FINAL Report on focus group research into perceptions of social capital at the 2008 Highway Africa conference

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# Executive summary of conclusions

This research project suggests that the majority of ‘ordinary’ delegates attending the Highway Africa conference are severely lacking in confidence and feel they have little to offer other delegates. This leads them to understand the value of the networks at Highway Africa in a very superficial way as simply providing contacts, skills and ideas. They appreciate these things enormously, but receive them in a very passive way, and there is little engagement with the possibility for being more active in the production or extraction of ‘value’ from the network beyond what is immediately available. However anecdotal experience during the research suggests that, given stimulus, space and encouragement, delegates would be extremely eager to be more active in networking and ‘value’ extraction or investment.

# Introduction

This research project, as it was originally conceptualised, aimed to “understand how Highway Africa delegates perceive the social capital available at the conference and how they perceive its potential value, with a view to proposing how the conference could further facilitate delegate’s investment in social capital accumulation.” (Research project proposal).

The research was undertaken under the assumption that social networking possibilities are an important ‘value’ of the Highway Africa conference, and that more needs to be known about the nature of this value and how and why it occurs in order to encourage it, thereby increasing the value of the conference. Berger writes that these benefits are an important part of the significance of the project, and need to be understood better (2008).

## Theoretical frameworks

 ‘Social capital’ is a concept used to describe the value of social networks, and provides a framework for understanding the value of the networks at the Highway Africa conference, particularly by seeing how they impact on social capital.

There are a number of distinct ways in which ‘social capital’ can be understood, all of which are useful to draw on. Broadly, they examine either individuals in a network, or the links between individuals, or the network as a whole.

Bourdeau describes social capital as similar to the amount of financial capital that a person could potentially extract from the people they know at any one time (2000). It is thus something which is vested in the individual – it is the value given to that individual by the people who know him/her, and the number of people who know him/her. If the conference can facilitate the growth of individual delegates’ social capital, this would clearly make it more valuable to each individual delegate. But beyond this, it might be assumed that enhancing the social capital of African journalists would enable them to act more effectively in the world – to be socially ‘empowered’, and hopefully to do their jobs better as a result. In other words, if social capital develops the individual, focusing on social capital could be an important way to develop Africa’s journalists.

For Coleman, social capital is present in the links of a network, and is constituted in the actual functioning and operation of the links. If the links between people (and institutions) are strong, they can ‘carry’ a lot more things, like information, capital, assistance in kind, etc. These things which are transmitted through links between people constitute social capital. Enhancing the functionality of the links between journalists would allow these links to be used to greater effect – enabling things like information and knowledge sharing and access and greater coherence of action. (Brown and Lauder, 2000 in Berger, 2008).This understanding of social capital allows for ‘diffusion analysis’ – looking at the way ideas, knowledge and understanding are carried and spread through a network, for example, from Highway Africa training workshops to isolated community radio newsrooms.

Looking at the broader network, Putnam describes social capital as something residing in the entire system or structure of a network or community. Social capital is understood to have an important role in the development of different kinds of societies and institutions. Putnam refers to the ‘social capital’ of a society as, “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1993: 1). Social capital enables people to work together more effectively, leading Putnam to argue that it “enhances the benefits of investment in physical and human capital,” and that “social capital is coming to be seen as a vital ingredient in economic development around the world.” (Putnam, 1993: 3). Thus, developing the social capital of the ‘African media landscape’ is understood to be an important part of developing the institutions that make up that larger institution, and helping them to function more effectively. For African journalists, this kind of social capital would enable things like collaborative projects and lobbying.

An integrated approach could easily be argued for, with the assumption that individuals with high ‘personal capital’ will encourage links that carry ‘social transmitted capital’, which will produce a larger network or community which is infused with ‘societal capital’.

In our questions as researchers we attempted to focus on issues around delegate’s individual social capital, in the sense that Bourdeau describes it. This was premised on a theoretical assumption that this kind of social capital underpinned other understandings of social capital, and a practical assumptions that delegates would find it easier to talk about themselves and their own individual ‘social projects’. We drew heavily on Berger’s arguments that social capital be understood in Marxist terms as something which is invested in, in order to acquire more in the classic system of capitalist accumulation.

A further important framework is the way social capital functions in relation to different existing network groupings. Social capital can be created by ‘bonding’, ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ social groups.

‘Bonding’ occurs within a small recognised group, where social capital is created by the strong internal links that promote reciprocity and solidarity (Putnam, 2000, in Berger, 2008). ‘Bridging’ occurs between different types of social groups, across different kinds of divides, and gives a network access to a diverse range of external assets. They also generate broader notions of identity, which are more ambitious and powerful. Field argues that “while bonding is good for getting by; bridging is good for getting ahead (2003, in Berger, 2008). ‘Linking’ is the capital gained from more expansive connections “entirely outside the bridged community” (Berger, 2008). This, like bridging, gives access to additional resources, and while it might be the most tenuous kind of link, “weak ties do not mean there is no social capital” (*Ibid.*).

# Data Collection

The project aimed to gauge individual delegates’ understandings of the social capital available at Highway Africa (both actually and potentially) using data collected from two focus group discussions with conference delegates. The first was to be a group of journalists involved in a training course organised by the conference, and the other a group of diverse stakeholders, including an academic, a funder, a Francophone delegate, a veteran delegate and a participant in the training course. We also planned to hold two pilots for each of the discussions along the same lines.

It was logistically difficult to coordinate our discussions with the shifting conference timetable and this forced us to make do with a less diverse second group and pilot than we had hoped for, and to have a slightly more diverse first group. There were also very few problems with the pilots relative to the formal discussions, and almost no differences between them, leading us to consider the data from the pilots as equally valuable for the purposes of our research.

The result was that research data could be used from all four group, the subjects of which could all be described as ‘ordinary delegates’ (none held particularly high authority) with only slightly varying diversity between the groups themselves. The value of this was that more conclusions could be drawn from across the groups, with sufficient deviation occurring within this type or level of delegate to compare responses in an illuminating way.

Facilitators aimed to get subjects to answer the following questions during the course of the discussions (often they were answered before being asked directly):

* What kind of value do you currently get from the opportunities that you have had to meet other journalists and delegates at this conference? Please give examples?

*i.e.: What kind of social capital do they perceive to be currently available to them at HA?*

* How beneficial are these opportunities? Do you share the benefits with anyone else (directly or indirectly)?

