

A gateway for capacity development

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Facilitating multi-actor change



FEATURE

Multi-actor systems as entry points to capacity development

SNV practitioners argue that multi-actor systems are more appropriate than single organisations as starting points for capacity development

PRACTICE

The dynamics of change

Jim Woodhill and Simone van Vugt discuss the importance of dealing with power and conflict in multi-actor systems

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Paradox or synergy?

Hettie Walters talks about the opportunities and challenges faced by donor organisation, ICCO, as it engages with multi-stakeholder partnerships

TOOLS AND METHODS

What it takes

Minu Hemmati explains that facilitating multi-actor processes requires considerable expertise – she sets out the skills that practitioners should master

PRACTICE

From token inclusion to transformative engagement

Kanak Tiwari and Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay recount how urban planners in India set about empowering marginalised groups

GUEST COLUMN

Working with power and love

Adam Kahane introduces an unconventional approach for addressing tough challenges in multi-actor engagements

How do our readers see us?

Coming up to the end of 2010, we decided to ask our readers what they thought of *Capacity.org*. So far, there has been a tremendous response, in English, French and Spanish. As we go to print, we have had a high level of response from staff and affiliates of SNV and ICCO and we are still receiving responses from ECDPM policy makers and other personnel. We would like to thank everyone for taking the time to respond and pass on their opinions and ideas.

We are both pleased and challenged by the reaction we have received. Responding to the request, *Please, give your overall reaction to Capacity.org*, an overwhelming majority of the respondents rated *Capacity.org* as 'very good' or 'good' (English: 76%, French: 98% and Spanish 91%). The remainder of respondents gave us a 'satisfactory' rating; no-one rated *Capacity.org* as 'poor'.

Leaders in the CD field

Across the three languages, some 40% of readers considered *Capacity.org* to be the leading professional journal in its field. Of those who read the magazine, 15% say they read all or most of the articles; 41% read several articles; 34% read just a few pages, and only 10% of recipients put it aside to read later.

Of the SNV employees who receive *Capacity.org* at work, 44% take it home with them to continue reading what they did not have time to finish at work.

The quality of the language in terms of style, clarity, fluency and grammar was rated by almost all readers in all three languages as 'very good or good' – but we did receive some requests to simplify the language and use less jargon. (We are already taking this on

board.) Readers are also asking for more case studies, more contributions by practitioners working on the ground and more issues per year. Some readers have indicated that they would prefer longer articles, while we also received requests from others to make some of the articles shorter. (We will do our best here to please everyone by making longer versions of some articles available on line.)

Electronic edition

Many of our readers do not realize that it is possible to subscribe on our website to an electronic edition of *Capacity.org*. This can be sent automatically to your inbox and often carries more content (more and longer articles) than the printed journal. You can also download the PDF versions of the entire journal or individual article in three languages from our website.

Your feedback has strengthened our determination to become the principal resource for capacity development practitioners across the world. Our aim is to make *Capacity.org* the place where CD professionals go to find good-quality content that helps them to keep abreast of developments in their field, improve the quality of their work and contribute their innovative ideas to the community of practice.

Our New Year's Resolution for 2011 is to follow up on the wealth of suggestions we received to improve the journal. We will increase our outreach by stepping up our efforts to promote the e-journal. And just to show that we mean what we say, we are already in the process of launching our new website – which is more intuitive and provides better opportunities for interacting with our readers.

PUBLICATIONS

Global Action Networks: Creating Our Future Together

Steve Waddell, Palgrave Macmillan, to be published in January 2011.



This book seeks to provide guidance for those engaged in multi-stakeholder processes at the global level through Global Action Networks (GANs). Steve Waddell sees GANs as communities of like-minded people from different backgrounds working together to address global challenges such as climate change, deforestation, the international financial crisis and poverty. GANs bring together people working with government, businesses and NGOs.

The book addresses the central question 'what is needed for these multi-actor networks to realise their potential?'.
<http://us.macmillan.com/globalactionnetworks>

Multi-stakeholders for clean water and sanitation



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Clean water and basic sanitation are among the most powerful drivers for human development. The crisis in water and sanitation is a crisis mainly for the poor, with some two-thirds of those lacking access to clean water living on less than US\$2 a day.

