their oppression by raising their consciousness of the oppression around them. Yet it sets out to implement important aspects of the Freirian idea because it assumes that any individual who is listened to on her own terms emerges from that interaction more conscious of her world and thus better able to act upon it.[25]

Sense-making also contributes to theory-building in an emancipatory way because it treats each respondent as a theorist whose work is his/her own life. The participant is asked to make sense

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[24]Ibid. p.75-76
[25]Ibid. p.76

systematically and to describe patterns, something usually done by the researcher. Dervin and Shields argue that intersubjectivity and collaboration are simply not suitable for all types of feminist research. They propose an alternative approach which allows for a less closely intertwined relationship between the researcher and the participants -- one nevertheless actor-centered and potentially emancipatory.[26]

RESEARCH APPROACH

I have presented the sense-making alternative because I found it a very powerful approach for my work with WEDNET. This is due to several reasons. I recognized that for me to undertake research with women in Africa, I needed to consider my position and that of my WEDNET collaborators carefully. I did not have the time necessary to establish an ethnographic relationship with each of them. Also, I was very conscious of my junior position relative to them. I struggled constantly with my position as a white woman researching in Africa. Because of all these competing issues, I had some difficulty in deciding whether I would do the research and, if so, how I would go about it. My first and most important task was to meet the network and get permission for my project.

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[26]Ibid., p.78

My first interaction with WEDNET as a whole was at a project meeting of WEDNET held in June 1991 in Accra, Ghana. I needed to know if I could do the work I was interested in with WEDNET and I wanted a low-pressure opportunity to introduce myself. I was invited to the meeting as an observer by the Canadian Coordinator of WEDNET. At this meeting many of the researchers were deciding on their project methodologies and priorities. I intended to observe and participate (if invited to do so) in the discussions and to document decisions as they unfolded. There was a diversity of opinion about how people who participate in research (as "subjects") are represented and by whom. I wanted to see where these ideas came from and how they were perceived by the group. The tone seemed academic and the debate was lively on the question of research subjects but I drew no firm conclusions. I got a preliminary sense of the group's dynamic and the direction of the discussions about communication and participation.

Naturally, my chief purpose in attending this meeting was to make myself known to WEDNET and to gain the permission of the researchers for my work. I did this in several ways. I spoke to the researchers individually, in an unstructured format, trying to understand the position of each regarding my stated objectives. I was introduced by the Canadian coordinator to many of the researchers as a Canadian student interested in communications. From there I had individual conversations with the majority of the researchers over several days. After establishing some connection to them, and having

explained what I hoped to do in my research and how, I asked for permission to come to visit them later in the year and to discuss further with them issues about WEDNET and communications. All of those to whom I spoke agreed. There were a few WEDNET members who were not present and a few I did not ask directly for permission. I subsequently did not include them in this study, largely for logistical reasons.

Following this conference, I structured my work around the following issues (of course they evolved as I did my research):

1) To address the issue of inequality between the researcher and the participants, I took a number of steps. I did not attempt to work with women at the grassroots level in Africa. I would have liked to work with the women who participated in the individual WEDNET research projects, but I did not feel that I would be able to establish a satisfactory and non-exploitative relationship with them. Despite obvious and important differences in culture and experience between us, I felt that the WEDNET researchers and I, as academics, had enough in common, particularly on the subject of research organization, to arrive at a good level of understanding and interaction. The barrier of language was also eliminated as all the researchers spoke either English or French, and I am fluent in both. Above

all else, I did not want to presume a collaborative emotionally-intertwined relationship with the WEDNET participants. In some cases a greater degree of collaboration did indeed occur, along with some emotional intertwining. But it was never my intention for that to occur as a result of the research process. I was prepared to accept whatever degree of closeness or collaboration the women I worked with were prepared to offer. I have also tried to continue my relationship with WEDNET by sharing the results of this research. I have accomplished that with some of the individual researchers. I have been less successful on an institutional level because of the current uncertainty about the institutional housing of WEDNET;

2) I incorporated Lather's concepts of <u>triangulation</u> and <u>construct validity</u> into my research and the writing of this thesis. I used as many diverse sources of information as were available to me, and tried out many different methods for gathering information. I used a variation on 'sense-making', following a semi-structured questionnaire, as my basic approach, and kept Lather's concepts of validity in mind throughout;[27]

3) I wanted to be a catalyst for a discussion among the researchers themselves of communications within WEDNET, but I had little preconceived notion of how that might take place.

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[27] See Appendix II for a copy of the questionnaire

I simply believed that if I asked particular questions of certain people, ideas might come forth and at some point be acted upon. To examine feedback to ELCI, in the design of my field work I deliberately scheduled two working periods there between visits to WEDNET researchers in the field. My intention was to use the time at ELCI to talk about what I was discovering as both a check for my work and as a potential catalyst for WEDNET's own activities and progress. I thought that these would be forms of Lather's <u>face</u> and <u>catalytic</u> validity;

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Decisions about methodology have been among the greatest difficulties in completing this work. The rejection of the possibility of an objective stance on the part of the researcher is now a fact of my research philosophy. However, the consequence is the tangle of experience and emotion that becomes attached to the work. I used sense-making for many of my interviews to give my informants some space. In doing so I also gave myself some space from the project, but it did not prevent me from developing some strong feelings about what was happening within WEDNET. I think sense-making was a good choice, although I did not use it exclusively and adapted its techniques. The sense-making technique of asking the participant to tell the story of a specific issue brought forth an abundance of ideas. I generally held my ideas in check until I had a good understanding of the researcher's

perspective. In subsequent conversations the sense-making cycle had evolved, and it felt artificial for me not to express an opinion. Usually at that point, my ideas and experiences would emerge in the conversation, often as a response to questions posed by the researchers themselves.

This conversation became part of my effort to achieve catalytic validity. I think I was more successful with the individual researchers than with the institutions, although I have not finished my efforts with either. I discovered that, because of the fragmentation at ELCI and the personality tensions, it was an objective not easily met. It is also possible that I did not achieve the sort of relationship with the principal actors at ELCI necessary to create a fully functioning feedback interaction.

I conducted or attempted to conduct interviews with some of the principal people at ELCI and was not satisfied with my results. This affected my success at triangulation. I was troubled but had no choice but to continue with my project. I decided I could gather enough information on my research area. Because certain doors were closed, I had to find other means of answering my questions. Although this was frustrating, I learned more about the research process than if the task had been easy. I suspect, but cannot know for sure, that I also modified my theoretical constructs more than I would have done had I not reworked my questions in mid-effort.

My thinking has continued to evolve both on the topic I chose and on the approach I took. As said in the preface, research never really ends. If I could do this again, I would apply my analytic framework to the institutions I would be working with <u>before</u> my encounter with them as well as during and after. The potential in ethnography for emotional and political entanglement should be taken very seriously - for both ideological and personal reasons.

CHAPTER THREE

WEDNET's Internal Communication

You cannot not communicate.
Communication occurs at two levels: content and relationship.
Communication transactions are either between equals or not equals, rooted in social contexts not communicative ones.[1]
The question for communications planner is : How can this problem be solved?
  1. By communications alone,
  2. By communications with other measures,
  3. By other measures only.[2]

Introduction

In this Chapter, I will focus on WEDNET as a network and address its internal information-sharing and communications activities. My premise is that the internal communication is ultimately connected to its external output. Also I want to focus some attention briefly on the organization of research in the form of a network to understand how it differs from individually funded research.

Jan Walls suggests that network types exist along a continuum:

Relationship-focused groups are characterized by intimacy, long-term responsibility of members for each other, and stability of membership with holistic relationships. They are not easily entered into and not easily left behind under normal circumstances. But the relationship-focused groups may also exhibit another characteristic - stagnation, unless their members and their internal relationships are invigorated by external linkages to other groups, involving the exchange of goods and technologies as well as information. Task-focused groups, on the other hand, are characterized by respect for the individuality of their members, by task-oriented responsibility of members, and by mobility of membership with

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[1] Sven Windahl, Benno Signitzer, and Jean T. Olsen, <u>Using Communication Theory: an Introduction to Planned Communication,</u> (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992) p. 86

[2] Windahl et al. 1992, p. 31

particularistic, rather than holistic, relationships. They are more easily entered into and are left behind with less remorse when better opportunities emerge outside the group. But task-focused groups also run the risk of disintegrating due to the lack of long-term commitment to internal relationships on the part of members.[3]

I would take these observations further and suggest that tasks done in a network can lead to or enhance relationships so that some blend of invigoration and stability could be fostered. How can a network be created so as to contain both elements -- more specifically, could WEDNET evolve so as to contain both parts? In fact, my observations indicate that WEDNET has swung back and forth along this continuum, remaining ambivalent about which it wanted to be.

The same is true with respect to unity and diversity:

> ... social systems characterized by great homogeneity and emphasizing communication among individuals with similar backgrounds and knowledge lead to less creative information-exchange than heterogeneous systems...Social systems will, in certain situations, benefit from encouraging the input of diverse or even contradictory information into the system, as well as placing people and groups with different knowledge and ideas in contact with one another.[4]

WEDNET was characterized at first by diversity of discipline and country of origin; all its members, with a few exceptions, were essentially academics. Homogeneity, the property of sameness, is useful at the inception of a network; it is conducive to stability. However, an expansion in a network to heterogeneity infuses

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[3] Jan Walls "Global Networking for Local Development: Task Focus and Relationship Focus in Cross-Cultural Communication," in Linda Harasim ed. Global Networks: Computers and International Communication. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993) p. 104-105

[4] Granovetter (1973), as quoted in Windahl et al. 1992, p. 48

creativity and gives it the potential for a longer, more flexible existence. Some diverse and perhaps contradictory ideas which might ultimately have strengthened WEDNET did emerge from the researchers but did not seem to find a route for expression and incorporation into the project's management.

The tasks which WEDNET members undertook were essentially solitary (academic research). Even when the research was conducted in teams the groups were of the same general academic culture (I acknowledge the disciplinary and cultural differences) in which the emphasis is on the production of research to a standard defined by peers in the field. The potential relationships with the women who participated in the research were left for the researchers to develop or not. While there was extensive debate about participation and relationships with research subjects, I did not find any evidence that the members of the network had established a set of goals for this issue. Similarly, between WEDNET members there were few collaborative tasks undertaken to strengthen the relationships which were created through meetings and common interest. Further, WEDNET's expansion as a task-focussed network to include diverse collaborators was limited by the vagueness of the actual tasks of WEDNET beyond the individual production of research.

1A: Internal Communications: Design

In Chapter One I quoted the WEDNET project document at length in order to present the "information-networking" and "communication activity" intentions of its creators. I have suggested that careful attention needs to be paid to the design of the project in light of the remarks I have just made. The discussion in the project documents from which I have had to glean my analysis is practical rather than theoretical. I limit my discussion to what I feel is evident without presuming to understand all of the vision of the project's designers.

Internal information-sharing

The electronic information-sharing component of WEDNET was developed primarily by the Information Sciences Divisions (ISD) at IDRC-Ottawa. At the Nyeri meeting, a systems-analysis consultant made a presentation, based on the ISD plan, on the creation of an electronic network within WEDNET.[5] The plan linked the coordinators in Toronto and Nairobi and linked the researchers to each other and to ELCI. The larger goal was to link with research

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[5].The consultant was later hired by ELCI to create and support electronic NGO networks, amongst other things. Electronic information-sharing is perhaps the fastest growing technology and technique in communications. An entire thesis could be written on this one question. For my purposes here, I am including it as one of several elements of WEDNET communications.

institutions with data bases that could be both sources of information and repositories for WEDNET research.

The technical infrastructure envisioned included provision of basic equipment (computer, modem) and basic training to the institutions where WEDNET researchers were located. E-mail and teleconferencing were to be used for meetings, information exchange, and monitoring procedures and for routine communication among network members. The coordinators were to use training opportunities through IDRC-Information Sciences Division (ISD) workshops to strengthen the network. Databases were to be established by information professionals at IFAN and ELCI with advice from Pan-African Documentation Information Systems (PADIS) in Addis Ababa. [6]The newsletter was to be also in electronic form, if the network became viable. Bibliographic support by ELCI and the Canadian Coordinator through York University was mandated. WEDNET information-sharing was meant to be part of a larger structure of electronically linked NGOs and research institutions.

At the Accra meeting, some researchers expressed surprise that they had not been given a computer and the appropriate training so that they as individuals could access e-mail. The ELCI systems analyst explained that it was his plan to place the e-mail connection (hardware and software) in the institution with which the researcher was

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[6] Some of the funding for the electronic network and training support came from the IS Division of IDRC through parallel projects.

affiliated, not with the researcher herself. The technology was to be used much like a fax or telex: a technician would actually operate the computer. The purpose was "institutional capacity-building." Although the latter took priority over individual access, researchers were assured that steps would be taken to ensure their access to the technology. However, I found no evidence that a systematic or ongoing survey was taken of individual researcher's needs and current access.

The overall plan acknowledged that much support would be needed to introduce a largely new communications technology to researchers and to ensure its integration into the institutions with which they were affiliated. The WEDNET project document provides for an Advisory Committee to alleviate these problems. It was to be established with the following members: the Canadian Coordinator, the Local Coordinator, a systems expert from IFAN and ELCI and one other information systems professional: it would "coordinate [and] ensure that the information professionals are active partners in network development and have a collective voice on the information support to the research activities... ."[7] I found no record that it was ever established. As I said earlier, the model used in WEDNET for information sharing relied heavily on the establishment of a functioning e-mail system. Given this dependence, it would have been valuable to have a committee in support of it or any other information-sharing efforts.

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[7].WEDNET Project Document, IDRC 3-P-88-0200, p. 10.

Internal Communications Activity

It was envisioned that internal communication would comprise two distinct activities. One consisted of commentaries (feedback) on the work of the WEDNET researchers; it would be intellectual and research-oriented. The other, separate from the research function, was the development of the technical and human infrastructure of the network.

In the second project year a communications consultant was to review network communications components to recommend changes and to plan the eventual dissemination of the research to target audiences and its utilization by them. This plan raises the important question of the systematic character of communications planning and action. A consultant generally is hired for a specific task which has a clear beginning and end. The consultant is not necessarily connected to the process and is often more concerned with generating specific results rather than facilitating a longer-term dynamic. Generating results is of course very important to communications planning but no more so than the creation of relationships through which information and collaborations take place. In the case of WEDNET, a communications person as a member of the coordinating group, or a consultant on a long-term retainer might have produced very different results. In particular, planning for and action on the communication

of the research might have been more fully integrated into the ongoing management of the network.

In the design, important questions were left unanswered or unaddressed. Many of the practical and logistical steps required to build a network were left undelineated and unassigned, as far as I can tell from the project documents. There were goals expressed, but not the specific means for achieving them. The question of the directions that the flow of information would take was essentially not specified. The structure of the network with ELCI as the point through which information would pass centralized the network. This had several repercussions 1) ELCI became critical to the success of the network. 2) The primary flow of information would then be back and forth between ELCI and the individual WEDNET researcher 3) While other potential directions for information flow were given some consideration, especially through electronic links, when the pressure on the coordinator's time increased, the default position was the one the design favoured: a centralized flow in which ELCI mediated communication within the network. If the horizontal links (those between researchers) had been well established when the centre defaulted in its mandate, they might have grown to take initiative and perhaps some coordinating roles. E-mail can enable one researcher to communicate simultaneously with the entire network, including its centre. Below I have created a model of the way WEDNET looked to me. In the next chapter, on external communication, I will present a

revised model of how WEDNET might have looked with some structural adjustment.

WEDNET's Communication Structure
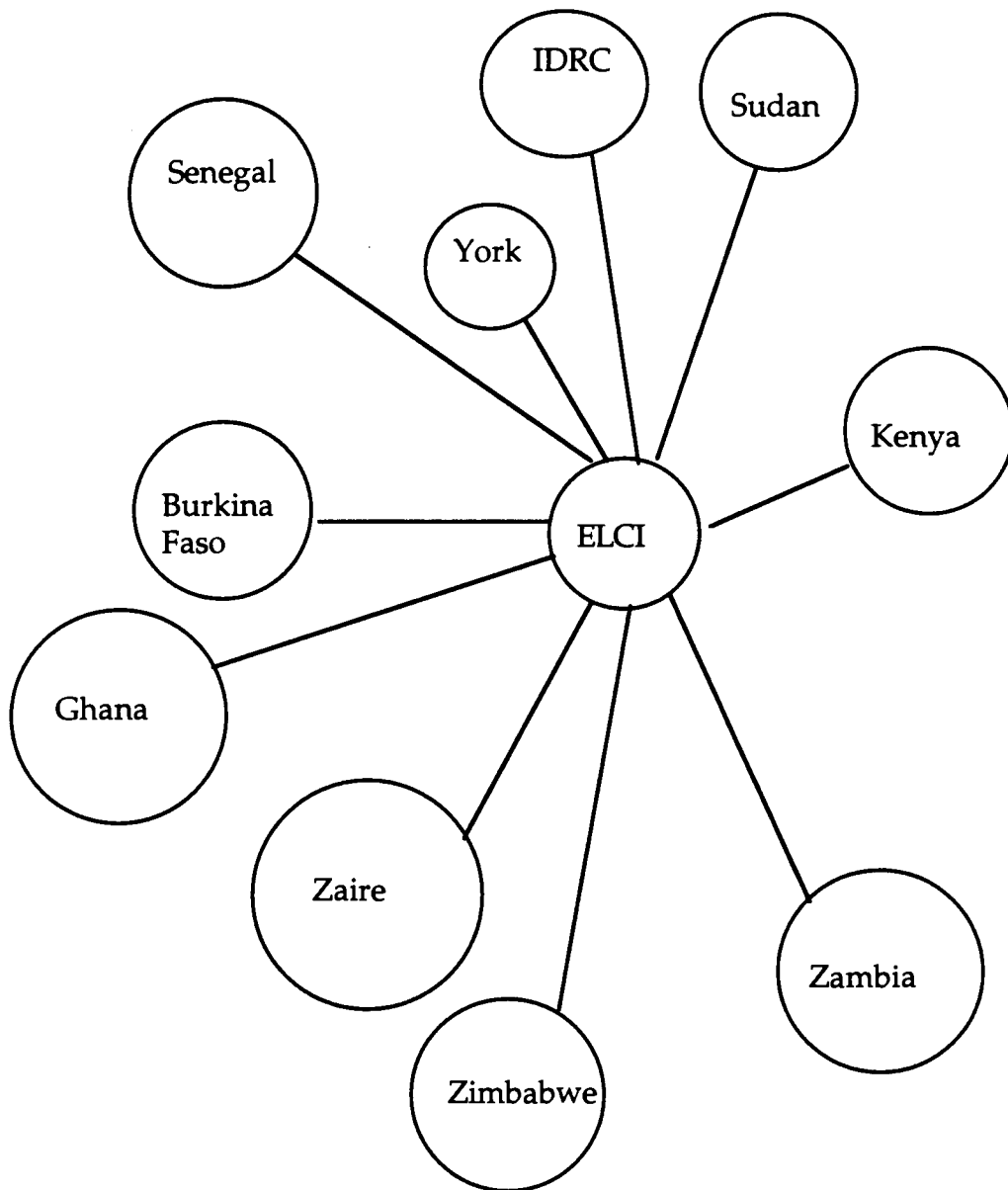
The Canadian Coordinator had some direct correspondence with the researchers, particularly concerning bibliographic support, but much of the network correspondence was fed through ELCI.

Questions relating to governance were similarly vague. What was to be the network's governance? This matter is very sensitive and perhaps it was left deliberately vague for that reason. Power is often hidden in networks of women who are taken to be peers. Since communication is enacted within power structures both its overt and covert distribution are significant variables in any analysis. In the meetings I attended democratic decision making took place, but that situation is hard to reproduce outside a physical gathering of participants. The secretariat at ELCI, consisting of the Local Coordinator and the Project Leader, was responsible for the implementation of the project. The Canadian Coordinator and the IDRC program officer responsible for WEDNET were also members of WEDNET's management, but were not *in situ* . The secretariat took primary responsibility for day to day decision-making It was then perhaps inevitable that a hierarchy would emerge within the network. Democratic communication within a network which had not defined a participatory decision making process outside of group meetings for itself is difficult to achieve.