*i.e.: How valuable is this social capital? How widely is the social capital spread?]*

* Do you feel as though you have shared something useful or helped someone else at this conference (at the conference or between conferences) in a meaningful way? Please explain.

*i.e.: How have they invested in/contributed to social capital?*

* Do you think that you could have done more than what you did?

*i.e.: What potential investment in social capital is available?*

* What would you like to get out of the people you meet and the connections you make at Highway Africa?

*i.e.: what is the potential value of the social networks at Highway Africa to delegates?*

* Do you think that you could be getting more out of the people you meet here at the conference?

*i.e.: What is the difference between the potential and the available social capital?]*

* Do you think you could be doing more to take advantage of the opportunity you have to network with people at Highway Africa? If yes - what? If no - why?

*i.e: Is there a lack of extraction of social capital on the part of conference delegates?* *What are the perceived barriers?*

* What do you think the conference organizers could do to help you to network better?

The four discussions were all between 70 and 90 minutes long and when transcribed produced just under 32 000 words in total. These transcriptions were individually summarised to produce outlines of the discussions, which were then summarised again to arrive at what seemed to be the central issues, debates and observations for each of the groups. These could then be drawn together to arrive at the overarching themes which came up consistently in all the groups, as well as the consistent points at which subjects diverged.

# Description of findings

## General overview of themes

Although the constitution of the groups varied, the majority, and sometimes all, of the people in the groups maintained several consistent positions and preoccupations in their discussions (with some minor variations or elaborations on these themes). These were as follows:

1. The primary value of the conference and its networks was seen to be skills, ideas and an enhanced ‘perspective’. Where researchers explicitly made the link between the individual relationships with people and workplace value, subjects described the value of acquiring a wide range of journalistic sources. Networking was generally not seen as the primary value of conference and networking was understood by some to be synonymous with skills acquisition (through meeting people who dispensed skills).

Decidedly secondary attention was given to directly material benefits, such as collaborations, jobs, or opportunities to travel.

1. All the subjects described an awareness of the *potential* for more concrete value to be gained from networks, often with reference to personal experience.
2. With a couple of very clear exceptions, the subjects demonstrated and described a considerable lack of confidence in their own capacity to network strategically.
3. All the groups included lengthy discussion of numerous perceived barriers to networking.
4. Various different allusions were made to the importance of larger networks to which people already belong, usually organisation, nation or specialisation-based. Subjects may represent these networks (providing a link between the conference and the networks at home), or these networks may be reinforced by subject’s interactions at the conference. In many cases, where subjects aimed to ‘get something out’ of social networks, the intended beneficiary of this was their country or organisation, rather than themselves.
5. There was a general consensus that an online social networking forum might be useful, but that numerous ad hoc email lists were already serving a significant role in maintaining connections.

## Divergence

Two individuals in two separate groups (groups three and four) showed a marked difference to most of the other subjects – they were extremely confident in their capacity to network, had networked deliberately, extensively and productively. In both cases, they had been directly prompted to engage in networking like this by senior colleagues, and had been encouraged by their experiences to do more. They also both described an awareness of the larger social benefits that could be created by their networking; for example by linking people and organisations which they had no direct connection with together. That is to say they both described helping other people and organisations to network, and described a broader developmental imperative in their lives. They demonstrated this during the discussions, where they coached other subjects on what to do, and gave them direct information on who to contact in particular organisations.

In direct contrast to this, in all of the groups there were several people who demonstrated a formidable lack of confidence in their own value to other delegates, and who did not expect to engage with them much, or to be capable of ‘getting anything’ from them. In two cases, in two of the groups (groups one and two), this was demonstrated very powerfully:

1. At the end of the discussions in group one, the whole group, who had been increasing in confidence during the course of the discussion, launched an impassioned plea to the researcher, asking him to help secure funding to bring a trainer to their countries. They described this as the first time they had thought to voice these desires, because the research group was the first time anyone at the conference had shown such an interest in them and their wellbeing.
2. Towards the end of the discussions in group three, a journalist from a South African community radio station took the opportunity to request information on something she was very concerned about: whether or not the SABC would be interested in getting story tip-offs from her that she gathered during her work in Ulundi, the capital of KwaZulu Natal. An SABC journalist who happened to be listening said that not only would the SABC value this enormously, but that they would probably be willing to pay her to do freelance work for them. He was also able to help her and her friend with applying for jobs at the SABC. The two journalists who were being assisted demonstrated a lot of surprise at this, followed by an enthusiasm that had been notably lacking earlier in the discussion.

## Individual summaries of discussions

[Key attributes *italicised*. See Appendix I for detailed outlines of the discussions]

### Focus group 1: general remarks/highlights:

The subjects of the first focus group who were all participants in a training course associated with the conference, had a strong *group consensus* with little divergence in views.

They demonstrated a *preoccupation with skills* when discussing the ‘value’ of networks. This was reasserted even after they were steered away by the researcher, and the discussion was brought back to re-focus on skills again at the end. Although the subjects knew of people who had gotten employment out of Highway Africa networks, they did not, until deliberately prompted to, describe these as being an important part of the value of the network. There was also a strong awareness that they are part of a larger network of people at home, and that they are representatives of and for this network.

The subjects undertook *extensive discussion of barriers* to getting value from networks, including: delegates different levels of skills, lack of interest on the part of some delegates, difficulty in ‘spotting opportunities’, difficulty identifying the ‘right people’, language barriers, and bureaucratic ‘red tape’ and a lack of technical resources and in the institutions they worked for making it difficult to implement the lessons they had learnt. There was reoccurring agreement that *networking itself is an important part of their skills development* at the conference, and required experience and confidence. This development was described as a process, which several of them felt they were only just beginning, after having been to the conference once or twice before.

During the course of the discussion they become more and more willing to interrupt to add to what others are saying or to agree loudly. This culminated in the subjects approaching the researcher with a *request for funding* to bring their trainer from the conference to some of their home countries. This was the first time they had approached anyone about this, and it was, they said, because this was the first time anyone had shown an interest in what they had to say.

### Focus group 2: general remarks/highlights

The second group was also made up of trainees, with the addition of a Liberian journalist who was part of the Digital Citizen’s Indaba which happened alongside the Highway Africa conference.

The discussion focused on a sustained debate around *whether people from ‘big’ organisations are interested in people from ‘small’ organisations.* One participant, the editor of a human rights publication, argued very vocally that they aren’t, framing his argument by talking about power differentials, where small organisations having more to gain from big organisations. Two journalists working as researchers for SABC argued that, from their experience, big organisations rely on and need small organisations, and that the nature of the organisation doesn’t usually matter. This view was echoed by a Zimbabwean web administrator, who had had several positive experiences with ‘big people’.

