Networking in order to respond better to our mission

Networks of the social apostolate in the Society of Jesus

Social Coordinators of the Conferences
May 2013

1. Introduction

This document was elaborated by the Social Coordinators of the Conferences, along with the Secretariat for Social Justice and Ecology, during their annual meeting in Rome in April 2013. It is the fruit of our joint reflection on the various experiences in the Conferences and on some documents about networking that have appeared in these last years.

This document is especially addressed to all persons and institutions active within the sphere of our social apostolate, including Jesuits, lay people, the Society's apostolic works, and institutions that collaborate with us. We believe this document can be used in formation workshops, and it can also be read by individuals responsible for creating networks at different levels. Furthermore, other groups both inside and outside the Society may find in these pages valuable elements for developing networks.

The text seeks to offer elements for reflection and practical recommendations that will help toward the development of networks as a way of providing a better response to our universal mission today. It begins presenting some documents about networking from the recent past. Then, it explains the reasons that motivate us to work in networks, shows the value that networks can add to our ministries, mentions the various types of networks being created, notes certain factors important for their functioning, discusses the difficulties in developing them, and ends with making some recommendations.

With this document we hope to add another voice to the dialogue being carried on in the Society about networking and to do so from the perspective of the social apostolate.

2. Some references on networking from the recent past

General Congregation 34 (1995) stressed the need for networking within the Society in a very meaningful text: "To exploit more fully the possibilities given us by being an international body, additional global and regional networks must be created. Such networks of persons and institutions should be capable of addressing global concerns through support, sharing of information, planning, and evaluation, or through implementation of projects that cannot easily be carried out within province structures… Initiative and support for these various forms of networks should come from all levels of the Society" (d. 21, n. 14).

Since that time many efforts have been made in the Society to create these networks, and there has been great generosity and creativity in attempts to respond better to our mission. In the course of these years the social apostolate has become ever more convinced that the problem areas which it addresses locally are often connected to global phenomena. There has, therefore, been an increasing demand in this apostolic sector for development of international networks that can deal with the root causes of injustice in the world.

This broad practical effort to build networks has been accompanied by an effort to reflect on the process. Thus in 2002 the Secretariat for Social Justice under the direction of Fr. Michael Czerny SJ published the document, "Directives for Networking in the Social Apostolate of the Society of Jesus." This text offered a series of guidelines and proposals to help in the development of networks, and many of them are still useful.

Several years later, in 2008, General Congregation 35 issued a similar instruction: "We encourage the Society's government at all levels to explore means by which more effective networking might take place among all apostolic works associated with the Society of Jesus" (d. 6, n. 29a).

Later still, in the year 2012, a congress was held at Boston College (United States) on networking at the international level in the Society. Both the preparatory documents and the final document[1] were received with great interest. All the documents may be consulted on the web page prepared for that event.[2]

3.   Why work in networks?—a new context

The social apostolate is motivated by the desire to share the life of the most disadvantaged, to serve and to defend them. Over the last few decades we have learned that our presence among the poor must aspire to encouraging them in their own processes of growth. The strength and credibility of the social apostolate derives in large part from our immediate local presence on the frontier zones that experience exclusion. As a result, there is a decided *tendency toward local involvement and insertion* in the social apostolate, since these give expression to our desire to accompany concrete persons and communities in their daily lives and their social struggles.

At the same time, one of our basic aims is the promotion of social justice. It is not just a question of trying to improve the living conditions of the people but of attempting to change the structures that produce injustice so that the excluded populations can live with independence and dignity and not have to rely on alms and the charitable help of others.

The external context: globalization

The context of our promotion of justice has undergone significant transformations in recent decades. The phenomenon we now call globalization assumes a fluid interconnection among economic, political, social, and cultural dynamics. It is now possible for local events to have immediate repercussions around the globe. That was the case with the economic crisis of 2008, which started in the United States but eventually affected the entire world. At the same time, many local situations are affected by global phenomena. The same global causes can give rise to a variety of local expressions. A phenomenon that produces beneficial results in one part of the world or in one sector of the population can cause conflict and violence elsewhere. There are winners and losers. For example, cell phones that offer planet-wide communication are benefiting many poor communities, but they are also provoking conflicts in the eastern Congo, which is the source of COLTAN, a mineral used in the manufacture of cell phones.