Internal Communications : Praxis

Information-Sharing - Praxis

The network functioned well between IDRC and ELCI. There was a generally steady flow of two-way communication -- generally by regular post, not by e-mail because neither institution had fully incorporated electronic technology into its administrative practices. Between York University and ELCI there was also a reasonably active electronic flow, especially at the outset of the project. One of the more successful elements of information-sharing has been the provision of bibliographic support by the Canadian Coordinator through York University: on this, the researchers' comments were generally positive, except for confusion about whether costs were to be absorbed by individual budgets or by the larger budget administered from York or ELCI. This is an example of how the political economy of a project can undermine communication relations.

The creation of a database was not completed at the time of my last visit to ELCI in 1993, but substantial work had been done at York by the Canadian Coordinator and her graduate assistant and a certain amount had been compiled at ELCI. Decisions about the housing and maintenance of the database, being contingent on a decision about the future institutional home of WEDNET, had not been finalized. For technical, administrative, and personal reasons, coordination with

other research centres was neither systematic nor sustained during the period when WEDNET researchers were undertaking their work. As I have mentioned elsewhere, the integration of the systems analyst and the ELCI librarian into the administration of WEDNET at ELCI was limited. At York these functions were better coordinated in part because one of the chief responsibilities assigned to the Canadian Coordinator was bibliographic support. She worked closely with a graduate assistant on this aspect. However, both coordinators were generally too busy with research administration to concentrate fully on other information-sharing aspects of WEDNET.

The electronic information-sharing model could not be applied universally in the field for technical reasons. [8] Introducing e-mail to Africa will be a long-term undertaking; in many countries the phone systems cannot sustain the electronic connections. This was foreseen by IDRC in its assessment of the risk involved in funding the project. In any case, this model has not worked well because each researcher has a different access path within her institution and must often confront complex budget and hierarchical arrangements. The West African component was quite recent in 1991 and had not attracted much interest from most of the researchers there. Its use by WEDNET researchers in

[8] The collection edited by Linda Harasim, Global Networks: Computers and International Communication (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993) includes issues and cases of global networks and contains articles from many regions of the world. Part I is an overview, Part II covers emerging issues, Part III looks at applications. The article by Jan Walls, "Global Networking for Local Development: Task Focus and Relationship Focus in Cross-Cultural Communication", raises number of important issues. Bellman, Tindimubona, and Arias Jr., "Technology Transfer in Global Networking: Capacity Building in Africa and Latin America" includes a useful description and analysis of the AFRINET project and a discussion of the problems and prospects for electronic networking in Africa.

West Africa seemed minimal. The potential is certainly there and many groups are trying to introduce this means of communication. It requires a great deal of financial, human and technical support to become viable. Despite the financial allocation to it from IDRC, through WEDNET and Information Sciences projects, WEDNET was unable to benefit fully.

Communications Activity - Praxis

> ... communication is only one of three categories of content of the social relations in networks. The other two are (a) exchanges and transaction and (b) values and attitudes.[9]

What I was looking for was evidence of relational communication outputs or tasks within the network -- those which would reflect not merely the content of the research but also the building of WEDNET specifically as a network. I attempted a holistic analysis: among my criteria were the following:

> - traffic: who does most of the talking and how much talking is done;
> - closure: how open the group is to outsiders and ideas from the outside;
> - convergence: whether members in group communication are on an equal footing or whether some are chiefly generators of communications while others are mainly passive receivers.[10]

Further, I looked with special care at roles:

> - membership role in groups and clusters of the network
> - liaison role individuals who link clusters in the network together
> - the star role held by individuals who link large numbers of other members together
> - the isolate role individuals to whom few are linked
> - the boundary spanning role which links network to the environment

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[9] Windahl et al. 1992, p. 72
[10] Ibid., p. 73

- the <u>non-participant</u> the individual who performs the role in the network without communication.[11]

In reading the files I noted that initially there had been fairly regular and substantive contact between the Canadian Coordinator and the Local Coordinator on e-mail. This contact was concerned almost entirely either with commentaries on the WEDNET research proposals or with the budget/financing and administrative arrangements for that research. This in itself is not problematic, but the absence of much communication about the nature of the network itself is.[12] For a combination of reasons, this contact declined during my stay in Nairobi. The e-mail declined because the technology at York University was changed, making communication through this medium more difficult for the Canadian Coordinator. Both coordinators became very busy - and tired; the Canadian Coordinator was also involved in several other projects. At ELCI relations between the Local Coordinator and the Project Leader were strained. The consequence was a slowdown in the momentum of network development and the intensity of consultation among key players. Despite the efforts of the coordinators, the Canadian Coordinator in particular, there were numerous delays in both research and coordination aspects of the network. The Project Leader, as the

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[11] Ibid., p. 77

[12] The Coordinators were both extremely busy. The Canadian Coordinator was working far more than the part-time hours allocated to her for WEDNET work. The lack of time for reflection and attention to the evolution of the network aspects of WEDNET is therefore not surprising. However, allocation of time then becomes an issue of priority in the design of the project.

Executive Director of a busy NGO and as a scholar in her own right was extremely busy. The development of the network and of communications was not maintained as a result of a) limited leadership and b) increased demands on the time of the coordinators. Research monitoring and network development, though interdependent, are not the same thing. Each requires its own inputs and strategies. Due to the pressures on both coordinators, more effort was devoted to the former; the latter was largely left to unfold, or not, on its own. Had there been greater monitoring of communications and network development built into the project, this might not have occurred, although it is very difficult to assess. Certainly the benefit to the researchers of participating in an active exchange of information was somewhat diminished.

The electronic links between ELCI and the researchers and among the researchers themselves seem to have been left for the ELCI systems analyst to create and administer. The electronic network was not an active tool of network development. In interviews with the researchers I heard little mention of contact with either the Local Coordinator or the Canadian Coordinator on this topic. In particular, the Local Coordinator was unable to incorporate e-mail into the routine administration of WEDNET, with the exception of her interaction with the Canadian Coordinator which for a time was electronic. This was because the technology was initially unavailable or unreliable, because the Local Coordinator was ambivalent concerning

its use, and because adopting it required adoption of a different administrative style. Like any innovation, electronic correspondence requires a restructuring of administrative practices - from staff relations (who files and types letters ?) to record keeping. ELCI was uneven in its adoption of e-mail making it confusing while several administrative systems overlapped.

Both the ELCI librarian and the systems analyst were involved in WEDNET. However -- according to the systems analyst -- WEDNET itself was poorly incorporated into ELCI; therefore, the entire information-systems component of WEDNET was marginalized. Between IDRC and individual researchers the contact was primarily through visits to the field by IDRC staff. Similarly, between York and the researchers the contact took the form either of commentary on research, bibliographic support, or a personal research monitoring trip. The latter produced an intensive flurry of communications which naturally could not be sustained. Many of the researchers I interviewed perceived that their contact with ELCI was irregular and one-way, that the return from ELCI was limited.

Early in the project, the Communication Program Officer of IDRC-EARO wrote to ELCI offering to meet and plan for communications in WEDNET.[13] Her offer was not acted upon and a substantive collaboration never took place. The provision for hiring a

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[13] Letter to the Project Leader from the IDRC-EARO Senior Communications Program Officer, September 1, 1989

communications consultant in the second year of the project was not acted upon. The work of making WEDNET a viable communication entity was sidelined. Much work was demanded of both the Local Coordinator and Canadian Coordinator in getting the research itself going; as the project was slow off the mark, the majority of the coordinators' time was spent on those activities. There was periodic correspondence between the Local Coordinator and individual WEDNET researchers which increased before or after a monitoring trip. Again, the intensity this direct personal contact produced could not be sustained from a distance. Its impact on network development was not systematically incorporated.

ELCI's administration of WEDNET seems to have overlooked some communications items specified in the project document. So far as I could determine, the advisory committee charged with alleviating the problems of introducing a complex technology (the electronic system) was never set up. I am not sure of IDRC's role in monitoring the implementation of all aspects of the project. Certainly, monitoring trips by IDRC program officers did take place. Again, I suspect that the primary concern of IDRC was also to support the research work of WEDNET. Both design and implementation play a role here. The pressure from IDRC and ELCI to produce the expected research results (as the primary output of WEDNET) and the relative lack of experience in both IDRC and ELCI in implementing such an ambitious

information-sharing and communications plan allowed these components to be sidelined.

From what I could determine about the flow of information within WEDNET, there had been considerable outward flow from ELCI and York to the researchers early in the project, particularly in the form of bibliographic support. Among researchers -- apart from those living in geographical proximity to each other -- contact was generally limited to conferences. Whether they were otherwise communicating among themselves did not emerge from the documents I saw. In interviews it became clear that when contact did occur, it was motivated by a variety of personal and professional interests. The design of the project did not seem to encourage such contact and the central coordinating body reinforced its central position rather than emphasizing the creation of horizontal linkages. The newsletter, WEDNEWS, did circulate regularly every few months, but its content was general in nature and designed primarily for an audience outside the inner circle of researchers. The researchers might have benefited for example from a newsletter devoted to their concerns, questions and experiences with their WEDNET research projects. This might have become a vehicle for a discussion of different experiences with communication in research.

The importance of the research that WEDNET was undertaking should be emphasized. It is ground-breaking and epistemologically

complex. There was very little precedent for this kind of research. It is therefore understandable that the emphasis was on supporting the research effort. Without the sustained support of the coordinators of WEDNET (and the Project Leader and IDRC program officers involved), the high standard of the WEDNET research would not have been possible. If my questions pertained only to this aspect of WEDNET, my analysis would be very different. Nevertheless, the quality of the research might have been enhanced if the researchers had had more consistent contact with each other outside of project meetings. The purpose of the project was, after all, to undertake this work within a network to break down the barrier of academic isolation.

The Researchers Speak about Internal Communication

In my discussions with a Ghanaian researcher, I sensed distress that recent communication with ELCI had been lacking. She was counting on ELCI to move forward her intentions to disseminate the results of her work, particularly to policy makers. Her sense of the network was cynical and she felt remote from its formal structure although great affection for some of its members. She commented on the benefit of working with other women. She expressed the sense that WEDNET was not a network on which she could rely.

The Burkina Faso researcher had hoped to organize a seminar on her research for the time when I would be in Ouagadougou.

However, she had received her funds from ELCI only a few days before I arrived and was therefore quite delayed. Until then she had not heard from ELCI for five months. At the Accra conference, she had discussed her work; she had been told it was satisfactory and to proceed. More detailed commentary had not been given. Nevertheless, despite the lack of support or direction from ELCI, she had a clear plan for continuing her WEDNET work to the point of developing applications and new projects.

The Senegalese researcher is attached to IFAN, a unit of the University of Cheik Anta-Diop. From her I heard now-familiar complaints of isolation and neglect by ELCI. She felt, in fact, she was not part of a network. To me she described at some length what she had thought would happen after she attended the conference at Nyeri -- in fact, much of the innovation described and agreed to there had not been implemented. As a researcher, she wanted more substantive discussions of scientific and methodological issues within the network and from ELCI support on research dissemination in the form of training or information.

Concerning communications and Phase II, she was pessimistic. She had expected more from ELCI during the first phase; she was not sure of her role in any future WEDNET extension once her current work should be finished. She clearly felt she had been little consulted about the development of the network nor about means of addressing

researchers' needs or interests. To my question about the possibility of a Phase II for WEDNET, she replied by asking bluntly whom the network was for? I gathered she meant that planning was going ahead without consultation among the researchers and without their present needs being met, let alone future ones.

In Zimbabwe one of the researchers maintained very high enthusiasm for the WEDNET project. She mentioned problems with ELCI's coordination, particularly with feedback on her reports and response to her bibliographic requests. Her primary concern was to get her work, including her WEDNET results, disseminated and published. Of her (local) round-table discussion, she said it had been most informative and that she would show me the report when it was written. The women in the group, according to her, were very eager to develop projects and seek funding.

In a detailed interview with the ELCI librarian, she also described problems with getting feedback on the materials she was sending to the researchers. She also discussed her disappointment at not being included productively in WEDNET planning and coordination at ELCI. Her role, she felt, had been reduced to that of a technician; this had created unnecessary problems.

Internal Communication - Comment and Analysis

Achievement of WEDNET's stated purposes -- the production of high quality research on women's knowledge of natural resource management, (that which could be published in peer reviewed journals), broad dissemination of research findings, and influence on the making of public policy -- depends upon the effective functioning of the network. Communication is not an end in itself, but without effective communication the crucial work of network research (intensive information sharing) and research utilization by non-academic communities cannot get done.

In examining the design and praxis of internal communications I pay particular attention to the roles of the project coordinators and to the network's electronic information-sharing component. This analysis is based upon two of my working propositions: first, that since explicit communication assumptions and goals rest on implicit ones, the latter need to be articulated and examined as carefully as the former, and, second, that in communication, informational issues cannot be addressed without also addressing the relational issues that they create or within which they subsist. In addition, the role of collaborative tasks undertaken within the network in order to build relationships emerged as an important factor. In reexamining my original questions concerning the capacity of networks to enhance

research communication and utilization, I naturally reflected upon the elements of concern voiced by the participants themselves.

It is particularly important to differentiate between communication as strictly an informational issue and communication's relational aspects. Because the information-sharing component was designed explicitly as a technological intervention, with an institutional capacity-building element, the implicit relational issues must be made visible. My analysis proceeds on several levels: the relationship between the systems analyst at ELCI and the WEDNET coordinator, the relationships between ELCI and the individual researchers, the relationships between the researchers and the individuals in their institution who control access to the technology, the relationships among the researchers themselves. Thus the issue expands to include not only the exchange of data but also the relationships within the network and their evolution.

Information-Sharing

Within a network, all information systems, including e-mail, need to consider the needs of each individual and how those needs can be best met given available resources. WEDNET was bold in its decision to try e-mail as its primary system of information sharing but did not develop a viable alternative should e-mail fail to take hold. The use of this technology within a network is dependent on

consciousness of the potential that the technology offers to the user in terms of convenience. It is of course also dependent on people having something to say to each other. The coordinators' initial extensive use of the technology is perhaps attributable to the urgency of their collaborative work. Its decline was due to the technical difficulties in getting the system to work in the absence of adequate phone connections and administrative ambivalence. Its very limited use by the researchers lies perhaps in the more solitary orientation of academic research. Learning to do research in a network where greater collaboration is the purpose requires academics to modify their usual practices. WEDNET researchers were certainly interested in sharing their work with each other. The degree that they did so outside of project meetings was generally not connected to the project's primary information sharing system. Better supported training and sensitization to the technology might have changed the situation.

The reasons for community - the understood and shared goals - need to be present before technology is fully useful. Both factors are time-dependent: networks take time to evolve to the point where a sophisticated communications technology can enhance and increase exchanges:

> [Time]: Communication is a dynamic process; a common mistake is to treat it as static. Communication between sender and receiver develops over time. The communication 'span' widens, i.e. the range of knowledge about the other party and potential communication themes increases.[14]

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[14] Windahl et al. 1992, p. 25

A synergy of available technology and social urgency needs to take place. Possibly the information-sharing component of WEDNET appeared before the network was ready for it and it was therefore seen as irrelevant. It may have been rejected also because the technology was perceived by some as alien and high-tech and therefore elitist. The ELCI systems analyst suggested that e-mail has not been given much attention within WEDNET because it is perceived as being inappropriate and too high-tech, and because of its inherently complex technology. [15]

Network Communication

So far as I could learn, there was no assessment -- as an integral part of project coordination -- of how researchers felt about the information they were receiving and how they were receiving it. [16] An evaluation and reinvigorated approach to information transmission would have been useful in the development of WEDNET. Given the size, dispersal, and ambitions of WEDNET, much more attention

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[15] Everett Rogers, in his diffusion-of-innovation model, [Everett M. Rogers, Diffusion of Innovation (New York: Free Press, 1983)] asserts that key people need to influence their peers to adopt an innovation. According to Rogers the stages of adoption are knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, confirmation. He points out that step one is the transfer of information, step two is the transfer of influence. I have not used Rogers diffusion of innovation model as part of my conceptual framework. It is highly instrumental, generally top-down, and contrary to the participatory model I have chosen. Rogers also discusses innovation in organizations in later works 1986, 1988. Innovation changes and is modified as the process unfolds. He identifies two vital roles: innovation champions and organizational administrators. WEDNET really had neither at ELCI and despite, my misgivings about Rogers' model, I believe that if WEDNET had had one or both of these persons within ELCI, it might have had fewer institutional difficulties.

[16] At the Accra meeting, the Canadian Coordinator, her assistant, and the ELCI librarian attempted to survey the researchers about how their bibliographic needs had been met. This was squeezed between other discussions and was of quite limited use.

needed to be paid, I believe, to the dynamics -- including feedback from members -- of network building. I emphasize the need for ongoing participation in formative and systematic feedback because it is less threatening to researchers than a single, possibly devastating, evaluation and makes it possible to correct and/or solidify the approaches being used.[17]

Other factors not explicitly discussed in the project design include the time and measures needed for network evolution, the fixing of technical hitches, the surveying (during both design and implementation phases) of needs and access issues and of attitudes towards this technology, the importance of leadership in adoption of technology and -- importantly -- in the creation of relationships. Relationships, often close, were created in WEDNET. While this possibility was acknowledged in the project documents and perhaps hoped for, there was little explicit recognition of the roles these relationships might play in WEDNET's development. It remained implicit. These would seem nevertheless to be key factors in the adoption of an innovation as radical as e-mail and indeed of the innovation that the network approach of WEDNET represented.

WEDNET information-sharing was meant to be part of a larger programme of linking NGOs and research institutions electronically. Such linkages perhaps need longer than project time to be adopted and

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[17] The works of Michael Patton on utilization-focused evaluation are exceptionally useful. Two are included in my bibliography.

integrated into an institution's life. E-mail within and among

developing countries has great potential, but because of it requires

specialized and costly inputs, it can most easily be exploited by existing

elites. Because the technology is remote from most people's lives, its

possible uses and benefits will not necessarily be evident; the most

disadvantaged are perhaps the least likely to use it. At present its

dissemination to grassroots organizations remains difficult; access will

long be an issue. Presumably such difficulties will diminish as

technology becomes cheaper and more widely available, but basic

relational issues will not be eliminated. The challenge is to establish

mechanisms and institutions which will over time expand its

progressive social potential through the inclusion of many more

people and groups. [18]

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[18] See Electronic Networking in Africa: Advancing Science and Technology for
Development, the proceedings of a Workshop on Science and Technology Communications
networks in Africa, The African Academy of Sciences and The American Association for the
Advancement of Science, 1992. This is a collection of papers which describe various
attempts at electronic networking in Africa. Numerous problems are identified and some of
the attempted solutions, both successful and not, are analyzed.

CHAPTER FOUR

WEDNET External Communication

> Leading scholars in development communication are now arguing for
> communication between the benefactor and the beneficiary where each side
> has an equal chance of influencing the other. The communication model that
> is envisaged for this would allow for exchange of information, ideas, etc.
> between equals. This emphasis is on knowledge-sharing rather than top-
> down transmission of information and teaching. [1]

The issue for me that is raised by this statement is the "how to" -

specifically, how to organize an exchange of information between

equals which emphasizes knowledge sharing within a network such as

WEDNET. Spontaneity is a key factor in knowledge-sharing yet alone it

is not necessarily enough. In my conversations with researchers I

noted that the lack of systematic and regular communication from the

organizers was considered problematic. I wondered if it was possible to

combine some form of clear management practices with the goal of

knowledge sharing emerging from spontaneous interaction. The

danger is of course that management is top-down and non-

participatory, but I firmly believe that attempting to find innovative

and participatory solutions to the "how to" question is essential.

> Communication planning should always involve a combination of creative
> and systematic elements. Both are essential: creative: finding new solutions,
> new channels, new messages or combinations; systematic: seeing that all
> receiver groups are reached, the message is disseminated in the right order,
> that follow-ups and evaluations are done, that a thorough analysis of goals
> is part of the initial project. [2]

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[1] Srinivas R. Melkote, Communication for Development in the Third World: Theory and Practice, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991) p. 252, citing Ascroft et al.1987; Ascroft and Masiela 1989.

[2] Eric M. Eisenberg and H.L. Goodall, Organizational Communication: Balancing Creativity and Constraint, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993) p. 20

The problem with this quotation is that it sounds very much like a top down diffusion of innovation model. I present it in the context of WEDNET, which had to satisfy both an internal audience and establish relationships with external groups. It is important to be systematic and creative in communication. The important question for me is : who is in control? A participatory network could use these principles to very different effect than an adminisrative unit charged with a communications task in a community of which they were not a part.

