

# ARnet Regional Review

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A report based on a meeting of ARnet Regional Nodes on 1 February 2001 in Nairobi, Kenya

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## SUMMARY

The ARnet Programme 's Regional Nodes and other selected Popular Coalition partners held a one-day meeting following the completion of a meeting of the African ARnet programme, entitled *Overcoming Rural Poverty and Food Insecurity: moving from information to knowledge to action* that took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 29-31 January 2001.

Discussions focused on 4 broad themes:

1. Evaluation: Evaluation of the current status of the ARnet programme
2. Programme: Identification of key programme areas and themes for future ARnet programme development
3. Operational: Assessment of key operational issues, opportunities and constraints
4. Expansion: Review of future possibilities for programme expansion

### 1.1. Evaluation

The overall evaluation of ARnet was positive. Existing ARnet activities have led to a range of concrete changes at all levels:

- community: increased access and security of natural resources for poor rural households
- national: strengthened CSO networks and higher levels of advocacy-related activities
- regional/global: strengthened networks and awareness levels.

Most importantly however, it was recognised that the ARnet programme demonstrates the immense value that can result from civil society organisations sharing their knowledge with one another. There is, it is clear, an immense resource of untapped or underutilised knowledge that is built on concrete experience and practical lessons. The challenge facing ARnet participants in the future is to channel this knowledge resource into tangible, useful and relevant knowledge "outputs" that can help others to improve their capacity for action through changing the way that they carry out their activities based on *knowledge drawn from other civil society organisations*.

A number of important lessons and considerations are emerging that will can help raise the capacity of ARnet to deliver concrete benefits. It is important however, to translate these lessons into operational and programmatic guidelines (and ultimately, into action). Indeed, this type of learning process is central to the innovative nature of the ARnet: the programme itself is a vehicle for generating knowledge on both this kind of network approach and on the range of knowledge that CSOs of this type can contribute to understanding the practical ways in which CSOs can help increase the rural poor's secure access to land and other productive resources.

### 1.2. Heightened Programmatic Focus

A wide number of possible future programme areas and issues were identified at the meeting. This exercise is part of an ongoing process to identify a number of specific themes and issues around which future ARnet activities can be organised. Greater focus will increase the depth and overall utility of programme outputs and will make ARnet a more valuable resource for CSOs around the world.

### 1.3. Evolving Operational Processes

The evaluation exercise led to the identification of a wide-range of operational issues during the meeting. The innovative nature of ARnet necessitates a continuous process of stock taking and reflection in order to build on successes and learn from weaknesses. Many of the most important lessons focus on operational issues. There was broad based agreement that heightened communication and strengthened linkages between regional nodes, national nodes and the Secretariat are the most important operational issues at present.

### 1.4. Expansion

Participants agreed to postpone discussions on the question of network expansion. This was because of the greater perceived importance of the other issues at this time and similarly, a recognition that expansion should not take place before any new and necessary programmatic and operational frameworks have been established. The ARnet programme is in a key transitional phase whereby it is no longer *just* a grant-driven programme but instead, is becoming an established consolidated knowledge network of partners. The view was also expressed at the meeting that it was perhaps premature to discuss expansion prior to clarification of future resource availability.

Notwithstanding these limitations, participants endorsed the conclusions of the last ARnet Programme Review presented to the 2000 Meeting of the Interim Steering Committee of the Popular Coalition that the programme should look to expand in three directions: 1) new regions 2) new countries in existing regions and 3) new partners in existing countries.

## 1. OVERVIEW

The Agrarian Reform Network – ARnet – is one of the core programmes of the Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty. It is at an exciting stage in its development. National and regional nodes are coming towards the end of their first ARnet activities. The potential value of the ARnet programme has already been demonstrated. Knowledge and information on practical ways in which civil society organisations can help increase the rural poor's access to land and other productive resources is being generated. The challenge facing all the partners involved in the ARnet programme in coming years is to increase the quality and quantity of knowledge production in order to maximise benefits to civil society organisations and other development practitioners worldwide, and in the final instance, to help empower the rural poor through increasing their access to land and other productive resources.

The ARnet programme is also an important learning process in itself. There is a need to draw on the lessons and experiences of previous ARnet-supported activities in order to build a strong and effective *knowledge network* that is able to provide wide ranging outputs that are of direct value to civil society organisations in their work to empower the rural poor through increasing their access to land and other productive resources. Above all, the challenge is to harness the immense experience and knowledge of the civil society organisations that make up the ARnet programme, in a way that can be readily shared and absorbed by other similar organisations.

This report assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the existing ARnet programme in order to build a stronger and more effective knowledge network in the future. The lessons drawn and the recommendations for future action focus on both programmatic and operational issues.

This report is only one contribution to an important ongoing process of continuous evaluation, learning and action.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

This report is based on a one-day meeting of the ARnet Regional Nodes from South America, Central America, Caribbean, North Africa and the Near East, Southern Africa and South East Asia that was held in Nairobi on 1 February 2001. The Regional Nodes from South Asia and West Africa were unable to attend owing to travel difficulties. The National Node from Cameroon attended on behalf of the West African Regional Node and the National Nodes from South Africa and Ghana were also invited to participate. Representatives of the World Bank and the Secretariat of the Popular Coalition also attended the session. A full list of participants is provided in Annex 1.

The meeting followed a 3 day meeting of the African ARnet programme, entitled *Overcoming Rural Poverty and Food Insecurity: moving from information to knowledge to action*.