SNV aims to improve the access of 6.8 million people in eight countries in Africa to sustainable water and sanitation services by:

- Increasing functional access to clean drinking water to 3.6 million people living in rural and urban environments
- Increasing functional access to acceptable quality sanitation services for a further 3.2 million people
- Ensuring that water resource bases that supply human populations are well managed and sustainable

Its approach is to facilitate analysis, learning and action with multiple stakeholders across the sector.

In 2009, SNV organised a collective learning event involving 90 SNV facilitators of multi-stakeholder processes in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector (WASH) in several African countries.

In the web edition of this issue, Michiel Verweij and Jackson Wandera outline some important lessons that emerged from this learning event.

Facilitating multi-actor change

In the practice of capacity development, we have seen a gradual shift away from training individuals to strengthening organizations. Currently, the emphasis seems to be shifting again; from working with single organisations to facilitating multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs). But it would be a mistake to assume that MSPs are just the latest fad in the discourse on capacity development (CD). In fact, they have always been an integral part of human interaction. MSPs spring up whenever people or organisations see that collaboration can help to seize development opportunities.

Michiel Verweij and Jackson Wandera explain that challenges in the water and sanitation sector have always demanded multi-stakeholder solutions. Water is used by all kinds of users for many different purposes. Water shortages create tension between users and uses and this tension has been a major cause of conflict right throughout history.

But as Verweij and Wandera point out, solving these conflicts through collaborative efforts has shaped human history and contributed to the rise of many of our great civilisations.

CD starting points

MSPs are as much a part of human systems dynamics as are individuals and organisations; but the starting point for many CD interventions still remains at the organisational level. This might be because multi-actor systems are generally not as well-defined as organisations.

But while MSPs might be somewhat harder to pin down, their effects are far-reaching and essential. In the feature article, facilitators of CD processes working with SNV describe their experiences with MSPs. They have learned from experience that the ability of any organization to improve its performance depends on the way it is linked to external actors, the quality of exchanges between those actors, and on the actors' various capacities. Having worked in MSPs in a number of different countries and contexts, they have come to the conclusion that the multi-actor system can be a much more appropriate starting point for CD interventions.

Developing new ways

Donor agencies are learning that most development challenges cannot be addressed by individual organisations. Agencies face the challenge of developing new ways of providing funding that allow for effective engagement with MSPs.

We interviewed Hettie Walters, ICCO's capacity development coordinator, who talks about the challenge donors face in ensuring that established donor-recipient relationships

do not undermine support for MSPs. She also points out that donors need to recognise that they are also *part* of the system and that their role can be beneficial but also harmful to MSPs.

Minu Hemmati explains that facilitating MSPs requires considerable skill. In her article, *What it takes*, she sets out key competencies that practitioners should master. These aptitudes, she explains, belong to a range of disciplines and professions, and include cognitive, emotional and social abilities. Many of these competencies can be acquired through research, while others are honed through experience.

Combat inequality

If the whole point of MSPs is to combat inequality and poverty, two aspects require the special attention of facilitators: the empowerment of marginalised groups, and the role of power as a positive force in MSPs.

Systems are often too large for the direct involvement of all stakeholders to be possible. If not handled correctly, this can lead to the further marginalisation of already marginalised groups.

Verweij and Wandera explain that in Africa's water, sanitation and hygiene sector, marginalised groups are often not organised at all and are therefore not in a position to send representatives to MSPs. It is a challenge for facilitators to be aware of such groups and find ways to mobilise them. They should also bear in mind that representatives of marginalised groups often lack the knowledge, information and connections to represent their constituencies adequately. Kanak Tiwari and Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay of PRIA explain how facilitators of urban planning in India address such inequalities. In order to ensure that MSPs help to change the lives of poor people, facilitators need to proactively engage in the empowerment of marginalised groups.

A common vision

While MSPs may be about working towards a common vision, they are also an arena for power games. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Jim Woodhill and Simone van Vugt explain that power is not negative; it is what enables any human endeavour to succeed. They suggest ways of dealing with the inevitable and natural power and conflict issues that arise in MSPs.