I take it as given that communication and participation are basic human rights. I take it further, following Diaz-Bordenave, that the communicative media can contribute to a participative society, for they:

1. Help in the development of a community's cultural   identity;
2. Act as a vehicle for citizen self-expression;
3. Facilitate problem articulation;
4. Serve as tools for diagnosis of a community's problems.[3]

Thoughout this Chapter, and indeed this thesis, I seek to find creative solutions to the challenge which I have just presented of what I termed "doing the thing right". I will attempt in this chapter to give some sense of what it might mean to create the conditions and then carry out a participatory (and potentially subversive) communications

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[3] Ibid, p. 247. See also R.C. Hornik, Development Communication: Information, Agriculture, and Nutrition in the Third World (New York: Longman, 1988), p. 36-38. Also Jan Servaes, "Another Development": multiplicity in one world vs. universality; organic and human vs mechanistic; focus on participation; distinction between participation as means and participation as end. In Ascroft and Masiela, 1983, p. 247.

strategy. I do so by looking at WEDNET's external communications which builds on the discussion in the previous chapter.

In the research process, taking into account the needs and expectations of the potential users of research is generally accepted as worthy by most development research practitioners. It is also held to be a complex undertaking because it is difficult to know who the users might be, what their precise needs are, and how and when to include them in the research project. It goes beyond that to a struggle for control of ownership and to the very nature of knowledge itself. This is the other dimension I raised in my epistemological framework. Because participation is both a philosophical and operational issue and is contested in arenas large and small, the following guide is meant to be flexible. Using a framework first developed by Henault, I have identified some of the variables that greatly affect the success of research utilization.[4]

1. The identification of potential users for research This is critical, complex, and contentious. Where does the very idea for the research come from: the researcher or the user? Are participants the owners of the research and its ultimate users? How are other users identified? This identification process can start at any time during the research and can be ongoing.

2. The length of time the research project is prepared to commit

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[4] George Henault, "The Dissemination of Research Results in Southeast Asia" in The Canadian Journal of Development Studies XIII: 1, 1992.

to involvement with user groups The range is from research as "piece work" to an evolving open-ended relationship.

3. The timing of the consultation and involvement with research users There are three possibilities: i) before the research agenda is set, ii) once the agenda is set, during the research itself, and iii) once the results are largely complete.

4. The control the users can exercise over the direction of the research as it is undertaken The issue of ownership of research is often cited as an important factor in the adoption of research results. Clearly in the case of scientific research important issues of power must be addressed between users not trained as scientists and those researchers who are. This speaks directly to the issue of indigenous knowledge and communication.

5. The incorporation within the research project of a program of community involvement and needs-assessment In projects which span several years and a number of institutions this variable is very important. In the case of networks it is even more so. It is not an add-on to a project; it is consistently developed through the cycle of the research.

6. The methodology of the research itself Even within projects that emphasize participatory research, large variations exist in the

scope, practice, and goals of such techniques. Participatory research initiatives often require the principle researchers to be retrained in new techniques - participatory research methodologies have not traditionally been taught at universities, particulary in the hard sciences.

7. <u>The approach, experience and attitude of the research team</u>
With respect to dissemination, great variations exist in the inclinations, experience, and skills of researchers. This is essentially a matter of institutional culture which I address in the next chapter.

8. <u>The availability of earmarked funds within the project budget</u>
While the costs of dissemination are not usually exorbitant, funds are nonetheless necessary to hire staff to lead focus groups, prepare documents, produce multi-media materials, and distribute these items. The existence of a line item for dissemination also imposes a quasi-legal requirement to carry out these activities.[5]

I also use circularity as conceptual tool. I indicated in the conceptual framework that the important factor in circularity is the degree to which the communicating group (individual or institution) is able to exchange information, incorporate it and be transformed by interaction with groups, individuals and organizations outside itself. I developed this idea in thinking about WEDNET's multiple targets for

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[5] I have previously discussed this in Chapter One.

the communication of its research. Further I wanted to use a

participatory approach rather than simply develop a model of

diffusion.

> ... social systems will, in certain situations, benefit from encouraging
> the input of diverse or even contradictory information into the
> system, as well as placing people and groups with different
> knowledge and ideas in contact with one another.[6]

I developed this idea as a means of envisaging a dynamic process

which incorporates diversity, fosters collaborative work and focusses

on the relational rather than informational aspects of communication.

External Communication - Design

> Research effectiveness is the property of development research that
> closes the loop from the perceived and real consequences of research
> and development among the populations affected by it to the people
> who define problems and plan their solutions through new policies
> and new research.[7]

To understand the communications aims of WEDNET, I have

drawn from several sections of the project document. From the section

called Communication Activity, the principal stated aim of WEDNET

was to increase the dissemination possibilities by enhancing scientific

publishing skills for the WEDNET researchers and to identify, with the

help of a consultant, other target audiences for the results. Second,

from the statement of the overall objectives of WEDNET, there is the

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[6] Windahl et al. 1992, p. 48

[7] Anderson, (1993) p. 39. Note that those who are defining the problem and planning solutions through research and policy are not those included as those affected. It still implies control on the part of researchers for the definition of the problem. It is important to highlight the struggle over who defines the original problem and to what degree that definition is open to modification. I would add to this very useful definition that the closure of the "loop" does not ensure that the power of development planners to define the research agenda is neutralized.

aim of forging links with policy makers through joint participation in research and seminars and producing a of a set of policy recommendations. A third objective is contained within the general methodological approach of WEDNET. Through the use of participatory methodologies, a link with grassroots women would be created which would then be an outlet for dissemination and utilization activities. It is significant that these external linkages were not grouped together as part of a comprehensive and systematic approach to external communication.

What I have called *circularity* is the interweaving of these diverse elements to create a synergy of communication exchanges. Again I stress how this reveals the implicit assumptions about the role of communications. Some things were considered to be communications activities and categorized as such. Others, which plainly are communications activities, are subsumed under a different category, which made it more difficult for those elements to receive the kind of attention required by communications activities: namely systematic and creative planning.

2B: External Communication - Praxis

Within WEDNET and at ELCI I sought evidence that communication was not conceived merely as an outward flow of information from an exclusive group, but rather as circulation between

two or more inclusive organizations. I was looking for the ways in which the activities of WEDNET were contributing to the possibility of fulfilling the different communications goals I have described. Naturally, this requires consciousness of the ways in which planned communication is achieved.

The planner must distinguish between "effects" and "effectiveness." She must identify and carefully analyze the effects that are intended and those that are not, the long-term and the short-term. A strategy of cumulative small steps is generally preferable to the big bang as represented by a one-shot consultancy.

Effects help set an agenda. One must therefore ask:

What is the overall time-frame of my communication effort?
When can I expect effects to show?
How long should the communications phase be?
How long should I expect effects to last?
When will effects reach their peak? [8]

I found no evidence of this kind of agenda setting, rather, pieces of all the communications activities proceeded in fits and starts without a widely discussed and well implemented agenda. A complementary project activity for utilization and dissemination activities was potentially to be funded by the Communications Division of IDRC. However, no consultant was hired during the regular period of project funding to review the functioning of the network and to draw up complementary projects to occur

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[8] Windahl et al. 1992, p. 198-200

simultaneous with WEDNET. Similarly, the explicit aspects of the projected communications activities remained underdeveloped.

Scientific Publishing

Provision was made for workshops at each WEDNET meeting to train researchers in the preparation of publishable manuscripts. The emphasis was on the dissemination of WEDNET research in established Western academic/scientific journals. However, at the Accra meeting little research was ready for publication; there was no general workshop, although the CC did give personal advice to a number of researchers. This trend continued at the subsequent meeting at Naro Moru.

Links to policy-makers

As for the policy aspects of WEDNET research, although the influencing of policy was held to be a fundamental goal, there seemed to be little systematic attempt during the course of the project to determine just what achieving that goal would require in concrete terms. A less tangible though undoubtedly significant contribution occurred through the work of the Project Leader and ELCI executive director. During my stay in Nairobi in 1991-92, she was traveling constantly to large international conferences and meetings with donors and government heads; most were preparatory activities leading to

UNCED in Rio in 1992. Her leadership of WEDNET was diminished because of her decreased availability. As a result, however, she was ideally placed to include her knowledge and concern of women and natural resource management and her involvement in WEDNET in any lobbying efforts she undertook. It is difficult to measure the impact of such work. I cannot do so here. However, I want to note that these intangibles must figure in the long-term assessment of projects such as WEDNET. A number of the women involved in WEDNET have been very involved in international commissions and working groups in recent years. They are certainly in a position to disseminate their learning from WEDNET in policy-making fora.

Circularity through participatory research

The relationships which would be created through participatory research were often discussed in a very stimulating way at meetings. At both of the meetings I attended, and from my reading of the Nyeri documents, I believe that all the researchers felt strongly about this component of their work. However, participatory research is an area of considerable debate. It is widely interpreted and difficult to do well. There was a considerable range in the experience which researchers brought to their attempts at participatory research in WEDNET. Further, the ways in which participatory research is related to participatory communication requires careful thinking. Again, I found that assumptions were made about this relationship which often

meant that no systematic planning or organizing took place. Many of the researchers commented that they would have liked to have been better supported in their efforts in this regard. Training in participatory research and communication might have been a useful first step. The issue was much discussed at the Nyeri meeting (WEDNET's first meeting) and again at the Accra meeting, but I cannot find evidence from the period of my research that a set of WEDNET operating principles was developed or circulated to the researchers from these discussions.

WEDNEWS

WEDNEWS was the blunt instrument of communication. It was designed for the broadest possible audience. The most tangible piece of WEDNET external communication, this newsletter contained highlights of WEDNET research and activity and was designed to publicize the network, especially its innovative features. The readership was largely in North America and Europe and in the Nairobi area. Institutions and policy-makers were included. The mailing list had been put together by canvassing knowledgeable people for ideas, by using ELCI's database, and by processing requests from interested persons. It was widely circulated through two databases of mailing lists, one at York and the other at ELCI. Unfortunately, this duplication caused administrative complications and contributed to my impression of inconsistency in external communication activities and to my sense that they were marginal to WEDNET's work. Neither

tailored specifically to WEDNET researchers nor to particular groups of designated audiences, **WEDNEWS** was directed to an undifferentiated mass of interested persons. It also served as a publicity vehicle for ELCI and for the very hot topic of women and natural resource management. Interested readers were directed to write to the Local Coordinator at ELCI for further information. Reader interest was considerable and stretched the available resources, as I noted from the overflowing file. The Local Coordinator sent appropriate materials which usually consisted of details of planned research or reports on conferences.

Some utilization and dissemination activity did occur much later, at the Naro Moru Conference in 1993, after the regular period of WEDNET funding was over (it had been extended at IDRC in order to complete Phase I and plan for Phase II). For the Naro Moru conference, a Kenyan communications consultant was hired to develop ideas for dissemination of research findings. She did an analysis of target audiences and strategies for reaching them. This was very interesting and potentially valuable, but in this case, there were non-communications issues - institutional ones in fact - that made planning for the implementation of any of her ideas inconclusive. The future institutional home of WEDNET and its direction was inconclusively discussed. For publishing activities the CC and the IDRC representatives discussed the research results and gave publishing advice in individual sessions. At a group session, a plan for

a book of WEDNET results was developed. There was no formal workshop on publishing which was perhaps due to the concentration on discussing other forms of research communication.

The Researchers Speak: Expectations and Dissemination

In interviews I found that researchers held explicit and implicit expectations concerning the "Communications Activity." The project document plainly mentions "scientific publishing." Expectations concerning participatory research and communication and other dissemination activities were created at both the Nyeri and Accra meetings. I believe these included more support and perhaps training to achieve some of the innovations in WEDNET (i.e. the explicit policy orientation of the research, the organization of the research in a network, the use of electronic mail). These expectations remained largely unfulfilled. Certain other perceptions are noteworthy:

a) There was an expectation on the part of a number of researchers that guidance for dissemination strategies would come from ELCI. Since contacts were centralized through ELCI, the researchers looked to ELCI to organize both the relationships and the tasks which would promote a utilization strategy (I am speaking of formal strategies). This does not imply passivity on their part; they all worked with varying success to develop contacts and initiate collaborations within their own communities.

b) There was a perception both among researchers and at ELCI that dissemination and communication tactics would be developed and accomplished after the research had been completed (excluding that which had taken place during implementation of the participatory research methodology). This is a design issue. Communication was planned for in terms of a Phase II which meant that it was not fully integrated into the first phase. Because it was considered primarily as an activity which comes after the research has taken place, some of the necessary base for research utilization was not supported in Phase I. The provisions in the project design for communication activity and preparation for utilization were thus more easily sidelined.

c) Most researchers felt that they lacked training in utilization and dissemination practices. Thus many believed that, though they would participate, this function would have to be coordinated by another agency. Again they looked to ELCI or IDRC.

d) There was an assumption of a need to meet IDRC 's high scientific standard in order to legitimize the knowledge of women in the eyes of other academics. This -- the good opinion of other researchers -- was mentioned by some as the primary goal of dissemination. (This requirement is also laid on the staff of many universities.) As I have said, the research which WEDNET undertook is original and required a great deal of support. That support is certainly justified in terms of the aspirations of the researchers to

produce high quality work. Unfortunately, it appears that the achievement of this goal was somewhat at the expense of the utilization goals, at least within the organizational structure of WEDNET.

e) There was a perceived need to move on to other work once the WEDNET research was completed and to await further instruction concerning dissemination from IDRC or ELCI. This is a major issue in development funding. There are some top academics who are very busy and all academics in Africa face financial exigencies. However, this issue raises the question of how research funding ,both in Canada and Africa, creates a culture of piece work rather than long-term relationships.

f) The desirability of strengthening WEDNET through greater coordination, consultation, and feedback was mentioned in connection with the need for comprehensive dissemination strategies. This is an example of how new and diverse ideas could be regularly incorporated into WEDNET. For example, if women's groups were full members of WEDNET at a local level both the network and the local community could benefit from the resultant exchange of ideas. This would encourage channels of communication to develop which might then be able to share information with the whole of the network.

WEDNET external communication: the researchers speak

All the researchers to whom I spoke were attempting some kind of dissemination work, although sometimes minimal, generally on their own initiative. Roundtable discussions were being organized by some researchers, for which there was funding in their project budgets. These usually included women participants in the research, policy makers, other academics, and NGO representatives. Through personal contacts many researchers had made available their findings to a variety of people. Some researchers attempted to expand the WEDNET structure to include small community projects involving participants in the original research; they looked to ELCI for potential funding. The availability of small funds to put ideas emerging from the research into practice was mentioned as a potentially important aspect of dissemination. This was not initiated by ELCI. In fact, I was often asked if I could get information from ELCI on how to apply for small grants.

From my conversations with the Burkina Faso researcher at the Accra conference, I knew she felt very strongly about the importance of communicating the results of her work. While I was in Burkina Faso, we went together to many of the agencies whose representatives she wanted to include in her roundtable. The group of people she consulted was very diverse as I noted in Chapter Two. She consulted with them regularly as she made arrangements for the seminar. She wanted to ensure that there was agreement during the actual round table and hence that substantive plans could be made. She asked if ELCI

had any funds for small projects which she could initiate with the women of her research group. Somewhat surprised that this form of extension and communication had not been used or suggested previously, I agreed to find out. In fact ELCI did have a program of small grants. I suggest that more information about the ways in which existing ELCI programs might have benefited WEDNET could have been identified in the project document.

One of the Ghanaian researchers declared that he feels a great responsibility to the women he worked with. They are expecting him to return with finished results to be discussed with the village elders and in effect to lobby on behalf of the women. This was the most immediate communication of results that he envisaged doing himself. He indicated that he would want to be involved in a supervisory role in any other communications strategies that might be prepared.

I believe that WEDNET's experience with participatory research displays a good range of the possible interpretations of that process. [9] A provision was included for "roundtables" to take place once the research was completed. This was interpreted by some researchers as an opportunity to take their results back to the participants to check their findings and solidify their conclusions. Others used it as a launch for action based on a previously existing dialogue and interaction. The notion of "taking it back to the community," which is how I heard the

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[9] See Majid Rahnema: "Participation" in Wolfgang Sachs: The Development Dictionary The Development Dictionary (London: Zed Books, 1992) p.116-131 for a sharp critique.

roundtable idea described, suggests that it has already left. The resultant question for me is the form in which the research is brought back to the community and what power it has to make use of the information. Nevertheless, all these are forms of participation which may be beneficial to the communities involved. However, in terms of an emerging WEDNET approach on participation, more analysis and exploration of this issue is necessary.

External Communication - Comment and Analysis

> Rural people's knowledge is often superior to that of outsiders. Examples can be found in mixed cropping, knowledge of the environment, abilities to observe and discriminate, and results of rural people's experiments. Rural people's knowledge and modern scientific knowledge are complementary in their strengths and weaknesses. Combined they may achieve what neither would alone. For such combinations, outsider professionals have to step down off their pedestals, and sit down, listen and learn.[10]

In a project designed to legitimize women's indigenous knowledge of the environment, I believe that not only a question of the content of their knowledge is at issue but also the form in which that information is held. People know by doing. Systems exist for the transmission of knowledge, indigenous communication and indigenous knowledge are intertwined. In examining communication in WEDNET, I want to be very careful to stress that it is not the role of the expert alone (who may nevertheless act as facilitator or catalyst) to manage this information. People everywhere communicate. To preserve and strengthen that knowledge, we must acknowledge that

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[10] Chambers, 1983, p. 75.

indigenous communications systems must be treated with great care and respect. This is not in any way to diminish the other elements of WEDNET communications which I am discussing. Participatory communication, from which I develop the idea of circularity, may utilize some elements of indigenous communication, but they are not the same thing. Participation and control for local communities is an essential starting point whether the resultant communication strategy is considered indigenous or not.

Pilar Riano has written about women and participatory communication concentrating on the actual strategies and media women employ in their community, household and personal struggles. She identifies the characteristics of participatory communication (PC) as follows:

> 1. Directly involves the target group in the communicative process
> 2. Demystifies the means of communication.
> 3. Incorporates participatory research methodologies.
> 4. Contains an educative component.
> 5. Recovers indigenous knowledge, communicative forms, and cultural traditions.
> 6. Promotes interactive relations with the audience.
> 7. Acknowledge the entertainment value of media production and reception.[11]

Participation is one of the elements of circularity which I think WEDNET could develop fruitfully. I believe that in this issue a fundamental link between WEDNET's research work and communication imperatives is revealed. It is the most explicit example

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[11] Pilar Riano, Empowering Through Communication: Women's Experiences with Participatory Communication in Development Processes (Ottawa: IDRC, 1990) p.19-21

I have given of the need to understand the social and relational aspects of communication. To make visible this link, a specific and careful approach is called for. Although participatory research was emphasized and a "methodological breakthrough" was sought, these goals were widely interpreted. As I have said elsewhere, WEDNET is a transitional research project and not all of its innovative components were implemented equally. Developing participatory communication activities is complex and difficult and requires long-term involvement and relationships which WEDNET did not explicitly allow for. Some of the researchers have created those relationships on their own.

Policy influence, which results from the knowledge exchanged in research, also requires a careful approach and the establishment of relationships.

> Policy research ... is defined as the process of conducting research on, or analysis of, a fundamental social problem in order to provide policy makers with pragmatic, action-oriented recommendations for alleviating the problem.[12]

> Policy research varies as to whether the funding source is or is not the study user: ... since the funder is not likely to be the user of the information, researchers using this model must seek out their own audiences for their recommendations. As a result, the researchers run the risk that users will not be found, leading to a study without impact.
> Policy research varies as to whether the focus is on problem definition or solution and as to the organizational setting.
> Policy research is responsive to study users. [13]

Communication with policy makers should start at the inception of the research study and continue actively throughout its

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[12] Ann Majchrzak. Methods for Policy Research (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1984) p. 12.
[13] Ibid, p. 16-18

duration. Communication with different study users must 1) translate research nomenclature and procedures into concepts understandable to different audiences, 2) recognize when detail should be explained and, 3) structure communication so that the audience does not feel intellectually inferior. Effective presentations form the basis for determining the ultimate utility of the policy research study -- indeed, presentation may mean everything in effective communication. Oral communication is generally more effective than written, although a written component is essential.[14] These steps clearly require consistent planning and implementation, although the achievement of policy influence is not as linear as the Majchrzak suggests. WEDNET's multiple communications goals all require this kind of disagreggated attention to the intended audience and a concentration on relationship building through collaboration if circularity is to be achieved. Also, and this will become clear in the next Chapter, responsibility for organizing those relationships must be established and monitored.