Another consistent theme was the idea that networking is something certain, particular people pursue actively, while for everyone else, it is just *a bonus, or side-effect*. The consensus was that interactions have value in and of themselves for providing perspective and understanding, and that the most important value of the networks is to provide *sources* for stories. Face-to-face conference networking was identified as often being part of internet-based interactions before and after the conference. Lack of time was identified as the single biggest constraint on networking, although there was no call for more time.

### Focus group 3: general remarks/highlights

This group was smaller than the others, consisting of two radio journalists from Zambia and Nigeria, and two community radio journalists from South Africa. There was an initial focus on the value of skills and ideas gained from networking, but the domination of discussion by the *Nigerian, a ‘super-networker’*, led to a stronger focus on *collaborations* as an important value in the networks. The Nigerian journalist demonstrated incredible networking success, claiming to have engaged with almost every major figure present at the conference, setting up a range of collaborative projects, as well as putting different people in touch with each other. He described his recipe for success being enormous confidence, hard work and deliberate measures to overcome the perception that as a Nigerian, he was just after money.

The Nigerian’s concerns stimulated lengthy discussions about *the power of national/racial stereotypes* to undermine networking, and the idea of ‘contributing’ by acting as an ambassador for your country.

*The two South African journalists* were largely unresponsive at the beginning, making a few unconvincing claims about their networking, and then piggybacking on the arguments of the other two. But by the end of the discussion, they had retracted many of their earlier brash statements and engaged more directly, asking questions. Particularly, one asked whether the SABC would be interested in getting story tip-offs from her station in Ulundi. The other maintained that she would like to speak to Snuki Zikalala from the SABC, because he is the only person she knows at the organisation, but said she lacks the confidence to approach him.

### Focus group 4: general observations/highlights

This focus group included *7 different people*, some of whom left early while some arrived late. The participants were all low-level journalists, with the exception of a Namibian journalism lecturer and a Nigerian journalist who held a lecturing position.

There was an initial preoccupation with skills and ideas as being the value of networks, and the consensus seemed to be that the biggest value of networking was sources for stories. There was also description of meeting other people being something with an intangible value, just ‘getting a feeling for what is happening’. Most delegates acknowledged *not doing as much networking as they could* have. One described feeling ‘lost’, while others admitted to not trying hard enough.

These sentiments were stimulated by the testimony of one of the participants, a South African SABC journalist who described a very successful determination to network as much as he could. This was based on a discussion with a senior colleague at an event early in the conference, where *he was* *instructed to network* and given some pointers as to who was worth speaking to. He described building on this base extremely effectively, using existing connections to make more connections, putting people in touch with each other, forming collaborative arrangements and at the end of the day getting a number of valuable and strategic job offers.

While this delegate described his value as relating to the people he knew (he has some extremely high profile friends and family members) and his influence in the SABC, the rest of the subjects described their ‘*value’ to fellow conference delegates as simply resulting from living in their particular country*, which they could talk about or potentially facilitate access to. One delegate understood networking as something he does with ‘the conference’, personified in the organisers and the speakers (rather than other delegates). He said he did not get as much out of the opportunities available because of time constraints.

There was a strong consensus on the ease or helpfulness of *connecting with people who there is already a connection with* – existing networks, shared specialisations or even people from the same country. There was reserved approval of online social networking system, with more credence given to existing ad hoc mailing lists.

## Participant observation

During the course of the conference, researchers were required to observe participants behaviour with regards to how they interacted, and what they seemed to be discussing. This process confirmed many of the findings of the focus group discussions.

Delegates were most obviously ‘engaging’ during lunches, and during lectures. Lectures seemed to be understood as an opportunity for discussions with the lecturers, and for individuals to voice very individualised, specific queries which were probably better addressed directly to the lecturer in a ‘one-on-one’ discussion. There seemed to be great potential for the lecture times to be expanded to accommodate more questions, for delegates to debate issues, and for relationships to be built.

During lunches, delegates appeared to be engaged in the most in-depth discussions. This seemed to be motivated by the pressure of being forced to sit at a table with a group of people who they did not always know, and had to talk to if they were not to spend the meal in silence. Thus, the lunch times were important for the creation of ‘bridging’ links with people across nation, language, specialisation, power, or other divides. The tables also seemed to create a ‘safe space’ for delegates, and during the lengthy time they sat together there was the potential for a large range of issues to be discussed. However, where delegates were speaking to others for the first time, the most ‘in-depth’ discussions seemed to consist of talking about working and living conditions in delegates’ respective countries. The lectures themselves, or skills learnt, did not seem to feature much in conversation.

In the evening cocktail parties delegates stood, and moved around a lot more, and thus they were not forced to engage with strangers for long periods of time. There were a lot of delegates milling around on their own, or standing awkwardly, appearing too shy to initiate conversation. Where conversations took place with new people, they were very cursory and ‘surface-level’. However the more hostile environment also meant that delegates were more likely to stick with people they already had some link with. This usually meant re-affirming ‘bonding’ links with people they already had something in common with or had met before.

In the ‘spaces in between’, such as waiting in queues, resting outside, waiting for a lecture to start, or moving from one place to another, links were also made, and these spaces seemed to be particularly important for exchanging business cards after very cursory interactions.

# Analysis of findings

## Introduction: Limited range of perceived value

An important part of the research aimed to discover *what* delegates perceived the value of networks to be – what they perceived to be the kind and the type of social capital available to them at present, and in potential. Subjects all saw the primary value of the networks available at Highway Africa to be skills, ideas and an enhanced ‘perspective’. Subjects also described the value of acquiring a wide range of journalistic sources, something which is of very particular value in the type of work they are engaged in. Significant, but much less attention was given to directly material benefits, such as collaborations, jobs, or opportunities to travel.

However all of these constitute only some of the potential types of ‘value’ to be gained from a network. According to Lin (2001, cited in Berger, 2008), these can include “the influence potential of those in network with power, increases in social credentials, and reinforcing identity.” Further types of value include “lower transaction costs, lower turnover rates, greater coherence of action...collective intelligence...access to power and to other networks.” (Berger, 2008). While these may be important factors in the networks available at Highway Africa, subjects made no reference to such understanding, with only one subject referring to the value of gaining emotional support from the network in a situation where she felt isolated by her knowledge, because it made her a ‘Western girl’. It is clear that, on the whole, delegates perceived the value of the Highway Africa network in a very specific and limited way.

