

WORKING PAPER 302

Constructing Transnational
Action Research Networks:
Observations and Reflections
from the Case of the
Citizenship DRC

L. David Brown and John Gaventa
April 2008



Citizenship DRC



Institute of
Development Studies

About IDS

The Institute of Development Studies is one of the world's leading organisations for research, teaching and communications on international development. Founded in 1966, the Institute enjoys an international reputation based on the quality of its work and the rigour with which it applies academic skills to real world challenges. Its purpose is to understand and explain the world, and to try to change it – to influence as well as to inform.

IDS hosts five dynamic research programmes, five popular postgraduate courses, and a family of world-class web-based knowledge services. These three spheres are integrated in a unique combination – as a development knowledge hub, IDS is connected into and is a convenor of networks throughout the world.

The Institute is home to approximately 80 researchers, 50 knowledge services staff, 50 support staff and about 150 students at any one time. But the IDS community extends far beyond, encompassing an extensive network of partners, former staff and students across the development community worldwide.



For further information on IDS publications and for a free catalogue, contact:
IDS Communications Unit
Institute of Development Studies
at the University of Sussex
Brighton BN1 9RE, UK

Tel: +44 (0) 1273 678269
Fax: +44 (0) 1273 621202
E-mail: bookshop@ids.ac.uk
Web: www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop

IDS is a charitable company, limited by guarantee and registered in England (No. 877338).

IDS WORKING PAPER 302

Constructing Transnational
Action Research Networks:
Observations and Reflections
from the Case of the
Citizenship DRC

L. David Brown and John Gaventa
April 2008

Constructing Transnational Action Research Networks: Observations and Reflections from the Case of the
Citizenship DRC
L. David Brown and John Gaventa
IDS Working Paper 302

First published by the Institute of Development Studies in April 2008
© Institute of Development Studies 2008
ISBN: 978 1 85864 691 X

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.
All rights reserved. Reproduction, copy, transmission, or translation of any part of this publication may be made
only under the following conditions:

- with the prior permission of the publisher; or
- with a licence from the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd., 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE, UK,
or from another national licensing agency; or
- under the terms set out below.

This publication is copyright, but may be reproduced by any method without fee for teaching or non-profit
purposes, but not for resale. Formal permission is required for all such uses, but normally will be granted
immediately. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or
adaptation, prior written permission must be obtained from the publisher and a fee may be payable.

Available from:
Communications Unit
Institute of Development Studies
at the University of Sussex
Brighton BN1 9RE, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 1273 678269
Fax: +44 (0) 1273 621202
E-mail: bookshop@ids.ac.uk
Web: www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop

Typeset by IDS, Brighton UK. Printed by RPM Print & Design, Chichester UK.
IDS is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (No. 877338).

Constructing Transnational Action Research Networks: Observations and Reflections from the Case of the Citizenship DRC

L. David Brown and John Gaventa

Summary

Many contemporary issues of development and governance are complex beyond the capacities of single institutions or countries. As a result, in recent years we have seen growing attention paid to the importance of networks – ranging from advocacy networks to multi-stakeholder partnerships – for the solution of development problems. This paper is particularly interested in the construction of transnational action research networks that effectively bridge the differences that separate the local from the global, practice from research, North from South, and many relevant disciplines from one another. Such networks must span inequalities in power and resources as well as differences in cultural and intellectual perspectives.

Using a unique ‘insider-outsider’ perspective, the paper examines the emergence (during the period 2000–2005) of the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability, a network of seven partners – from the UK, India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, South Africa, Mexico and Brazil – concerned with research, capacity building and policy influence on these issues. This case is interesting for several reasons. First the research available on long-term collaboration between Northern and Southern research institutions is very limited. Second, the longitudinal study offers opportunities for understanding development processes that are not visible to the more common comparisons of cases at one time in their history. Finally this research also offers opportunities to look at the challenges of building transnational networks as they emerge across several levels. These represent the areas that are not well developed in existing research on inter-organisational networks.

Keywords: action research, research partnerships, networks, citizenship.

L. David Brown is Associate Director for International Programs at the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations and Lecturer in Public Policy at the Kennedy School of Government. Prior to coming to Harvard he was President of the Institute for Development Research, a nonprofit center for development research and consultation, and Professor of Organizational Behavior at Boston University. His research and consulting focuses on civil society organisations and networks that foster sustainable development and social transformation. His most recent books are *Transnational Civil Society: An Introduction* (with Srilatha Batliwala) and *The Struggle for Accountability: NGOs, Social Movements and the World Bank* (with Jonathan Fox).

John Gaventa is Director of the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability at the Institute of Development Studies, and a member of the Participation, Power and Social Change Team. His research focuses on issues of participatory research, democracy, citizen mobilisation and engagement and participatory governance. His most recent books include *Unpacking Policy Processes: Actors, Knowledge and Spaces* (co-editor with Karen Brock and Rosemary McGee) and *Global Citizen Action* (co-editor with Michael Edwards).

Contents

Summary, keywords	3
Author note	4
1 Introduction	7
2 Background and review	8
3 Method: insider-outsider action research	10
4 The case: the Citizenship DRC	11
5 Constructing the Citizenship DRC	16
5.1 Articulating shared values and purposes	16
5.2 Developing relationships and trust	20
5.3 Creating network architecture	22
5.4 Distributing formal and informal power	24
6 Constructing transnational action research networks: lessons and implications	26
References	30
Figure	
Figure 4.1 Centre and network research organisations	12
Table	
Figure 5.1 Lessons from evolution of the Citizenship DRC	17

1 Introduction

The contribution of various forms of action and participatory action research in the development field is well known. Action research has been used to strengthen grassroots development projects and social movements; development organisations have incorporated action research perspectives to reflect on and improve their work; forms of participatory research have been used to influence national governments, and have been institutionalised to affect policy processes. While each of these is important, they have largely remained at the local, or at most, national levels.

Many contemporary issues of development and governance, however, are complex beyond the capacities of single institutions or countries. This paper is concerned with the development of interorganisational learning and research networks that use diverse resources and perspectives to generate new knowledge that can be disseminated and used for better understanding and more effective action on development issues across national boundaries. We are particularly interested in constructing transnational action research networks that effectively bridge the differences that separate the local from the global, practice from research, North from South, and many relevant disciplines from one another. Such networks must span inequalities in power and resources as well as differences in cultural and intellectual perspectives.

In essence this paper seeks to build theory and practice that will be useful for constructing transnational action research networks that can guide future initiatives like the example we discuss. The paper begins with an overview of existing theory and research to identify some of the issues involved in constructing knowledge networks. While such networks are increasingly seen as critical for solving many problems, our knowledge about the ingredients critical to constructing them remains limited (Brown 1999; Maxwell and Stone 2005). The next section discusses the methods of participatory action research, insider-outsider research and reflexive praxis that we have employed to construct and examine the case study.

Then we describe the evolution of the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (Citizenship DRC), a network of seven partners – from the UK, India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, South Africa, Mexico and Brazil – concerned with research, capacity building and policy influence on these issues. This network was launched and coordinated by a team based at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex with support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). At the time of this study it had been operating for five years, and had been funded for a second five-year period by DFID. We briefly describe its first five years and explore its evolution as a transnational action research network. Finally we discuss some of the implications of this case experience for constructing future transnational learning and action research networks.