The goals of the ARnet Regional Meeting were to examine the findings of the main meeting and to take stock of the current and future condition of the ARnet programme in the various regions.

This report builds on the discussions that took place in Nairobi. It does not provide a precise record of the proceedings. Instead, it distils the main findings into a series of key lessons and recommendations for action in support of future programme development.

## 3. PROGRAMME EVALUATION

### 3.1. General

ARnet has led to distinct benefits to both CSOs and to poor rural communities. This has demonstrated the value of building a network based on sharing knowledge amongst civil society organisations engaged in wide-ranging activities directed at the overall goal of increasing the rural poor's access to land and other productive resources. ARnet has also involved a rich learning process. The approach was innovative and therefore untested and unproven. The first range of country and region-based activities has provided valuable lessons and clear indications of how the network approach can be used to deliver greater products and benefits in the future.

ARnet's value is based on the extent to which it is able to deliver concrete benefits to the rural poor in general and programme participants in particular. ARnet's objectives focus on three broad objectives:

1. building and strengthening CSO networks
2. harvesting and sharing knowledge on successful instances in which CSOs have contributed to increasing the rural poor's access to land and other productive resources
3. delivering concrete positive impacts at the local level in terms of resource access

ARnet has delivered positive impacts in all of these areas. Throughout Latin America for example, the ARnet programme had encouraged members of associated networks to focus more directly on the land issue in their activities. Similarly, it had facilitated the sharing of valuable knowledge through its support to website development on, *inter alia*, the legal dimension of the resource access question. Similarly, it was recognised that ARnet has helped create a new space for discussion and awareness raising on issues relating to the rural poor's access to land and other productive resources.

ARnet has also led to concrete benefits at the community level. In South Asia for example, it has supported a number of community-based programmes that have led to substantive changes in the rural poor's capacity to access scarce natural resources. Likewise, in Southeast Asia, ARnet has supported initiatives that have led to the revival of land access issues in national policy debates.

The ARnet programme is a learning process. It is an innovative mechanism for sharing knowledge. Evaluation must therefore focus on drawing out lessons from past and ongoing programme experiences in order to build a more powerful and valuable knowledge network in the future that can lead to the direct empowerment of poor rural communities. In this context, it is possible to identify a number of factors that have affected the development of the ARnet programme at the national and regional levels. These are described below.

### 3.2 The Nature of ARnet

ARnet is one of the core programmes of the Popular Coalition. In many cases, it is the primary point of contact between the Popular Coalition and national CSOs. Often, it was the *only* point of interaction. This was also the case for many of the regional ARnet nodes. This situation led to a number of related consequences:

1. the distinct and specific programme nature of ARnet was not always clearly understood
2. at times, ARnet supported activities were more closely related to the broader goals of Popular Coalition rather than to the specific goals of the ARnet programme
3. ARnet reports have often focused on supporting the ongoing activities of participating CSOs rather than on the production and sharing of knowledge and information *based on and drawn from* organisation activities

In addition, it was clear that many of the comments and issues raised during the ARnet Regional Meeting were as pertinent, and in some cases, *more* pertinent, to a discussion of the Popular Coalition, rather than just the ARnet programme.

*Lesson 1 : ARnet must develop a distinct programme identity*

*Lesson 2: ARnet activities should lead to concrete knowledge outputs that can be readily shared with other participants*

*Lesson 3: A focus on knowledge "themes" and knowledge "issues" would increase the value of overall knowledge outputs*

*Lesson 4: A greater number of thematic similarities between different ARnet activities leads to more valuable overall outputs and can help cement programme identity*

*Lesson 5: Regular communication is a basic foundation for building a sense of programme identity*

**Action 1:** *Identify in partnership with ARnet participants a series of knowledge "themes" and "issues" around which to base programme development in 2001 and 2002.*

**Action 2:** *Develop clear guidelines on what constitute ARnet activities and membership as compared to other Popular Coalition activities*

### 3.3 Recognition and Visibility

The ARnet programme does not always enjoy appropriate (or sufficient) visibility at the regional and national levels. This is the result of a number of factors. In the first instance, ARnet-related activities are often very small in scale. This may mean that some ARnet participants may not perceive their level of involvement in ARnet as sufficient to justify the resources required to actively raise the visibility of ARnet in their local context.

At other times, the relatively low level of communication flows (see below) between the Secretariat and the nodes has meant that there has been little opportunity to develop awareness of the precise needs for and benefits of, raising local and regional awareness of the ARnet programme in particular, and the Popular Coalition in general.

In other cases however, ARnet partners have been weak in their attempts to ensure appropriate recognition and visibility. At times, for example, credit has been improperly assigned (i.e. to "IFAD" rather than the "Popular Coalition") and elsewhere, no recognition at all has been given for activities that have been supported directly by the Popular Coalition through the ARnet programme.

*Lesson 1: Recognition and visibility are not automatic consequences of activity development; they must be nurtured and supported*

*Lesson 2: Greater communication between programme partners helps nourish awareness of the need for increasing programme visibility and of the benefits that can result*

*Lesson 3: Regular communication between all levels of ARnet is a basic foundation for building a sense of programme identity*

**Action 1:** *Develop a more focused, internally coherent set of ARnet activities*

**Action 2:** *Establish clear guidelines for the type, level and nature of recognition that should be associated with both the Popular Coalition and its ARnet-related activities*

**Action 3:** *Ensure regular communication between all levels of the ARnet programme*

### 3.4 Communication & Linkage

It was widely recognised that the levels of communication and general linkage between regional nodes, national nodes and the Secretariat have been insufficient. Communication has too often been infrequent and has often been administrative in focus with little emphasis on network development, its goals, its achievements, its activities and successes. Likewise, there has been limited technical feedback between the nodes and the Secretariat. Improved information flow can contribute significantly to creating a sense of membership, value and commitment. It helps participants understand that they are part of something global, a network that brings together diverse groups from around the world.