## Nothing to invest

As mentioned in the Introduction, the research questions focused on social capital in the way Bourdeau conceptualised it – as something vested in the individual, and which individuals attempt to capitalise on. However it was clear that most subjects understood social capital in the way Coleman conceptualises it, as value delivered by links between people. Most subjects focus was almost entirely on basic outputs created wherever delegates met each other – the person’s contact details, and some information about where the other delegate came from. In the case of ‘super delegates’ who gave talks or conducted seminars, ‘meeting’ them also provided skills and inspiration or ideas. Where subjects felt there was a shortfall between what they *could* be getting out of networks and what they *were* getting out of networks, the focus was invariably on difficulties with making links with people, not on what the subjects themselves had to offer. Where personal input was discussed, it was in very nebulous terms regarding the need to keep in contact – the drive was simply to maintain the link.

Thus, it appeared that most subjects’ approach to networks was the result of not having much ‘personal social capital’ to trade in the networking market place. Within Bourdeau’s framework of social capital being vested in the individual, most subjects clearly considered themselves extremely poor. It was very clear that they did not feel like they had much to offer, usually referring to their own value as consisting simply in their ability to talk about their home-country, or they said they could help logistically if people at the conference decided they wanted to do research or provide training in their country. This was all potential ‘value’ which would only be given if solicited, which was not offered or presented.

This can be compared to the two delegates who were clearly extremely capable networkers, and who understood networking as something which required input in order to get something out. Both of them made extensive use of their existing contacts, capitalising on these relationships by putting other people in touch with each other. There focus was clearly on ‘putting in’ to relationships or investing their social capital, rather than getting something out, although it was clear that they frequently did get a lot of direct value out.

What this illustrates is that it might be possible to capitalise on even very little social capital. When pushed to compare themselves with the two very active networkers, the other subjects themselves admitted that they weren’t being very active in their networking. Or, to put it another way, they weren’t investing what little social capital they had. Rather, they focused on extracting what was freely available from the network at that moment in time: contacts for sources in stories, skills, and ideas.

This approach to networking fits in with how Coleman understands social capital as existing in the links between people. For many of the delegates, being at the conference was enough; the links were created by listening to people give talks and then getting their business card afterwards, and the value was in the information that they got from the people giving talks, or from the ideas they got hearing other people talk about what happened in their countries.

## Bigger networks

An alternative perspective on why very few of the subjects engaged with Bourdeau’s individual-centred approach to *investing* in social capital is that the subjects might be described as having a ‘community or institution-orientated’ approach to networking and social capital. A recurring impression was that many of the subjects considered themselves direct representatives of their newsrooms at home. They were not at the conference for their own benefit; they were there for their colleagues at home. Social capital (in the sense that Coleman uses it) was something which was acquired for the group.

[Where some delegates attempted to approach social capital in a more ‘Bourdeau-ian’ fashion, they still almost always described their social capital as being derived directly from the country or institution they came from, ie. It was understood to be vested in their institution. For example, one subject described people from ‘big’ institutions as having more social capital, and people from small institutions as having less social capital. Other delegates described working to enhance the profile of their country or organisation – in other words, investing in their country or organisation’s social capital.]

This lack of personal focus was extremely consistent, and while most of the subjects did not appear to be networking very actively, it is important to consider that they were also playing very important roles as ‘nodes’ linking the network of Highway Africa delegates to hundreds of other smaller networks across the continent. It gives the impression that there is great potential for the network created by Highway Africa to have a lot of social capital in the sense that Putnam describes it; as the extent to which a network facilitates communication and collaboration. Also in accordance with what Putnam argues, this kind of social capital “is motivated by civic-mindedness and social generosity” (Berger, 2008), things which were both extremely manifest in all of the groups. It also confirms Berger’s assertion that “social capital is inherently collective property” (2008).

## Bonding, Bridging and Linking

The limited active networking which many of the subjects described could also attributed to the Highway Africa networks’ failure to facilitate the production of ‘linking’ social capital, which is social capital that is created by “linkages up and down the social and economic scale” (Berger, 2008).

Berger writes that

..it would be valuable to assess to what extent...the HANA participants are “bonded”, and the wider conference attendees and parallel event participants (spanning fewer shared experiences, expertises, interests) are “bridged”. Also worth attention is the way in which there is “linkage” of both to different groups – such as corporate, or to community radio, thereby creating additional (and rich) social capital otherwise unlikely to be possible.” (2008).

The first two focus group discussions were comprised almost entirely of HANA participants, and they demonstrated a relatively strong bonding, as hypothesised by Berger. For example, they describe creating ad hoc mailing lists to keep in touch with each other, introducing each other to new people, and knowing a lot about each other, including people who have attended before, but weren’t there in 2008. Similarly, a number of delegates described the value of forming very strong bonds with people they had met before, or who were from their own country, but whom they had never *needed* to engage with properly before.

It also appears that significant bridging was taken place – participants made no mention of problems in forming bonds across medium, specialisation, genre, or country, although language barriers were, understandably difficult logistically.

However many of the subjects described difficulty in engaging with delegates of a different ‘level’. It could be that assertion by some of the subjects that they were ignored by more ‘important’ delegates was true. Berger cites Arniel and Lin to say that social networks are often exclusionary, and ties may be dependent on “homophily – people link to others who are similar to themselves” (Berger, 2008). It is not certain to what extent this failure to create ‘linking’ capital was a misconception on the part of intimidated ‘lesser’ delegates, but anecdotal evidence from an SABC journalist suggests that ‘big shots’ at his organisation are very interested in forming relationships with people from small organisations who they can work with.

It seems clear that, largely because of feelings of inadequacy, there is a very real division between delegates perceived to be ‘important’ and delegates who perceive themselves as ‘ordinary’. As described, this division may also simply be between delegates who actively engage in social capital investment, and delegates who are more passive. This represents a failure by the conference to capitalise on a very important, rich source of social capital – that created by a network’s ‘linking’ bonds.

## Learning how to network – some lessons

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that many of the subjects demonstrated a powerful lack of confidence in their capacity to network. Often it took a long time before the subjects ‘warmed up’ and were able to talk freely. Many were extremely nervous about speaking. One pair of subjects from community radio stations in KwaZulu Natal clearly viewed us, the researchers, as people with power, and were trying to make a good impression by agreeing to everything we asked them and saying the things they thought we expected them to say. A Zambian delegate called for country names to be removed from tags so that people wouldn’t be able to ignore him because of where he came from, revealing deep insecurity. They described feeling intimidated, out of depth, and ‘not ready’ and needing time to get used to their surroundings. One delegate got into an extended argument in which he refused to recognise the possibility that ‘big shot’ organisations might have a shared interest in speaking to people from ‘small shot’ organisations, that the ‘small shots’ might possibly have anything to offer, let alone be important and useful.