This case is interesting for several reasons. First the research available on long-term collaboration between Northern and Southern research institutions is very limited. Second, the longitudinal study offers opportunities for understanding

development processes that are not visible to the more common comparisons of cases at one time in their history. Finally this research also offers opportunities to look at the challenges of building transnational networks as they emerge across several levels. These represent the areas that are not well developed in existing research on interorganisational networks (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Grave, and Tsa 2004).

2 Background and review

Networks have emerged as important organisational forms for many purposes. They have been hailed as a central actor in the formation of individual identity (Castells 2000), as critical actors in global governance (Reinicke and Deng 2000), and as major actors in a range of public and private contexts (Brass *et al.* 2004; Powell 1990). In the transnational arena network organisations have been seen as fundamental to international problem-solving and governance (Reinicke and Deng 2000; Rischard 2002; Slaughter 1997, 2004). Investigators have identified transnational networks that deliver relief and services (Lindenberg and Bryant 2001), advocacy that influences global actors and policies (Fox and Brown 1998; Keck and Sikkink 1998), and transnational learning that generates and disseminates new knowledge and practices (Maxwell and Stone 2005; Brown 1999; Gaventa 1999).

There has been considerable interest in the evolution of 'epistemic communities' (Haas 1992) of researchers and 'communities of practice' (Wenger *et al.* 2002) that create knowledge and shape policy and practice across national boundaries. But those networks typically bring together knowledge-producers who share conceptual frames and social positions that facilitate communication and mutual influence. We are interested in the challenges of building action research networks that span the North/South and research/practice chasms to produce knowledge and action to improve citizenship, participation and accountability from a diversity of participants that could easily produce misunderstanding and conflict.

Existing literatures suggest attention to several issues as a basis for understanding network evolution: (1) the articulation of shared values and purposes, (2) the development of relationships and trust among network members, (3) the creation of a network architecture of tasks, structures, cultural expectations and organisational resources that shape its activities, and (4) the distribution of formal and informal power within the network.

Networks are organised around *shared values and purposes* that make sense in the light of the purposes and strategies of their members (Castells 2000; Powell 1990). For transnational action research networks the articulation of shared values and purposes around the generation and dissemination of knowledge across national boundaries is critical. When the networks span the large differences in resources and perspectives, discussions of values and purposes often catalyse misunderstanding, contestation, and polarisation. How those misunderstandings and contests evolve can have a large impact on the viability and effectiveness of the network.

Networks depend on the development of *relationships and trust* among their members. The creation and accomplishment of shared values and purposes depends on building relationships among members, particularly when they have few other tools, such as binding contracts or enforceable rules, with which to influence each other (Church *et al.* 2003; Powell 1996; Newell and Swan 2000). Trust may be based on deterrence, where parties can punish each other's violations, on knowledge, where they have the information to predict each others' actions, or on identity, where the parties are committed to shared values and purposes (Sheppard and Tuchinsky 1996). Identity-based trust is particularly important as a factor in the construction of transnational action research networks. When existing relations have histories of conflict and exploitation, the evolution of increased trust is critical and potentially very tricky.

A third aspect of network construction is the *creation of network architectures* of formal structures and systems, informal norms and expectations, task definitions and human resources that guide collective action to accomplish shared goals and purposes (Nadler and Tushman 1992). Networks vary in how much their architectures are formally developed and centralised (Clark 2003; Young *et al.* 1999). For transnational action research networks, balancing the autonomy needed for local innovation and ownership with the accountability required for achieving shared goals is an ongoing challenge. New networks often rely on informal arrangements and relationships, and develop more formal systems and structures over time (Brown and Fox 1998; Young *et al.* 1999).

A fourth issue in the evolution of networks is the *distribution of formal and informal power* within the network. Networks vary from flat alliances that accord equal say to all members to centralised federations coordinated by powerful central offices (Young *et al.* 1999; Clark 2003). Network leadership can require both facilitation that fosters member ownership and direction that enables decisive action. Transnationals are often perceived to be dominated by affluent Northern researchers with access to donors and transnational policymakers (McNeill 2005; Brown 1999), but empowering Southern participants can be critical to making use of their special perspectives and access to realities on the ground.

Purposes, relationships, architectures, and distributions of power interact to shape network decisions, activities, results and subsequent organisation and capacities. Members invest more or less according to their assessments of past results and their expectations for future results. Members continue and expand their engagements when they believe participation advances their own values and goals as well as those of the network; when they develop relations of trust and mutual influence with other members; when they see network architectures evolve that promise more capacity and influence in the future; and when the network appears to enhance both its accountabilities to its members and its members' accountability to their own stakeholders. Defining and measuring results is often challenging, particularly when desired impacts depend on other actors or take much time to accomplish. But assessing results can powerfully affect the network's ability to learn from its experience or to hold its members accountable for performance (Jagadananda and Brown 2005).

3 Method: insider-outside action research

Understanding the dynamics of an evolving action research network is a complex task. We use a longitudinal case study to examine the complexities of the Citizenship DRC's evolution over a five year period. This approach offers an opportunity to explore in some depth the factors involved in the network's evolution, though it does not permit easy generalisation to the evolution of other networks (Miles and Huberman 1994; Yin 1984).

A longitudinal case study of an international network evolution also poses problems of access and data collection across countries and over long periods. We have used an 'insider-outsider approach' to this research that makes use of the special access to data of network insiders with the perspective and independence of outsiders (Bartunek and Louis 1995). More specifically, Gaventa has been the coordinator of the Citizenship DRC since its inception, and so has extensive data on events, crises, expectations, and evolving conceptions of the network – but he also comes equipped with a full set of biases about events, in spite of efforts to understand the perspectives of other participants. Brown had nothing to do with the Citizenship DRC until he participated in a mid-term review of the project in spring 2004, though he has experience with several other transnational action research networks. In that review he interviewed representatives of all partners, was a participant observer in a week-long series of DRC meetings, facilitated meetings with the Steering Committee to review initial findings of the mid-term review, and participated in discussions with DRC and DFID oversight staff after drafting the initial report. We have pursued this insider-outsider team approach because it offers insider information and in-depth perspective evolution in combination with outsider balance and perspective across a range of networks.

We have also conceived of this project as an action research initiative that should foster 'reflexive praxis' in the Citizenship DRC as well as develop new knowledge about transnational action research networks. Preliminary findings and draft reports of the mid-term review have been discussed with network members as a way to improve the review's understanding of the DRC's evolution and to provide a basis for member and network action on issues identified by the review. Member discussions at an internal reflective workshop on research methods have shaped future investigations and understandings of research possibilities. This paper (and several others) have been extensively discussed at a Synthesis Conference at the end of the first five years, and helped to shape plans for the continuation of the network. So the opportunities for reflection and analysis of DRC experience have been used to further develop the particular network as well as to develop ideas about the evolution of action research networks in general.

Using this approach, we have taken different roles in writing this paper. Following extensive conversations about the overall frame, Brown drafted the first three sections and Gaventa drafted sections four and five, drawing extensively from the research for the Mid Term Review which Brown conducted in 2004. Then each read and revised the other's drafts. The implications and conclusions in section

six have been written together. Quotes from the Mid Term Review (MTR) are mainly from Brown's perspective. In other places, quotes from Gaventa's perspective are cited as (JG personal reflections).