Finally to aid in illustrating what I envision by circularity, I have drawn a possible model for WEDNET. The local networks are very important. A network which hopes for a long life must rely on the stability and renewal of a well-grounded membership. Having an influence on global policy, or at least recognizing the effect that policy made at the international level has on local conditions, can be

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[14] Majchrzak, 1983, p. 92-101

strategized and coordinated by the diverse groups who have an
interest in working at this level.

Possible model for circularity in WEDNET
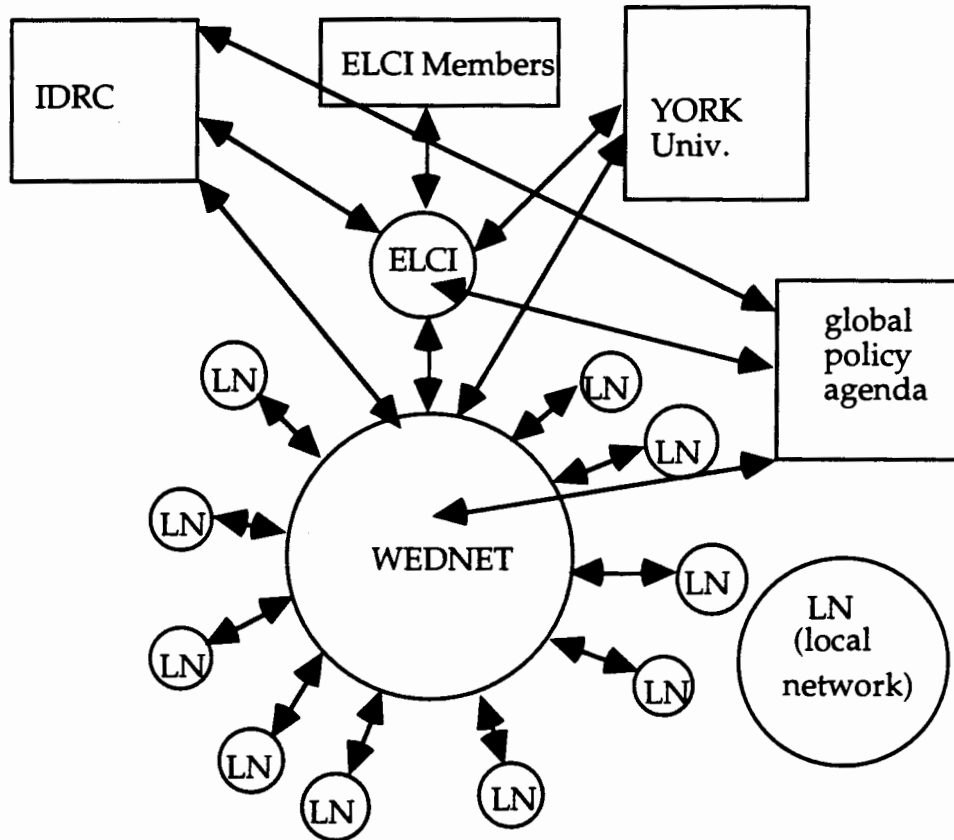
In this model there is an ongoing flow of information between
different levels and types of actors within WEDNET. The process is
necessarily decentralized. The important issue in this model is the
degree to which the multiple dimensions of the communication
interactions could be directed and organized for maximum impact. The
institutional imperative in this model is to work simultaneously at
many levels while developing a global policy focus.

CHAPTER FIVE

Institutional Issues

The organizational problems and outcomes of policy are regarded as interdependent. This means that the quality of aid is directly related to the ways in which it is organized.[1]

Development policy is thus constructed and reconstructed within the organization...There is more than one set of goals and priorities in the development organization, each of which is geared towards a specific public. The top is responsible for securing the inflow of funds. It has to take into account the views and interests of those with whom it deals.[2]

Culture in organizations: It is misleading to think of a culture as something that an organization 'has'. Culture is (1) Actions and practices; (2) Narrative and dialogue:
Culture is what people make or construct when they do what they normally do. Because a culture consists of ongoing dialogues among various subcultures, what is constructed is not - as in the case of systems theory -understandable as the sum of its parts... In other words, a culture is known and enacted through its dialogic practices and exists in interpretations of meaning attributed to those practices.[3]

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[1] Philip van Ufford, Dirk Kruijt, and Theodore Downing, The Hidden Crisis in Development: Development Bureaucracies (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988) This book addresses an important and (the authors argue) hidden crisis in development: the role of development organizations themselves. The criticism comes from people who are traditionally considered supporters of international development; this leads the authors to assert that the distinction between supporters and critics is anachronistic. Through a series of articles addressing both conceptual issues and case studies, the authors make a persuasive case for attention to the social construction of development aid. Normative preoccupation with development assistance has overshadowed attention to problems of organization. The aim of the book is to provide a broad context for discussion of the problems of organization and effectiveness in development policy. The authors discuss constraints on development institutions and question their capability to provide the desired results. The relationship between specific organizations and their development environment is dealt with chapter by chapter. In this way the authors bring together action and outcomes, dimensions traditionally separated in the discussion of effectiveness. The book's central theme is the paradoxical relation between the political intentions of development planning and the effects of policy. The authors point out that organizational problems that result from this paradox have been under-researched. The contribution of this book to my thinking is two-fold:(1) it focusses on micro-issues and case studies of development bureaucracies, and (2) it brings critical analysis to the discussion of the relationship between international development and its institutions. p. 11

[2] Ibid. p. 22-23

[3] Eisenberg and Goodhall 1993, p. 137-138

Introduction

Significant variables both in decision-making processes and in managerial attitudes are discovered by examining the framework or strategic plan of an organization. For a discussion of communication and research utilization there are specific considerations. All or part of this framework was applied to all the institutions I had access to, including IDRC, ELCI, and those the WEDNET researchers are attached to. Again I have used the article by Henault cited earlier as a reference for this framework. [4]

The following considerations form the framework of my analysis:

1. The objectives (implicit and explicit) of the institution compared to those of the specific WEDNET project Inevitably different institutional cultures must work together. The relative power of each player with respect to project administration and the different explicit and implicit goals of each is a significant variable.

2. WEDNET as a singular project or based within an existing program The operation of WEDNET within a pre-existing gender and development program offers greater opportunity for cross-fertilization than does WEDNET as a singular project. ELCI had a women's

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[4] Georges Henault, "The Dissemination of Research Results in Southeast Asia," in The Canadian Journal of Development Studies XIII: 1 (1992)

program but WEDNET was its primary project. This also raises the issue of funding for projects versus funding for programmes. IDRC generally funds projects not programs.

3. <u>Resources of the institution, both financial and staff, and reliability and sources of funding</u> Diversified, steady, funding versus the need to constantly solicit for new projects affects the ability to commit to a long-term dissemination strategy.

4. <u>Bias of institution toward research, policy influence/dissemination, grassroots/political activism, or other</u> Different universities, NGOs, and networks all have different standards and expectations of their staff, which promote certain styles and kinds of dissemination. Another important variable is the experience and policy of the institution in terms of research projects and dissemination projects.

5. <u>Existence of channels of communication and systematic linkages with other institutions, and -- importantly -- the degree of diversity of these organizations</u> The diversity of the user groups is important and the position of the institution in terms of the diversity of its contacts is significant. Also, whether there is a history of collaboration between the institutions.

6. Evaluation practices, internal and external, of the institution and the resulting accountability to both funders and member communities How and whether the needs of users and constituents are brought into the strategic plan of an institution can affect the reception of dissemination projects both within the institution itself and among outside groups.

This framework gathers together a number of important factors which I became aware of during and after my research. Research is conducted by individuals, and there are large natural differences in the approaches of individuals to research dissemination. As I discovered during the course of my research, each WEDNET researcher thought about and practiced dissemination differently. Nonetheless, I believe that institutional norms are often the dominant variable. In subsequent discussions I will point out the variations among WEDNET researchers.

Institutions - Design and Praxis:

> Once the definition of a particular problem of development becomes
> identified with a specific organization, it is of vital interest to the
> organization to propagate its importance.[5]

I have combined these categories, design and praxis, because IDRC, York University, ELCI, and the researchers' institutions pre-existed the creation of WEDNET; therefore the crucial intellectual

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[5] Ibid. p. 22

operation here is to distinguish between actual practices as against

officially mandated ones. The following list illustrates some of the

areas where this difference is manifested. It is a partial grouping of the

factors I looked at in my analysis.

> 1. Operative goals and priorities as shown by decisions about resource allocation.
> 2. Unofficial structures (e.g. Cliques, working ties that cut across departmental lines, grapevines...etc.
> 3. Role definitions and group functions in practice (e.g. actual division of labor...)
> 4. Informal leaders, influence patterns, and power relations
> 5. Actual work procedures (e.g., uses of new technologies; record keeping and reporting practices; cutting corners on safety, quality checks; improvised solutions and procedures)
> 6. Everyday beliefs (culture) about the payoffs (or penalties) for hard work and initiative; perceptions of the tasks and conditions facing the organization...; beliefs about the kinds of information that can be taken seriously.[6]

Throughout my work I tried to envision WEDNET as a totality

without losing a sense of the particularities of each node along the

network. A network starts with its individual institutional

components and moves (one hopes) beyond them, or is in some

manner transformative. Each of these points is connected to numerous

others. These connections (of which, in my view, WEDNET made too

little use) will be discussed below. Each institutional node represents a

particular set of practices which determine how research is legitimized

and disseminated.

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[6] Michael I. Harrison, Diagnosing Organizations: Methods, Models, and Processes (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), p. 95. See also pp. 108-13.

IDRC

> ... IDRC has spoken for years about transferring ownership of its
> research and development efforts to the people who are its intended
> beneficiaries, to make them a central part of the program. But,
> within IDRC, there is frank admission that transferring ownership is
> very hard indeed....So effectiveness has also come to mean the ways
> and means of creating a proprietary interest, where it is possible, in
> research and actions that leads people to solve their own problems.[7]

IDRC's slogan is: "Development Through Research." Its specialized function within the constellation of development agencies and NGOs is the strengthening of indigenous research institutions and capacity. Research issues -- generally along well-established scientific principles -- are normally identified by scientists from those countries. Research results are disseminated in traditional academic forms. As in the North (Western tradition), the task of popularization and dissemination is secondary; generally it is not the task of the originators of the research. Some might call it the "extractive model" except that it has been carried out by local researchers (which is not dissimilar to the "comprador" extractive model). That ethos is now changing somewhat; there is greater concern for the use of research results and new programs have been introduced.

In the GAD Unit there was always a political motivation in the funding of research. GAD support is meant to contribute to the legitimization of women's ways of knowing and to the rectification of gender insensitive development and research. However, GAD was also concerned to get researchers published, especially women from the

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[7] Anderson, 1993, p.vii.

South. The communications activity was often focussed on scholarly publication - either by IDRC or in other scholarly journals. It also focussed on the general category of policy makers.

York University: Faculty of Environmental Studies

The Faculty of Environmental Studies is an action-research oriented organization. It is interdisciplinary and innovative. The institutional norm is still academic research. Note that both IDRC and York were important in the conceptualizing of WEDNET -- York could provide the intellectual and bibliographic support, and did -- but it was peripheral in the implementation given the geographic distance and the desire to have an African organization as the leader of the project. The personal efforts of the Canadian Coordinator based at York went well beyond the stated expectations of the project.

ELCI

The GAD Unit of IDRC, the Project Leader (and Executive Director of ELCI), and the Canadian Coordinator designed WEDNET after a consultative meeting with African researchers. ELCI was to operate the network. It was to be the linchpin of WEDNET.

ELCI has several functions. It comprises many different member organizations and groups, primarily NGOs, involved in environmental action. The majority are in the South, but some

northern institutions -- York University's Faculty of Environmental Studies for example -- are also involved. The choice of ELCI as the organizing institution for WEDNET is noteworthy, for it highlights the importance given to "information exchange" concerning women and natural resource management -- exchange which was to occur among NGOs in North and the South and among other members of ELCI. In discussing development bureaucracies, the authors of a recent book express the problem thus:

> In our concern with problems of organization and effectiveness we conceive of the relationship between development organizations and their contexts as a two-way process.[8]

The word 'liaison' from the Centre's name is important to the function it was perceived to have. It suggests an information-action change model based on the ability of the Centre to transform the sharing of information between different groups into social and policy change -- certainly not an easy task under any circumstances.

This analysis of an NGO described by the same authors is illustrative of a problem common to most NGOs.

> ...the different groups of actors - the 'director' and the 'spending staffs' - became increasingly disconnected as the organization grew. The contacts with different parts of the (external) environment resulted in greater internal compartmentalization. The larger amounts of money to be secured and spent made the relevance of external contacts much more important. The strength of inter-organizational networks in which these vital tasks were executed led to weakness and compartmentalization within the organization. The success of these negotiating networks thus carried a price tag: lack of oversight and coordination; ignorance about what went on elsewhere, etc. The means of control within the organization over spending

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[8] Van Ufford, 1988, p. 12

decisions decreased. As a matter of fact, the organizational need for controls is not great, as long as the top is able to convince its sponsors that policy is well-implemented, or that more funds are needed because of grave developmental problems.[9]

ELCI's five-year plan was being developed in 1992 while I was there. This meant that key people were locked away in meetings and that tensions were very high because of the sensitivity of the debates. The information I obtained about planning and evaluation processes at ELCI was of two general types. Either I heard considerable complaint about the process, or I was given a highly circumspect analysis. One of the larger issues was the degree of individual participation or what one informant called "democracy in decision-making" or "empowerment."

People and groups use power to accomplish tasks and fulfill organizational objectives as well as to oppose them. Hence a critical issue for the diagnosis concerns the degree to which particular groups are empowered -in the sense of having sufficient resources and influences to accomplish their tasks. ...To promote innovation, management must empower people who are capable of developing new ideas and technologies.[10]

My purpose is not to evaluate ELCI. However, on the subject of empowerment and its role in promoting an innovation such as WEDNET, I found little evidence that such conditions existed.

The integration (or lack of it) of WEDNET into ELCI is also important because of the network's potential for generating liaison and communication activities. Many of ELCI's member groups would benefit from information about WEDNET and from WEDNET, indeed were eager for it. I wanted to know how ELCI goes beyond distributing

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[9] Ibid. p. 24-25
[10] Harrison, 1994, p. 101.

information to develop projects based on the information it produces.[11]The central question was whether an institutional culture existed to enable the goal of information exchange to flourish. As an NGO whose members were all grassroots groups, how did ELCI encompass the values of these groups? I found that an understanding of what ELCI members wanted was not widespread among the staff. Further the relationship between programs and member activities was inconsistently coordinated.

An ELCI staff member, who was busy at the time with UNCED and GATT preparations, discussed with me the potential uses of my work; he was very encouraging. In his view, much serious work was needed to create a culture or ethos of change and a process through which ELCI could better absorb and integrate information. Within his own unit he was studying these questions and putting into practice some new ideas which he shared with me, especially implementing much more vigorous communication and efforts to obtain feedback.

The problems within WEDNET were of course much like those that existed generally within ELCI. The challenge was to persuade members that the conceptualization of communication and change is not merely a stylistic but a substantive matter, one which needs to be addressed as such. I recognized that my communication problems and

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[11] During this time ELCI was evaluated by an external group at the request of the Board and ELCI funders. This document, the Matrix Report, discusses a number of these issues in great detail. I have read the report and absorbed some of its ideas, but because I am not evaluating ELCI, as such, I am not referring to it directly.

those of WEDNET were due only partially to personality and timing; the larger issue was the model of communication and political change that was being used.

Researchers' Institutions: Ghana

The Ghanaian researchers are involved with a number of research projects. One also teaches at the Institute of African Studies at Legon University.[12] Her contacts with women's groups and other researchers are excellent. Although her field is not communication, she has a good sense of where information could be most effectively placed and implemented. However, as she is expected by her institution to produce research, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect that she would carry out dissemination activities herself. She evidently expected more support on this activity from ELCI. This included training, repackaging of materials, development of policy briefs, and generally a sense of expertise from ELCI in this regard.

A variation on the theme of ELCI neglect emerged from a conversation with another Ghanaian researcher. WEDNET is his first experience of working on gender-based research. He too complained about the lack of feedback from ELCI, remarking that if it were not women who were running the project, he would be more angry... . Despite this, he said, he felt he had learned a great deal from this

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[12] While I was there she gave a well-attended seminar on gender research.

project. He is of course paid to be a researcher and was already busy with another project. Funds are limited at Legon University; researchers are dependent to a large extent on outside funding. This means that they cannot afford to be idle nor to work extensively on projects for which they are not funded. This raises a crucial issue. How can a network devoted to one area of research sustain itself when researchers inevitably must move on to other projects? I suggest that infusions of new researchers and community members would transform and sustain a network although not in its original form.

Researchers' Institutions: Burkina Faso

The researcher in Burkina Faso provides a model for several aspects of WEDNET, particularly communication. She was operating with a number of principles which we articulated during the course of our meetings. She is systematic in her consultations, she believes that her responsibility as a researcher does not end abruptly with the conclusion of her piece of work, and she is consulting diverse groups of people whom she hopes will become a community of stakeholders. Also she has great respect for the 'encoding' of knowledge that the women she worked with practice. (In this she is not alone. Most of the other WEDNET researchers mention this.) Significantly, she is not affiliated with an institution and is not an academic. I believe that this gives her more freedom to extend and interpret her work with WEDNET. She said she does not feel a part of a network and that ELCI

had hindered rather than helped her. She questioned the choice of ELCI as a coordinating centre for WEDNET; she suggested that IDRC should have administered it directly. Had ELCI provided more of what it promised, it might have greatly benefited the researcher. Its role as a mediator between IDRC and the researcher became a frustration.

Researchers' Institutions: Senegal

The WEDNET researcher in Senegal is affiliated with IFAN. Her job is to do research, not dissemination. However, she expressed a deep desire to see the results of her work carried in a number of different directions. She made clear to me how strongly the institutional ethos can influence a researcher's ability to communicate or to extend her work into new areas. Her contacts are primarily with other researchers although she has worked with some women's groups. Her expectation was that ELCI would be the source of action (as opposed to information, which was also not forthcoming) on dissemination and utilization.[13]

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[13] At IFAN I learned something of the conditions in which research takes place. One researcher described his frustration with what he called mandated research and with the institutional culture which encourages the production of research without institutional or managerial accountability. He believes that this kind of unaccountable research can be reformed by changing the way institutions are structured. Communication of research results cannot be expected to flow from institutions where accountability is not systematized. I was interested to find out later he does not in fact work at IFAN, but is a consultant who was borrowing a friend's office.

Researchers' Institutions: Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe (as I have noted) I conducted brief interviews with the available WEDNET researchers and also spoke with a number of members of institutions not affiliated with WEDNET. The WEDNET researchers are academics affiliated with the University of Zimbabwe. They are active in their fields and many policy areas. As I explained in Chapter Two, since I was unable to meet with them extensively, I turned to other groups for an understanding of how NGOs conduct liaison with university researchers.

Analogous Organizations: Southern Africa Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC)

The project coordinated by the Southern Africa Research and Documentation Centre bears some similarities to WEDNET. It seeks to gather and legitimize information on environmental problems in southern Africa and to use that knowledge, once gathered, with maximum efficiency. The coordinators travel regularly to various countries to view data bases, meet activists and researchers, and to publicize their work. I wanted to get a sense of which groups had been involved in the consultative process that led up to the project and how this might affect the dissemination of the information SARDC produced. I learned that the project was conceived by the SARDC staff and board; it was based on general knowledge and experience and not

on a specific demand from the NGO community as such. The way in which the disposition of the collected materials was envisioned followed logically from the conception of the project. SARDC operates a service to news/wire outlets. The directors planned to provide, on a continuing basis, articles about issues and events in the area. They envisioned articles derived from the environmental research. SARDC also planned to make its database available to as many other organizations as possible. From my visit, I did not get the sense that this was an institution whose projects and activities were driven systematically by its members; rather its mandate was to be a resource centre as opposed to a liaison centre. The difference lies of course in the degree to which the institution is proactive and aggressive in seeking intercourse with other organizations.

Analogous Organizations: ENDA Zimbabwe

ENDA Zimbabwe is connected to other ENDA organizations across Africa. Their nominal base is a group called Tiers Monde in France, but each national committee is largely autonomous. ENDA Zimbabwe is focused on environmental issues. The informant and I discussed issues of research and institutions. He spoke emphatically about the need for research to be driven by communities, not by institutions, including his own. So far as his projects are concerned, he believes that the necessary research skills exist within the community and need mostly mobilization. The most important factors for him are

that the work of outsiders be at the invitation of a community, that significant training and skills be exchanged, and that the process be long-term.