It appeared that at Highway Africa there were two distinct spheres of engagement: one group of ‘networking-aware’ and ‘high-level’ delegates engaged in very productive networking, while another group of ‘low-level’ delegates came for skills and inspiration and were largely indifferent to the networking possibilities (largely, it has been argued, because they had no reason to consider themselves as possessing any social capital to trade). Of course, this is a very simplistic model and there were clearly innumerable overlaps and variations, but it is a useful way of understanding how many delegates act at Highway Africa.

However, when they were pushed, it was very interesting to note that all the subjects demonstrated a clear understanding of the potential value of networks. They described not acting on these ideas because of perceived barriers – however these ideas seemed to have no relation to the subjects’ actual practise, as despite probing from the researchers, these assumptions were never backed up with anecdotal evidence. In a number of cases they also clearly articulated the idea that networking skills were something that took time to grow and develop.

When given the opportunity, it was clear that delegates were interested in networking and responded very well to input – they demonstrated passivity and a lack of initiative, but *not* a lack of concern. In two cases during the focus group discussions, when it became clear that the researchers or other delegates were interested in what they had to say and offer, their previous hesitance and reticence was replaced by a sudden and unexpected enthusiasm. Where an opportunity appeared in front of them, they grabbed it with both hands.

It appears that, from their perspective, they are given little interest, attention or recognition. But the moment that was given, a whole realm of possibility was opened up. But until then, they didn’t ‘bother’.

A further example of this was the value given to the lectures themselves as an opportunity to ‘network’. A few subjects seemed to have a strange misconception that conference lectures were the most important place for building relationships and generating social capital. It would seem that the reason for this was that *the lectures were one of the few situations in which the views, needs, questions, and knowledge of individual delegates was actively solicited by ‘the conference’.* Subjects thus recognised this as the most important place in which they could “network with the conference”.

Meeting people with whom subjects had something in common began to give some of them the confidence to begin networking. The two subjects who worked as academics described being encouraged to network by a facilitated meeting between academics, while a number of others described the value of meeting people from their own country. A number of subjects called for small meetings like this which could facilitate engagement. The more successful networkers almost all described the value of being forced to begin networking, either by direct input from someone, or by finding themselves ‘alone’, or in one case, by mistake.

This seems to have been what happened in the two examples where enthusiastic networking was induced in previously wary, insecure subjects. During the course of discussions, they had been forced to see that networking was important and imperative, and they had then been given an ‘opening’, an opportunity to put it into practise in a safe environment, which they immediately followed up.

# Evaluation of research

The relatively shallow initial formulation of the research meant that it may have missed a lot of opportunities to understand specific issues better in the rush to cover a wide area of ground. For example, in the subjects’ frequent descriptions of the barriers to networking, it was usually not clear if they were talking about assumptions or experiences, and this has a very significant bearing on how this information is analysed. If more attention had been given to these responses, this information might have been available.

A particularly important area of enquiry which was not adequately addressed at all was the nature of the links that delegates made, with regard to them being ‘bonding’, ‘bridging’ or ‘linking’ connections. These were issues which subjects raised as being important, but which were not sufficiently probed to illicit many clear conclusions.

As mentioned, the data collected during research departed quite significantly from what was originally envisioned in the proposal, both theoretically and logistically. However in the latter regard, the eventual composition of the groups was to provide a valuable consistency which enabled us to reach several solid conclusions, while still allowing room for comparison. [For example, even within the discussions it was very useful to be able to ask subjects to compare themselves and respond to the testimonies of the ‘star networkers’ in the groups.] On a theoretical level it was actually very important that preconceived frameworks were not able to hold sway, and were shown to be ‘out of touch’ with how most of our subjects understood and acted in the conference.

It was also important that the researchers had very little idea about where the subjects were ‘at’. This meant that they often reacted quite defensively to our questions, which may have been unrealistically probing, intimidating and demanding, especially given the high esteem the researchers were held in by their subjects. There is the possibility that some of what the subjects said was related more to their needing to ‘perform’ than to their actual feelings and experiences.

The focus group format was very useful for this, because it meant that the researchers were not able to exercise a rigid control over the direction and framing of what people talked about. Despite very carefully framing our questions around a ‘Bourdeau-ian’ framework for social capital, the subjects were able to make it clear that this was not how they understood the idea. The group had the power to avoid some questions and follow up on other things in a way that an individual in an interview would not. For example, a number of questions, such as ones relating to corruption, were not followed up on at all. In parallel to this, while the researchers worked hard to steer the discussion away from issues around skills, the groups were usually able to bring it back to this in spite of the researchers’ efforts.

However the focus group format might also have had its problems. The consistent ‘group awareness’ evidenced by almost all of the subjects might have had something to do with trying not to look ambitious or grabbing in front of others or in front of the researchers. There might have also been strategic involvement with research, although this seemed unlikely, given how un-strategic in their networking most of the subjects seemed to be.

In terms of representivity, the composition of the focus groups was generally excellent, with an equal balance of men and women overall and with a wide range of national and language groups present. The total number of subjects also ensured that the conclusions drawn from the groups are very compelling, given that they are consistent across different focus groups and different genders, language and national groups.

In looking at how the results of this research have been analysed it is important to recognise that, for journalists, ‘contacts’ have professional value in and of themselves in a way that is different to almost all other professions. This was not something that was taken into account in the initial formulation of the questions, and which may well have ‘muddied’ or confused the results and how they had to be analysed.

# Recommendations

## Highway Africa

It is clear from this research that just because delegates are journalists, it does not mean they are particularly good at engaging with strangers in an alien environment.

If the organisers of Highway Africa want to increase the creation of social capital at the conference, one of the most important things they need to do is try to meet the vast mass of meek, intimidated delegates halfway. They need to offer a lot more support in developing delegates’ capacity to network – conscientising educational programs, exercises to build self-confidence in the conference environment, explicit guidelines, frameworks for negotiating the mass of people available, and possibly the most important, a ‘way in’ to the networking ‘scene’ and support while they are doing this. This might involve meetings where delegates are directly forced to engage in networking, but within a ‘safe’ environment. It appears that many delegates could do with a lot more support, and it is not enough to just provide the space and wait for them to take the initiative. For example, while the evening meals were specifically designed for networking, most delegates described the lunches as being more important, because they were forced to interact with a small group of people, and given time to warm up to each other.