The core of the DRC's work has been about participation and accountability. The commitment to reflexive praxis also draws on the network's research for ideas about its own evolution. For instance, an emphasis on actor-based approaches to citizenship, which is constructed from identities and action of the members rather than handed down from above, has implications for how membership in the DRC itself could be constructed by its members (Kabeer 2005). A focus on how to make spaces for engagement more inclusive has implications for how we work together to generate knowledge (Cornwall and Schattan Coelho 2006). The theme of going beyond rules-based and technical approaches to accountability has implications for how we hold each other to account, and how formal and informal systems of power affect DRC rules and realities (Newell and Wheeler 2006). And the ideas of 'cognitive justice' and linking different ways of knowing in policy deliberations, which has been central to the science and citizenship theme, has implications for how we integrate our own diverse approaches to knowledge, and what forms of knowledge are considered legitimate in our global policy outputs (Leach, Scoones and Wynn 2005).

In short, the Citizenship DRC research themes generate a need and an opportunity for reflexivity on its own practice, a challenge re-iterated by its Advisory Review Group, who urged the DRC to document its work and use its own development as a case study of the broader themes on which it was working. This documentation contributes to the reflections in this paper.

4 The case: the Citizenship DRC

Development research – in the UK and internationally – is a large-scale enterprise. In the UK alone, the Department for International Development (DFID) deploys millions of pounds annually on generating knowledge about development processes and policies. In the past, much of that research used a centralised agency approach, in which research institutions, usually Northern, were contracted for research on specific issues to be carried out in a limited timeframe. Those institutions often subcontracted Southern consultants or researchers to gather information in the field. In the centralised agency approach:

the central unit frames research questions, chooses methods, selects and sometimes trains data collectors, does comparative analysis of data from the field, interprets and draws analytic conclusions from those data, and disseminates new knowledge to consumers or policy makers. This model offers the advantages of quick development of focused research questions, coordinated research methods, research designs that allow rigorous comparative analysis, and concepts and theoretical advances based on those analyses.

(MTR¹ by Brown and Wilson 2004: 2)

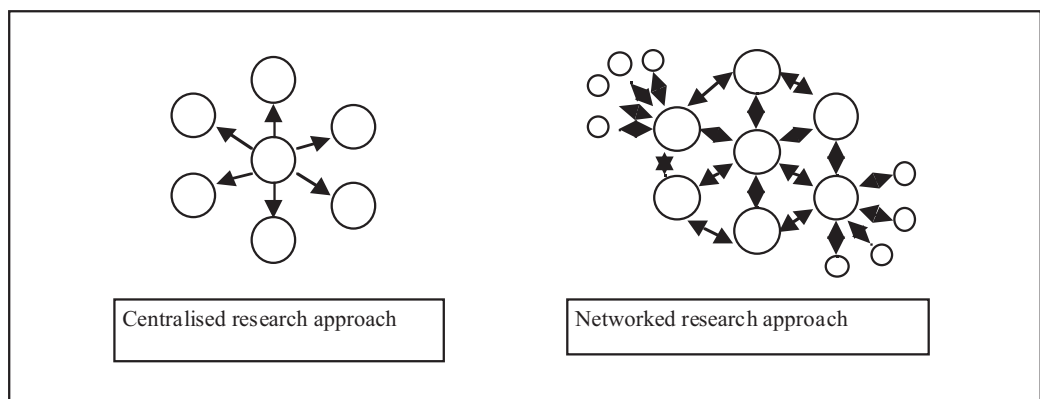
This centralised model of research has also been long criticised, especially by those concerned with more participatory and collaborative forms of research, for

reinforcing hierarchies of knowledge between North and South and for not being accountable to, or benefiting, the people whose lives such development research was ultimately meant to improve. Moreover, ‘the centralized model is less effective in learning from unexpected differences across settings, using diverse resources to articulate new concepts, building capacity across participants, or adapting findings to local concerns’ (MTR).

In 2000 DFID issued a call for ‘Development Research Centres’ that offered long-term (five-year) funding to explore key themes. The programme required work with Southern institutions and linked research to processes of capacity building, dissemination and policy influence. DFID has continued to use this funding model and recently relabelled the concept from ‘Development Research Centre’ to ‘Research Programme Consortia’ (RPC). Because of its large scale, long-term, relatively flexible partnership-based approach, such centres had the potential to help to create a more participatory kind of research network, that could go beyond the centralised agency approach described above. Moreover, they provided the potential to link action research projects and their influence across local, national and global levels in ways that are not often found in more localised experiences of participatory research.

Figure 4.1 contrasts the relationships in a research centre model with those in a participatory action research network model. The ‘centre model’ sub-contracts to partners and holds them accountable to standards set by the central contractor. The network model involves ongoing multi-way negotiations and mutual accountabilities among partners and to some extent their local constituents.

Figure 4.1 Centre and network research organisations



It was with the possibility of exploring a different model of international development research that the Citizenship DRC was organised by teams at the Institute of Development Studies with partners from:

1 In future, this shall be referred to simply as ‘MTR’. Though the overall review was done by Brown and Wilson, the sections on the network were primarily prepared by Brown.

- Bangladesh – Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
- Brazil – Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento
- India – Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)
- Mexico – Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México / Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana – Xochimilco
- Nigeria – Theatre for Development Centre, Ahmadu Bello University, and
- South Africa – Centre for Southern African Studies / School of Government, University of the Western Cape.

In 2000 the Citizenship DRC was funded by DFID, one of the first six such Centres. In 2006, it was awarded funding for a second five years as one of four programmes expected to contribute to more effective states and the alleviation of poverty.

Over the last six years, the Citizenship DRC has evolved into a collaborative partnership of seven institutions, involving over 60 researchers in a programme of research, dissemination and policy influence, and mutual capacity building. Following its initial inception period, the Citizenship DRC has been organised both through country programmes, coordinated by partner institutions, and through thematic working groups of representatives from partners, who work on common themes or research questions and come together at regular intervals to share and analyse results. The DRC has organised its work in two-year cycles of activity and reflection, each of which was preceded by a six-month scoping and inception phase. The organisation of the working groups has varied slightly, depending on the needs and priorities for the research in each phase. Overall coordination of the DRC remained at the Institute of Development Studies, under the guidance of a steering committee made up of institutional partners and theme convenors.²

Through this work, the Citizenship DRC has explored a number of related research themes, including:³

- how poor people in different countries understand their roles and identities as citizens;
- the spaces and dynamics through which they engage and participate to articulate their interests,
- the new relationships of accountability that emerge between non-state actors, the state and the market as citizens mobilise to claim their rights; and
- the relationship of citizenship to issues of science, technology and policy.

The results of the Citizenship DRC's work have been widely disseminated through: an international Zed Books series, further books produced by southern partners, a working paper series at IDS and by several partners as well as, multi-media productions, and a web page which has received more than 200,000 hits since February 2003. These results have also been shared in policy fora at

2 For a more complete account of the themes and activities of the DRC, see its end of phase report, October 2005 and other annual reports on the website, www.drc-citizenship.org.

3 Further information on these themes may be found in the *Claiming Citizenship* Zed book volumes cited below, and in other DRC publications.

international, national and local levels through special workshops, events and training programmes. A strong emphasis on partnership and collaboration has contributed to use of the results by partners within their own countries in multiple and innovative ways.

Over the course of its work, the Citizenship DRC has also undertaken a number of activities for mutual capacity building of the researchers involved, their institutions, and other organisations with which they work. Such activities have included South-South visits and exchanges, student internships, author write-shops, development of research libraries and the bibliographic resources, and workshops with local civil society organisations and government officials. Within a number of countries, the DRC has spawned other partnerships and sub-networks, and has leveraged additional funding for initiatives in several countries.