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[1] *International Networking in the Society of Jesus. Challenges from a Universal Mission*, Conference at Boston College, 28-30 April 2012, at
http://historial.pastoralsj.org/jesuitnetworking/docs/2012_Conference_International_Jesuit_Networking.pdf, accessed in July 2013.
[2] http://www.jesuitnetworking.org/, accessed in July 2013.

These characteristics of our present age render the local setting inadequate for understanding and confronting the basic causes of injustice. We need to pay more attention to the larger regional and international dimensions. The social apostolate is experiencing this reality with special urgency because the daily life of the people in the poorest communities where we are working is being seriously affected by the global phenomena.

The internal context: intersectorial and international collaboration

The Society possesses the necessary *conditions* to operate within this new context. The Society has a great variety of different works in many countries, all of which share a mission and a way of proceeding based on the same spirituality. As a result, the Society is a body especially well endowed for acting within the global context to which we have alluded. The Society has many institutions at the local level; it possesses means of communication that are capable of overcoming geographical barriers; and it has good reasons to pursue coordinated action at the international level. In the case of the social apostolate, the motives for undertaking joint action are especially compelling.

Not only are there conditions for joint action, but there is also a *need* for it. Networking is necessary first of all for the fuller comprehension of reality available through international and interdisciplinary studies. We may speak of phenomena like migration, ecology, or mining and the impact they have on the poorest people, but we immediately become aware that explaining all that these phenomena entail requires field work, academic study, and approaches from the social and economic sciences— and all this undertaken from an international viewpoint. A second reason why networking is necessary is that best practices are dispersed. Not all institutions are equally prepared in every area, and there is much that they can learn from one another. A third reason why collaboration is needed is advocacy. The promotion of justice involves shaping public opinion and influencing the spheres of power which make the major decisions and which often are far removed from the people who suffer their consequences. This is the case, for example, of huge multinational companies that violate human rights in countries of the South can perhaps be influenced only in countries of the North or before international organizations.

It is clear that intersectorial and international collaboration is needed for doing research, learning best practices, and defending the most vulnerable. The social apostolate has identified the universities as especially relevant collaborators or allies for carrying out this common mission of the promotion of justice.

This intersectorial and international collaboration required by the external context of globalization and the Society's own internal context is being implemented now by the development of networks. We believe that networks allow us to respond to the new conditions of mission while at the same time respecting the autonomy of institutions and maintaining our contact with local realities, a contact which provides us with credibility and spiritual nourishment for our commitment to justice.

There exist other ways of responding to the new conditions of our mission. For example, other actors create hierarchical type organizations which subordinate local institutions. This allows for easier alignment of these local institutions. However, we are not taking that path. We have chosen networks because they seem better adapted to the conditions of the Society. Consequently, we can say that the networks are not an end in themselves or simply the latest fad; rather, they are a privileged means for our corporate collaboration as the Society.

4. The concept of networking in the Society

In general, we can say that a network is a structure of horizontal communication that brings together a variety of local actors for the purpose of facilitating collaboration among them. This broad and somehow vague definition allows us to understand most of the horizontal collaborations in the Society.

More specifically, networking in the Society is a way of working which uses regional or global collaboration of local institutions—or nodes—to offer joint responses to regional or global apostolic challenges that cannot be met by these institutions acting on their own. This second, more ambitious definition emphasizes unity of action, ability to act at the regional or global level, and intensification of the level of response. We devote these pages to this definition.

Networking in the Society and Ignatian spirituality

We can observe certain characteristics proper to networks that are inspired by Ignatian spirituality. In the Contemplation on the Incarnation, when the three Divine Persons behold the misery of the world and have compassion on it, their response is, "Let us work redemption." We are called to participate in that *movement of the redemption of the world in its totality* whose aim is to help people to live and to live completely.

If we are to take seriously the consequences of this commitment today, it means that we must look beyond the narrow frontiers of our works and our local, provincial, and national contexts. Questions about justice are being decided at a global level which we should aim to influence even if only modestly. Our networks are rooted in this universal perspective, which runs through the Contemplation on the Incarnation, a bedrock of Ignatian spirituality.