In his guest column Alan Kahane explains that power is essential in order to achieve results – provided it is counterbalanced by love.

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Future issues

The next issue of Capacity.org will focus on developing the capacity of health systems, particularly primary health care. Our August 2011 issue will cover the effectiveness of capacity development support.

Cover Photo

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Multi-actor systems as entry points for capacity development

Naa-Aku Acquaye-Baddoo, Julia Ekong, Duncan Mwesige, Lucia Nass, Rem Neefjes, Jan Ubels, Piet Visser, Kencho Wangdi and Thomas Were; all of whom work at SNV's offices worldwide, and Jan Brouwers, senior consultant at Context, international cooperation.

An important mind shift

For a long time, capacity development (CD) practice has focused on strengthening individuals or single organisations. The functioning of larger systems was always considered the domain of policy development and regulatory frameworks. This separation has contributed to the view of CD as skills training, knowledge transfer and the development of organisational structures and processes.

Multi-actor approaches are not new and development processes usually involve working with multiple parties. 'Multi-actor processes' however, have tended to be understood as consensus-building,

Terminology

- *Multi-actor system*: the set of actors and relationships pertinent to a specific development issue (for example a rural water supply or an agricultural value chain). The actors may not necessarily physically meet each other. They may not even know each other or all parts of the system.
- *Multi-actor engagement*: the explicit effort to connect to multiple actors involved in a specific development issue – but not necessarily in one coherent process or platform.
- *Multi-actor process*: a usually time-bound and deliberate process in which multiple actors meet to address a development challenge and achieve collective results, for example in setting priorities or implementing a project.
- *Multi-actor platform*: a more-or-less ongoing mechanism in which actors meet regularly to foster exchange and promote joint decision making and collaboration in a continuously evolving way.
- Note that we use the term *actor* rather than *stakeholder*. Actors bring more to the table than just its stake or interest. For example, they may bring knowledge, relational abilities, resources, etc.

It is often assumed that capacity development starts from within individuals and organisations and then permeates into society. But capacity also comes about through interaction between actors. This suggests that a change in intervention logic and repertoire can boost effectiveness.

participatory decision-making or programme implementation exercises – not as CD. Over the past decade, practical experience started to show that working with multiple actors could be an effective form of CD in its own right. When done well, multi-actor engagement builds the combined as well as the individual and organisational capacities of actors within the system, and enhances the quality of the policies and regulations that influence their interrelationships. This results in a more effective and more sustainable larger system.

Significant conceptual and methodological insights are starting to emerge from the growing body of experience we get from working with multi-actor systems. Some of these insights imply a shift in mindset with regard to what capacity is, how it grows and how its development can be supported. Here, we will identify professional, policy and aid-modality challenges that call for further exploration and responses from the wider aid community. We will also use three case studies from different parts of Africa to illustrate how our conclusions on multi-actor CD are borne out in real-life experience.

Improving actor interrelationships

The capacity of a system is increased by enhancing the quality and relevance of relationships between actors at different levels. The essence of working with a multi-actor system is to establish or reinforce connections between actors who did not previously relate to one another, or who did so ineffectively or antagonistically – despite having interests in common. The Ugandan case study demonstrates that facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement was pivotal in creating favourable conditions for other innovations and forms of capacity development support. The multi-stakeholder platforms produced concrete results, and they did so through the enhanced collective ability of the multi-actor system to understand, discuss, act, change and develop itself.

A key element of all three of the case studies we have referred to here is that the system was *helped to see itself*. This happened in three stages: first, through making a strong value chain analysis by asking whether it was possible to add significant value and by identifying obstructions that could be addressed jointly. Second, by connecting actors that had not been connected before and helping them to see that they were part of a larger network of relations and issues. And third, by generating new and explicit analysis of the system as a whole (including better bottom-up information flows).

By knowing each other and better understanding the bigger picture, actors start to jointly influence whole systems in positive ways and work together to negotiate improved conditions, such as better policies and financing.