Over its first five years, then, by a number of indicators, the Citizenship DRC emerged as a relatively 'successful' international action learning and research work, spanning North and South, and focusing on important issues of rights, citizenship, participation and accountability. Though there have been tensions, and of course varying perceptions of the nature and degree of 'success', perhaps most significantly, at the end of the first five years, none of the partner institutions wanted out of the network, and others wanted to find out how to join. The network has continued to expand and in 2005 received funding for another five year period.

But from the vantage point of this paper, the key question is how did the transnational action research network evolve and add value? How and to what extent did it contribute to results that would not have been achieved by other approaches?

Participants in a DRC sponsored methods workshop and the mid-term review reflected on what they had gained from the diversity of perspectives and exchanges within the network. Both IDS and partner participants shared accounts of the value of linking practitioners to academic debates and exposing academics to practical realities. Participants talked about the value of learning about different approaches to research, about wider intellectual debates and challenges, and about how learning from each other became a 'capacity building exercise' in itself. One partner said,

The environment of discussion and interdisciplinary sharing deeply helped shape the process of research. It helped open the debate in many institutions. And then we expanded the debate.

(Methods workshop April 2005)

Members also talked about the value of learning from other contexts:

The stories from Chiapas make me see similar things in the Delta. They make you feel that the issues you are researching are not confined to your country but in others too. That is enlightening.

(Methods workshop April 2005)

Another partner talked about how what his group had learned through applying debates on rights and accountability to their work on the ground with their own partners. Another said:

Because we engaged with different people, we could compare issues across [our own country]... it helped us scale up. We can build research capacity in our own country with activists, academics, students. Through this network we have attempted to engage social science theoreticians in practical issues. Also, we have engaged practitioners in doing analytically rigorous reflection and writing. We have built the capacity of local partners, which is essential because we need the partners to do the work.

(Methods workshop April 2005)

The diversity – and the associated learning – bridged disciplines and perspectives and also along ‘vertical’ levels from international to national to local. Those who worked more at the international and conceptual level learned about concrete experiences and practice. But even within countries, researchers spoke of the value of linking to and learning from local actors.

While much attention has been paid to the importance of horizontal linking in transnational action research networks, the Citizenship DRC also demonstrated the importance of vertical linkages to bridge knowledge and perspective from the local to the national to the global levels. The evolution of the DRC as a partnership encouraged partner ‘ownership’ of its research results, and partner influence in setting research agendas enabled a research agenda that was in fact relevant to their national contexts. As a result, partners were uniquely positioned to link DRC research to local and national policy debates in ways that would not be possible for researchers based at IDS or in other international development centres. Mapping exercises during the mid term review and in the methods synthesis discussions revealed scores of ways in which research processes and results were being utilised by citizens and officials at national and local levels. The routes to influence were varied, from local feedback sessions and workshops to national policy forums; from training exercises with civil society to curricula and teaching programmes; from newspaper articles and pamphlets, to nationally produced policy briefs and books, from participatory videos to nationally broadcast television interviews.⁴

These innovations in local and national dissemination communicated to Southern audiences in ways that Northern based development policy researchers could not. In addition the links to international networks opened possibilities for Southern researchers to communicate to international audiences. South-to-South links between partners in Nigeria and India opened space at the Commonwealth meetings in Nigeria for Nigerian teams to share their results with national and international audiences. The Zed Books series and links to the IDS website gave international visibility and legitimacy to local and national actors. International meetings held in the partners’ countries helped to create space for dialogue with global policy actors who otherwise might have been difficult to reach.

4 For a review of the various ways that research was used in the policy process, see Wheeler (2007).

The DRC case illustrates, then, how transnational action research networks which are vertically and horizontally integrated can contribute to linking research and policy change. By involving partners who are embedded in networks at multiple levels, channels of influence across levels emerge that could not have been created by any single actor in the network. Moreover, as participants shared in reflections on methods, learning across the network contributed to new intellectual perspectives and also to changing participants' views of themselves as influential actors. Transnationals have the potential to produce both new knowledge and new understandings and strategies for using that knowledge for change.

5 Constructing the Citizenship DRC

While the Citizenship DRC has clearly faced challenges along the way, it also has continued to stay together and to evolve. The possibility that such results might occur was not at all clear in the beginning of the effort. What has been learned in the process? The next section reflects on some of the challenges in constructing such a transnational action research network, paying particular attention to the issues previously identified in the literature related to (a) shared values and purposes; (b) relationships and trust; (c) network architecture; and (d) the distribution of formal and informal power. Lessons from the analysis are summarised in Table 5.1.

5.1 Articulating shared values and purposes

Articulating shared values and purposes across a diverse set of actors is a critical starting point for transnational action research networks. The Citizenship DRC was both challenged and potentially strengthened by the diversity of its members. Within the Institute of Development Studies, researchers came from four separate teams with little prior experience in cross-team learning and collaboration. The six international partners represented diverse geographical locations and contexts and also came from different institutional settings – such as universities, advocacy NGOs, and independent research centres. The partnership included a cross-section of disciplines, including sociology, theatre, political science, anthropology, planning, environmental studies, international relations, political philosophy, adult education, demography, economics, organisational development and others. Each partner had a relationship with at least one member of the IDS team at the outset, but few had worked with one another or with others in IDS. As John reflects,

Looking back, the first meeting of the partners and IDS in November 2000 reflected the potential tensions from such diversity. Other than hasty phone calls and e-mail consultation in the proposal writing process, there had been little opportunity to develop any shared vision.⁵ At the first meeting we spent a great deal of time discussing the overall purpose of the Centre, and tried from the beginning to elaborate some common understandings of our mission and ways of working together. A massive card sort exercise – which tried to

Table 5.1 Lessons from evolution of the Citizenship DRC**1 Articulating shared values and purposes**

- Initial expectations may support centralised control rather than partnerships of mutual influence among very diverse partners.
- Shared visions and values are created through ongoing reflection and debate that enables adaptation and learning from experience.
- Shared values and purposes must also be renegotiated with external institutions, such as donors and host organisations.
- While shared goals and values may become clearer and programmes more focused, significant differences in knowledge creation and use continue to create tensions.

2 Developing relationships and trust

- Trust among individuals does not become trust among institutions, particularly if partners have experience of the 'subcontractor model'.
- Frank discussion of critical issues, such as budget allocations, priority setting, and research approaches are central to building trust.
- Investing time, space and personal engagement is central to building relationships and shared culture that can support peer critiques and network learning.
- Relationships emerge from workshops, field visits and other activities that enable intensive interaction and mutual learning.
- Trust in networks is easily destroyed if it leads to shortcuts on key issues.
- Trust building is important among network partners, between them and their host organisations, and between them and the communities they research.

3 Creating network architecture

- Networks may begin with architectures based on general agreements on goals and informal relationships.
- Pressure for coordinating joint action, allocating resources, managing brands, holding members accountable and joint learning from coherent research required clearer formal and informal architecture.
- Network architecture must also respond to other networks and institutions that affect network performance and learning.