Networks oblige us to engage in *dialogue*, to open ourselves to other forms of work and ways of perceiving reality. They require us to consider the truths held by others and to take on their causes and make them our own. This openness to the other and detachment from the self is an exercise that is profoundly Ignatian.

Networks in turn require us to practice *generosity* and *trust* since responsibilities are assumed jointly with others. They ask us to give what we can without necessarily realizing any direct institutional benefit. Joint agendas are created for the service of others, and resources, personnel, and enthusiasm are offered to others. This is the way of practising generosity. Networks also demand that we trust people who are different from us in their language, their ways of working, or their perceptions.

Such trust helps us realize better the principle of subsidiarity and allows each institution to discern at the local level how best it can contribute, according to its context and internal circumstances.

Generosity and trust also help toward *detachment from power* and the realization that power should rely on consensus and operate more horizontally. There should not be imposition of particular interests or agendas. What must prevail is the persuasion of truth and pursuit of the common good.

In networking the way of proceeding is *participative* through mutual listening, prayerful discernment in common, and active reception of the Spirit who opens up spaces through the network itself. That

work of building together with the help of the Spirit is what generates esprit de corps throughout the network, which thus constitutes a community of service to a greater mission.

The Society's networks should carry out their diagnoses *rigorously* and *with profound analysis*, drawing both on academic research and on reflection about our experiences of accompanying the marginalized communities.

We therefore stress the importance of taking seriously the themes of redemption, dialogue and openness, generosity and trust, detachment from power, discernment, and rigorous analysis. These are characteristics needed for networking, and they form part of the Ignatian spirituality that the Society of Jesus seeks to embody.

5. "Value added" of the networks

Networking provides added values that can be achieved by other means only with difficulty. We list here some of the values to be found in different areas:

a. For the local institutions:
  i. The network provides help for the weaker institutions by broadening their horizons, reinforcing their social capital, and reducing any sense of isolation they may have
  ii. Interconnection increases the capacities of institutions without competing with their proper autonomy
  iii. The local mission gains in universality and also in relevance
  iv. The local institutions achieve greater visibility and importance

b. Practical advantages:
  i. The institutions learn from one another: best practices, methodologies, ways of proceeding
  ii. There is easier access to relevant information
  iii. Intersectorial collaboration is made possible around shared apostolic projects
  iv. Networks have better access to financing agencies

c. For the apostolic body of the Society:
  i. Networks bring with them a new sense of being a universal body
  ii. Networks contribute to the development of a joint strategic vision of the Society's future
  iii. New levels of action are discovered which allow regional or global responses to apostolic challenges
  iv. Networks help to coordinate the efforts of different institutions on behalf of common apostolic challenges
  v. Networks project to the public an image of the Society's common identity
  vi. Networks allow for advocacy at the international level

d. Other benefits:
  i. Networks provide new possibilities for research and shared learning experiences by allowing quality access to many social realities
  ii. Networks allow for the creation of knowledge that would not be possible just by local analysis

iii.   Networks help the Society to generate a common vision regarding important apostolic questions

6. Types of networks

Networks can be distinguished according to different criteria:

a. **According to the geographic area** in which they are located, we can distinguish between those that are i) provincial level, ii) conference level, and iii) global. It is expected that as Conferences develop they will in turn facilitate the creation of Conference networks which may then interconnect at a global level.

b. **According to the apostolic sector** in which they function, we can distinguish between i) those which exist only within the social sector and ii) those which are intersectorial

c. **According to the type and purpose of coordination**[3]:

   i.   Peer network:

   This type of network is one established among organizations that work in similar areas. Regular communication among the organizations allows them to learn from one another and to exchange information and resources. It is also possible to establish spaces for discernment and consultation.

   This type of network requires minimal coordination, the obligations for the institutions which make it up are not demanding, and there are not many common objectives. In the course of time it may be possible to engage in a common project such as, in the fields of training, research, advocacy, good practices, or other areas.