Capacity is relational

In general, an 'inside-out' logic seems to prevail in which capacity is understood to consist of actors' internal abilities. This is reflected in the dominant approaches to capacity development, which focus on the training of individuals and the development of internal organisational systems. But the Kenyan, Ugandan and Ethiopian cases show something different. Many effective capacities can exist only in the relationships *between* actors and grow through interaction rather than from training or organisational development. We can see this in the bulk-importing of seed and the provision of financial services to farmers in the Uganda oilseed chain. And it is also apparent in the market management example in Samburu, Kenya.

These case studies show that capacity does not have to begin within an individual or organisation and then be deployed in society. Capacity can also come about in the interaction between actors. In recognising this, we make a radical shift in intervention logic, away from supply-driven training and



A bustling livestock market in Kenya

workshops that prepare people for an often externally prescribed change.

The alternative approach could be called *action CD* (following the idea of *action research*), and starts with issues that matter to local actors and with shaping their agenda for change. Then context-specific capacity development elements are carefully infused, and a real sense of local needs and timing make this approach very different from other programmes. It allows us to tap local energy for change, to set local agendas and to develop effective on-the-ground solutions as a basis for larger patterns of change. The challenge for donors is how to invest in such dynamics.

Trusted brokers

The Ethiopian, Kenyan and Ugandan cases show a form of external assistance in which outside advisors did not prescribe what to do or how to do it. Nor did these cases focus on the implementation of expert solutions, good practices or training modules. In each case, in one way or the other, advisors were called in to facilitate a first analysis and multi-actor meeting. Afterwards, they were asked to stay and continue to support the process. The advisors did not act as experts or trainers. Rather they supported the creation of understanding, perspectives and solutions.

Transforming livestock marketing – Kenya

For decades, livestock producers in the Wamba area of Samburu County had struggled to access markets and meet their income needs. They often had to trek for several days to markets, encountering considerable insecurity along the way. Margins were very low; an animal often changed hands five times before being sold. Producers had no direct link with livestock markets. This was left to the middlemen who came to the rural areas looking for animals to buy. Even though there was demand, the high transaction costs incurred by traders buying from geographically spread producers resulted in low prices.

Cutting out the middleman

However, an innovative approach to livestock marketing began to emerge from the collaboration of the various actors. This involved establishing an interior market managed by the community. The community also collected livestock taxes on behalf of the regional local government, with whom they shared the tax on a fifty-fifty basis.

The new market's proximity to the community encouraged direct links between traders from terminal markets and the producers. This cut out a number of middlemen and improved prices by more than 30%. As a result of sharing the taxes,

the community's commitment to the arrangement increased and this contributed to reductions in livestock theft, insecurity and tax evasion by producers and traders.

On market day, the market plot is now a hive of community activity with men and women, old and young, all trading livestock, hides and skins. More than 800 households depend on this market as their major source of income. Over 300 women are engaged in other small businesses centred around the market, and many shops are managed by young people – who also make up 50% of the market traders.

Spreading the idea

The impressive work by the community stimulated the Samburu Council to launch similar markets in other locations. This was the result of stakeholders successfully influencing the council's livestock by-laws to have them changed in order to recognise the co-management model. Subsequent lobbying to the Ministry of Local Government led to a national stakeholders' workshop. This model has now influenced donors such as FAO and Food for the Hungry International to build the capacity of communities, and it has influenced councils in seven other regions to introduce it. The Ministry of Local Government is considering adapting the model for other sectors such as horticulture and indigenous craft markets.

The oilseed value chain – Uganda

An analysis of Uganda's oilseed sub-sector in 2006 revealed that there was great potential for growth in terms of productivity, income and employment. However, it was apparent that growth was stifled by poor coordination, and lack of collaboration and information sharing between actors. As a result, the supply of inputs was inadequate, bulk purchasing was a rarity, post-harvest handling facilities and technologies were inadequate, actors lacked access to finance, and sub-sector policies and regulations were weak.

When confronted with this analysis, the value chain (VC) actors decided to jointly tackle the constraints in the value chain. One national and four regional multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) were established comprising all relevant actors in the VC including primary actors (producers, input suppliers, researchers, processors, sector associations, warehouse owners and transporters); service providers (financial institutions, higher institutions of learning, business-development services); and government and key donor agencies.