4 Distributing formal and informal power

- Formal power allocations in networks may be subverted by informal control over key resources and decisions, relationships, and communications.
- Sharing power does not require equality when levels of responsibility and accountability vary, but it does imply some degree of mutual influence.
- As partners take up new responsibilities, power can be reallocated.
- Pressures for accountability to external stakeholders can undermine mutual accountability within the network.
- Diverse purposes and stakeholder pressures among partners can test mutual influence and accountability within the network.

bring all partners' ideas into defining research themes and interests – allowed perhaps for inclusion, but later, according to some, was seen as lacking the rigour and thinking necessary for developing serious and coherent research questions. Even though progress was made at the first meeting, intense debates continued to occur over our collective identity, symbolized by vociferous discussion over what the working groups themselves would be named at the subsequent meeting of the steering committee in January 2001. Almost four years later an exercise which reflected on that first meeting (at the mid-term review in 2004) showed that it was still remembered as a place of a great deal of suspicion, jockeying and contestation.

(JG personal reflections)

Since then, the DRC members have remained together and grown as a research network, linking research, policy influence and dissemination around core themes. And yet this is not to say that all members agree on what the DRC is or what it should become. Although it has developed and maintained broad boundaries of consensus, within those boundaries there are many views and tensions about the balance of DRC activities across research, policy influence and capacity building, and about the best approaches for achieving these ends. What has been learned about developing and maintaining collective visions and values?

First, as indicated by the mid-term review and later conversations, defining a partnership-based way of working, as opposed to the more conventional centralised model, is a challenge for us all. Each partner brought old ways of working and internalised sets of expectations about roles and responsibilities to our joint work. As the analysis of spaces team has reminded us, those expectations tend to fill new spaces in spite of good intentions. Thus, as outlined in the mid-term review:

In the centralized model, research questions and methods are set by the lead organization. Strategy formulation in the partnership model must be negotiated across the partners, giving at least some recognition to the interests and concerns of each. While the organizers had a general conception of the research areas to be explored by the Citizenship DRC, many early meetings were devoted to discussing the topics to be investigated and the roles different partners would play. Many partners commented that these discussions were an unsettling experience – they were more familiar with being told what data to collect and how to analyse it. While they were attracted to the idea of a partnership model, they were not at all sure what it would mean in specific terms, and wanted to make sure that the partnership goals were consistent with their own agendas. This participatory process delayed the articulation of clear goals and methods, since it required negotiating across the varied interests of diverse partners. On the other hand, the participatory process of strategy development increased partners' ownership and commitment to shared goals as well as the ability of the partnership to use the special resources of diverse Southern participants.

(MTR 2004: 4–5)

5 At that time, there was not the pre-proposal workshop with partners, which DFID now encourage.

Second, the DRC experience demonstrates that the collective vision and value formulation process is ongoing. It is not simply a matter of working things out in the beginning and getting on with the rest of the work. Instead working groups constantly re-visited what they were trying to do and how they wanted to do it, especially when they had very diverse memberships.⁶ The mid-term review also commented on this approach:

Thus it has been important for the dynamism of the programmes that the 'original objectives' defined at the inception phase were not taken as carved in stone but could be revisited and revised in response to on-going dialogue. Frequent discussions among partners have led to a growing coherence in research thinking in terms of sharing conceptual and analytical vocabularies, experiences with different methodologies and priorities given to different research topics and areas. This constitutes an important achievement and it demonstrates how research partnerships need time and care in order for them to evolve and acquire maturity. Only then can they foster and facilitate original research of quality and relevance.

(MTR 2004: 10)

Since long periods of time often occurred in between meetings, every time the groups came together they had to take time to re-form and re-articulate their goals. As one person said, 'We feel like we are part of the DRC only when we come together' and norms and identities had to be re-established. The two year iterative cycle of planning, working, reflecting and re-planning and the opportunity for synthesis and reflection before moving have allowed reconsidering basic purposes and adjusting as new priorities emerge.

This is important for a third point. The process of setting and maintaining a shared vision and way of working is not simply internal; that vision and approach must constantly be re-negotiated in relationship to external institutions as well. The broad goals of the DRC were set in initial negotiations with DFID. But over time, personnel and mission changes within DFID produced changes in signals about the priorities of those broad purposes, including more weight on applied policy research than academic studies; and on the importance of working with and influencing national and local policy processes, not only global debates. Similarly, each partner had to navigate changing pressures and opportunities within their own institutions, whether to meet publication expectations or other priorities which varied across institutions.

To some degree, as indicated in the MTR, the goals and shared values of the DRC have become clearer, as it moved from loosely coordinated collections of initial projects based on individual interests to more focused research programmes with explicitly comparative agendas in later phases. Yet, tensions remain. For instance, though there is broad agreement that all want to use research to effect change, members take vastly different approaches to creating and using this

6 At one working group meeting, Gaventa noted nine disciplines and eight countries represented in a group of about a dozen people. No wonder it took a while to develop and adhere to a common framework!

knowledge. Some use local, participatory approaches; others carry out and publish more academic research for international audiences. As one participant reflected in the methods workshop, 'we found that engaging with other disciplines was exciting at one level, but also was frustrating at another level. The methodological conversation continues, and it is still difficult' (Methods workshop April 2005).

5.2 Developing relationships and trust

A second theme emerging from the literature for the evolution of transnational action research networks is the importance of developing relationships and trust – particularly identity-based trust grounded in shared values and goals – among individuals and eventually among the organisational partners they represent.

At the beginning of the process, Southern partners were recruited in part on the basis of previous relationships with at least one IDS member. But the DRC quickly learned that the existence of trust between two individuals does not automatically translate into group or collective trust. In fact, prior negative experiences contributed to deficits of trust, especially in the beginning. As one partner – now deeply involved in the work of the DRC – reflected in the methods meeting:

I came to the DRC very sceptical, because I had had a bad experience with [northern research institutions] before... In the other programmes, everything was predetermined – we only had to do a case study. It was colonial. After we submitted, we did not know what happened. But when you came to these meetings, you do not get a feeling that everything is predetermined. Everybody is contributing. I am now glad I took the plunge.

(Methods workshop April 2005)

Another partner noted that being on the receiving end of the 'subcontractor model' contributed to internalised 'inferiority' for Southern researchers, and that it was a challenge to learn to work in a more interactive and participatory style. Learning new ways of working was initially an 'unsettling' experience.

In the mid-term review, David also heard about the scepticism felt by many partners at the beginning:

Donor deadlines required quick recruitment of partners, so the Citizenship DRC drew on prior IDS relationships to find partners ... The DRC then used the inception period to define collaboratively basic partnership goals and organisation. But even with prior relationships, potential partners were sceptical about the DRC's commitment to genuinely collaborative research. Many had prior experience with research centres, and that experience led them to expect that the initiative would exploit Southern 'partners' to provide data to Northern researchers. While their prior relationships with IDS were enough to bring them to the table, they were not sure what 'partnership' meant in this particular project. The initial planning meetings in Brighton at IDS and New Delhi at PRIA were described by many participants as full of scepticism and distrust about the DRC's allocation of resources and power.

(MTR 2004: 4)

On the other hand, the mid-term review and the methods synthesis group agreed that the DRC had developed increased trust among partners over time. The review reports several processes or moments which helped this to occur – including frank discussions about budget allocations in initial meetings; iterative and participatory planning processes that adjust priorities and recognise various need; and the acceptance of a variety of methods and approaches, so that no one approach dominated.

However, a key lesson from the Citizenship DRC is that while budget transparency, information sharing, and development of common intellectual language are critical, they do not replace the important of space, time and personal engagement for building trust relationships. For instance, at the end of the first workshop, several Southern participants commented that they felt marginalised by the academic discourse at IDS; participants in early ‘write-shops’ noted their discomfort in having their papers discussed and criticised publicly, and used an evaluative drama to portray the feelings. But over time, working groups created more inclusive and deliberative approaches for working on shared research projects. The DRC developed a shared culture of peer critique, in person and by e-mail. Shifting meetings to partner locations helped to create different kinds of spaces. Reflection and evaluation of how meetings occurred contributed to our learning.