   Networks in the apostolic sector are generally of this type.

   ii.   Transnational advocacy alliance

   This type of network is created out of the need to respond to a specific local problem that requires an intervention in another country. Alliances are established with institutions in other countries that can contribute to the resolution of the problematic.

   This type of network lasts only as long as the local problem that needs resolving. It does not always need a global network; it is enough to form strategic alliances with institutions that can do effective advocacy.

   In this type of network it is essential to concentrate efforts on those private or public organizations that can change the conditions of the local problematic.

   iii.   International advocacy coalition:

   This type of network brings together a variety of organizations which contribute to a set of common objectives. These objectives may be organized around a joint international

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[3] This section is indebted to the presentation on networks offered by Christina Kheng to the leaders of the GIAN networks in 2011.

campaign. Such a network may in turn join other coalitions that share the same objective. The results expected should be quite specific.

Some of the networks that are being developed in the social apostolate

− There exist several *networks of social centers*, and these are becoming strong in several Conferences. They are peer networks that identify various areas where the social centers can collaborate together. They are limited to the social sector and develop within Conferences.

− The *Xavier Network* brings together NGOs of international cooperation and the mission offices of Europe and Canada. This also is a peer network that has identified specific areas of collaboration. It is limited to the social sector. Although the institutions are mostly European, its reach is global.

− The *Jesuit Migrant Network* in Latin America is a transnational alliance of works in different sectors that have identified common areas of collaboration with regard to the problem of migration. The aim of the network is to develop new levels of agency.

− *Fe y Alegría* is a regional network in Latin America (with some presence in Africa and Europe). It works within the sector of education and concentrates on educating disadvantaged students. It provides a model for networking because of its insertion into the Society's governing structures, its style of leadership, its internal participative organization, and the way it identifies common objectives to which it responds by means of programs deployed throughout the network.

− *African Jesuits AIDS Network* (AJAN) is a network of Jesuits and other co-workers in sub-Saharan Africa, who serve people affected by AIDS in different ways. They may also work in the area of HIV prevention.

− The *Global Ignatian Advocacy Network* (GIAN) has global reach and involves the participation of different sectors. It also has the aim of developing new levels of action. It is functioning in five different areas: Migration, Right to Education, Ecology, Governance of natural and mineral resources, and Human rights. [Promotio Iustitiae n. 110](#) has been recently devoted to these networks.

− The *Jesuit Refugee Service* is primarily an institution that can nevertheless be viewed from the perspective of a global network within the social sector. It establishes fruitful relations with other apostolic sectors.

7. Key factors for international networking in the Society

We mention here a series of factors which contribute to the successful development of international networking. They are the fruit of learning acquired in different types of experience. We will distinguish factors internal to the structure of the network, factors external to the structure, and factors related to the institutions that form part of the network.

Factors internal to the structure of the network

a. The network leader. The leader must have the time, the ability, and personal dedication. The leader should promote frequent contact. Heightened motivation is helpful. The leader should have a strategic vision and know how to inspire others by offering lofty, attractive objectives.

b. A core group that is the moving force of the network in which the leader is inserted**.** In this group decisions should be made mostly by consensus. It is helpful to have a prospectus of the network that can be shared with new members.

c. An institution which acts as the communications hub. It is helpful if one institution of the network takes on the function of facilitating internal and external communication and offering services the network needs, such as maintenance of a web page or elaboration and justification of projects. These tasks can either be centralized or be distributed among members of the network. The relation established between this institution and the leader should be clear.

    In particular, when the activities of the network are funded by outside agencies and they are being carried out by different institutions of the network, the role of this central institution is fundamental. Failure to carry out this task well can be the source of problems.

d. Regular meetings. Communication technologies make it easy to have necessary electronic meetings. However, actual meetings where members are physically present are necessary in order to develop mutual knowledge and trust and to foster friendship and a sense of community in mission.

e. Apostolic plans that are clear and concrete. When the network does not achieve discernible concrete results, people easily lose interest. Enough freedom should be allowed so that members can participate in some program and not others. The apostolic plan, however, should be approved by the network as a whole. Finally, there must be firm commitment to these apostolic plans.