It is perhaps important to stress that there is space for all partners of the ARnet programme (national nodes, regional nodes, Secretariat) to improve information flows. All partners have, at times, been slow to communicate new information and have been slow and/or failed to respond to requests and enquiries. Likewise, some nodes have tended to communicate with the Secretariat as if ARnet were just a conventional grant programme, rather than a *knowledge network* built on common interest, shared goals and collective responsibilities.

*Lesson 1: Communication must be regular and informative*

*Lesson 2: Communication is the responsibility of all ARnet partners*

*Lesson 3: Communication requires regular contact and regular reply*

*Lesson 4: Insufficient communication can lead to a range of additional problems*

**Action 1:** *Establish clear communication guidelines*

**Action 2:** *Establish common commitment to revised principles of communication*

**Action 3:** *Organise a regular newsletter for sharing ARnet information amongst programme partners*

**Action 4:** *Ensure that communication is improved between the Secretariat and the regional and national nodes but also, between the regional nodes and between the regional nodes and national nodes*

**Action 5:** *Greater use of web resources, in particular, the Popular Coalition website, to share knowledge and information*

### 3.5 Future Resources and Activities

There was wide consensus that insufficient financial resources have inhibited the capacity of the ARnet programme to deliver wide-ranging benefits and more concrete outputs. Likewise, it has, in some cases, reduced the relative importance of ARnet-related activities for participating partners. It was also recognised that in some cases expectations were created at the onset of the programme that were unrealistic and beyond the scope, capacity and resources of ARnet at that time.

Some partners recognised that limited resources meant that it was often difficult to assign adequate staff / human resources to ARnet activities. This contributed significantly to the reduced importance and visibility associated with ARnet activities within the participating partners and lessened the extent to which partners were able to ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach towards the fulfilment of their ARnet commitments.

Likewise, until now the ARnet programme has involved a wide range of activities. These have included, *inter alia*, supporting the development of national CSOs networks, assisting lobbying and advocacy work of NGOs in order to heighten political attention on agrarian reform issues, financing the development of websites to facilitate information exchange on a regional level, covering the costs of multi-stakeholder workshops and helping training programmes in marginalised communities. In other instances, ARnet activities have been closely tied to larger donor projects or have been used to undertake detailed research at the community level in order to foster greater understanding of the processes and factors that shape the rural poor's access and use of land and other productive resources.

The breadth of these activities reflects both the multi-dimensional nature of the resource access issue and the rich diversity of the ways in which CSOs can help increase the rural poor's access to land and other productive resources. In many cases however, this richness of experience and the valuable reserve of knowledge on the practical ways in which civil society can contribute to resource access issues, has not been captured to the fullest degree in all ARnet-related outputs .

In future, ARnet activities will be directly tied to the specific task of the production of knowledge outputs illustrating practical ways in which civil society organisations can help increase the rural poor's access to land and other productive resources. In the past, ARnet resources were often used to support in full, or in part, activities linked to other ongoing programmes and activities of the recipient organisation. This led to the production of outputs that were often more diverse in nature and that only at times focussed specifically on the production of knowledge outputs that could be easily and readily shared with other programme partners. This tendency has been reflected for example, in reports being submitted for ARnet that tend to cover larger programmes. In future, it is important that resources are tied to precise ARnet-specific outputs. *And in all cases, ARnet activities should be directed at the production of concrete knowledge outputs that can be readily and usefully shared with ARnet participants and other civil society organisations.*

In terms of future resource availability, the same level of finance is currently available as was used to fund the current group of activities. This raises several important questions, that must be answered in the near future:

- what are the resource implications for a future ARnet programme focused specifically at the generation of concrete knowledge outputs?
- what are implications for average grant amounts made to national and regional nodes for a more explicit focus on the generation of concrete knowledge outputs?
- what factors and criteria will determine the future participation of existing ARnet national and regional nodes?

What is certain is that future ARnet programmes will focus far more directly on the generation and reporting of knowledge on successful examples and lessons relating to increasing the rural poor's access to land and other productive resources. This conclusion reflects the findings at a series of ARnet-related meetings that took place in 2000 and 2001 regarding understanding of the precise

ways in which ARnet can make a positive contribution to participating organisations and can lead to concrete changes in the lives of the rural poor. At these meetings that took place in Tagatay in the Philippines and Nairobi in Kenya, ARnet partners recognised the importance of focusing more directly on knowledge generation. In this respect, they identified the need to adopt an approach to programme design based on knowledge “themes” and knowledge “issues”. These themes would constitute the broad knowledge areas around which individual node activities would be organised and around which final outputs would deepen knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, and as noted above, greater thematic consistency and linkage between ARnet-supported activities would:

- nourish a stronger sense of network membership;
- contribute to building a critical mass of new knowledge around certain themes;
- provide a more concrete basis for future programme development; and would:
- ensure a greater consistency and coherency of outputs.