Analogous Organizations: Women's Action Group (WAG)

A director of the Women's Action Group (WAG) spoke in a similar vein, although not so critically. As the name indicates, action is the entire focus of the group. Their activities include a newsletter, educational workshops, solidarity with particularly marginalized women (such as prostitutes or women with AIDS), and political agitation. She was highly pragmatic. She welcomes women academics as long as they can contribute in the popular manner that WAG has chosen to adopt. In her view the original motivation for the research is less important than the effort that is made to translate it into widely useful materials. She saw, within the women's movement, women with different abilities contributing each in her own particular way. She further stated that a network's strength lies in its diversity rather than in a more narrowly-defined ideological aim.

Conclusions

To conclude this chapter, I want to return to the framework I presented at its beginning and think simultaneously about the influence of institutional cultures.

The objectives of WEDNET involved a bringing together of several institutions. In a sense, a competition ensued for which institutional culture would dominate. Given that more of the institutions were biased toward research, it is hardly surprising that this aspect of WEDNET has been the most successful. IDRC, York University, and the majority of the researcher's institutions are all institutions with an academic focus. ELCI's relative weakness even in terms of its NGO oriented culture further affected the tendency for WEDNET to emphasize its research orientation. There was also no history at ELCI of integrating a research network into its liaison work.

WEDNET was isolated within ELCI. It was the major women's program and could not therefore amplify its strength through existing channels. The liaison potential for WEDNET through ELCI connections to other organizations was limited by the difficulties ELCI experienced in carrying out its mandate. However, this mandate is a complex and evolving one and WEDNET might have contributed to that evolution had there been a greater precedent for research, policy and NGO linkages.

The other major issue concerns funding and accountability. There is always tension surrounding the power dynamics between funders and executing agencies. ELCI is dependent on donors and is necessarily concerned to be accountable to them. However, the other constituents need to be accounted to but this process is operationally

and philosophically complex. WEDNET was generously funded by IDRC. However it was project funding as opposed to programme funding which meant that the funds were for a specific undertaking and were not discretionary within a wider program. This renders projects vulnerable to disappearance when their term is ended unless new funding can be secured. The dilemma is that an executing agency must persuade the funder that the project must be continued both as a matter of survival and as a matter of genuine interest. This system introduces factors which have nothing to do with the subject of the project and which unfortunately can have a large impact on the direction development projects take.

In the concluding chapter that follows I will summarize my design and operations analysis and offer policy recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions, Policy Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research

This chapter contains a summary of the conclusions I made elsewhere in the text and some further concluding thoughts. I want to stress again that my own work on WEDNET is in progress; these are by no means final, absolute, conclusions. I continue to learn from WEDNET as I assume do its members. There are three sections to my conclusions. First, I would like to suggest some conclusions about the relative contributions of WEDNET's design and operations to its achievements. Second, I make some policy recommendations, both about WEDNET specifically and about research network communication in general. Third, I point to some areas of future research which I have identified from my work.

WEDNET Design and Implementations

This has been a particularly difficult section to write. It has been suggested to me that readers might expect me to judge the success of WEDNET. That was never my intention. So I suggest that the question be rephrased. I would prefer to try to understand how WEDNET has evolved from its particular design and through the development of certain operational practices.

WEDNET's design is a mixture of the network model which had become prevalent at IDRC and a number of innovative features designed to push the information-sharing and communications components forward. There is no question that these features were strong elements of WEDNET's goal and were adequately supported financially. Project design is a subtle tool rather than a ready-made product. It is always subject to interpretation. In the case of WEDNET, there were many levels to the interpretation as it wended its way through numerous individuals and institutions. While there were numerous elements supporting the innovations, they often contained implicit assumptions about communication which were then subject to the biases of the individual in charge of executing the specific task. For example, the incorporation of the network development (internal communication and circularity) aspects of WEDNET into the administration of the research was subject to the interpretation of the coordinators and project leader and always under pressure of reduced time. Is this a design or operations issue? I would suggest the following way of looking at the problem.

WEDNET is a transitional project. Its design reflects a tentative move in a new more communications oriented direction. The dominant research model is still very strong and the goal of producing high-quality research according to existing academic standards is paramount. An explicit overlay in WEDNET was that the research must be policy-oriented. The planning and achievement of this goal

while urgent was less familiar to the project's designers than the creation of ground-breaking research on gender and environment issues. Therefore those elements are less fully developed in the tasks assignment of the project document and were not as systematically integrated into the operations of the project. The electronic information-sharing model was heavily dependent on the success of the technology and its support. WEDNET's major link to policy makers was through the production of a critical mass of research facilitated by the electronic network. These activities presumed large concentrated efforts rather than the strategy of small steps to which I have alluded previously. A further example is the provision for hiring a communications consultant in the second year. It is a perfectly good idea, but it is easier to put aside communications issues when a consultant is assigned to deal with them later. In any case, the consultant was not hired until much later and only when the situation had become problematized. The result was that the information-sharing and communications goals were more dependent on i) the vagaries of administration, ii) the understanding and appreciation of communications and utilization issues of the individuals involved, iii) the time available to those who may or may not have been specifically assigned the task of implementation.

I would like to point out the ways in which WEDNET is a movement beyond the standard research network model.

First, in the choice of an NGO, ELCI, as an administrative body. Although this was not an unqualified success, the problems that arose point to at least two things: 1) that there was considerable interest in the dissemination (if not utilization) of the research results on the part of the project's designers, and 2) that the very fact that the irregular functioning of ELCI could have such a great impact on the course of WEDNET is ironic proof of the importance of the institutional setting. 3) NGOs without previous experience in coordinating a research network need a great deal of support in planning and implementation, and need to be monitored closely through regular formative evaluations.

Second, WEDNET attempted to create a participatory methodology that would be a "breakthrough" in the field of women and environment research. Because of different disciplinary standards and approaches, the multi-disciplinary nature of WEDNET's research projects made this difficult, but in a new field there is always a great deal to be learned. The difficulty is that there are so many ways to participate. The distinction between participation as a means and as an end must always be kept to the fore in mind and in action. Some WEDNET researchers used participatory methods as a means to gaining more accurate results and were less engaged in follow up activity with the participants. Others did develop innovative participatory strategies from which other researchers, both inside and outside of WEDNET could benefit. I believe that ultimately it is

necessary to relearn participation as a process, an end, in every attempt at research. The connection between participatory research and participatory communication and circularity could be encouraged and developed within WEDNET.

Third, the risks that WEDNET took were numerous; it came very close to being a truly different project. However, it did not sort out its assumptions about communication, nor perhaps even about development itself. The paradox of WEDNET's radical research agenda arising from a fairly traditional development organization was addressed I believe by the decision to house the project within an NGO. This did not alleviate the paradox because the NGO had also not fully created and implemented a policy on network and research communication. It had not achieved the kind of liaison with its members which could transform its bureaucratic tendency toward non-participation and shallow democracy. It was therefore not able to create the circumstances for grassroots participation in communications.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

One: Research can be considered as a community resource. Therefore I suggest a kind of community User's Council (or Local Network) consisting of a diverse range of interested parties (Original research participants, women's groups, community groups, local development officials, NGOs, academics, donor representatives) who

contribute to the direction and dissemination of the research. This need not be rigid, but it should be systematic and formalized within reason. A homogeneous group is likely to be unable to expand the number and kinds of groups that use the research. A heterogeneous group brings diverse ideas together. If the User's Council is diverse and accountable to its community members, then the way in which the relational nature of communication is important to the sharing of information is made visible. When there is either a group of the same kinds of people or a group of experts thinking about the information and persuasion components of development communication, relationships are seen as less important if not a potential obstruction. User's Councils are a possible means of: 1) respecting informal indigenous communications, 2) encouraging a system where participation in decisions about a community resource is the norm and is ongoing, 3) combining imaginatively the systematic and creative aspects of communication countering the tendency toward efficiency in development communications where the focus is on persuasion not empowerment. The difficulty is in the very heterogeneity which is sought. It is dependent on a community's ability to work together and make decisions.

Two: WEDNET itself could become a more inclusive diversified network, seeking to include as full members researchers, practitioners, policy makers and others. WEDNET should seek to be accountable to its diverse constituents and should have an ongoing system of member

consultation. A number of other ideas emerged from my discussions with WEDNET researchers and administrators whose resources of invention have scarcely been tapped. Therefore one of the most important suggestions I have is that WEDNET become a more interactive and responsive network.

Three: Academically-trained researchers generally do not know much about planned communications techniques. Use their informal communications networks, but create a team that would include different kinds of communication practitioners (not just academic or technical experts) to work with the researchers on participatory and other techniques, evaluation, and coordination.

Four: Within a network as large and far-flung as WEDNET, a system for receiving researchers' feedback in order to give direction to the network is necessary. If communications projects are to smoothly flow from a research project, even while the research is ongoing, there should be a system for formative evaluation of the work within the design of the project. Such measures are useful in order - among other things - to ensure that the needs of participants and users are being met on an ongoing basis so that any modifications can take place before problems become insurmountable.

Five: Crucial issues of governance, purpose, life span, funding commitment, inclusivity and exclusivity are often left vague by

network designers. These issues must be addressed, often repeatedly as the network evolves, in order to make the network a living entity.

Six: For research already completed I suggest that "legitimization of women's knowledge" as an operating principle be similarly diversified. The notion of legitimacy needs to be re-examined by different communities: from policy makers to women's groups. As I have stated earlier, indigenous knowledge cannot be separated from indigenous transmission of knowledge. I firmly believe that to understand and preserve the knowledge we have to understand and support how it is communicated within communities.

Seven: Communication issues, especially information sharing, dissemination and utilization, should be considered as integral to the research process as the choice of methodology. The possible future users of the research and the participants in the research itself should be included in all stages of the research so that relationships and channels for the eventual communication of the research are allowed time to develop.

Eight: Funding for single projects, which have a lifespan of two-three years or less or are for one-off events, places considerable pressure on executing agencies to persuade funders to continue their support. This affects the time staff members have to attend to administration and programme development and requires that agencies hire staff for

their fundraising skills as much if not more than for their analytical or administrative skills. Networks are particularly vulnerable because they may take years to develop effectively. These considerations of type and length of funding committments need to be very carefully strategized by both funding and executing agencies for their impact on the evolution of projects and programmes and on the institutions themselves.

General Recommendations

Following Riano's writing on participatory communication, I recommend that the following be considered principles of communication for research networks:

1. Direct involvement of the target group in the communicative process, whether policy makers or village women or academic network member.

2. Demystifying the means of communication from electronic to low-tech.

3. Incorporating participatory research methodologies and discussing just how participatory they are going to be and for whose benefit.

4. Use participatory processes to recover indigenous knowledge, communicative forms, and cultural traditions.

5. Attempt a constant interactive relationship with the audience.

6. Accept that the outcome of communication strategies cannot be predetermined and that a certain amount of control has to be relinquished.[1]

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This section allows me to discuss what I chose to set aside in the thesis and to point out the gaps in the literature. I chose the approach used in this thesis because of my interests and because of the way the project evolved. I had to rummage through a number of different sources for literature. On the question I developed, I found only brief and fragmentary discussions. If "networks" were discussed, it was not from the position of communication or dissemination of research. If research dissemination was discussed then it was not about networks. There is a huge literature on organizations, but little about development . What there is on development bureaucracies does not address communications issues. Almost never was the discussion gender-sensitive, let alone feminist. Discussions, such as Riano's are exceptions, but even Riano does not specifically mention institutions or networks and focusses more on media for women's participatory communication than on strategies for research communication.

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[1] Pilar Riano, Empowering Through Communication: Women's Experiences with Participatory Communication in Development Processes, IDRC-MR278e, IDRC, Ottawa, 1990, pp.19-21

What I could have made the major focus of the thesis but did not:

• Electronic networks and research networks for development. This is a growing area of interest: How is the technology transformed and transformative of relationships? How does this affect relationships created in development projects?

• Dissemination media in Africa such as community theatre, dance, song, video, comics, soap operas, radio listening groups, etc. (Much work has been done in this area, but not necessarily gender-sensitive) What kind of work has been done translating research results into community media, especially outside the health sphere?

• Communications and the confrontation of knowledge systems in development.

• Official Canadian development policy and institutions and their attitudes towards communication and development: the discourse on participation.

Certainly, I suggest that the combination of issues and approaches I have gathered here be further developed. I believe that the elements included in my analysis are all vital, but there are likely to be more issues that could be discussed. For example:

•• Concerning the potential of communication to subvert the development apparatus: does it always get subverted by the bureaucrats? Do development bureaucracies always neutralize subversive communication? When do they not?

• The role of e-mail in increasing participatory communication.

• What would a real-time, long-term engagement with a community research project teach us? What communication strategies and techniques emerge and how do they evolve?

• Study of WEDNET over a period of a decade: what do we learn about communication and the evolution of networks and research communication?

• Further implications of putting an academic research network into an NGO: any other examples out there?

• If we rename international development: "confrontation of knowledge systems," then what is the role of communication?

Finally, I would say that WEDNET is far more than the dissection I have done here might suggest. It represents something that should be heard and understood beyond my analysis. I want to close this discussion, not with grand thoughts of my own, but rather through two writers who do not simply summarize what I would say, but take me far beyond.

> Let them come and see men and women and children who know how to live, whose joy of life has not yet been killed by those who claimed to teach other nations how to live.
> Chinua Achebe, No Longer at Ease

> Our people say that if you take up a drum and nobody joins you then you just became a fool. The women's movement has helped in that it is like other people taking up the drum and beating along with you.
> Ama Ata Aidoo, African Women Writers Speak

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APPENDICES

A) IDRC WEDNET Project Document

B) List of persons consulted or interviewed

C) Sample Questionnaire

D) Research Narrative

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE CENTRE DE RECHERCHES POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT INTERNATIONAL **PROJECT SUMMARY/RÉSUMÉ DE PROJET**	File Dossier 3-P-88-0200 Prepared By/Prepare par Eva M. Rathgeber

Project Title Titre du projet	Women and Natural Resource Management Network (Africa)

Division Division	SPA (administered by Social Sciences); Information Sciences; Communication;

Activity/Sub-Activity Secteur/sous-secteur	Women in Development; Infrastructure Development; RRDU

Recipient Institution (Name and Location)
Bénéficiaire (nom de l'organisme et endroit)

Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI)
P.O. Box 72461, Nairobi, Kenya

Research Institution (Name and Location)
Institution de recherche (nom et endroit)

Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI)
(same as above)

Project Leader (Name and Location) Charge de projet (nom et endroit)	Dr. Shimwaayi Muntemba ELCI (same as above)	**Approvals** **Approbations**

| Funding Amount (CAD) Duration (Months): | $ 753,100(36 months): SPA- 599,500;
IS - $118,600; Comm - $35,000 | Program Director
Directeur de programme |
| Subvention montant (CAD) duree (mois): | | |

Other Phases (Amount Duration) Autres phases (montant duree)	---

Recipient Contribution Contribution du bénéficiaire	---	RECOMMENDED

Other Participating Agencies Autres organismes participants	---	

Abstract/Abrégé	The President: Le President du Centre

This project will provide support to a group of anglophone
and francophone researchers in various African countries as
well as 2-3 associated Canadian researchers to undertake a
series of studies on the participation of women in natural
resource management. The studies will be centred around
three specific concerns and will be carried out using a
common methodology and frame of reference. An explicit
information component will support the research and
communication activities of the network from its inception.
This activity is aimed at servicing the immediate
information needs of the researchers by ensuring that all
information generated by the network participants is
effectively and promptly shared with research colleagues and
disseminated to appropriate groups of possible users,
especially to decision makers in local and national
governments of the countries of the network as well as to
other researchers interested in environmental issues.

RECOMMENDED AT PRO
COMMITTEE ON

DEC 14 1988

The Executive Committee
Le Comite de direction

GRANT APPROVED

JAN 2 0 1989

The Board of Governors
Le Conseil des gouverneurs

93000-002 (RE) 06-84

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(i)

APPRAISAL

This project will provide support for the creation of a research network on Women and Natural Resource Management in various anglophone and francophone countries in Africa. The network's major focus will be on the identification and legitimization of women's knowledge about the environment. The project recognizes that the current environmental crisis in Africa and the enduring poverty of African women are not distinct phenomena. They represent the simultaneous result of global and regional policies that force African women to transfer their own poverty onto Africa's natural resource base.

The crucial conceptual shift in this project is its emphasis on women as problem-solvers whose success at sustainable resource use is largely dependent on their own opportunities for constructive decision-making. The network will provide funding for 10-12 individual projects to be carried out using a common framework of investigation. This framework, which centres on women's indigenous knowledge concerning natural resource management, emphasizes three interrelated concerns: the relationships of women's knowledge to other modes of understanding for resource utilization; the nature of household strategies for coping with environmental degradation; and innovative strategies developed by individual women and women's groups for sustainable resource management.

Ouput

The project will have two important network components. First, it will bring together a group of researchers who will develop their research proposals within a common conceptual framework and who will meet and communicate on a regular basis throughout the life of the project. Second, it will set up an information network which will enable researchers in different countries and institutions to share important sources of information and research materials throughout the life of the project. Two coordinators have been identified to facilitate information sharing and the maintenance of regular communication among the researchers. The project also will have an on-going communications component. Researchers in different countries will be linked through the production of a bilingual project newsletter and a research report writing and editing mini-workshop will be included in both of the major network meetings planned during the life of the project.

Research Component

The project will support individual studies in all or some of the following countries: Burkina Faso, Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. The component studies each will be carried out using a common conceptual framework and will share some overall objectives. Network researchers will meet once soon after the approval of the project, to discuss their research designs and ensure that commonalities are intact. They will meet again towards the end of the project to share research results and discuss

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(ii)

dissemination and follow-up activities. Since this project has a very clear and specific policy focus, policymakers will be invited as active participants in both meetings. While the majority of the project participants will be African researchers, provision has been made to allow 1-2 Canadian researchers to join in cooperative projects with Canadian researchers. The Canadian participants will play a particularly important role in ensuring that relevant theoretical literature is made available to African participants.

Information Component

The information activity is a pilot project or model exercise for information systems support to research networks, and innovative service development using traditional and telecommunications information dissemination methodologies as appropriate.

While it is intended to concentrate on the immediate information needs of the network, it is recognized that the information processing capacity of participating institutions in Africa may need strengthening to allow them to support their network members effectively. Basic information systems development is not envisaged within this project. However, equipment, training and services provided in and because of this focused information networking activity will provide an opportunity for the information units of participating institutions to gain some experience of modern information services. It will encourage closer contacts with an important user group, and increased visibility within their organizations, as well as a better grasp of what can be done, and what support is needed, for the development of dynamic and effective information services for development. It will also encourage explicit support and understanding of information units from some of the researchers these services are designed to serve. The data collected during the research studies, and the resulting reports and analyses will create an invaluable "state-of-the-art" information resource. This will be recognized and safeguarded as such within the researchers' parent institutions, from the time of its creation, as well as being disseminated throughout the countries and the region involved.

The information-sharing capacity will support the ultimate objective of the network, which is to establish direct links with policymakers and to develop a set of policy recommendations for the sustainable management of natural resources that will draw on women's knowledge and experience of their own environments.

Institutions and Researchers

The project will be based at the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) in Nairobi. The ELCI is a coalition of more than 250 NGO's worldwide working for sustainable development. Its official working languages are English, French and Spanish. Through its networking and advocacy activities, the ELCI is actively promoting an appreciation for the indigenous knowledge of local communities concerning their own resource bases. One of the particular objectives of the

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ELCI is the promotion of sustainable development through grass-roots self-reliance. In this regard, the ELCI has particular interest in policy initiatives that focus on women and environment. Their activities in this area include a specific emphasis on the documentation and analysis of African women's effort in resource management.

The Executive Director of the ELCI, Dr. Shimwaayi Muntemba, will act as the project leader. Dr. Muntemba is a highly experienced researcher, who has written extensively on women and environment issues. She also served in the Secretariat of the Brundtland Commission, which produced the 1986 report, Our Common Future. As Executive Director of the ELCI, Dr. Muntemba is uniquely placed and qualified to serve the research and policy goals of this project.