Solutions

The platforms have produced a number of solutions. The national platform contacted Uganda's largest processor and seed importer, Mukwano Industries, who agreed to import enough hybrid seed for all the farmers in the sub-sector. They also negotiated a funding guarantee scheme through the Agricultural Sector Programme Support, a project run by the Danish International Development Assistance Agency.

This enabled the agro-input dealers' association, UNADA, to distribute Mukwano's seed using its own nationwide input distribution network. The platform used the funding scheme to negotiate an agricultural loan guarantee with Stanbic Commercial Bank. This scheme offered a 50% donor guarantee to all oilseed farmers taking out loans to buy ploughing implements. Some 50,000 oilseed producers benefitted from this scheme.

As a result of the policy dialogue organised by the platform, the Ugandan government introduced a guarantee scheme through commercial banks to make it easier for farmers to access financing. Later, they introduced a warehouse receipts system in the oilseed-producing areas closer to the farmers. Much of the information – especially on prices, sector trends and production systems – was generated from work on the rural information system.

Results

The impact in terms of productivity, income and employment was impressive. In three years, the number of households engaged in oilseed farming increased from about 150,000 to 500,000. Now, 70% of oilseed-producing households have access to hybrid, high-quality seed; yields have increased from 600 kg-per-acre to 1000 kg-per-acre; farm gate prices for raw materials have increased from about 400 USh/kg to 850 USh/kg; and the number of processors has increased from four to 34.

Trust

At the root of this success is the change in relationships. Actors who previously did not trust each other and worked independently, now recognise that they all belong to one system. They have set up collaborative relationships and joint strategies to develop the VC. They have developed the ability to think beyond specific actor interests and focus on systemic issues to develop joint positions and solutions.

Solutions posed at regional MSPs have influenced national policy decisions, rather than policy decisions being pushed down from the top. This has contributed to a favourable environment for producers to strengthen their organisations and speak with a strong collective voice at platform discussions where they can now articulate their challenges and negotiate better terms and conditions. The multi-stakeholder process thus served as a basis for the empowerment of producers and improved the engagement of other actors at the same time.

workshops for NGOs, farmers' organisations and governments. Now we engage with the multi-actor chain as a whole and I need to know more to be able to point my clients to dynamics, opportunities and contacts. So I need to be very familiar with the happenings in the sector. At the same time, I cannot prescribe what should be done, and I have to be more responsive and skilled in facilitation than I was before. The actors determine what is interesting and feasible and can usually do so much better than external players.'

What Were is describing is the role of a trusted broker who decreases the levels of risk for actors to engage and who helps them to do things that they did not consider feasible before. During a recent conversation about these and other cases, an observation was made that a trusted advisor or broker is 'like an intelligent friend'. Such friends are responsive to your situation and needs. They have a fresh view and help to understand the situation from various angles. They are respectful and understanding, straight and honest. And they are independent and do not try to please you or serve particular interests. With such quality of support, that elusive substance, 'trust' starts to become a concrete reality.

Conclusions and perspectives

This leads us to three types of conclusions: conceptual and methodological insights; clues about how to improve the effectiveness of development support; and professional challenges.

From a conceptual and methodological perspective the findings point to:

- An evolution in CD thinking and practice that moves away from training and organisational development towards fostering the effectiveness of multi-actor systems
- The recognition that capacity is highly relational and that many forms of effective capacity grow in the interactive spaces between actors
- The notion of 'action CD' that focuses not on capacity inputs but on supporting the change process led and carried out by local actors with capacity development support woven into the process
- The importance of a 'trusted broker' in improving multi-actor dynamics and the related understanding of a range of facilitating elements that can help multi-actor systems to gain new dynamics and levels of performance

From a perspective of 'aid effectiveness', it is relevant to note that all the cases in this article show that fundamental changes in the way actors related to each other resulted in systems functioning better than before. This was evidenced by higher levels of production, income and employment. These cases illustrate how effective change is created by and between local actors and not simply through policy implementation.