In future, ARnet activities will therefore focus on two specific types of activities:

1. supporting network development
2. generating knowledge that can be usefully and readily shared amongst network partners

First and foremost however, ARnet is a knowledge network. It aims to:

1. to generate knowledge of a sufficient quality, quantity and value to make a difference in the way that a large number of CSOs undertake their activities in support of the rural poor; and
2. to demonstrate to government and international organisations the very real contribution that CSOs can make to increasing the rural poor's sustainable access and use of land and other productive resources.

It is clear that there have been considerable advances, based on the assessment of past experiences, regarding the regarding both the future use of ARnet resources and the type of activities that ARnet funds will be used to support at the national and regional levels.

*Lesson 1: Activity design must be closely tied to resource availability*

*Lesson 2: ARnet activities must be tied to concrete ARnet-specific outputs*

*Lesson 3: A more focussed range of activity types makes it easier to develop coherent, consistence and valuable knowledge outputs*

*Lesson 4: All ARnet activities must be directed at the production of concrete knowledge outputs*

*Lesson 5: Knowledge outputs must be clearly specified in individual node proposals*

**Action 1:** *Final resource information will be shared prior to the formulation of new programmes*

**Action 2:** *Clear guidelines, based on a revised strategic vision, must be provided regarding patterns and levels of future resource provision to existing nodes and possible new partners*

**Action 3:** *The Secretariat, in conjunction with all ARnet partners to identify the type and range of future ARnet knowledge themes around which activities will be clustered*

**Action 4:** *The Secretariat, in conjunction with all ARnet partners to identify knowledge areas and themes around which future ARnet activities will be organised.*

**Action 5:** *Ensure that every ARnet activity results in a concrete knowledge output that can be shared with other CSOs and other Popular Coalition partners*

**Action 6:** *Clarify the programmatic relationship between network building and the generation of knowledge outputs*

### 3.6 Reporting

The ARnet programme is directed at the production of knowledge. Final outputs must therefore contain knowledge that is both relevant to, and usable by, other civil society organisations around the

world. The balance between data, information and knowledge must reflect these goals. This type of knowledge output requires a certain level of descriptive content related to the specific cases that are being described. Context-specific detail should not however dominate as this can often reduce the extent to which the knowledge can be “shared” and used effectively by other civil society organisations. It is difficult to define precise rules and protocols regarding the balance between place-specific and general information and knowledge contained in a final knowledge output. The goals of the ARnet programme however, must lead the design of these outputs: the production of knowledge that can be of assistance to civil society organisations elsewhere.

In addition, it is likewise clear that in all instances, node activities are only completed when the final knowledge outputs have been completed and their value has been demonstrated.

ARnet programme activities also require another type of reporting in addition to the production of knowledge outputs.. ARnet activities are funded by direct grants from the Popular Coalition. The Popular Coalition owes fiduciary responsibility to its membership, its financial supporters and IFAD, its host organisation. For this reason, all ARnet activities must be subjected to standard reporting obligations, including proof that supported activities have taken place and audited accounts as necessary.

These two broad reporting requirements - knowledge outputs and fiduciary obligations - should not be confused. They are distinct and highly different in form and content. The knowledge output is invariably analytical and should describe practical ways in which civil society organisations can influence (or, *have influenced*) the resource access opportunities of the rural poor, in a way that is readily usable by other organisations. Reporting for fiduciary obligations must demonstrate that the conditions and obligations established in the Letter of Agreement have been fulfilled and that further payments are due. This type of report should therefore be rich in descriptive and financial content.

*Lesson 1: Different types of reporting requirement demand different types of reports*

**Action 1:** *Prepare standard formats and protocols for the different types of reports*

**Action 2:** *Ensure more timely and detailed reporting*

**Action 3:** *Develop clear guidelines and formats for knowledge reporting*

**Action 4:** *Secretariat and regional nodes undertake more rigorous technical review of reports submitted*

### 3.7 Quality control and evaluation

ARnet is a new and innovative programme. It is an attempt on a global scale to systematically support the gathering and sharing of knowledge on the practical ways in which civil society can contribute to increasing the rural poor's secure access to land and other productive resources. It has been demand-driven, focusing on the needs and capacities of partner organisations. It substitutes a traditional donor/beneficiary grant mechanism for an innovative network linking partners on an equal basis and driven by the combined force of common interest, shared responsibility and mutually beneficial synergistic exchange. In simple terms then, it is a "community of interest" directed at the dissemination of knowledge.

ARnet is an evolving programme grounded on a principle of learning. This demands continuous assessment, evaluation and reflection. Until now, the evolving nature of the programme has limited the extent to which it has been either feasible or worthwhile to undertake formal evaluation. Future programme development however, demands the identification of appropriate indicators and the establishment of clear criteria for the more systematic assessment of the performance of individual nodes, the evaluation of knowledge outputs and overall programme development.

*Lesson 1: Innovative programmes demand flexible approaches to evaluation*

**Action 1:** *Develop an appropriate evaluation strategy, drawing on the expertise of evaluation experts at IFAD and in other member and partner organisations of the Popular Coalition*

**Action 2:** *Identify a range of indicators to assist in the evaluation of a) the quality and value of individual knowledge outputs b) the performance of individual nodes, and c) overall programme development*