In later reflections the methods working group identified relationship-building as emerging from the time together in workshops, visits and field trips to each others’ country. In particular, members cited a retreat setting where ‘We had five days together, and we had time to read and to develop rapport. We built ways to be together.’ Another member commented, ‘The relationships [developed at the workshop], develop trust among members. It is a good feeling. It is more at the human level. It is an enriching experience while doing research.’ Several participants talked about the importance of a process that included more than research outputs. The pressing deadlines for completing publications sometimes focused too much on research themes and products. As one member said,

...in a research driven process you don't capture enough if you start thinking your output is a paper.

I loved these meetings ... if I hadn't stayed in the field trip, I would be a diminished individual. It allowed me an understanding of what accountability really is in Nigeria.

(Methods workshop, April 2005)

Others talked about the importance of such spaces for relationship-building in terms of learning as well as trust:

What is valuable about the relationships? We get support and challenges. It is stimulating, seeing things done in different contexts, which you can pick up. It is more of a catalyst than an idea.

(Methods workshop, April 2005)

In the methods reflections researchers from both IDS and partner institutions suggested that the DRC meetings had created spaces for sharing and learning

that they did not have in their own home institutions. Speaking of the writeshops, one partner said, 'I find them really interesting and stimulating, as these spaces seemed to be closed in my university' (Methods workshop, April 2005). Some partners commented that the mid-term review itself helped to build trust, as it provided a space for to voice views of partners about the nature of the partnership and to raise issues. As one person commented in a presentation to other researchers in her home institution, the mid-term review process

... allowed us to share what did we think, how did we feel about it on a number of different levels, organisational, in terms of the research, all sorts of things. I personally found that absolutely amazing. So many of our partnerships would not have wanted that. They would not have wanted to open the Pandora's box, would not be able to handle the criticism. But by this time trust had been built, we could feed in anything we wanted. It was an entirely constructive process.

(Transcript, partner presentation, July 2005)

Yet, this thing called trust is elusive and slippery. Experience in the DRC is consistent with the notion that trust can be more easily lost than created.

As director I have learned this the hard way. When shortcuts to consultation and transparency have been taken, on the assumption that trust would give them legitimacy, trust was sometimes weakened.

(JG personal reflection)

And as one participant in the network reflected, trust needs vigilance:

... Sometimes there are slippages, misunderstandings, we share certain things, but we are not vigilant enough... We take for granted we are a group.

(Methods workshop, April 2005)

It has become clear that in transnational networks trust must be built with multiple constituencies. It must be developed across all parts of the network – *within* institutions, including IDS and partner teams; across Southern and Northern participants; and between researchers and the communities they research. The experience of building trust in one setting can contribute to building it in others. Yet at the same time, trust between institutions remains elusive and can quickly be undermined, when, for instance, administrative procedures or representatives fail to reflect values central to the network.

5.3 Creating network architecture

In addition to coherence of vision and the development of trust, networks do need an organisational architecture that includes definitions of tasks, formal structures, informal norms and expectations, human resources, and leadership capacities that enable it to implement activities and achieve results consistent with its vision and values. The Citizenship DRC – like many other network start-ups – began with very little architecture other than some initial relationships and some general agreement on a vision for future joint action.

Over five years the DRC developed a complex architecture. It includes (a) a coordinating unit based at IDS; (b) partner institutions based in six countries and led by a country convenor, (c) working groups led by convenors or co-convenors, which have evolved over time in both membership and topic, (d) a Steering Committee composed of coordination staff, country convenors and working group convenors, and (e) a Central Advisory and Review Group that provides perspectives from key academic, policy and donor stakeholders. These formal systems interact with the tasks defined by the vision and goals of the DRC, the culture of mutual respect, participation and trust that has evolved over time, and the leadership and human resources provided by participants to create the DRC's capacity for implementing its strategies.

Over time this architecture has been created to solve problems of coordinating and implementing DRC activities, from making decisions about allocation of resources, to defining processes for internal peer review and use of the DRC 'brand', to managing expectations about formal reporting and accountability of partner institutions and individual participants to the network. From the beginning, the Citizenship DRC sought to discuss openly explicitly common understandings of 'ways of working' and at various points along the way critically reviewed understandings of roles and responsibilities of key leaders and network members. It also has discussed and experimented with differing forms of communication across nodes of the network, evolving for critical issues from discussion by email to use of the phone, and more recently increased use of skype and conference calling facilities.

While overall the architecture 'works' in the sense that the network has been maintained, products have been delivered, and resources have been allocated and managed, the definition of its form and functions has not been without contention. The DRC has not achieved universal agreement on important issues of centralisation and decentralisation, the roles of the coordinating team, convenors and country leaders, or the level of resources required to manage and develop the network. Yet, important lessons have been learned.

First, the Citizenship DRC has learned about the importance of paying attention to architecture at every level and also about letting these architectures evolve as the network evolves. For instance, the initial core proposal for the DRC grew from within IDS, particularly from an IDS group interested in these themes. As partners were recruited, discussions about accountability, communication and resource allocation were framed as issues between IDS and the partners. As a consequence, in the early phases, while the working group convenors had central roles in bringing projects together under broad themes, they had little to do with defining the initial round of projects – which were defined by negotiations between the coordinating team and partners, which contributed to some frustration about their role. As pressure mounted for stronger research coherence in later phases, loose working groups became research programmes and convenors became more central. At the same time, discussions of accountability, communications and resources broadened across and within groups, not only between centre and partner. In the new phase of work, the majority of the convenors are drawn from the partners rather than IDS, and the roles of the country teams, working group and coordinating centre again are being redefined.

A second unanticipated lesson has involves the DRC's links to other networks. The architecture of the network can be understood as one that involves six institutional partners, ten IDS Fellows, and an IDS coordinating unit. That network is complex enough in itself. But each of these actors is involved in other networks, and the DRC has in various ways helped to spawn and strengthen those networks when its activities have proved relevant to theirs. In this sense, the transnational action research network includes the links between participants and their local partners and the engagements participants have with other global networks (such as the science and society networks, local governance networks, or deliberative democracy networks – to name three examples strongly connected to the DRC). Each of these linkages also creates expectations and demands externally, which translate into internal demands on our own network as well.

Finally, the Citizenship DRC has illustrated that the management of such complex network with so many changing nodes and relationships is a continuous challenges. There are countless day-to-day issues and transactions involving communication, decision-making, administrative details, contracts, funding, workshop planning, and the like, all of which require time and resources to resolve. As the network has grown and created sub-networks, each builds its own ways of working and its own network architecture. Different working groups or country networks then have different expectations of the support they seek from the centre and from other partners. The overall DRC architecture must respond to this diversity while promoting clarity about what can be expected from others' roles and responsibilities. As the mid-term review observed in somewhat understated fashion, 'the organisation and management of development research partnerships can be very challenging for both the coordinators and the partners.' It also pointed to the importance therefore of bridging leadership at every level – the coordinating teams, country teams and working groups – to manage potential conflicts and to articulate shared interests.

5.4 Distributing formal and informal power

Questions of architecture are of course deeply linked to questions of power, both formal and informal. The DRC's own research also says a great deal about the relationship of power and accountability and about the ways that informal power can affect formal architectures which attempt to be inclusive. The issue of power amongst partners, and particularly across the North-South divide, has been at work in much of the previous discussion of the emergence of DRC as a shared action research network rather than a centre for development research.