This requires considerable knowledge and appreciation of the sectoral context on the one hand and advisory and facilitation skills on the other. Whenever there was a direct technical contribution, stakeholders were always assured that the external advisor would not take control or determine the agenda.

What the cases do not describe in detail is that in improving relations one has to deal with interests, power and conflict. Often actors do not trust each other very much and a blame game may be going on. But the cases do show a highly practical and results-oriented approach to facilitation in such potentially difficult settings. On closer scrutiny, we can see a range of elements:

- Brokering new contacts
- Brokering information and knowledge to understand context
- Hosting, chairing or facilitating meetings, trips, visits, etc.

- Facilitating negotiation and deal-making between actors
- Participating in innovation between actors, 'cultivating' their commitment
- Giving individual advice or coaching to actors to strengthen their roles/capacities
- Mediating in conflicts or difficult situations
- Facilitating multi-stakeholder processes or platforms that extend over time
- Being an administrative agent for financial arrangements between actors
- Promoting issues or perspectives that others can not take on

Note the significant shift from 'expert' roles to 'facilitation' roles – facilitation that is very results-oriented and requires adequate sector knowledge. Kenyan advisor, Thomas Were, one of the co-authors of this article, explains: 'As a capacity development specialist in the livestock sector, I used to provide fairly standard training and



Alamy / Michael Runkel

Traditional beehive, Ethiopia

Boosting the honey trade – Ethiopia

In 2005, Ethiopian beekeepers were producing just small quantities of high-quality table honey. Most of what they produced was of a standard quality and destined for sale locally to be used in *tej*, the traditional Ethiopian honey wine. Five years later, 27,000 producers managed to increase the production of high-quality honey resulting in an increase of average household income by US\$150. Now, ten honey processors are providing 400 tonnes of honey annually for the export market.

How did this change happen? Although a simple story in itself, the reality is a complex one of facilitating immediate opportunities, stimulating innovation, building on or unlocking existing initiatives, using flexible funding and providing services.

The story started at the 29th Apimondia trade fair in Dublin, Ireland, in 2005 when Haile Giorgis Demissie, the enterprising director of Beza Mar honey processors recognised that there was a huge export market for Ethiopian honey. But he also realised that bringing honey to the international market was not something he could do alone.

The spark of an idea

Back in Addis Ababa, he presented his ideas to a multi-stakeholder workshop organised by SNV. A basic value-chain analysis was carried out and the spark of his idea ignited enough interest among the participants to form a coordination group (CG) headed by Demissie. Over time, the CG has been joined by processors, exporters, newly established producer associations, apex organisations, certification and auditing service providers, financial institutions, government ministries, and research and educational institutions.

The CG looked at ways of entering the EU market and addressed the issues of how to qualify for export licences and how to orchestrate sufficient volumes of honey to fulfil overseas orders. SNV's role was to bring the stakeholders together. Consultants were hired to advise on issues where

SNV and value-chain actors had no expertise. For example, SNV assisted in liaising with a laboratory in Uganda to use their facilities, and the Ministry of Agriculture helped exporters to acquire EU accreditation for Ethiopian honey.

A business perspective

The next step was the formulation of a Strategic Intervention Plan. This focused on three main areas: establishing export contacts, boosting processing capacity and qualifying for certification. As this required increasing the production of specific grades of honey, forging stronger business links between processors and producers was vital. These links helped both parties by assuring a consistent supply of honey for the processors and reliable market outlets for the beekeepers.

In order to create these new links, levels of trust had to be increased and relational risks reduced. New technologies also needed to be taken on board, the service delivery had to be improved in almost every area, and new ways had to be found for accessing finance and other inputs. For example 'transitional beehives', developed by an entrepreneurial farmer and improved by HOLETA Bee Research Centre, were tested for appropriateness and affordability for Ethiopian beekeepers, specifically women beekeepers, and scaled-up with the help of processors.

All this activity resulted in the establishment of the Ethiopian Apiculture Board as a public-private partnership incorporating the CG and steering further sector development.

Transfer of expertise

SNV's role was to facilitate the change process, especially through establishing business links, supporting planning, smoothing access to grants and investment capital, and moderating the CG. By engaging an Ethiopian CD firm, SNV transferred value chain facilitation skills to a local actor. In the course of this process, SNV's role changed to 'value chain coach' for business innovations and CD services, and for replication to other sectors and programmes.