## 4. IDENTIFICATION OF KEY PROGRAMME ISSUES

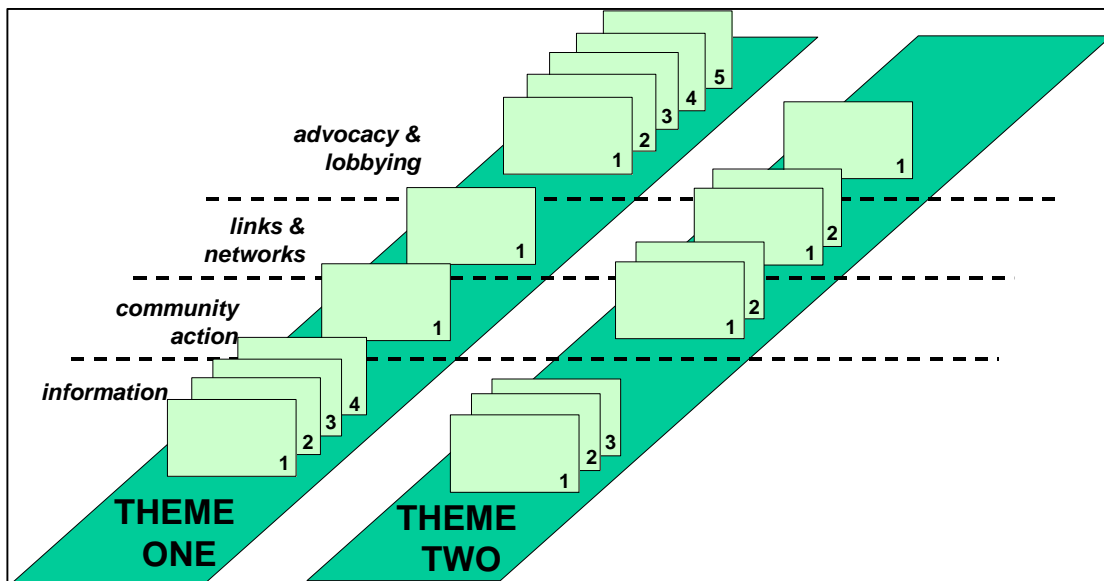
### 4.1 General

ARnet is a knowledge network. Its main aim is to support the production and sharing of knowledge drawn from examples illustrating the ways in which CSOs can therefore help increase the rural poor's access to land and other productive resources. These contributions may be diverse in nature, ranging from direct community action to raising popular awareness of resource questions and putting these issues onto the national policy agenda. Similarly, benefits may result from helping to organise CSOs and form networks linking like-minded organisations for action at national or local levels. The key point is that ARnet is directed at harvesting this knowledge and making it available to others.

Knowledge is distinct from information. It is likewise distinct from data. Knowledge expresses the *know-how*, the *know-who*, the *know-what* and the *know-when* that contribute to understanding events and processes. It represents then, the assemblage of information and data that enables people in other places to benefit directly from the experience of others in such a way that they are able to do their activities differently and more effectively.

ARnet is a vehicle for harvesting this knowledge from some of the key actors in the development process, but simultaneously, a group whose voice is often under-represented. These are the smaller CSOs working in a limited number of communities, the lobbyists and activists dedicated to changing national policies and programmes and the movements and organisations that help shape international dialogue. These are the typical partners of the ARnet programme. Invariably, their knowledge is the product of long-periods of activism and work in communities. And in many cases, it is knowledge that they have rarely been asked to record and report previously.

A growing volume of interim reports from ARnet partners coupled with Secretariat Missions to more than 20 ARnet nodes has provided the opportunity in recent months to re-visit the question of ARnet knowledge outputs. An important meeting of the ARnet nodes in Asia in December 2000 provided further impetus to this process. Likewise, the meeting of the ARnet nodes in Africa in January 2000 moved this process further forward. The emerging conclusion is that the ARnet programme should focus on knowledge themes and issues. This would form clusters around which different types and examples of knowledge could be assembled. Rather than producing for example, knowledge on 30 different subjects, the programme should aim to produce several items of knowledge on a more limited range of topics. These clusters would be based on the areas of action and reporting capacities of individual partners. In many cases, ARnet partners could produce several discrete knowledge items, reflecting lessons and knowledge from different areas of activity. This approach is shown graphically in Figure 1.



Knowledge Output Matrix - Approach One

**note:** suggested knowledge areas are only illustrative

The December meeting of the ARnet nodes in Asia produced a provisional list of knowledge areas. Participants at the two Nairobi meetings built on this list, incorporating examples from their own national and regional contexts. Participants identified a long list of possible themes. ARnet partners, in conjunction with the Secretariat, will be required to narrow this list down to approximately 10 broad knowledge themes and clusters. The potential areas identified at Nairobi included:

#### 4.2 Possible Thematic Areas

- Security  
*Meaning and significance of tenure "security" in both theory and at the household level*
- Water  
*Access to water and water management / water markets etc.*
- Communal Lands  
*Communal lands - positive experiences and examples demonstrating the continuing importance of communal lands in given contexts and / or cases in which they have been privatised or individualised to the benefit of the rural poor*
- Privatisation  
*Privatisation -examining the impact of privatisation and individualisation on customary tenure regimes and communal lands*
- Market Development  
*Report on cases in which poor rural communities are able to benefit from the develop of resource and other factor markets (i.e. land markets, credit, commodity markets etc.)*
- Broader Linkages  
*Linking land issues and agrarian reform to broader social and economic development –*
- Food and Nutritional Security  
*Demonstrating the links between agrarian reform and household food and nutritional security*
- Influencing the Political Environment  
*Learning from cases in which CSOs have been able to influence the political environment in favour of the resource rights of poor rural communities*
- Creating Space and Opportunity for Multi-stakeholder Dialogue  
*Examining successful examples in which spaces for effective multi-stakeholder dialogue have been created*
- Legal Issues  
*Examples in which laws have been used to defend community rights at the local level or mechanisms for providing legal support directly to communities and vulnerable groups*
- Competition for agricultural land  
*Details of how poor rural communities have been able to preserve land holdings in contexts of increasing competition for agricultural land*
- Land management  
*Examining successful examples of innovative community-based approaches to land management*
- Resettlement  
*Providing information on resettlement, and in particular, on community-based approaches that benefited the rural poor*
- Land markets  
*Providing further community-centred insight into the meaning and impact of land markets on poor rural households in order to learn how these groups interact with emerging land markets*
- Breeding  
*Exploring the links between improved breeding techniques, increased production and heightened market access*
- Sustainable Natural Resource Management  
*Providing information on ways in which CSOs have helped communities improve their natural resource management*