There would be value in programs that aim to do little more than build delegate’s confidence in themselves. One way to do this might be to engage them on something that they are ‘experts’ in, as was the case in the research focus groups, which clearly did extremely powerful work in ‘building up’ many of the participants.

Part of these kinds of efforts might also be to help delegates prepare for the conference before they arrive. This could involve providing them on more information on who is going to be there, so they can consider who they need to speak to (or, given that they are representing their organisations, consult with their colleagues), or it could involve more direct instructions about, for example, printing business cards.

Highway Africa might also benefit from engaging more with and building upon existing networks, both informal or ad hoc and formal. More research does need to be done on the role these networks play, but for example, if there was an attempt to create an online social forum to replace email lists, the attempt would be much more likely to succeed if it can draw on the social capital (in Putnam’s sense of the term) of the existing online engagement.

## Further Research

To follow up the conclusion that delegates would benefit from more support and guidance to promote their ‘networking’ and social capital investment at Highway Africa, it might be valuable to engage in direct experimentation to discover the ways in which different types of stimulus effect delegates behaviour by monitoring their ‘network activity’ after they have been encouraged in different ways. If steps are to be put in place to support delegates, it is vital to try and decide what the best kind of support would be.

For example, it would be valuable to know if simply discussing ‘networking’ prompted delegates to engage in it more. It may also be that it would be useful to discuss different types of value with delegates, beyond the immediate range of ideas which seem to have available to them (source-lists and ideas), such as promoting shared interests or gaining access to other networks, or to powerful individuals. It would be valuable to know whether this fairly limited stimulus would be effective, or whether more ambitious interventions are needed (or useful), such as a type of small group session, facilitated meetings, or even something like role-playing training.

It would also be important to try and discover what the most logistically feasible intervention would be. For example, it might be very easy and effective to simply extend the time given for questions during lectures, while it might not be worth trying to accommodate small group discussion forums.

One very important recommendation for further research is to look at the way existing networks between journalists fit in to the networks developed Highway Africa – what their role is, what is the relative importance of the different networks and how they can be built or capitalised upon.

Given the important discovery that delegates generally seem to understand the networks available at Highway Africa in terms of Coleman’s framework focusing on the *links* between people, it would be useful to interrogate this understanding more, especially given some of the theoretical criticisms that are levelled at Coleman’s framing. This research project did not look into this much, given that it was outside of the researcher’s initial framework. For example, it would be valuable to know how much delegates actually *use* the massive lists of sources they build up for their journalistic work, which seem to be one of the most important ‘values’ of the network.

Berger argues that “there is no reason why social capital cannot accrue from both instrumental and unintentional actions” (2008). This research suggested that delegates’ ‘instrumental actions’ in generating social capital were often quite limited. Thus, it might be valuable to try and discover what role ‘unintentional actions’ have in generating social capital – whether delegates may be investing in and producing social capital without a deliberate ‘means to an end’ approach. It may be that delegates do a lot of this kind of social capital generation, but it was not uncovered during the research project because of an undue focus on ‘instrumental actions’. Further research might focus simply on how delegates interact with each other, rather than the delegates’ perceptions of these interactions, and then have researchers interpret what they are doing.

If a focus on ‘instrumental actions’ is to be maintained, it might be valuable to know more about the perceptions and activity of more ‘conscientised networkers’ who actively engage in social capital investment. These types of delegates were marked exceptions during this research project, and served simply to be contrasted with the vast majority of other delegates. However it might be worth investigating the extent to which a sphere of more active ‘elite networking’ exists, and what the dynamics of this sphere are. It might well be that the most valuable social capital development at the conference takes place in this area, about which very little can be gauged thus far. The finding that there exist two distinct spheres of engagement at the conference would first need to be confirmed, and if it is ‘true’, would be a very valuable premise for further research.

It might also be worth trying to confirm some of the subjects’ assertion that the ‘elite sphere’ of networking at Highway Africa is exclusionary. This was a hotly debated idea in the second discussion group, and it might be valuable to do research focusing specifically on the extent to which ‘bridging capital’ and ‘linking capital’, where networks occur across social divides, is being created, and what might be done to encourage its creation.

On a less ambitious level, while we gave a lot of attention to asking our subjects to consider what makes them valuable to other delegates, it would be worth asking “What makes a person valuable to you?’, or ‘What makes another delegate a good person for you to know?’ This might have further and better illuminated what subjects might want to get out of the networks at Highway Africa.

# Appendix I: Detailed discussion summaries

## Focus Group 1 – Sunday, September 07

This focus group consisted entirely of trainees from the Highway African news agency. There were three women from Mozambique, Malawi, and Tanzania and two men from Swaziland and Limpopo. All the participants were low-ranking journalists in news organisations in their countries, mostly broadcast media. The women all had some trouble speaking English. All the participants except one had been to the conference before.

The discussion was facilitated by Luke Reid.

### Focus group 1: outline of discussions:

All responded to the opening question of ‘What do you get out of the people you meet and connections you make at Highway Africa?’ with reference to learning new things from other people – particularly skills, and ideas.

Furaha (Tanzania):

“They have to have some kind of alumni thing so that if you get stuck in your country, we can communicate with other people, so that we can get assistance from each other....when I get back to Tanzania, I can’t access some things which I was taught here, so it will become very difficult for me to ask Peter who is my trainer or my friends to help me. So I think something should be done so that if you get stuck in your country you can ask and get some help.”

When prompted, talked about ‘value’ of networks as something which grows with time.

Discussed problem of different levels of skills making it difficult to get ‘value’ out of the talks.

Discussed problem of people coming without an interest in learning.

Discussed people having different capacity to ‘spot opportunities’ – something which has to be learnt, and which is difficult.

Discussed problem of resources and red tape making it difficult to implement skills at home.

Discussed problem of language making interaction difficult.

Whole group agreed that there are significant challenges to getting ‘value’ out of networks

Two people contend that even small contributions are significant – e.g. knowing what button to push in a computer program

>Interviewer provided clear example: getting a job or ‘scoop’ from someone after helping them<

One person discussed problem of different levels of power

Mongi (Limpopo)

“They are at their own level, and they are more likely to consider each other in terms of employment opportunities. Not to say there’s no possibility with us, but it’s very hard. Because half the time you will meet people and discuss issues of better opportunities, ‘How did you do that?’ Maybe this person has just won an award, they say, ‘No, you know what? Here’s my business card, let’s keep the fires burning, let’s see what happens’. You get back home, and the first thing you do, you ‘gooi’ him an email. But what comes out of that?”