Researchers for the project will be drawn from a variety of institutions in anglophone and francophone Africa. Specific projects will be selected by a team composed of Dr. Muntemba, the Coordinator of the WID Unit of IDRC, and two consultants, one African and one Canadian who will be attached to the project. The information needs of these researchers will be addressed through the formation of an information-sharing system which will link documentation centres in West, East and Southern Africa with ELCI.

Risk

A project of this size and scope necessarily entails a high level of risk. The project represents an entirely new way of thinking about environmental issues in Africa and has the potential to make a significant impact. However, it involves the active collaboration of many different researchers and institutions. It involves a level of interaction between anglophone and francophone researchers who will not necessarily be familiar with languages other than their own. All of these potential problems have been considered and attempts have been made to ensure that they are minimized. A project development meeting was held in May 1988 with a selection of experienced African researchers. An appropriate framework of investigation was developed and contacts were initiated with potential participants. In addition, the WID Unit supported a consultant who established contacts for the network with additional researchers and institutions in nine African countries. Moreover, though the involvement of two consultants, every effort is being made to ensure that project coordination will proceed smoothly. The two consultants will be part of a project management team which includes the Executive Director of the ELCI and the Coordinator of IDRC's WID Unit.

The link between research and utilization is always difficult to effect, but to begin the progress of ensuring the ultimate objective of establishing direct links with policymakers and developing a set of policy recommendations for the sustainable management of natural resources that will influence policies in Africa, a selection of policymakers will be invited to both of the research network meetings.

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There is also a necessary level of dependence on the commitment of the ELCI towards the success of this project. In this case, the proposed project will assist the ELCI in the fulfillment of specific aspects of its own mandate.

For these reasons, this project is recommended for support.

Eva M. Rathgeber
Coordinator
Women in Development Unit

I concur.

Anne K. Whyte
Director
Social Sciences Division

This project provides an exciting opportunity for cooperative, inter-Divisional support to research on a major development issue in Africa, African women and the environment. The creation of an explicit, experimental information service from the beginning of the network's life is a challenging initiative the ISD is pleased to support. This highly focused service will make use of the latest telecommunication and microcomputer technologies to facilitate the network's development and administration, service immediate information needs, and help in creating, and safeguarding the new information generated by network members. The experience gained by the African institutions, and by the Centre, in what is and is not possible in data networking will be valuable in many other areas, while the development of close relationships between the researchers and the information professionals of the network will draw both teams together, and establish a lasting legacy of contacts between African institutions involved in research on women, and on environmental issues. It will also increase the visibility of the network and the research results, and highlight their importance for decision makers and managers in the participating institutions, and in national policy making bodies, hopefully increasing the possibility of providing some actual benefits for African women, and their families.

Martha Stone
Director
Information Sciences Division

3-P-88-0200

(v)

We look forward to working with Social Sciences and Information Sciences divisions on this project which will not only enhance the research competence of women involved in natural resources management but will strenthen their capacity to communicate with one another and to present and disseminate the results of their research in various formats to appropriate audiences. I am pleased to provide support for this project and look forward to participating in a future complementary activity which will contribute to the wide dissemination and utilization of the research findings.

David Nostbakken, Ph.D.
Director
Communications Division

1. This project will support the establishment of a network of anglophone and francophone researchers to undertake studies on the participation of women in natural resource management, focussing specifically on the existant knowledge bases, needs and priorities of African women.

Background

2. Research undertaken in the 1970s on women in Africa clearly substantiated and documented the central role women have played in the agricultural systems of sub-Saharan Africa. But it was not until the processes of desertification were brought to global attention and the most recent and dramatic food crisis publicized, that women's economic activities began to be appreciated within the context of ecological and environmental sustainability. As it seeks for ways in which to feed into policies and developmental pathways, research on women in their socioeconomic arenas and activities is beginning to focus on the linkages between the position of women and the environment, particularly the resource base. Our Common Future, the 1986 report by the World Commission on Environment and Development, highlighted human and natural resource management as basic to environmental security. Various policy and action-oriented organizations, such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and the Environment Liaison Centre International, are developing programs focussed on women and environments. Many universities and research institutes both inside and outside Africa are beginning to participate in the debate on sustainable development.

3. In conceptualizing the issue of women and natural resource management, it is useful to begin with the identification of three interrelated concerns: i) natural resources as they are perceived by individuals and groups: ii) the relationship between individuals and the natural environment; and iii) the relationship between communities and the environment.

4. Natural resources as they are perceived by individuals and groups. This concern begins from the position that different cultures and actors within cultures, conceive of the environment in varying ways. The current tendency amongst development planners is to focus on natural resources as a "problem" but how that "problem" is defined has had important implications for women. An example of such a conceptual problem is the general failure of policymakers and international agencies to recognize that deforestation has created a double crisis for women. While there is awareness of the energy problem - shortages of domestic fuel, for example - the livestock feed problem has for the most part been invisible. As a consequence, reforestation schemes have advocated the planting of trees such as eucalyptus which do not provide women, who often have responsibility for care of small animals, with necessary sources of fodder. As a result they face grave difficulties in fulfilling their responsibilities with respect to family livestock. Similar observations can be made about conceptualization of environmental problems with respect to the land base, water resources,

and crop varieties. Research in this project will try to identify the
different conceptualizations of environment held by women farmers and l
official agencies.

5.   The relationship between individuals and the natural environment. This
     concern focusses on women's lives as they intersect with the changing
     environment. A substantial literature already exists on African women'
     loss of political power and personal autonomy, and the increased burder
     labour placed upon them as a result both of changing environments and
     changing gender relations. It is the intention of the current project
     move forward from this work, while applying to specific resource issues
     insights of earlier research regarding property and use rights, changir
     economic practices and relations, and the impact of state and aid polic
     upon women. The environmental crisis is seen as falling into two
     categories: overt and hidden. The overt crises are those issues which
     already make a dramatic claim upon public attention, such as desertific
     and deforestation. The hidden crises are those which have as yet recei
     little notice, because they are occuring in areas where there is as yet
     obvious serious environmental degradation. Issues such as the impact c
     biotechnology and plant breeders' rights, and the use of damaging pesti
     and other agricultural inputs fall into this category. Research will f
     on women's strategies regarding both of these types of crises and an
     assessment will be made of the extent to which women are actually able
     "manage" resources rather than simply to "respond" to situations over w
     they have no control.

6.   A starting point for the research network is the notion that women are
     problem solvers: they are not the problem. The critical conceptual sh
     is to focus on women as actors, rather than as passive recipients of ch
     They are more or less successful in their strategies depending on the e
     to which they are effectively empowered to make constructive decisions.
     Decision-making draws both on the adaptation of traditional solutions t
     modern problems, and the very style of decision-making developed by Afr
     women in the past. Evidence suggests that women continue to use this s
     even under adverse conditions. One of the objectives of the network wi
     to examine the transformation of women's decision-making style in the
     context of both social and environmental change. Specifically, the lin
     between women's strategies and women's rights in resources, past and
     present, must be considered. An important dimension of this exercise w
     be to identify the inappropriate decision-making models that Western
     knowledge and policy have imposed in Africa.

7.   The relationship between communities and environment. This third conce
     focusses on the ways in which communities interact with natural resourc
     Inevitably, this is linked with the relationship of individuals with th
     environment insofar as many aspects of women's decision-making are orga
     by the groups in which women participate. Some work already has been d
     on the analysis of women's groups although there are more calls for res
     in this area than achievements within it. Women have worked together t

solve problems regarding natural resources, using self-help groups,
revolving credit clubs, and other forms of contemporary political
organization. Some evidence suggests that women have imaginatively adapted
their traditional associations, such as age sets and cultivation groups, to
these contemporary organizations.

8. The project therefore will attempt to establish the positive aspects of
group strategy, including women's traditional practices, in order to
correct policymakers' neglect of women's collective decision-making
capacity as a powerful and necessary human resource. To this end, the
researchers will investigate the conditions under which women's groups are
able to engage in effective resource management strategy. The
documentation of successful cases is an important aspect of this
investigation. Equally important are questions about the constraints
facing women's collective action. The network will explore the kinds of
competition in which women in groups engage with respect to resources. Do
they engage in literal competition over dwindling resources where they
cooperated in the past? If this is the case, what is the prognosis for the
survival of women's cooperation? To what extent do individual advantaged or
powerful women manipulate cooperative traditions within groups? The network
will also ask questions about group interaction between women and men to
determine the circumstances under which they either compete or cooperate.

9. All of these issues were discussed at a project development meeting held in
Toronto at York University in May 1988. At the meeting, which concluded
with a day-long public forum on Women and Natural Resource Management, it
was agreed that a regional network on Women and Natural Resource Management
should be formed. The meeting brought together researchers from Zimbabwe,
Ghana, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya, Sénégal and Canada. The participants were
drawn from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds including agricultural
economics, political science, history, anthropology, soil science,
hydrobiology, food science, education and law. Only a few were invited to
present papers, which ensured that discussions were long and thoughtful.
The African participants prepared a statement drawing attention to four
critical research questions with respect to women and natural resource
management in Africa. They emphasized the necessity of considering the
issue in the context of the structural adjustment policies currently being
promoted by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and adopted
by African governments. Specifically, the participants were concerned with
the attrition of women's use rights in productive resources; with reduction
of household and national food security; with environmental degradation; and
with worsening conditions of production and exchange at the international,
national, community and household levels. While the network will not
address all aspects of these concerns, it was agreed that they should guide
the research agenda. The network members would undertake series of small,
tightly focussed research projects using a common conceptual framework, with
the objective of producing a set of comparable data which could be used to
feed into policymaking at both the national and regional level. While the

majority of the network members would be African researchers, a few
Canadians also would be involved in a cooperative mode.

Objectives

10. The general objective of this project is to highlight women's knowledge
    about the environment by providing support for a set of studies on women and
    natural resource management in Africa. The specific objectives are as
    follows:

    i)   to develop a network of concerned researchers and grassroots groups in
         different parts of Africa who will share information and research
         findings and undertake research within a common framework of analysis;

    ii) to support research on a) spheres of knowledge about the environment,
         b) household strategies for coping with environmental degradation, and
         c) innovative strategies for sustainable resource management;

    iii) to forge links between researchers and policymakers through joint
         participation in research and in meetings and seminars; and

    iv) to produce a set of policy recommendations for more effective resource
         management which take into account women's insights and experiences.

11. Important information and communications components have been added to this
    project. They will ensure that information is shared effectively and
    systematically amongst participating researchers and research institutions
    and that final reports and papers are prepared in such a way as to provide
    maximum dissemination opportunities not only to national policymakers,
    international agencies and the international research community, but also to
    grass roots groups working on environment issues in Africa.

Mechanisms and Methodologies

12. It is anticipated that approximately 10-12 research grants will be made to
    individual researchers, each in the range of $20,000 - $25,000. The general
    framework for investigation will be the legitimization of knowledge about
    the environment, specifically women's knowledge, in its traditional and
    contemporary aspects, and the processes that deny this knowledge validity
    and significance. Contacts already have been made with researchers in
    institutions in Nigeria, Ghana, Sénégal, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Tanzania,
    Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana and researchers have been invited to prepare
    statements of interest which relate to the conceptual framework being
    proposed for the network. The specific research to be supported will fall
    into three categories:

    i)   Spheres of knowledge. Research in this category will examine the
         maintenance of separate spheres of knowledge about the environment,
         specifically the different knowledge about the environment held by

women and men. Integral to this research will be analysis of the manner in which legal statutes on the one hand, and public policy on education, health and development on the other, create and maintain barriers between these spheres of knowledge. As well, the inquiry will explore the contradictions between indigenous African knowledge generally, and externally imposed environmental perceptions and explanations. It will focus upon the undermining of women's knowledge about the environment, and on the ways in which public policy may hamper women's authority and ability to manage the environment.

   ii) <u>Household strategies</u>. Research here will focus on the manner in which women, as members of households, cope with the resource limitation that results from commercial agriculture, environmental degradation, legislation and public incentives and disincentives for the use of the environment. It will explore the dilemmas these factors create in women's ability to use the environment in a sustainable manner and women's experience of powerlessness in the use and management of environmental resources.

  iii) <u>Innovative strategies</u>. Research here will focus on the development and implementation of innovative strategies for sustainable resource management and the roles played by individual women, women's self-help groups and larger women's networks in the promotion of sustainable development strategies. Of particular importance will be a survey and analysis of innovative strategies already devised by women and communities, often in spite of indifference or opposition to their efforts.

13. Preliminary proposals already have been received from various researchers and information centres. The topics which have been proposed for research include the following:

<u>Nigeria</u>

    i) Women, land and the Nigerian Environment: A Socio-Legal Investigation of the Rights of Rural Yoruba Women for Access to Land

   ii) Inadequate Rural Water Supply: Real Cost to the Female Farmer

<u>Ghana</u>

    i) Women and Forestry Development in Ghana

   ii) Women of the Ghanaian Grasslands

  iii) Women, Forest Resources and Development in Ghana

   iv) Gender and Access to Land: The Interface between Recent Legislative Initiatives and Customary Tenure in Ghana.

Sénégal

    i)   Les femmes et la tenure foncière

   ii)   Les femmes et les activités de production en milieu fluvio-maritime sénégalais

  iii)   Savoirs et technologies féminins et production

Burkina Faso

    i)   Le rôle des ONG au Burkina Faso

Kenya

    i)   Impact on Health of Women's Coping/Management Strategies in Wake of Environmental Degradation

   ii)   Struggles over the Land: Gender Rights in Contexts of Legal Pluralism.

Tanzania

    i)   Traditional Strategies for Soil Conservation

   ii)   Women's Access to Land

Zambia

    i)   Legislative policy, customary practices and their Impact on Women's Access to Land

Zimbabwe

    i)   Women, Household Food Security and Wildlife Resources

   ii)   Indigenous Shona Knowledge and Practices of Conservation of Natural Resources

14.   It is not anticipated that all of these proposals will be funded and it is likely that other proposals will be received for consideration, however this gives an idea of the type of research which will be undertaken by the network and indicates the high level of interest and commitment that already exists in various African countries. The countries to be included in the network are Sénégal, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana. Various projects related to the research interests of the network already are being supported: Social Forestry (Lesotho) 3-P-87-0227, Fuelwood Carriers (Ethiopia) 3-P-88-0019 and Access to Land

Ownership (Kenya) 3-P-87-0330.

15. Selection of studies to be funded will be made by a team composed of the
Executive Director of the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) in
Nairobi, the Coordinator of the WID Unit of IDRC, and two consultants, one
African and one Canadian, who will be attached to the project. All studies
will be carried out within the common framework of investigation already
described and it is expected that completed reports will be available within
18 months of commencement of the individual studies. The African
coordinator, based at the ELCI in Nairobi will have primary responsibility
for monitoring projects and information activities. The Canadian
coordinator, based at York University's Faculty of Environmental Studies,
will have responsibility for providing network participants with
bibliographic references and ensuring that a flow of communication is
maintained among the participants. She also will undertake some project
monitoring in consultation with the African coordinator.

16. Information Networking

This proposal presents an idealized, experimental model for the sharing of
information in this research network. The model is a starting point for
building a working information system, dependent on the actual structure of
the research network and its evolution, and on specific decisions with
regard to costs and possible benefits. It will be reviewed regularly by
researchers and information professionals.

The model has four goals:

i) to provide the ongoing possibility of direct communication between the
various coordinating links and the researchers in the network;

ii) to build on existing strengths by using documentation centres that are
already established or have been awarded funding by other donor
agencies;

iii) to facilitate, and in some cases, to establish links between these
centres; and,

iv) to ensure the strategic and broad dissemination of network data,
particularly through the creation of linkages with other active
research and information networks.

The model envisages an information-sharing system on three levels: a set of
links between the IDRC WID Unit and the ELCI in Nairobi; a set of links
between ELCI and IFAN (Dakar), the IAS (Accra), the IITA and NISER (Ibadan),
the ACTRW (Addis Ababa), ZARD (Lusaka), the Women's Affairs Unit (Gabarone),
ZIDS (Harare), and the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (Dar es
Salaam); and a large group of persons on a communications list who would
receive specific data and reports from the network. The first two levels of

the system would aim at computer aided networking, while the third would be
established initially by mail.

Information units at the following institutions would participate in
network activities:

ELCI: The Environmental Liaison Centre International - Nairobi;

IFAN: Institut Fondamental d'Afrique - Dakar;

IAS: Institute of African Studies - Accra;

IITA: International Institute of Tropical Agriculture - Ibadan;

NISER: Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research - Ibadan;

ACTRW: African Training and Research Centre for Women - Addis
          Ababa;

ZARD: Zambia Association for Research and Development - Lusaka;

WAU: The Women's Affairs Unit - Gabarone;

ZIDS: The Zimbabwe Institute for Development Studies - Harare; and

WRDC   The Women's Research and Documentation Center - Dar es
          Salaam.

17. The information activity will enable participants to access research
     proposals and documentation on research in progress generated by network
     colleagues, as well as background materials essential to the research
     studies undertaken within the network. It will include traditional services
     such as SDI and, where possible, the use of the newer information
     technologies to support electronic mail and teleconferencing, the
     cooperative development of joint research presentations and the conduct of
     peer reviews, referral services to appropriate information sources at
     national, regional and international levels, on-line searches, and the
     development of network databases on participating researchers and their
     work.

18. Methodology

     Basic equipment to support the information networking activity comprises
     microcomputers, modems and communications software. Two microcomputers are
     budgetted in the information component of the project: one for ELCI in
     Nairobi, the African Coordinating Centre for the Network; and one in IFAN in
     Dakar, for West African participants.

19. An Advisory Committee on Network Information Services will be formed, to coordinate the information activities of the network, ensure the information professionals from participating institutions are active partners in network development and have collective voice on the information support to the research activities, coordinate and develop standard practices for the network information services, and share their experiences. Membership should include the 2 coordinators, 3 information professionals (from ELCI, IFAN and one other), and 2 researchers (probably 1 from ELCI) to represent users' interests directly. The Advisory Committee will have 2 meetings during the course of the project. The first one will draw up the workplan and outline the information activities of the network, including a survey of microcomputer access of network members (building on the Consultant's initial report); testing telecommunications access between members of the network; using e-mail and teleconferencing to exchange information on network research projects, preparations for the annual research meetings; information resource location; sharing and commenting on research papers in process; and monitoring procedures for ongoing assessment of use of the information services by network members.

20. The second meeting will assess the first year's progress, and detail future support needs to fully establish the information networking support to the research activities.

21. Some training and familiarization with the technical side of the information networking activity will be required. This may include basic use of microcomputer operating systems, and word processing, communication, database management and software packages.

22. Full use will be made of any local training opportunities, and local or regional ISD projects that do or will support the use of telecommunications and computers, such as School of Information Studies for Africa (SISA) 3-P-88-0014; Pan-African Documentation and Information System (PADIS) 3-P-86-0175; Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA) 3-P-86-0033; École de bibliothécaire, archivistes et documentaliste (EBAD) 3-P-88-1010. In addition, any institutions taking part in the network will advise Network Coordinators on, and make use of any local microcomputer training exercices. Additional requirements will be assessed by the Advisory team, and the consultants.

23. Two databases will be created and maintained by the the information professionals of the network, covering ongoing research information on participating and related research, and related publications and publications in progress. Advice on database content and structure will be sought from institutions engaged in related activities, especially CODESRIA, as a member of the International Development Information Network (3-P-87-0256), and PADIS.

24. A newsletter, in traditional and electronic form will be developed, to keep members of the network in touch with each others' progress, and to

publicize the network's research and findings to wider development community.

25. Two consultancies are planned for the information network: one to visit member institutions and meet with the information professionals and the researchers to advise on and/or help implement telecommunications linkages; the second to provide information for assessing the progress of the activity during the first 18 months.

The Communication Activity

26. In addition, the Communications Division will support activities which will strengthen the ability of the network participants to communicate the results of their research to the broader scientific community by assisting in strengthening skills in scientific publishing. At the same time the Division will support a review of the strengths and weaknesses of the network's internal communications mechanisms and an analysis of how the results of the research can be widely diffused, beyond the research community.

27. Researchers in developing countries frequently experience difficulty in getting the results of their research activities published and disseminated. This is due in large measure to a lack of training in analyzing, preparing, writing, and editing material for scientific publications.

28. In recognition of this problem, time will be allocated at each workshop to training in this area. At the first workshop, 1 day will be devoted to analyzing, writing, and preparing research results for written and oral presentation. In advance of the second meeting, participants will submit their papers to the resource persons for review and analysis and time will be made available during the workshop for the resource persons to meet with each author to discuss ways to improve the presentation of her research findings. One day will be devoted to training in rewriting, editing, and dealing with publishers and printers.