    The existence of clear apostolic plans makes it possible to render a thorough accounting of the network itself and to evaluate its functioning.

f. Clear Ignatian and Jesuit identity in the institutions, processes, and structures. Such an identity generates a strong sense of belonging within the network and offers a coherent image to the larger world. A shared logo can also be very helpful.

g. Effective communication of the achievements of the network. Such communication makes the network visible and allows others to see its value and importance.

External factors for "official networks"[4]

Many networks are informal and do not need approval or special recognition by Superiors. Other networks may receive official recognition from the corresponding Superior because of the special contribution they make to the strategic plan of the entity in which they are deployed, whether it be a province, a conference, or something more global. Here we refer to these lattermost.

a. It is best that these networks be incorporated into the structure of the Society's government, which means the following:
    i.   They should make a substantive contribution to one or more of the strategic objectives established at the province, conference, or global level. In this regard, strategic planning

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[4] The concept of official networks is mentioned in the document *International Networking in the Society of Jesus* (2002), to which we referred earlier.

at those levels is extremely helpful for identifying the areas in which networks may be necessary. This in turn will make it possible to establish a certain order as regards the priority of some networks over others.

ii. These networks and the institutions which make them up require a clear mandate from Superiors that identifies them as high priority.

iii. The mission and the plans of these networks should ideally be approved by the corresponding Superior.

iv. The network leader and the members of the group that is its moving force should receive their Superiors' approval and be missioned by them for these tasks.

v. The conference social coordinators should provide accompaniment, guidance, and support for the networks, and they should also help to put order into the different initiatives of the conference when they become numerous.

b. If they have received approval by Superiors, these networks must have some means for gaining access to the economic resources needed for their structure and activities.

Factors relating to the institutions that form part of the network

a. The institutions that participate in the networks must provide the human and financial resources that are needed to maintain their participation and execute the activities being carried out.

b. The activities of the networks should finally be incorporated into the networks' apostolic plans and their annual calendars.

8. Obstacles and limitations that present themselves in networking

a. Weak sense of universal mission. A first difficulty consists in the lack of a sense of the Society's being called to contribute to a mission that extends beyond the local ministry. Without this sense of a wider mission the emphasis of our action is limited to one locality while the importance of the global level is neglected. As a result, important challenges of a global nature appear to be competing with urgent local needs.

b. Individualism. Certain unhelpful attitudes can flourish in institutions, such as self-sufficiency and individualism. Also, the failure to fulfill commitments assumed can jeopardize the survival of a network since confidence is undermined.

c. Lack of sufficient resources. Practical obstacles also exist; these may include the absence of human and financial resources dedicated to the network, the lack of resources for good communication, or the inability to use such resources. Often there is much good will, but also an inability to use horizontal participation to identify visions and objectives for the network; this results in a network empty of contents.

d. We are not used to horizontal leadership. Our present mentality is also sometimes an obstacle. We are not accustomed to horizontal leadership, where decisions are made by consensus and we respond to commitment collectively. Such leadership requires rendering of accounts, and often we are not prepared for that.

e. Organizational culture. The establishment of intersectorial and interprovincial networks sometimes may not be favored by the Society's organizational structure, which entails a certain

understanding of authority and of the procedures and behaviors required by authority. Diversity is part of the Society's potential, manifesting itself in the variety of apostolic sectors, provinces, languages, cultures, etc. At the same time, diversity can become a major obstacle to achieving joint plans and agendas.

9. Some recommendations and proposals

There follows a brief list of recommendations for developing networks in the social sector, that can be considered together with the key factor already mentioned in section 6:

a. Create a few intersectorial networks at the province level (or among several provinces) to respond to an important apostolic challenge. This can provide an opportunity for testing and learning and will allow for the development of more complex networks.

b. Formation programs can be set up that will help to develop the abilities needed for the creation of networks.

c. Raise the awareness of Provincials and Conference Presidents about the interest of present networks as instruments that will help them respond better to the Society's apostolic mission; they should be encouraged to provide human resources and financial and technical support for the networks. Every six months their respective social coordinators should report to them on the progress of the networks in which they participate.

d. A major communications effort should be made in the formal spaces of the social sector for the purpose of increasing awareness among those who form part of the social apostolate.

e. Include in the strategic planning of the social centers some type of participation in networks.