Whole group discussed people who have got employment out of Highway Africa connections

Most of group asserted understanding of potential value of network for employment opportunities, based on several personal experiences.

Various people discussed problem of identifying the right people.

One person discussed problem of ‘big shots’ not being interested.

One person discussed problem of language.

Bordina (Mozambique):

“I think in this time it’s very difficult for me. Maybe when I speak very nice English I will have a lot of opportunities. For now, I think no.”

Whole group discussed issue of needing to develop networking capability, networking as a skill.

Furaha (Tanzania)

“I came here last time, it was my first time, then I see what was happening, and then this year I came again, and I know what is going where and who is who. So I started to put my strategy towards maybe, three years to come, where should I go with, or what should I take as an advantage to attend this conference. So maybe in the long run I will come with my strategy so that I can know what I will do to utilise this opportunity.”

Extensive discussion of networking skill being about confidence.

Example given of person who won an award which they heard about in an email that was passed on from Highway Africa informal email list to email list of Swaziland journalists.

Discussed value of travel and exposure.

Discussed ability to pass on skills to people at home.

Suggested providing all delegates with laptops so they can implement skills at home.

Group attempted to persuade researcher to secure funding to bring training to their countries.

On being asked why they had waited for this moment to ask someone:

FH (Tanzania): Because we don’t know where to go. We don’t know where to send our views

MZ (Swaziland): It’s that same process of growth, you open up. Understanding is growing.

FH (Tanzania): We don’t know you before we meet today. But because I saw you are interested in our growing, to see us we move one step forward, that’s why we tell this to you.

BM (Mozambique): You was open for us. You came to us, you asked, and then we had lots of things to do. And we asked. So please!

## Focus Group 2 - Monday, September 08

This focus group consisted of four participants in the Highway Africa News Agency training program and a male Liberian journalist who was a delegate in the Digital Citizen’s Indaba. The participants from the training program comprised two men, one of whom was a South African editor of a human rights publication and the other a Zimbabwean online editor, and two women from the research department of the SABC. All of the participants identified as proficient English speakers. Been before?

The discussion was facilitated by Luke Reid

### Focus group 2: outline of discussions

SABC researchers discuss how networks provide them with sources, contacts and information, although working for news agency has prevented them from devoting much time to it.

Discuss feeling of being quite disconnected from the rest of the delegates at first.

Editor discusses using networks to find people to write for him in different countries.

Discussion of value of getting perspective from meeting/interacting with people.

Discussion of Highway Africa as a catalyst for further networking long afterwards, using ad hoc email lists. Email lists used mainly to disseminate information – important stories, opportunities.

Editor discusses email lists as very important:

 Mashilo (South Africa):

“When we email it’s like we see each other every day because we talk on email every day. We play some jokes. Anything. We talk about lots of things.”

Web administrator describes emails as useful, but face-to-face as very powerful. Recounts corresponding with people in pre-existing networks, and then meeting them for the first time at Highway Africa and being offered a job and introduced to more people.

Two people discuss how people from unknown publications have to work harder in networking, but also that they have more to gain.

Abdullah (Liberia)

“These opportunities and these meetings are very important for small organisations. They try to make the most of it because if you are not very careful you will be highly inactive at big meetings. If you look at the full schedule I want to run here, I want to run there. You need to be able to engage and get information and ask questions about resources.”

Researchers disagree, arguing that the SABC is anxious to get in touch with small organisations.

Editor maintains his position that small publications face difficulties in networking.

Researchers argue that people are open to discussion, even if they may not actually be interested in working. Describe using the conference to organise guests for their programs, and not finding barriers – the organisation people come from is not important.

Web administrator agrees, describing engaging with people personally, only to find out how important they are later.

Editor maintains his position, acknowledging that there may be exceptions if the ‘VIP’ is drunk.

Discussion of opportunities, but how limited interaction requires deliberate effort to take advantage of it.

Discussion of how valuable the opportunity is – air tickets are expensive – and need to capitalise on it.

Discussion of time as the big problem. But no calling for *more* time.

Editor discusses strategy of preparing in advance by finding out who will be attending and deciding who he needs to speak to. And building on past networking – getting introductions from people you met before.

Web administrator agrees.

Researchers say their primary aim was the training course, and backup for the SABC broadcasts. And networking was just a bonus.

Liberian calls for subregional events across the year

Otherwise everyone seems to be happy with the way things run

Researcher argues that meeting new people is a benefit enough in itself.

Agreement that a facebook-type online social networking website would be useful.

Networking seen as something for specific people with specific purposes, but for ‘ordinary’ delegates, its ‘not a major issue’.

Liberian says he is frequently invited to conferences without applying.

## Focus Group 3 - Wednesday, September 08

This focus group consisted of four radio journalists: two women who work at community radio stations in KwaZulu Natal, a male radio presenter / online editor from Voice of Nigeria and a male radio journalist from a community radio station in Zambia. All of the participants identified as proficient English speakers.

The discussion was facilitated by Luke Reid and Harriet Mclea

### Focus group 3: outline of relevant discussions

Nigerian says conference provides sources for stories, especially from other countries and provides skills, like blogging, which are tools for sustaining networks.

Zambian highlights value of skills

Nigerian says he has given out 1200 cards during the course of the conference. His main aim is collaborative projects, which he claims to have arranged many of.

Zambian describes a potential collaboration with a Channel Africa station which broadcasts in the same language as his station.

Nigerian describes need to overcome national stereotypes when proposing projects - describes his perception that he is treated warily because he is black, and because he is Nigerian.

Zambian describes internet access as a challenge he faces. Says that he couldn’t have come to conference without the internet.

Nigerian describes his own valuable input as being improving people’s knowledge of Nigeria, including highlighting that South Africans should be grateful for the opportunities in their country.

Nigerian describes carefully avoiding asking for money, and rather suggesting collaborations and partnerships.

Zambian describes his interest in taking home the idea of introducing interested high school students to journalism before university.

Nigerian describe requesting copies of academics books to be donated to his country’s universities, and suggesting collaborative training projects – going beyond himself as a connector.

Zambian describes potential ‘service exchange’ project where staff in South African and Zambian radio stations do exchange programs in each other’s newsrooms. Describes his confidence due to the fact that the other party actively sought him out.