29. During the second year of the project activities, a communications consultant will review the network communication components, of the research and information networking activities, and recommend changes, if necessary. The same consultant will draw up a plan for a complementary project activity for the dissemination/utilization of research results to be funded by the Communications Division. It is envisaged that the consultant will carry out a thorough analysis of the potential target audiences for information generated from the network, and will recommend strategies for reaching and influencing those people.

Research Network Meetings

30. Provision is made for two meetings of all the network participants, one in

West Africa and one in East or Southern Africa. At the first meeting, to be held soon after the commencement of the project, all network participants will meet to discuss their proposals and to consider how changes might be made in their own research designs to ensure maximum comparability with the work of colleagues in other countries. Since one of the objectives of the network is to ensure maximum opportunities for sharing of information and for the creation of colleagial ties across countries and regions of Africa, it is important that the participants meet one another as quickly as possible. At the second meeting, to be held approximately two years later, participants will present their final reports and discussion will centre around how maximum policy input can be achieved through dissemination of different types of research documents. A selection of policymakers will be invited to both of the network meetings. During each of the research network meetings, a day will be put aside specifically for the communications component of the project. At the first meeting, participants will join in a one-day mini-workshop on the preparation of data for publication and the writing of research papers. In the second mini-workshop, by which time participants will actually have done their research, attention will focus on the final preparation of research findings for publication in international journals, the preparation of short, well-focussed reports for policymakers, and on the preparation of more popular information materials.

31. <u>Roles of Coordinators</u>. The project will be directed by Dr. Shimwaayi Muntemba, the Executive Director of the ELCI in Nairobi, but much of the day-to-day work will be carried out by a local coordinator, to be based in the ELCI, working under Dr. Muntemba's supervision. The local coordinator will be expected to:

   i) participate in the selection of proposals to be funded;

  ii) monitor on-going studies, visiting each researcher at least once during the course of the research;

 iii) correspond on a regular basis with researchers;

  iv) assist researchers with acquisition of relevant literature and information-sharing;

   v) organize two network meetings;

  vi) coordinate the preparation of the newsletter; and

 vii) undertake any other network-related activities as agreed in discussion with the Executive Director of the ELC and the WID Coordinator of IDRC.

The Canadian coordinator will be based in Toronto, in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. She will be expected to:

  i)   participate in the selection of proposals to be funded;

 ii)   correspond with network participants on a regular basis, giving input
       as necessary into their work;

iii)   assist with the identification of relevant literature of interest and
       use to network participants;

 iv)   make three trips to Africa to monitor selected network projects;

  v)   attend network meetings;

 vi)   assist with preparation of the newsletter; and

vii)   undertake any other network-related activities as agreed in discussion
       with the WID Coordinator of IDRC and the Executive Director of the ELC.

       It has been decided to involve two coordinators in the project because it is
       considered that the task of managing a sizable and widespread research
       network will require considerable human resources. The bulk of the work
       will be done by the local coordinator, who will work approximately one-third
       time at the ELCI. The role of the Canadian coordinator will be smaller but
       of particular importance with respect to ensuring that researchers have
       ready access to bibliographic materials.

Institution

32. The network will be based at the Environment Liaison Centre International in
     Nairobi. The ELCI has the advantage of being an institution with three
     official languages (English, French and Spanish) which will be of importance
     in a network involving both anglophone and francophone researchers. The
     ELCI is a global umbrella organization of environment and development NGOs
     with objectives loosely linked to those of the network. They are to i) help
     empower grassroots forces; ii) influence policy that impacts on environment
     and sustainable development through strong NGO involvement in the planning
     and policy-making process; and iii) promote and facilitate South-South and
     North-South networking. The ELCI currently has programs in Women,
     Environment and Development, Food Security and Forestry, Sustainable
     Development, Industrialization and Human Settlements and International
     Economic Relations. Its activities are carried out in affiliated offices
     around the world but its headquarters are in Nairobi, where this project
     will be based within the Women, Environment and Development program.

33. Dr. Shimwaayi Muntemba, the ELCI's Executive Director is a highly
     experienced Zambian social scientist. She joined the ELCI in January 1988
     after several years in Geneva, working first in the International Labour
     Office and later in the Secretariat of the Brundtland Commission. She has
     written extensively on women and environment issues. She will take a
     leading role in guiding the current project.

34. The Canadian coordinator will be Dr. Bonnie Kettel of the Faculty of
    Environmental Studies at York University. Dr. Kettel is an anthropologist
    who has done extensive research on pastoral societies in Africa. She
    teaches courses in women and development and research methodologies and will
    be a valuable resource person for network members. The local coordinator
    currently is being identified by Dr. Muntemba. It is anticipated that s/he
    will hold a postgraduate degree, have relevant research experience, and be
    able to function in English and French.

35. The resource persons for the writing/editing component of this project will
    have several years experience in writing/editing/publishing and will have
    conducted similar training sessions. It is expected that they will use and
    build upon materials developed during the Editing and Publication Production
    Training project (3-P-83-0336) funded by the Communications Division.
    Wherever possible there will be collaboration between the resource persons
    and the editors associated with the Scholarly Publishing African project (3-
    P-87-0199), funded by Comm Division, SS Division and EES Division, and
    members of the African Association of Science Editors many of whose
    activities are also funded by IDRC.

WOMEN AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (AFRICA)

PROPOSED BUDGET-C90

	IDRC Contribution				ELCI Contribution
RECIPIENT ADMINISTERED FUNDS	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	
SALARIES AND ALLOWANCES					
Coordinator (Africa)	17.200	18.300	19.400	54.900	0
Executive Director	0	0	0	0	29.900
SUBTOTAL	17.200	18.300	19.400	54.300	29.900
TRAVEL					
Coordinator*	15.000	15.000	15.000	45.000	0
Executive Director	0	0	0	0	36.000
SUBTOTAL	15.000	15.000	15.000	45.000	36.000
CONSULTANTS**					
Telecommunications linkage & inventory of equipment	10.000	0	0	10.000	0
Information network progress assessment	5.000	5.000	0	10.000	0
Resource Persons (4)	2.700	0	3.300	6.000	0
SUBTOTAL	17.700	5.000	3.300	26.000	0
RESEARCH COSTS					
Research Awards (10-12)***	100.000	150.000	0	250.000	0
Acquisition of books, documents	14.000	22.000	0	36.000	0
SUBTOTAL	114.000	172.000	0	286.000	0
MEETINGS****					
Information Sciences Meetings:					
East Africa	8.300	0	0	8.300	0
West Africa	0	8.300	0	8.300	0
Project Meetings					
East Africa	33.320	0	0	33.320	0
West Africa	0	0	33.320	33.320	0
SUBTOTAL	41.620	8.300	33.320	83.240	0
EQUIPMENT					
Microcomputers (2)	12.000	0	0	12.000	0
Communications equipment (modems), software	6.000	0	0	6.000	0
SUBTOTAL	18.000	0	0	18.000	0

WOMEN AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (AFRICA)

PROPOSED BUDGET-CAD

	IDRC Contribution				ELCI Contribution
RECIPIENT ADMINISTERED FUNDS	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	
COMMUNICATIONS					
Information networking costs	7,500	15,000	7,500	30,000	0
PUBLICATIONS					
Production & distribution of newsletter	3,000	8,000	7,000	18,000	0
TRAINING					
Short training courses in use of software	16,000	0	0	16,000	0
SUPPORT SERVICES					
Secretarial assistance	6,000	6,600	7,200	19,800	0
TRANSLATION COSTS*****	5,000	5,000	5,000	15,000	0
RECRUITMENT & RELOCATION					
Coordinator(Africa)	0	0	0	0	24,000
Space, Administration & Accounting Services	0	0	0	0	27,800
	0	0	0	0	51,800
TOTAL RECIPIENT ADMINISTERED	261,020	253,200	97,720	611,940	117,700
CENTRE ADMINISTERED FUNDS					
CONSULTANTS					
Coordinator (Canada)					
Fee (150 days)	10,500	10,500	10,500	31,500	
Travel**	10,420	6,940	6,940	24,300	
Support******	1,880	1,880	1,940	5,700	
Communications Expert					
Fee (21 days)	0	4,200	0	4,200	
Travel**	0	6,940	0	6,940	
SUBTOTAL	22,800	30,460	19,380	72,640	
CONTINGENCY	0	0	68,520	68,520	
TOTAL CENTRE ADMINISTERED	22,800	30,460	87,900	141,160	
TOTAL GRANT	283,820	283,660	185,620	753,100	

Persons Interviewed or Consulted
1991-1993

WEDNET Members:

Binta Sene-Diouf,
Suzanne Coulibally Lankouande,
Takyiwaa Manuh,
Elizabeth Ardafio-Schandorf,
Jacob Sonsore,
Ntombe Gata,
Aisha Mustafa,
Rosemary Jommo,
Cecelia Kinuthia,
Shimwaayi Muntemba,
Bonnie Kettel,
Eva Rathgeber

ELCI:
Dianah Macharia,
Heinz Grein,
Sam Otiro,
Luis Merico,
Doug Ribgy,
Noel Lambama,
Edward Rugumayo

IDRC-East Africa Regional Office:
Nancy George
Firoze Manji

Kenya:
Jon Metzger, SatelLife
Davinder Lamba, Mazingira
Institute
Simone Bilderbeek, Netherlands
IUCN

Ghana:
Rose Mensah-Kutin,
Ministry of Energy and
Environment, Accra
Nancy Drost,
Women and Development
Lecturer, University of Legon,

Burkina Faso:
Lampo Jamano,

Ministry of Environment
Secretariat (LUCODEB)
Marguerite Kabore,
 Foresterie Villageois Project,
 Ministry of the Environment;
Alfred Zapo,
 SNV (Dutch Volunteer Service)

Senegal:
Seydou Mourou Toure of IFAN
Sade Taiwo, GAD intern at IDRC -
Dakar

Zimbabwe:
Liz Smith,
Communications consultant,
Bruce Waring,
Southern Africa AIDS Education
and Training Project,
Canadian Public Health
Association.
 Philip Nyahota, AIA
(Africa Information Afrique)
David and June Gallagher,
Oxfam and CUSO
John McCullum /Andrea Booth,
Southern Africa Research and
Documentation Centre
S. Gumbo, ENDA Zimbabwe.
Salina Mumbengegwi, Women's
Action Group

Canada:
David Nostbakken, IDRC Ottawa
Yianna Lambrou, IDRC Ottawa

In conducting interviews or conversations with the WEDNET participants in my study, I phrased my questions in terms of sense-making. I used the following questions as a guide only and as a means of ensuring that I got information on roughly the same areas from each researcher I spoke to . I did not develop a formal questionnaire for the other participants in this study because the circumstances of every interview were different.

I.   Research Initiatives:

1.   How would you describe the research you have undertaken?

2.   How was it developed? With whom was it developed?

3.   Where does its contribution lie

     i.   in the immediate or short-term?

     ii. over the longer term?

4.   With which individuals or groups have you shared the research with?

     i.   and at what stages?

5.   Which individuals or groups have been/are most important? Why?

II.   Methodologies:

1.   Research with women; what should it be like?

     i.   How should it be carried out?

     ii. Who should it be done with/for?

2.   How did you develop the research methodology you used?

3.   What modifications were made as your research progressed? Why did you make them?

4.   Does your methodology include consideration of the future communication of your research? If so, please describe.

5.   What have you learned about research methodologies with women that is new to you?

6. What does your relationship to the women who contributed to your research look like?

    i.   How has it changed?

    ii. What, in your opinion, is the future of that/those relationship(s)?

III.   **WEDNET AS A NETWORK**

1. What is your experience of WEDNET as a network? in terms of

    i.   communication of information <u>to</u> and <u>from</u> ELCI? (please discuss separately).

    ii. Where/when have you contacted other WEDNET researchers?

2. What do you understand of ELCI's role in communicating WEDNET?

    i.   Do you know of any communications activities other than WEDNEWS undertaken by ELCI?

3. How have you/your research benefitted from participating in a network?

    i.   what/who has been most useful?

4. In terms of the evolution of WEDNET as a network, what would you like to see?

    i.   who should do this?

    ii. have you been asked this question before? if so where/by whom?

5. Please list the major triumphs and problems with communications within the network.

6. Have you used WEDNET electronic communications links?

    i.   why or why not?

    ii. is it a useful activity?

    iii. how could it be improved?

7. Which WEDNET conferences have you attended?

   i. how were they useful to you?

   ii. what would have made them better in terms of information exchanged?

IV. FUTURE OF WEDNET

1. What are your plans for your future participation in WEDNET?

   i. how do you plan to use your research?

   ii. with what groups, and by what means?

2. How would you design a "Phase II" of WEDNET?

   i. Have you been consulted on this question?

   ii. If so, who/when?

3. Who should carry out a Phase II of WEDNET?

V. IDDC AND YORK

1. Did you feel you could design research that you felt was truly interesting and worthwhile within the IDDC framework for WEDNET? why?

2. Outside of your home institution, where has the bulk of intellectual feedback originated from?

   i. Has this been satisfactory?

   ii. How could it be improved?

VI.

Please add any commentary - on WEDNET or this questionnaire. Thank you.

Research Narrative

My involvement with WEDNET began at IDRC, where I worked in 1988-90. I first heard of WEDNET through an ongoing women-and-development seminar sponsored by the GAD Unit. Later, after I left IDRC to pursue my studies at SFU, IDRC awarded me a Young Canadian Researcher Award (YCR) which allowed me to carry out field work on WEDNET.

I decided to focus on the means at the disposal of a research network for communication of the results of its work. I specifically wanted to understand the mechanisms by which research carried out within WEDNET is transformed into different pieces of information intended for different audiences. In order to do this, I planned to look at the entire process of research, from conceptualization to dissemination, within the network. It seemed to me that there would be critical intersection points at which information could be shared and transformed by diverse interests. Although these were likely to vary among individual projects, a model, or map, of these stages could be drawn. The institution at which WEDNET is based, Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI), and the home institutions of the researchers themselves, are of central importance to the manner in which information and audiences are perceived and ultimately included in the dissemination process. I hoped to make of my work a

modest contribution to the ongoing discussion of communications in WEDNET.

Narrative of Field Work

A summary of my field work: I attended the second WEDNET meeting, held in Accra, Ghana, in June 1991, at which preliminary reports were given and some discussion of dissemination took place. In October of the same year, I arrived in Nairobi to do research at ELCI. From Nairobi I went in November to West Africa (Ghana, Burkina Faso, Senegal) to meet with WEDNET researchers in those countries. I spent December in Nairobi, again at ELCI. In January I went to Zimbabwe with the intention of meeting the WEDNET researchers there. In February I returned to Nairobi. I returned to Canada in March 1992. In May 1993 I attended another WEDNET meeting in Kenya.

Accra, June 1991: I attended this conference for several reasons: to introduce myself to the network , to try to determine whether the research questions I had formulated were feasible of execution and relevant to the network, and to gain permission for my research from network members. The discussion of the dissemination of WEDNET research took several forms. There was a vigorous discussion of participatory methodology and the resultant communication effects; concerns were raised that the research results must be relevant to and usable by Africans, from policy makers to future generations of African

women. However, I noted that, with the exception of bibliographic support, there was little agreed-upon planning of institutional follow-up to the issues raised in general discussion.

I found these discussions very stimulating; my research interests and the concerns of WEDNET researchers appeared to mesh. In private conversations researchers encouraged me to undertake my project; I was further stimulated to believe I was on the right track. For my part, impressed with the dedication of the WEDNET researchers, I left with a strong desire to learn from the WEDNET women. I designed my project during the months which followed before returning to Africa with the aim of making my work useful to them and to the wider communities they worked within.

Field Study: October 1991-March 1992

I structured my research plan so that I would start at ELCI and would return there for a few weeks after each visit with WEDNET researchers in the field. My purpose was to enable me to share the information I had gathered with the relevant people at ELCI and to modify subsequent research as required. In this way I hoped to contribute my research to the WEDNET project. I remind the reader that I observed only a short period in the life of WEDNET; my observations pertain to a particular time and place. They are, I hope, important because of what they reveal about communications and networks in general, but they are not all-defining either in general or

for WEDNET. I hope the reader will bear the larger context in mind.
Networks, like all institutions, have life cycles. WEDNET too has
evolved; below I will discuss later developments.

Nairobi, Kenya - October/November 1991

I went immediately to the Environment Liaison Centre
International (ELCI) and held discussions with the IDRC program
officer responsible for WEDNET, the ELCI Executive Director and
WEDNET Project Leader (PL), and the Local Coordinator (LC) of
WEDNET. [1]

ELCI was, along with one other NGO, responsible for the
organization of a large conference of NGOs in Paris in December 1991
in preparation for the UNCED in Rio in 1992. It was of the utmost
importance to virtually everybody there. I prepared a document on
"Women and the Environment," which was needed for the
documentation being gathered for distribution before the conference. [2]
During the first full week I spent in Nairobi, I worked entirely at the
ELCI offices. My two main activities were reading the ELCI WEDNET
files and conducting preliminary interviews.

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[1] This was a period of immersion for me. I had to deal with all the usual questions of
introducing myself to the different members of the institution. Importantly, I immediately
sensed a very strong hierarchy within the organization. This caused me ongoing doubts about
how I interacted with it.

[2] This large conference absorbed a large amount of the energy of ELCI during the first months
I was there, and indeed had done so previously. It did however give considerable attention to
ELCI and its agenda.

I discussed with the Local Coordinator issues arising from my readings of the WEDNET files. She was generally informative, although she was under considerable pressure to produce several WEDNET documents. Tension arising from this pressure affected my work.[3] The report from the Accra conference in June had not yet been written, and WEDNEWS (the newsletter of WEDNET) was also late in appearing.

From my understanding of the Accra conference, much of the designing of the dissemination of WEDNET research was to have taken place in the intervening months. During this week I realized that very little had been done from ELCI on WEDNET since June; moreover, basic correspondence was lacking and little had been done with respect to what had been discussed at Accra. The lack of activity on WEDNET made my work more difficult and delicate. While I could gather considerable data on the early progress of WEDNET, the more recent activity in which I had expected emphasis on communications was lacking. Accordingly, I decided to concentrate on understanding how ELCI functioned as a liaison centre and how WEDNET worked within it. [4]

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[3] I had not expected that personality issues within ELCI would affect my ability to carry out my work. I struggled to find a position of relative neutrality, but it was not always possible, nor did I fully understand every situation.

[4] This was an early conceptual development in my understanding of WEDNET. Because I was inside ELCI, I was able to see on a micro-level how and why decisions were made and how they affected the project.

In brief conversations with the ELCI librarian, I learned a number of intriguing things. She and the Canadian Coordinator, working with a graduate research assistant, had distributed the bibliographic materials for the WEDNET researchers. At the Accra conference she had given an interesting presentation on many forms the communication of WEDNET research might potentially include: from traditional African women's song and dance to video to policy briefs. However, since that presentation she had received no instructions to follow up her suggestions, nor had she received any requests from any of the researchers for more information.

I had an extensive conversation with the ELCI systems analyst about the electronic information-sharing work of ELCI. To create a network the elements needed are: a computer, a modem, a telephone line, and a trained user. He was most interested in institutional capacity-building. He expressed the desire to have ELCI serve as a node for other Nairobi-based NGOs, but he has had a number of bureaucratic problems within ELCI. WEDNET information-sharing was meant to be part of this larger process of electronically linking NGOs and research institutions. It appears also that WEDNET researchers have had problems with access to the technology located in their institutions. I also had a useful conversation with IDRC's Senior Communications Program Officer concerning her thoughts on possible ways of

communicating the results of research networks. [5] She continued to remind me of the importance of institutions and audiences.

I also studied the WEDNET mailing list and letters of interest in <u>WEDNEWS</u>. WEDNET has attracted considerable interest; naturally, information about who wants what kind of information is very important. In the matter of the mailing lists, however, there seemed to be two of them, one at ELCI and the other at York. I could not learn whether they had been merged and the system centralized. This is an example of difficulties arising from having two coordinating centres. [6]

The other files I examined were those concerned specifically with the West African researchers with whose work I was familiar. I noted that correspondence was sparse, especially since June. All of these researchers had presented reports to ELCI and were awaiting commentary from both coordinators and the Project leader.