This suggests that *action CD* should be at centre stage when we are rethinking the role of capacity development in policy and practice. Such action CD is based on three key principles: multi-actor engagement; the matching of financial support with local resources, dynamics and ingenuity; and support that is responsive and flexible to the local change process. These present clear challenges for many sector programmes.

There is convincing evidence that multi-actor approaches have something quite important to offer. But it needs further exploration as a professional domain. Some important professional challenges are:

- Deepening the understanding of the range and variation of multi-actor processes, spaces, platforms and mechanisms, and exploring their relevance for various situations and purposes
- Looking at the practices and principles that help sustain productive multi-actor spaces and dynamics; and doing this without over-institutionalising them or making them overly formal
- Exploring innovative financing and support strategies for multi-actor system change (see also the interview with Hettie Walters on page 9)
- Expanding the professional repertoire of facilitating and brokering multi-actor dynamics
- Fostering learning opportunities for professionals in advanced change facilitation, especially for in-country and international capacity builders.

Overall our central conclusion is: effectiveness is created 'on the shop floor' and spreads most effectively through bottom-up and horizontal links rather than being imposed from the top. Capacity cannot be taught. Rather it evolves from helping actors to deal jointly with real-life challenges. So working consciously, or deliberately, with multi-actor systems is an essential evolution. The concept of *action CD* helps to shift away from a supply-push approach to responsive support. Working with multi-actor systems not only complements and incorporates earlier training and organisational development approaches, it also has the potential to address development challenges more effectively and to create more self-sustaining forms of capacity. <

Further reading

- *The IOB-led evaluation Dutch Support to Capacity Development: Synthesis report on SNV* – to be published in 2011.
- Ubels, J., Acquaye-Baddoo, N.A., and Fowler, A. (eds), (2010) *Capacity Development in Practice*. Earthscan. <http://tinyurl.com/CDInPractice>. (See the following chapters in particular: Multiple Actors (Woodhill); Advisers' Roles (Champion et al.); Dialogue (Bojer); Institutions, Power and Politics (Boesen); The Micro-Macro Gap (Ubels, Van Klinken and Visser); Working with Value Chains (Mwesige) and Taking Stock of the CD Field (Ubels, Acquaye-Baddoo and Fowler).



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Dealing with power – the key to successful MSPs?

The dynamics of change

For over ten years, Wageningen UR Centre for Development Innovation (CDI) has been offering capacity development programmes to support the practitioners of multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs). One of the most important functions of these programmes is to prepare facilitators to work with power and conflict in order to bring about successful outcomes.

Politics and power are at the heart of any effective MSP. After all, power differences are often at the root of economic and social inequality, unsustainable resource use and conflict. Not recognising this, or ignoring its implications, can pose serious risks to the process. MSPs can be powerful drivers of change but if practitioners do not understand the power dynamics between stakeholders, they can undermine the process or even make things worse. We should also bear in mind that development practitioners and organisations are not ‘neutral’ in MSPs; they bring their own power and political interests to the table.

Two sides of the same coin

Let’s be clear – power is positive. It is what enables any human endeavour to succeed. However, power can also be used to maintain privileged positions, protect discriminatory interests and preserve the status quo. In MSPs, individuals and groups have very different types and levels of power in the multiple relationships at play.

How power dynamics are dealt with significantly influences the trust, openness and overall legitimacy of the process. Conflict and anger often emerge when individuals or groups feel overpowered by others and sense that their issues and concerns are not being fairly treated.

As a practitioner, it is not always necessary, or desirable, to tackle power and conflict head on. Handling power in a way that can contribute to constructive stakeholder engagement requires a good deal of wisdom on the part of leaders and facilitators.