The DRC partners have not explicitly discussed power a great deal, but they have discussed partnership and the two are of course deeply inter-related. Can real partnerships be created without the dispersal of power across the partnerships? Formally the DRC has evolved a governance structure that attempts to share power through the steering committee across all institutions in the network. But at the DRC, as in other systems, power is often exercised or experienced beyond the formal structures – through the holding and allocating of resources, in constructing meetings and deliberations, in privileging some knowledge and methods over others, in structuring and surrounding formal decisions and

procedures with informal networks and relationships. Power relations shape experience at every level: between IDS and partners, between partners and practitioners, within working groups, between working groups and the centre, within the IDS team and within partner institutions.

In a telling exchange in our reflections group, one IDS member called for future exploration of:

... How we can create more equal partnerships...or move IDS to the ring rather than the centre?

to which a partner responded,

Part of the reason IDS is in the centre is how DFID sees things. But everybody in the partnership is equal. We are not research assistants to IDS.

(Methods workshop, April 2005)

The response from the partner indicates that some initial fears about the DRC replicating a 'colonial' mode of research have been allayed. As the network has developed members have reported feeling more capacity to participate and influence its directions; yet others worry that knowledge production has still been too focused at IDS, where most of the convenors were based, at least in the initial phase.

Attempting to share and distribute power does not necessarily mean that it should or will be shared equally. Issues of power interact with levels of responsibility and with issues of accountability. Despite attempts to share and disperse power, and to create forms of mutual accountability, as the Director of the DRC, Gaventia is ultimately held accountable by the donor, DFID, and by the contract holder, IDS. Yet, that does not mean that partners are without power. If power is not responsibly used and shared, as one of the members of the network observed, Southern researchers who are accustomed to centralised contract research also have an arsenal of 'weapons of the weak' to resist the demands of their Northern contractors – including delay (foot-dragging), over-expenditure of budgets, and deliberately poor performance (partner workshop presentation, July 2005).

As architecture changes, power may also change. For instance, as the DRC entered its second round funding in 2005, partners took up more formal power in convening working groups and new members joined, raising the possibility of a gradual dispersal of formal power. The Steering Committee in the new round of work has only one member from IDS, with the other convenors drawn from Southern institutions. But formal authority may be subverted by informal relationships and patterns of communication.

It is convenient for those of us at IDS to pop down the hall to consult and reach quick decisions. We must find other ways of communicating when formal power is more dispersed across the network. Many of us have close personal relationships that may influence formal processes of decision making as the network becomes more diverse and less IDS-based.

(JG, personal reflection)

Locating working group and steering committee meetings at partner sites has helped to disperse power – at least as it teaches all participants about the cultures and spaces of others and the contextual constraints and possibilities that others face. Creating new patterns of communication amongst steering committee members has also been important, with regular telephone skype and conference call communications now supplementing the annual meetings of the group.

Power distributions are also complicated by the diversity of network members, each of whom faces multiple accountabilities in their own institutions. The multiplicity of network accountabilities challenges traditional ‘upwards’ accountability systems. The DRC has sought to create mutual accountability of partners to one another, so that the IDS based coordination team can be held accountable by a country partner as well as vice versa. But the DRC’s attempts to build mutual respect and influence among the partners is constantly challenged by pressures for accountability from external stakeholders – from DFID as the programme funder; from IDS as the institutional base for the project; from universities and other institutional bases of project partners; and from stakeholders and participants in particular research projects around the world. Managing multiple accountabilities is challenging for network members and for the network alike. In the methods reflection, for instance one partner described very powerfully the tensions of navigating the multiple accountabilities – within the university, across departments involved in interdisciplinary research, to the dean, to the NGO through which the work was conducted, to IDS, to the partner communities, to his colleagues in the in-country network, to DFID.

Similarly, the diversity of purposes of the networks, contributes to the need of diverse systems of accountability and authority. The logic of dispersing power in order to build partnerships at times runs counter to the logic of centralising power to build coherent research agendas. The logic of dispersing power for policy influence may require sharing power among researchers, users and research disseminators in new ways. Multiple identities for network members and multiple network loyalties create multiple forms of accountability which no single organisational model will fix. A big challenge is to move more to a model of mutual accountabilities, from the centre out, across the nodes and ultimately to the constituents the research is intended to serve.

6 Constructing transnational action research networks: lessons and implications

What then does the reflection on the case of the Citizenship DRC contribute to broader knowledge about the construction of transnational action research networks? At one level, the case supports emerging theory about the value and nature of such networks. In a variety of ways, it has helped to demonstrate how transnational action research networks can span diverse resources to produce creative results that would not have been possible without the network. This network bridged many axes – diverse disciplines, North and South, practice and

research, local and global – to create new knowledge and insight; to enable participants to learn from one another; and to catalyse innovations in policy and practice not been possible to any single actor. The Citizenship DRC in this sense illustrates the emerging phenomenon of global knowledge networks and their potential for knowledge production and policy influence in an increasingly interdependent global system.

The case illustrates the significance of (1) the articulation of shared values and purposes, (2) the development of relationships and trust among members, (3) the creation of appropriate network architecture and (4) the distribution of formal and informal power. (The lessons related to each are summarised in Table 5.1.) Each of these contributes to enabling network activities that produce results which are greater than the sum of the parts. While the DRC case illustrates and confirms themes found in existing literature on transnational action research networks and in its own research, the case also suggests the importance of several new themes for future research and practice in this field.

First, the DRC case highlights the dynamic, ever-changing and evolutionary nature of action learning and research networks. In its research, the DRC has argued that an actor-centred notion of citizenship means that citizenship is always under construction in practices and processes of contestation, not simply handed down from above as a given status. Partnership-based action research networks which link diverse partners from demanding institutional and environmental contexts cannot simply be designed or imposed by formula. *Effective networks are the result of ongoing social and political construction processes*, in which cycles of negotiating purposes, creating relationships and trust, defining architectures, implementing initiatives and producing results interact to support and constrain future initiatives. Previously constructed architectures and expectations provide both constraints and backdrops against which new purposes, relationships, architectures and activities may be created or old ones reinforced (Berger and Luckmann 1971; Powell 1990).

Second, leadership at every level has played a central role in building network architecture to meet changing needs and demands and in creating and re-creating network trust and relationships. Understanding the network as an ongoing process of negotiation and construction means that roles, expectations and architectures constantly evolve and change. It also means that leadership able to bridge differences, build trust, catalyse mutual influence and create space for reflective internal learning, is a vital resource. *Bridging leadership emerged as vital to constructing and maintaining the network*. The DRC benefited from sophisticated leadership from the IDS team in launching the DRC as a partnership rather than a centralised venture. It also benefited greatly from bridging leaders among its partners that enabled both mutual influence within the network and effective partnerships with a wide range of external stakeholders in different countries. In retrospect virtually all the DRC partners agreed that collaborative leadership in the network, combining invitations to participate and influence events with willingness to take stands and confront difficult issues that threatened the network's mission, was essential to its evolution.