West Africa - Ghana, Burkina Faso, Senegal -
November/December 1991

In designing my project, I had assumed that the researchers themselves would have particular insight into the potential audiences

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[5] The intellectual guidance of this program officer was extremely important to me while I was carrying out my work. Many of the conversations I had with her were of a formative nature which I had envisioned having with the WEDNET secretariat.

[6] The creation and production of the newsletter (which I observed) was time-consuming and fraught with problems of writing, translation, mailing list coordination. I also felt that it was impeded by a lack of a clear vision of the audience, something which always helps in writing.

for their work, and perhaps also how they might be reached. I wanted to be able to compare the different approaches envisaged and to understand the reasons why differences existed. I expected that there would be considerable variation between countries and between researchers. Apart from direct contact with individual researchers, my principal motive for field visits was to see what WEDNET as a network looked like from the perspective of its different foci widely-dispersed across the face of Africa. Naturally, I did not imagine that I would see all of them. I chose West Africa because it is far from Nairobi, has both French- and English-speaking researchers, and is a region traditionally fraught with communications difficulties.

Ghana

I met with three of the WEDNET researchers at the University of Legon: in the Department of Geography and Natural Resources and the university's Institute of African Studies.

In discussions with one of the researchers, I sensed her considerable distress that recent communication with ELCI had been lacking. She had done much of the local organizing of the Accra conference in June 1991 and had expected to receive a report by the time of my visit (mid November). More importantly, she and her co-researchers had submitted their research report and were waiting to hear commentaries which would indicate to them how they should

proceed. She felt this was especially important from the communications perspective, as she felt that planning for dissemination could really only take place once they felt that the research had been completed most effectively. She believes her work, which concerns land-tenure systems, is also particularly suited for lobbying and policy-making kinds of communications.

One of the other researchers echoed many of the concerns raised by her colleague, but she was less forthcoming. Her plans to hold a round table on her results were being delayed by the absence of communication with ELCI. Because her research area was in the north of Ghana, the work had to be done during the dry season. The discussions at the Accra conference led her to believe that work would be done by ELCI both on communication of research results and on planning for a potential Phase II. [7]

I met with a woman working at the Ministry of Energy and Environment in Accra and discussed dissemination of WEDNET research. Her work at the Ministry involves fuelwood issues for women, especially the introduction of modified cooking stoves. She faces considerable obstacles in using gender analysis in Ministry

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[7] The researchers at Legon face numerous technical and logistical difficulties in their work. I had considerable difficulty in getting through to Ghana from Kenya before my departure and difficulties communicating within Accra. Telephone connections were intermittent and the electronic components of WEDNET felt remote from the real conditions experienced by the researcher. Their accomplishments evolved due to their resourcefulness rather than advanced technology. Also factors like the seasons (rainy or not) greatly affected the follow up to the research. Although the funds provided the researchers with a comfortable margin to work within, other factors influenced their choice of communication media.

planning which is very traditional in its approach. Her interest in dissemination of WEDNET research was mainly at the national level, although she mentioned specifically that international donor agencies should be made aware of WEDNET findings.

I had a meeting with a Canadian woman working as a Women and Development Lecturer at the University of Legon. We discussed WEDNET dissemination. She pointed out that researchers at Legon are generally not funded to disseminate their work and must obtain research contracts in order to survive financially. This was a sobering comment. I began to look at what the researchers were able to do within their institutional and financial constraints.

Burkina Faso

The field visit in Ouagadougou consisted of daily meetings with the WEDNET researcher. From conversations with her at the Accra conference, I knew she felt very strongly about communicating the results of her work. She has worked with NGOs and as a consultant and is one of the few WEDNET researchers who is not an academic by profession. In Ouagadougou we worked together as she prepared a round-table forum to disseminate her WEDNET findings to various agencies active in Burkina Faso. Our collaboration included interviews and visits with several of the women with whom the researcher worked; representatives of the NGO with which she works; a

representative from the Ministry of Environment Secretariat working

against desertification (LUCODEB); a representative from the Foresterie

Villageois project, who works with women on social forestry and fuel

woods for the Ministry of the Environment; a representative from the

Dutch Volunteer Service (SNV) about the integration of women into

the Dutch environment projects and Swiss Aid representatives about

the dissemination of women and environment work. The researcher

was continuing her work and consulting with them as she had

prepared for the seminar to ensure that there was agreement during

the actual round table so that substantive plans could emerge. The

researcher had been in communication with these groups about her

work from the beginning. The women who originally participated in

her research maintained an interest in her current plans and she

intended to continue include them. [8]

Dakar, Senegal

I discussed WEDNET with the WEDNET researcher at the

Institut Fondamental de Recherche sur l'Afrique Noire (IFAN) at the

University of Cheik Anta Diop over several days. I also met with other

researchers at IFAN the Head of Department of Geography at IFAN and

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[8] I learned an enormous amount from this researcher. She feels that research is not finished
until it is reintegrated into the community in the form of new projects. Rather than discrete
piece-work, she believes research should evolve and continue; she feels also that the
researcher should be responsible to see that her work is communicated as effectively as
possible and results should not simply be handed over to someone else to be disposed of. It
was from my experiences in Burkina Faso that I began to develop the idea of circularity.

with the Gender and Development (GAD) intern at IDRC -Dakar.[9]

There was concern about ELCI's lack of communication in recent

months. I got considerable information about what it felt like to be a

node of a network that is far away and that conducts its business

primarily in another language. Both on the level of network and

research coordination more had been expected from ELCI.[10]

Return to Nairobi, Kenya - December 1991

During this month I had lengthy discussions with the IDRC

Communications Program Officer and several other people at IDRC. At

ELCI I met with the systems analyst and with the Local Coordinator. I

also met with a representative of SatelLife Communications, an NGO

involved in establishing electronic information sharing in Africa. I

discussed what I had learned in West Africa with the Local

Coordinator at ELCI, but no action was determined. The Project Leader,

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[9] I became very ill during this part of my research. I am grateful to the researchers and also the complete strangers who assisted me. My work was somewhat impaired by my physical state.

[10] This researcher did not feel that she was not part of a network. She described at some length what she had thought would take place after she attended the Nyeri conference. Much innovation discussed and agreed to there had not materialized. As a researcher, she wanted more substantive discussions of scientific and methodological issues within the network and from ELCI more action on dissemination. Her job at IFAN was research, not dissemination, she said, although she is interested in seeing her work extended along appropriate channels. The influence of the institutional ethos on a researcher's ability to communicate or extend her work into new areas was made clear to me. Her contacts were primarily with other researchers, although she had worked with some women's groups. In terms of communications and Phase II, she was pessimistic. She had expected more from ELCI during the first part; she was not sure of her role once her current work was finished nor in any subsequent extension of WEDNET funding.
She felt that she had been little consulted about the development of the network and about means of addressing researcher's needs or interests. When I raised the possibility of a Phase II for WEDNET, she asked quite bluntly whom the network was for? I took that to mean she believed that planning was going ahead without consultation with the researchers, that their present needs were not being met, let alone future ones.

along with most of ELCI staff, was in Paris and little could be done

without her. The Senior Communications Programme Officer at

IDRC's East Africa Regional Office (EARO) debriefed me at length on

my West Africa trip. Several ideas emerged: i) the need to include

formative evaluation in a network project to ensure both good

communications and network democracy, and ii) to include potential

audiences and users of research in the evolution of the network.

Recognizing that researchers are not trained as communications

planners, we discussed how a planning team could be put together to

meet the several needs of the network. I appreciated deeply the

opportunity to have this conversation with her but reflected that I had

hoped to have such conversations at ELCI with the WEDNET

organizers. The latter, however, seemed very reluctant to engage in

this kind of formative discussion.[11]

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[11] During the Christmas break I read a number of books I had brought with me or had found along the way. Srinivas R. Melkote, Communication for Development in the Third World: Theory and Practice (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991) is an intelligent encyclopedic discussion of development communication and its relation to the development project. It is both literature review and critique. It ends with the 'participatory '90s' and the emergence of "alternative development" and "another development." Melkote relates development communications critically to development; his purpose is to construct models more relevant and useful to the Third World.
As an Indian, his frame of reference is Southern. He discusses modernization theory and its attendant communication approaches and the subsequent denigration of this dominant paradigm and the critique of its communications theory; he proposes a new theoretical framework for the eighties. He rejects empirical positivism and embraces qualitative, normative models of development communication. The last chapter includes strategies for participation and communication. R.C. Hornik's, Development Communication: Information, Agriculture, and Nutrition in the Third World (New York: Longman, 1988), conceptualizes the different functions that communication planning can achieve: low-cost loudspeaker, institutional catalyst, political lightening rod, organizer and maintainer, equalizer, accelerator of interaction. From my readings and my observations at ELCI I began to understand the difficulties of organizing and administering a participatory approach to research and network coordination from a centralized institution which was itself dubious in its commitment to participation. I looked for ways of bringing participation and systematic communications planning together in network design and implementation.

Zimbabwe, January 1992

I went to Zimbabwe with the intention both of gathering more data and of modifying hypotheses drawn from my experiences in West Africa and with ELCI in Nairobi. I wanted to explore issues of exclusiveness and inclusiveness in networks. At ELCI I had observed that in this difference lay the basis for much discussion about the role of a liaison centre in meeting the needs of its members. Having realized that neither WEDNET nor ELCI was functioning as expected, I decided to expand the area of my research. I would turn to those groups whom I would expect to be beneficiaries of such work, even though they might not themselves be involved in WEDNET-style research. Because this expansion of research interest had been unforeseen and unplanned, it was difficult to carry out. I had to define a new subject area for myself and to make contact with people I had not expected to meet. I thought, however, that by meeting a wider community of NGOs and other organizations I would be in a better position to understand the needs of the communities that lie outside a network such as WEDNET.

I arrived in Harare, Zimbabwe and attempted to make contact with WEDNET researchers. Despite the fact I had written to them several times before my arrival, this proved very difficult. Both WEDNET researchers at the University of Zimbabwe were usually unavailable, though for different reasons. Not uncommon for top

academics, one was out of the country, while the other was very interested but busy. She appeared very concerned to obtain certain materials from ELCI which I could not provide. She also wanted to wait to discuss her work until she had finished a report for WEDNET on a round-table forum which she had held with the women participants of her research group. I had many phone conversations with her and made several arrangements for meetings which fell through. When I did talk to her substantively about WEDNET, she maintained very high enthusiasm for the project. She mentioned problems with ELCI's coordination, particularly on the subject of feedback on her reports and response to her bibliographic requests. The electronic network aspects of WEDNET did not emerge as going concerns within the work of the researchers. Her primary concern was to get her work disseminated. This included a desire to see WEDNET results published. Of her round-table discussion, she said that it had been most informative, and that she would show me the report when it was written. The women participants in the group were apparently very eager to develop projects and seek funding.

Harare, outside WEDNET

I contacted a representative of CIDA; a Canadian communications consultant, and a representative of the Southern Africa AIDS Education and Training Project for the Canadian Public Health Association. These people, in addition to being useful

informants themselves, put me in touch with many more informative groups. I followed their advice and held discussions with AIA (Africa Information Afrique), Oxfam, the Southern Africa research and Documentation Centre, the Women's Action Group and CUSO.[12]

I also spoke to the coordinator at African Information Afrique (AIA). He is designated to staff MANGO (the electronic node) and to ensure that it serves local NGOs. He told me that the WEDNET researchers had been given access to MANGO through ELCI's systems analyst's work at the University of Zimbabwe. There, a technician has been trained and support was available from the university computing centre. While the AIA coordinator was somewhat evasive about the problems facing MANGO, he did admit that conflicts over control and direction of this resource were common. When I asked what he believed the network should accomplish, and for whom, he responded that he thought the technology was neutral and that it could be managed for the benefit of grassroots users. I asked about user's councils and the mechanisms for ensuring their access to the resource. Again he was evasive and said that the user's council by its very existence ensured access.[13]

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[12] I discuss these in greater depth in Chapter Five

[13] User's Councils gather together representatives of the organizations that use the local electronic node. They are a decision making body in charge of the distribution and direction of the electronic communications system. ELCI and IDRC were involved in setting them up in numerous African countries where they were developing electronic communications systems.

Contacting a group of randomly-selected potential "users" of WEDNET results gave me the opportunity to do several things. The work of many of these groups was unknown to me; their insight and experience with both research and communications issues was invaluable. I was able to try out some of the ideas I'd had about managing research for maximum communicability. In addition, I gained a greater understanding of the variety of institutional environments which receive research and either integrate that material into their efforts or do not depending on a variety of factors. I was unable to investigate one of WEDNET's communication aims, that of influencing policy-makers, because I had no such contacts in Zimbabwe.

Evaluating my research, I felt justified in having placed greater emphasis in my research in Zimbabwe on what, in my original planning, had been peripheral. On closer examination, it did not seem justifiable to keep WEDNET alone at the centre of my project. That consideration, plus the difficulties at ELCI in the management of the project and the inherent difficulties of making a network function, caused me to look at possible alternatives or modifications that might be made to the WEDNET model. However, I still hoped that on my return to Nairobi and ELCI I would be able, together with the Local Coordinator and Project Leader to work through some of the issues I

had uncovered -- with a view both to contributing to WEDNET and to advancing my understanding of what my research could contribute.[14]

Nairobi, Kenya - February 1992

During this period I divided my time between ELCI and IDRC. At ELCI I interviewed for the second or third time: the librarian, the systems analyst, the Local Coordinator, the Project Leader, the producer of ELCI's news magazine, the associate director, and a coordinator of a large program area. I had several purposes. I wanted to discuss the information I had gathered thus far about WEDNET to try to see how that information could be made useful to both WEDNET and ELCI. I needed to fill in many gaps in my understanding of how ELCI was functioning and planning its future .

At this time, the Local Coordinator's future at ELCI was the subject of much tense discussion. I was unable to have substantive conversations about WEDNET either with her or with the project leader. Among other staff at ELCI, however, I did find enthusiasm for and interest in my work. I gained greater insight into the functioning of the Centre.

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[14] I very much enjoyed the period I spent in Zimbabwe. My modification to my research plan felt like the right thing to do and a stage in my growing understanding of circularity. I tried to do something of what the researcher in Burkina Faso had done - look to those who would be the users of the research for guidance. Of course, my attempt was an entirely experimental exercise. I did feel regret at the limited contact I had with the researchers but I had to accept the circumstances handed to me and respond as well as possible. I also felt relief at gaining some perspective on the situation at ELCI. The work I did in Zimbabwe combined with what I learned in West Africa was invaluable. I still believed that the institutional base of the network (ELCI) was a crucial variable.

I also discussed my work with various people at IDRC. I worked with the senior Communications Program Officer regularly to put together a plan which would involve the IDRC Nairobi communications section in the proposed Phase II of WEDNET. A Health Sciences Program Officer invited me to look at a proposal he had received at IDRC for a health and nutrition network. I recognized in it certain standard ideas about what a network does and to whose benefit. I felt that the proposer threw in "network" without having much sense of what the term implied -- merely, I felt, because it is currently fashionable.

ELCI's systems analyst had been very active in setting up stations along the NGO e-mail network. He was very pleased that he had gotten several groups in North Africa on-line and had improved other links within Africa. He felt, however, that his work was only partially related to other ELCI activities -- that is, that ELCI was compartmentalized instead of integrated. He was concerned about the information I related about MANGO in Zimbabwe and the limited response of the WEDNET researchers to the potential of their e-mail connection. He observed that a kind of "marketing" would have to be done to persuade the researchers of the usefulness of having access to many networks through e-mail. He was not sure that WEDNET had demonstrated this to them.

I came to believe I should remain in Nairobi somewhat longer to see if I might possibly put some of my findings into action. The Canadian Coordinator of WEDNET was due to arrive in mid-February, so I adjusted my schedule to hers. When she arrived, she and I discussed WEDNET at length. Simultaneously, I continued to try to work with the Local Coordinator and Project Leader at ELCI. The Canadian Coordinator was aware of the state of WEDNET and concerned about the tension at ELCI. She was able to clarify for me many questions that had arisen during the previous months of field work.[15]

In February I attended a three-day workshop in Nairobi on Women and Natural Resource Management organized by the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) . No one from ELCI or WEDNET was invited; during the conference, no mention was made of WEDNET. The director of ACTS had previously submitted a project proposal to WEDNET so was not ignorant of its existence. I take this an example of competition between NGOs which I witnessed a great deal of in Nairobi.

During this last week I met with the director of the Mazingira Institute and also a lawyer for the International Union for the

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[15] Although I had accomplished a large amount of the work I had set out to do, I was concerned because WEDNET was not functioning as I had expected according to my plan. Therefore in reorienting my research, I had to spend more time assessing what was really going on and what I could hope to glean for my analysis. This was further complicated by the personal tensions in the project. I benefited greatly from conversations with the Canadian Coordinator who arrived in Nairobi two weeks before my departure.

Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Netherlands Committee, both of whom wanted to discuss and develop ideas on networks. Networks, we agreed, can be used for political advocacy, for straight information exchange, for solidarity, etc. The question of how a network defines itself and grows or moves forward is becoming more critical. This is especially true for environmental networks as the demands on them increase and as NGOs from the North and the South attempt to strengthen linkages.

I had extended my stay in Nairobi to the end of the month. I felt that to prolong my stay any longer would not be fruitful, although I would have liked to engage in a detailed discussion of my preliminary findings with WEDNET organizers at ELCI . My health was also poor and I did not want to strain it much further. I returned to Vancouver in March 1992.[16]

Naro Moru, Kenya - May 1993

In May 1993 I attended the WEDNET conference at Naro Moru, Kenya, to which I had been invited as a communications resource person. The communication of research results was a primary purpose of the conference. A day was set aside for planning communications activities and a communications consultant had been hired to prepare a

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[16] Field work is exhausting. I experienced an eight month period after my return in which my health was poor. During that period I read relevant books and wrote a narrative account of my research, but it was only after that period that I began to compose this analysis.

paper on possible strategies for the dissemination and utilization of WEDNET research results.

Since February 1992 several changes had taken place in WEDNET. At ELCI two new co-Executive Directors and a new Local Coordinator were in place. Neither the previous Executive Director / Project Leader nor the previous Local Coordinator attended the conference. The WEDNET research was mostly completed; so also, unfortunately, was IDRC's funding. One purpose of the conference was to determine what potential might exist for a Phase II -- a dissemination and utilization phase -- of WEDNET. ELCI, with its new staff and revised mandate, seemed eager to continue the project; IDRC seemed interested in principle in continuing its alliance with ELCI. In part, the conference was designed as a brainstorming session involving WEDNET researchers, representatives of ELCI and IDRC, invited academics and NGO activists, and communications resource people. In plenary sessions and facilitated small groups a number of possible scenarios emerged. The strongest was that of regionalizing WEDNET within Africa, which would mean creating senior and junior research groups and working more closely with local communications specialists. In these discussions, many ideas I had developed about WEDNET and communication appeared to be confirmed.

I also learned that WEDNET researchers, according to their own capabilities and those of their home institutions, had in fact

communicated or incorporated lessons from WEDNET into their communities. In the absence of systematic communications planning, I learned, communication still takes place through such undirected and spontaneous outreach. These should be recognized as valuable, I believe, and should be reinforced by consistent planned support. They in no way eliminate the need for the latter.

Institutional responsibility for, and control of, communications plans and network development were important subtexts to the conference; periodically they were discussed openly. The subject of academic vs. grassroots research caused considerable tension. Members of ELCI's Board of Directors questioned the role of an academic network in an NGO such as ELCI. The clash of different institutional cultures and its resultant impact on network dynamics, both external and internal, was evident. In conversations with ELCI staff, the latter expressed determination to continue the WEDNET project, but on their own (i.e., non-academic) terms. IDRC's plans for the project were not immediately clear. Although IDRC's commitment to WEDNET researchers was clear, the institutional arrangement for perpetuating IDRC's ideas for WEDNET was not. At the outset of the conference I had observed a strong desire on the part of the Canadian Coordinator and of the IDRC representatives to revitalize the original communications goals of WEDNET at ELCI. By the end of the conference, however, with the emergence of strong differences in the goals of the various institutions, it no longer appeared that this was true

-- indeed, this issue had grown more controversial than any other. Moreover, such controversy diverted participants from the actual planning of communications. To learn how such institutional issues were resolved the interested reader can contact IDRC or ELCI -- or must await another thesis.

At this conference I was able to present my conclusions to members of WEDNET and to obtain their feedback. I contributed what I could to the discussions while trying to remember the smallness of my role in the life of the network. In future I will follow WEDNET's progress with interest and affection and will try to continue to contribute.