- Economics of agrarian reform  
*Provide further insight, centred on the voice and experiences of poor rural households, of the economic implications of agrarian reform in order to help policy makers and CSOs alike "measure" the true cost of agrarian reform*
- Mapping donor policies  
*Developing detailed knowledge of the approaches of different donors at the international and national level to a range of agrarian reform issues, for use by CSOs and communities alike*
- Institutional reform  
*Exploring the impact of institutional reform, and in particular, the decentralisation of public services, on poor rural households and their access to land and other productive resources*
- Conflict  
*Generating knowledge on the nature of conflicts between different user groups in the context of land reform and ways in which CSOs have been able to help resolve these conflicts*
- Small Island States  
*Deepening knowledge on the specific problems and challenges faced by the rural poor in increasing their access to land and other productive resources on small island states.*
- Globalisation  
*The impact of globalisation on the resource access of the rural poor*

## 5 IDENTIFICATION OF KEY OPERATIONAL ISSUES

### 5.1 General

### 5.2 Communication

Improved and revised approaches to communication between ARnet partners emerged as the most important operational imperative. It was widely recognised that communication flows between partners had been insufficient. All partners should therefore commit themselves to improving the frequency, content and type of communication with other network partners.

**Action 1:** *The Secretariat should, in consultation with all ARnet partners, develop an appropriate communication strategy to ensure efficient and effective reporting in the future and to identify reporting responsibilities and obligations of the Secretariat, regional nodes and national nodes*

**Action 2:** *Secretariat should coordinate the production of periodic ARnet news updates on activities and progress*

**Action 3:** *Secretariat to encourage more systematic approaches to technical feedback and review of ARnet reports and knowledge outputs and identify appropriate mechanisms for peer review*

**Action 4:** *Regional nodes to ensure higher levels of communication with Secretariat, national nodes in their region and other regional nodes*

**Action 5:** *National nodes should ensure that all ARnet-related information is conveyed to the appropriate regional node and the Secretariat in a timely manner and that requests are responded to in a timely manner*

**Action 6:** *Organise a regular newsletter for sharing ARnet information amongst programme partners*

### 5.3 Financial resources

Perceived resource limitations have affected the capacity of national and regional nodes to undertake their ARnet-related activities. Nonetheless, final agreements were made with full knowledge of available resources. In future, ARnet-supported activities must be directed *first and foremost* at the production of knowledge output and that proposed outputs are fully feasible bearing in mind the level of resources that will be committed by both the Popular Coalition and the beneficiary organisation to the activity.

- Action 1:** *A clear indication of resources available for new ARnet activities should be circulated to existing ARnet partners*
- Action 2:** *Overall policy decisions regarding the use of future resources should be made by the Secretariat in consultation with appropriate partners, regarding the level, geographical scope and focus of future grants*
- Action 3:** *Secretariat should approach other potential donors in order to mobilise additional financial resources for future ARnet programmes*

#### 5.4 Workplan and strategy

ARnet is an innovative programme. It is also an evolving programme. Considerable lessons have been learnt from the current phase of activities and significant adjustments have been made in terms of proposed future programme goals and activities. It is important to consolidate these advances in a revised strategy document and a new indicative workplan.

- Action 1:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, to formulate a revised ARnet strategy document and indicative workplan for consideration and endorsement by the Popular Coalition Executive Council in 2001*

#### 5.5 Indicators and Evaluation

The growing consolidation of the ARnet coupled with the increasing clarity regarding the precise ways in which it can maximise returns for partner organisations and CSOs in general augments the need to develop a more systematic approach to evaluation and the development of standardised, comprehensive and measurable indicators for the assessment of overall programme development, the quality of specific knowledge outputs and the performance of individual participating organisations.

- Action 1:** *In consultation with appropriate partners, the Secretariat should develop a strategic framework for evaluation and identify appropriate indicators for the assessment of*  
*1) overall programme development 2) the quality and value of knowledge outputs and c) the performance of individual ARnet partners*

#### 5.6 Reporting Guidelines

ARnet generates a range of reports and documents that reflect both the search for knowledge and the fulfilment of fiduciary responsibilities. Experience has demonstrated that that different reporting requirements are best satisfied in distinct and separate outputs.

- Action 1:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, to provide clear reporting guidelines, including suggested formats and indications of content and coverage for all types of reports*
- Action 2:** *Secretariat to distribute examples of final ARnet Knowledge Outputs produced in collaboration with selected ARnet nodes*

#### 5.7 Increased Inter-regional coordination

The regional nodes recognised that there was considerable space for improving the level of communication between each other. Increased information flows between regional nodes would strengthen the overall network. At present, most information flows are channelled through the Secretariat. In future, reports, outputs, updates and news should also be distributed to all partners of the ARnet network when appropriate and when feasible.