Third, the evolving relationship enabled growing ability to depend on members to deliver what they promise. While the Citizenship DRC began in a welter of

scepticism and doubt about the possibility of genuine partnership across such diverse actors, it gradually built a shared set of values, goals and expectations for member contributions and responsibilities. *Members developed mutual influence and accountability that pressed them to live up to each others' expectations for performance* on network initiatives. This evolution has required that members navigate accountability relationships initially with each other, and later with other constituencies. Creating mutual accountability among such diverse partners is a very challenging task, particularly since they bring very different priorities and interests. But over time, members agreed on increasingly specific and inter-dependent goals for DRC initiatives, accepted increasingly common standards for performance assessment, and recognised the value of living up to common standards of quality more widely.

Fourth, while action research networks must constantly undergo processes of construction and reconstruction, they do not do so in isolation. We can understand the Citizenship DRC as a complex web of nodes and partnerships in contrast to the more common centre-and-periphery model. But each member of the network is embedded in other networks and institutional relationships which affect their time, resources, and interaction in the DRC. *Embeddedness in other networks and institutions creates both obstacles to and opportunities for network evolution and impacts.* If the institutional expectations of donor, host or partner institution run counter to network values and processes, creativity and trust can be diminished and constrained. For example, the procedures of contracting, fund transfer or incentives within IDS and its partner institutions seriously limited network actions in the early days of the DRC. On the other hand, network impacts may be enhanced by their embeddedness. Action research networks are at once potentially 'victims of' or 'change agents for' the broader institutions in which they are embedded. The Citizenship DRC has contributed to changing conceptions of IDS research partnerships and how to support them. Other partners have also reported how their learning from the DRC has catalysed change in their own institutions, contributing to formation of new centres on citizenship, new ways of doing research, new strategies for policy influence, or broader networks within their own countries. DRC members have also used their positions in broader networks to strengthen dissemination and impact of network initiatives. Institutional embeddedness can create constraints, tensions and huge organisational transactional costs, but it can also multiply paths and possibilities for influence and confer leverage for change well beyond what the network itself could muster.

The Citizenship DRC has been a productive experiment, though it has certainly not been universally successful or efficient. Some tensions are always present, and members of the network may have differing views of its success. At the same time, most would agree that it has helped to catalyse the development of new knowledge, some of which could not have been created by more centralised networks. It has contributed to building capacities for its members, as witnessed by both Northern and Southern partners. It has contributed to a diverse array of initiatives to affect policy and practices, from initiatives to alter DFID policies, to debates on reshaping Nigerian understanding of citizenship, to conferences on democratic governance in India, to policy perspectives on citizenship and science in the UK. In a world of increasing global interdependence, expanding problems of

governance and citizenship, and escalating need for developing new knowledge, policies and practices, we are convinced that transnational networks offer an important area for the strengthening of the role of action research in development.

References

Primary sources

Primary sources consulted for this paper have included minutes of working group, steering committee and CARG meetings; the mid term review prepared by David Brown and Fiona Wilson in 2004 and workshop notes from reflections of the methods working group meeting held in April 2004, as well as personal observation and conversations.

Secondary sources

Bartunek, J. and Louis, M. (1996) *Insider/Outsider Team Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann (1971) *The Social Construction of Reality*, Harmondsworth: Penguin

Brass, D.J.; Galaskiewicz, J.; Grave, H. and Tsa, W. (2004) 'Taking Stock of Networks and Organizations: A Multilevel Perspective', *Academy of Management Journal* 47.6: 795–617

— (1999) 'Social Learning in South-North Coalitions: Constructing Knowledge Across Social Chasms', in D. Lewis (ed.), *International Perspectives on Voluntary Action: Reshaping the Third Sector*, London: Earthscan: 39–59

Castells, M. (2000) 'Toward a Sociology of the Network Society', *Contemporary Sociology* 29.5: 693–9

Church, M.; Bitel, M.; Armstrong, K.; Fernando, P.; Gould, H.; Joss, S.; Marwaha-Diderich, M.; Torre, A.L.D.A. and Vouhe, C. (2003) *Participation, Relationships and Dynamic Change: New Thinking on Evaluating the Work of International Networks* (Working Paper 121), London: Development Planning Unit, University College London

Clark, J. (ed.) (2003) *Globalizing Civic Engagement: Civil Society and Transnational Action*, London: Earthscan

Cornwall, A. and Schattan Coelho, V. (2006) *Spaces for Change: The Politics of Participation in New Democratic Arenas*, London: Zed Books

Fox, J. and Brown, L.D. (1998) *The Struggle for Accountability: NGOs, Social Movements, and the World Bank*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Gaventa, J. (1999) 'Crossing the Great Divide', in D. Lewis (ed.), *International Perspectives on Voluntary Action*, London: Earthscan: 21–38

Haas, P. (1992) 'Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination', *International Organization* 46.1: 1–36

- Jagadananda and Brown, L.D. (2005) *Civil Society Legitimacy and Accountability: Issues and Challenges*, Johannesburg and Cambridge: CIVICUS and Hauser Centre
- Kabeer, N. (ed.) (2005) *Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions*, London: Zed Books
- Keck, M. and Sikkink, K. (1998) *Activists Without Borders*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press
- Leach, M.; Scoones, I. and Wynne, B. (2005) *Science and Citizens: Globalization and the Challenge of Engagement*, London: Zed Books
- Lindenberg, M. and Bryant, C. (2001) *Going Global: Transforming Relief and Development NGOs*, Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press
- Maxwell, S. and Stone, D. (2005) 'Global Knowledge Networks and International Development: Bridges Across Boundaries', in D. Stone and S. Maxwell (eds), *Global Knowledge Networks and International Development*, London: Routledge: 1–17
- McNeill, D. (2005) 'Power and Ideas: Economics and Global Development Policy', in D. Stone and S. Maxwell (eds), *Global Knowledge Networks and International Development*, London: Routledge: 57–71
- Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis* (second ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- Nadler, D.A. and Tushman, M.L. (1992) 'Designing Organizations That Have Good Fit', in D.A. Nadler *et al.*, *Organizational Architecture*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass: 39–56
- Newell, P. and Wheeler, J. (2006) *Rights and Resources: The Politics of Accountability*, London: Zed Books
- Newell, S. and Swan, J. (2000) 'Trust and Interorganisational Networking', *Human Relations* 53.10
- Powell, W. (1996) 'Trust-based Forms of Governance', in R. Kramer and T. Tyler (eds), *Trust in Organizations*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Powell, W.W. (1990) 'Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization', in B. Staw and L.L. Cummings (eds), *Research in Organizational Behavior* (Vol 12), Greenwich, CT: JAI Press: 295–336
- Reinicke, W. and Deng, F. (2000) *Critical Choices: The United Nations, Networks and the Future of Global Governance*, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre
- Rischar, J.F. (2002) *High Noon: Twenty Global Problems, Twenty Years to Solve Them*, New York: Basic Books
- Sheppard, B. and Tuchinsky, M. (1996) 'Micro-Organizational Behavior and the Network Organization', in T. Kramer and T. Tyler (eds), *Trust in Organizations*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Slaughter, A.-M. (2004) *A New World Order*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

—— (1997) 'The Real New World', *Foreign Affairs* 76.5: 183–91

Wenger, E.; McDermott, R. and Snyder, W.M. (2002) *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press

Wheeler, Joanna (2007) *Creating Spaces for Engagement: Understanding Research and Social Change*, Citizenship DRC Working Paper. www.drc-citizenship.org/docs/publications/drc_general/Creatingspacesforengagement.pdf

Yin, R.K. (1984) *Case Study Research*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications

Young, D.R., Koenig, B.L., Najam, A. and Fisher, J. (1999) 'Strategy and Structure in Managing Global Associations', *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 10.4: 323–43