South African women say they needed more time. Raise issue of people who are very unresponsive to her overtures, which she perceives to be motivated by cultural or racial stereotypes.

Nigerian argues that journalists need to make people talk.

Nigerian calls for past editions of ‘Open voices’, past and upcoming research papers, list of speakers, etc. to be posted on the website before the conference, so delegates can prepare and familiarise themselves.

Zambian calls for nametags to not identify people from specific countries.

Nigerian argues for as much ‘cultural shock’ as possible, to overcome stereotypes.

Zambian changes his mind and argues that the power of the conference networks to overcome national barriers is part of their intrinsic value.

Nigerian calls for ‘continental diversity’ training or focus at next conference.

Nigerian argues that his skills make him valuable, such that he does not need to use nepotistic relationships.

Zambian says that knowing someone was not important for him getting to Highway Africa.

South African women argues that knowing someone is essential for getting a job in South Africa.

Admits she didn’t really try to find people to ‘get to know’, even though she is looking for ‘greener pastures’.

Nigerian says that there is no point knowing someone if you don’t have the skills/capacity.

Nigerian needed to know someone to get access to information about Highway Africa, in order to apply.

South African woman asks whether SABC would be willing to accept her story ideas.

Nigerian argues that online communication does not allow people to ‘create an impression’

Nigerian describes his own incredible success at networking, largely a result of his confidence, and his hard work.

South African women describes wanting to speak to Snuki Zikalala (head of news at SABC), except that she doesn’t have the confidence to approach him, and he is the only person she knows there.

SABC online journalist nearby offers to help her work with the SABC. She is clearly astounded, then extremely engaged.

## Focus Group 4 - Wednesday, September 08

This focus group consisted of seven people. There were five male journalists: an online journalist from Ghana, a print journalist writing for a community newspaper in Zambia, an online journalist from the SABC, and two journalists from Ethiopia and Malawi. There were also two academics, a woman who lectures in Namibia, and a Nigerian man. The Ethiopian and Malawian journalists were not proficient English speakers. None of them had been to the conference before.

The discussion was facilitated by Luke Reid

### Focus group 4: outline of relevant discussions

Zambian describes putting *in* effort and getting *out* information, inspiration and ideas

Ghanaian describes value of whole conference as a refresher course in information. Value of having other people is to get ideas from them.

“You realise that people have similar problems. But you may not have all the answers or solutions, so you listen to one another.”

Researcher asks if networks are about more than just skills and ideas.

Malawian describes being given valuable inspiration for making his paper’s website more profitable.

Nigerian describes value of conference in allowing him to meet people he would ordinarily would have taken a long to meet. Describes *also* (secondary value) being offered a scholarship, a trip, and a wife.

South African describes developmental collaborations, describes meeting people he had lost touch with, describes different people having different value for him, describes feeling ‘valuable’ because of his position in the SABC and his family relations. Describes being a ‘connector’ – putting people in touch with each other, which benefits him as middle-man as well. Describes having 112 cards, from all 45 countries represented.

“It’s invaluable in terms of meeting people that you ordinarily wouldn’t meet. So Africa came to me.”

Ethiopian agrees with this sentiment. Says he came looking for contacts and information, which he got, but contacts “weren’t that solid”. Also wanted a scholarship for a Masters degree. Describes failure as being lack of aggression and diplomacy.

Ghanaian describes being briefed before coming about value of networking. Realises he could have got a lot more cards, which he says he will use if he starts a project. Describes getting a job after being recommended by someone he knew in another country, although there was no personal relationship between them.

Zambian describes not getting as much out of the conference as he would have liked, because of time. Describes leaving lectures early to get to others. Understands ‘networking’ as being the workshops and lectures themselves.

South African describes coming for skills, then being told by a senior SABC person that he should be networking.

“After 5 minutes I was looking at the event in a completely different light. And he told me that this is what you meant to be doing and this is who you should be speaking to. He told me what I need to get from the event.”

South African then describes tentative name-dropping, putting people in touch with other people, and getting very encouraging results.

Malawian describes feeling ‘totally lost’. Describes coming to ‘sit and listen’. He says listening to the South African has inspired him to make the best of the opportunity in the future.

Ghanaian describes asking someone who had been before about what to expect, but not getting much help.

Ethiopian describes getting contacts for writing ICT stories. ‘That’s the big thing I got’.

Zambian describes the most important place for networking being the lectures, where he valued the chance to interact with the speakers, which gave him confidence.

Namibian academic describes best thing as meeting other academics.

Nigerian academic/journalist says best thing is getting sources in places where Voice of Nigeria doesn’t have correspondents. Appreciates sharing his knowledge in lecture sessions.

Namibian describes value of finding potential staff members for new positions at her university.

Nigerian describes value of meeting people not being tangible: “You get a lot of feel about what is going on there.”

Zambian feels the conference is like a church for Christians.

Nigerian describes meeting people from Nigeria who he worked with, but wouldn’t have otherwise met, and cemented a relationship.

Malawian says he felt speaking to funders was ‘way above me’.

Ethiopian suggests having smaller groups of people meeting with topics or issues to discuss. Says he feels the main objective is to create networks.

Nigerian says most important thing is knowledge building through interaction.

Namibian describes how finding herself ‘the only Namibian’ forced her to start networking, which snowballed as she reinforced relationships and people introduced her to other people.

Ghanaian describes how the other Ghanaians were ‘in top positions’, but being at the conference drew them together and allowed him to make connections with them.

Malawian says the most important place for networking was the big lunches, because it forced people together.

Zambian says the speakers made him feel like he could talk to anyone.

Ghanaian says transit periods were also important places where people were forced to connect. Describes coming to the conference because of a recommendation from a friend.

Nigerian describes his plans to get other people to come to the conference through organisations.

Ghanaian describes his own value as being his availability in Ghana to help get articles published for people or to help organise courses if they wanted to hold them in the country.

Namibian describes her value as being the only Namibian, and as being someone who has access to fifty students who she can pass on knowledge to.

Zambian describes his value as being someone who can talk about Zambia. “When I get to be known by my fellow participants, then they will know Zambia, because they might not be able to get to Zambia.” Says his knowledge of Zambia could give the conference organisers a case study.

Namibian says her value is also that she can give interviews to journalists at the conference. Says the time allocated to discussion in lectures was too short.

Nigerian says a mailing list would be more important than a social networking website.

Namibian says facebook will need a forum that precipitates constant dialogue.

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