- Action 1:** *With the support of the Secretariat as appropriate, the Regional Nodes will increase information flows between themselves (and the Secretariat)*

#### 5.8 Relationships with other national, regional and global networks

Whilst recognising that its structure and overall approach to knowledge sharing are unique, ARnet is not alone in terms of its core concerns and the principles it embodies. A wide and ever-increasing number of networks and organisations focus on issues relating to the rural poor's access to land and other natural resources. These networks vary in scale and scope. ARnet in particular, and the Popular Coalition in general, has to date, established formal relationships with only a very limited number of these networks and organisations.

**Action 1:** *The Secretariat, in direct consultation with ARnet and other partners, establish criteria for the establishment of formal relations with other networks and organisations that are not already part of the Popular Coalition*

**Action 2:** *Identify networks and organisations with whom ARnet could and should establish formal relations and linkages*

## 5.9 Translation and Abstracts

ARnet is a global programme. Its partners use and understand a wide number of languages, ranging from the most common to the dialects of small indigenous groups. The goal of harvesting and sharing knowledge on a global scale demands sensitivity to the language demands of ARnet partners and the continuous search for creative solutions. Nonetheless, the very high costs associated with translation and likewise, the costs of preparing summaries and abstracts presents significant obstacles at the Secretariat level and elsewhere. A comprehensive review of how ARnet, and the Popular Coalition in general, will respond to the language challenge must be undertaken in the near future. Decisions regarding the type of document that should be translated and the languages that should be considered as essential need to be made in the near future. Likewise, a careful review of translation in terms of maximising the benefits of the diverse membership of ARnet (i.e. who, how and when can translation be undertaken most efficiently, effectively and at the lowest overall cost).

**Action 1:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, identify criteria and standards for translation*

**Action 2:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, explore possibility of producing regular and standardised abstracts of selected ARnet material*

**Action 3:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, to review the best modalities for efficient and high quality translations in various languages, in a suitably timely manner and at the lowest cost*

**Action 4:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, to develop policy guidelines regarding support for translation of core documents into local / non-standard languages and dialects*

**Action 5:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, to examine minimum and maximum requirements for the translation of the website into main languages*

**Action 6:** *Secretariat and ARnet partners to pursue additional funds to cover translation costs*

## 5.10 Payments - timing and procedures

In terms of grants and payments, ARnet combines both innovative and conventional elements. The development of an innovative network-based approach does not preclude the need for robust, transparent and standardised procedures for payments. Despite several recent attempts to inform ARnet partners on standards rules and procedures, the process often remains problematic in terms of timing, the provision of necessary information and the transfer of moneys.

**Action 1:** *All ARnet nodes should follow the detailed guidelines on rules and procedures for ARnet-related payments that have been made available by the Secretariat*

**Action 2:** *ARnet nodes must assume leadership in assuming that all nodes comply by contractual agreements and abide by the guidelines and procedures outlined in the core programme documentation regarding payment requests*

## 5.11 Improving the work of regional nodes

The Regional Nodes are a crucial part of the ARnet programme. They oversee the work of national nodes and are fundamental to developing understanding of common interest and network membership. A broad range of roles and responsibilities were identified in the development phase of the ARnet programme and were consolidated in its core documentation (See Annex 3). It is important to revisit these roles and responsibilities, in light of subsequent experience, in order to ensure that the Regional Nodes are able to contribute to overall programme development in the most effective and efficient ways possible.

- Action 1:** *Secretariat, in consultation with Regional Nodes, to refine and update the roles and responsibilities of Regional Nodes, with particular emphasis on identifying non-administrative functions*

## 5.12 Creating incentives for national nodes to engage other national partners

ARnet is nodal in structure. Existing partners function as nodes. At the national level, it is intended that nodes will provide a hub for a range of ARnet-related activities undertaken by diverse CSOs leading to the increased production of knowledge and strengthened CSO capacities and networks. The nodal presence is designed to ensure a degree of thematic coherence and consistency at the national level and to ensure an identifiable focal point at the national level.

There have however, been only a limited number of cases in which national nodes have actively sought to involve other CSOs, and this has often reflected pre-existing alliances and relationships. Instead, a desire to reduce the risk of resource competition coupled perhaps, with an incomplete understanding of the nature of nodal approach has meant that there have been few incentives to involve new CSOs at the national level. The national structure of the ARnet programme and the potential contribution of Regional Nodes in fostering national expansion must therefore be revitalised.

- Action 1:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, in particular, the Regional Nodes, should undertake a systematic evaluation of the viability of the “nodal” approach to national programme development*
- Action 2:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, in particular, the Regional Nodes, should examine the nature and role of national nodes in terms of creating incentives and opportunities for the expansion of ARnet activities at the national level through encouraging the involvement of new CSOs*
- Action 3:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, in particular, the Regional Nodes, should evaluate the performance of existing national nodes*
- Action 4:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, in particular, the Regional Nodes, should identify ways of encouraging the involvement of new CSOs at the national level*
- Action 5:** *The Secretariat, in consultation with other ARnet partners, should identify the financial implications of increased numbers of CSO involvement in national programmes*

