



Net - Map

toolbox

Influence Mapping of Social Networks®

By Eva Schiffer

Making the most of social networks

Imagine the following scenario: two villages depend on a river that flows between them. It's a source of life for both groups, a marketplace for some, and a recreational spot for others. Each of these groups has a clear set of—sometimes complimentary but more often competing—interests regarding how to use this scarce natural resource. With many actors come many perspectives, making the achievement of a common vision particularly challenging. A new tool developed by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)—the Net-Map toolbox—innovates this process to enhance the way in which people work together to reach common goals.

The Net-Map toolbox

The term “toolbox” is literal. The kit includes small figures that represent different actors. Lines are drawn to link the actors and reveal how they are connected and, perhaps even more importantly, how they are not connected, and “influence towers” are built to reflect the relative power of each actor (the higher the influence tower, the greater the influence). By visually capturing these arrangements, users can determine whether their current way of working will help or hinder the achievement of their goals. For example, groups typically cite the desire to form coalitions and to avoid deadlocks. The Net-Map toolbox can assist users in reaching these goals by mapping the most influential actors for their work, how they are linked to these actors, and whether these arrangements will help them achieve their goals. When different groups use the tool together, they can learn from each other and identify a winning strategy.

The concept of social network analysis is not new, and several computer programs are available for the pur-

The White Volta Basin Board

In rural Ghana, the White Volta Basin Board is responsible for overseeing local water resources. The Board collaborates with several partners, making decisive action difficult. To enhance the decisionmaking process, the Board has employed the Net-Map toolbox to identify its partners, its linkages with those partners, and their distinct goals and levels of influence. By improving its understanding of the approaches of its various partners, the Board can work with those partners more effectively to achieve the common goal of managing scarce water resources effectively.

pose of analyzing the data collected. However, most approaches to collecting and analyzing network data are abstract and require high technical capacity. Before the Net-Map toolbox, it was difficult for actors at the grassroots and policymaking levels to utilize social network analysis to improve their work. The Net-Map toolbox builds and expands on previous approaches to participatory social network analysis to allow anyone, regardless of their level of literacy or education, to better understand and communicate how they or their group are connected to others and to identify more effective ways of collaborating with partners to achieve mutual goals.

The network mapping approach is particularly important for finding common ground on highly contentious issues, such as competing access to prized natural resources. Net-Map helps individuals and groups clarify complex



decisionmaking processes and answer key questions to make these processes more streamlined and effective. In this way, the Net-Map toolbox allows all types of organizations and individuals to navigate a variety of situations successfully, as is highlighted in the many examples that follow.

cratic policy environment that needs to be reformed. The network maps can also highlight the appropriate timing of interventions and then monitor their overall effectiveness.

Improving the Impact of Research Projects

Researchers often face frustration when their findings have low impact in policymaking processes. Net-Map can help users understand the flows of knowledge and the formal and informal ways in which policy decisions are made. Thus, researchers can become more strategic in linking their research with policy processes, thereby increasing its visibility and impact.

Improving and Coordinating Multi-Stakeholder Governance

A multi-stakeholder governance body can expand its impact by improving its understanding of its members' individual networks and views. A sequence of individual and group mapping exercises can enable a dialogue to facilitate members in benefit-

Showing Impact to Donors

An inclusive network-mapping process clearly conveys the message to donors that an appropriate procedure was developed and implemented to achieve a project goal. Network evaluation with stakeholders and beneficiaries can help in assessing the quality of project governance and determining whether the target group was involved in the decisionmaking processes and whether it benefited from the project.

Preparing and Monitoring

Net-Map can help users/researchers understand complex policy networks—for instance, a network surrounding a new development project or bureau-



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ing from the complexity and diversity of the group, while at the same time developing a common understanding.

Facilitating Inclusive Community-Based Projects

Visualizing networks, power structures, and goals makes it easier for leaders of community projects to conceptualize and therefore integrate the needs and interests of disparate local and external groups, ranging from rich to poor constituencies, and from overarching authorities to individual farmers. The exchange of different local perspectives can help everyone involved to work toward a solution that takes all views into account.

With its straightforward visualization approach, Net-Map promotes inclusion so that the voices of disempowered and illiterate groups in a community can be heard.

Sketching and Discussing Hands-On Interventions in Project Teams

By regularly including network mapping in planning processes, team members have a tool that easily allows them to discuss options and use their newfound understanding strategically. A team that is aware of the formal and informal links among its members can maximize its use of that network and strategically assign responsibilities to span the network's boundaries.

The Net-Map toolbox was developed by Eva Schiffer, a postdoctoral fellow within IFPRI's Environment and Production Technology Division, who is now adapting the toolbox for different uses in the field.



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For more information about the Net-Map toolbox, please visit <http://netmap.wordpress.com>. To learn more about how the Net-Map toolbox could be used in your current or future projects, please contact Eva Schiffer at IFPRI-NetMap@cgiar.org. For more information about the project for which Net-Map was developed, "Integrating Governance and Modeling" in Ghana and Chile—which is part of the CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food—visit <http://www.igm.uni-hohenheim.de>.