## 5.13 Institutionalising the ARnet Programme in Partner Organisations

Within the organisations that participate in the ARnet programme, involvement is often translated into highly personalised terms, meaning that *in practice* it is “people” rather than “organisations” that actually participate. ARnet however, is built on organisational membership. The programme seeks to build a network of civil society organisations linked by common interest and shared goals. It is about a network for sharing knowledge. It is about the creation of a “community of interest” bringing together CSOs around the challenge of increasing the rural poor’s access to land and other productive resources. ARnet was established to provide a service to CSOs. It is therefore important for the overall development of the ARnet programme that the idea of ARnet “membership and involvement” it becomes institutionalised at an overall organisational level

- Action 1:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, in particular, the Regional Nodes, should ensure that ARnet partners are fully apprised of the nature and goals of the ARnet programme*
- Action 2:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ARnet partners, in particular, the Regional Nodes, should seek to identify ways of ensuring that ARnet membership is perceived in “organisational” terms*

## 5.14 Raising visibility

In many instances, the overall visibility of the Popular Coalition and the ARnet programme in particular, remains low at the national and regional levels. This however, is a reflection of its resource base rather than its potential capacity to deliver common benefits to CSO partners and the rural poor. Furthermore, increased visibility will deliver direct benefits to partner CSOs as it will raise the capacity

of ARnet-related activities to influence the policy agenda and to act as a vehicle for increased dialogue with other key stakeholder groups.

**Action 1:** *Secretariat should develop a strategy, including clear guidelines for raising the visibility and overall awareness of the ARnet programme and the Popular Coalition at national and regional levels*

**Action 2:** *Secretariat to provide, in consultation with ARnet partners, in particular, the Regional Nodes, should undertake a systematic evaluation of the viability of the “nodal” approach to national programme development*

### 5.15 Technology audit for all partners

Effective communication and knowledge management strategies are necessarily sensitive to the Information Technology resources of partner CSOs, including both computer and internet-based systems of communication and more traditional forms of dissemination.

ANGOC has undertaken a Technology Audit of its member organisations. This enabled ANGOC to organise a far more effective communication strategy tailored to the specific IT resources of its members. The ARnet programme, and the Popular Coalition in general, aims to benefit from these positive experiences and undertake a similar audit of its members and partners. This will enable the identification of ARnet IT Standards and the design of a realistic communication strategy.

Another member, the NLC in South Africa, has organised similar “skills audits” of regional members. This exercise attempted to identify organisational strengths, weakness and opportunities in terms of core skills and capacities. This enabled the NLC to design a programme that reflected member capacities more accurately and also, allowed them to identify training and capacity building needs. The Secretariat, in consultation with all ARnet partners, will explore the need and possibility for a similar exercise for the ARnet network in the future.

**Action 1:** *Secretariat, in consultation with ANGOC and other interested partners, will organise and undertake a technology audit of all ARnet partners*

**Action 2:** *Based on the results of the technology audit, the Secretariat will, in consultation with selected partners, identify basic IT and related workstation standards for ARnet partners*

**Action 3:** *The Secretariat will seek to mobilise sufficient funds to ensure that all ARnet partners are equipped with IT resources of a minimum basic standard*

### 5.16 Maintaining the programme structure of the Popular Coalition.

The portfolio of Popular Coalition programmes and activities is undergoing significant expansion. This includes the full operationalisation of the Community Empowerment Facility (CEF) during early 2001. New programmes and activities are also being formulated, reflected growing interest from governmental and inter-governmental donors.

Until now however, the principle point of contact between national and regional CSOs and the Popular Coalition has been the ARnet programme. The expansion of new programmes will change this situation. It is important that necessary distinctions between different types of programme involvement are made and that the relationships between the different programmes of the Popular Coalition are clearly understood and maintained. This will ensure programme clarity and will increase the overall effectiveness of the Popular Coalition.

**Action 1:** *Secretariat should ensure that the distinct character and focus of Popular Coalition programmes is clear to all partners and participating organisations*

**Action 2:** *Secretariat should prepare clear guidelines to help participating organisations describe their involvement in the Popular Coalition’s programmes, including the provision of logos and any necessary accompanying text*

## **6. EXPANSION**

### **6.1 General**

Regional nodes underscored the need and value of geographical expansion. Nonetheless, participants at the meeting agreed to postpone further discussion until many of the operational and programmatic issues identified above have been examined in more detail and until a more comprehensive picture of future resource availability has been provided to programme partners.

Nonetheless, Regional Nodes recommended that at a general level, attention should be directed at the need for a) further expansion in Latin America b) the launching of national ARnet programmes throughout the Caribbean region and c) the involvement of additional countries in West Africa.

### **6.2 Possible Dimensions of Future Expansion**

The Regional Nodes endorsed the recommendations approved at the last meeting of the Popular Coalition's Interim Steering Committee in 2000, regarding the three main dimensions of future expansion : i) new regions ii) new countries in existing regions iii) new partners in existing countries.

- i. Preliminary discussions are underway in East Africa with a range of possible partners. Attention is focusing on Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda. The possibility of linking an East Africa regional programme with nodes from the Horn of Africa region is being examined. This could involve partners from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.
- ii. A number of new countries may join existing ARnet regional networks. These may include, *inter alia*, Brazil, Namibia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Niger, Syria, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.
- iii. The ARnet programme is built on the principles of networks and partnership and recognition of the benefits that stem from the involvement of multi-stakeholder alliances in forging change at both the community and policy levels. A vital element of national ARnet programmes involves the creation and strengthening of networks and alliances at the national level. Current national activities are largely focused on single national nodes. Future activities will include a focus on the building of robust and effective national ARnet networks involving a number of civil society organisations.

### **6.3 Financial Aspects of Programme Expansion**

It was recognised that future expansion would be dependent on the availability of additional resources.