Designing and facilitating

CDI has developed a framework to help MSP practitioners to design and facilitate a process that is unique to the demands of their specific situation. Central to this is an understanding of the issues of power and conflict within a wider context of governance, and an appreciation of the

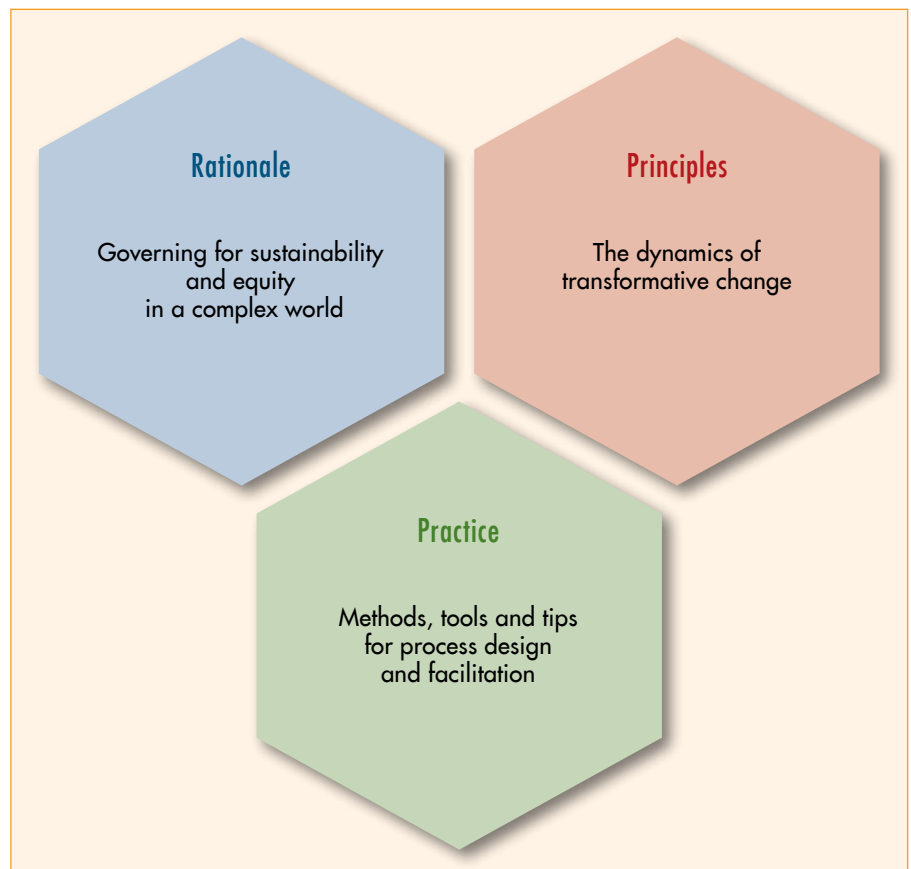
complexity of human systems. CDI’s framework consists of:

- 1) *The rationale* – which explains why, in an increasingly complex world, MSPs are becoming an important governance mechanism
- 2) *The seven principles* – which deal with the dynamics of transformative change (these include recognising issues around power and conflict)
- 3) *The practice* – which shows how a wide range of participatory methods and tools are combined with facilitation competencies to enable effective change processes

(More detail on this framework can be found in the online version of this edition of Capacity.Org)

Shifting power

A significant shift in power relations is often required in order to bring about change and tackle the underlying issues that have led to an MSP being set up. For example, it may be necessary to empower less-influential stakeholder groups and individuals. Often, it is only when marginalised groups exert power that those who call the shots see the need to engage.



There are many different types of power and ways of looking at it from the perspective of MSPs.

- *Authoritative* – the authority given to or taken by a particular individual or group; for example, governments, legal systems, managers and social group leaders
- *Economic* – the access to and control over financial and material resources
- *Coercive* – the use of physical violence or psychological manipulation to control what others do
- *Knowledge* – having privileged access to or control of knowledge, information and expertise
- *Ideological* – the use of ideas, culture, religion and language to shape the way people see their world and behave
- *Charismatic* – the ability of individuals to use the power of their personalities to gain a following and exert influence

To engage with shifting power, practitioners need to:

- Understand the dynamics of power at play
- Work with less-powerful groups to help them identify concerns and issues clearly
- Actively support the capacity development of some groups by facilitating access to resources
- Build trust and understanding between groups so that the more powerful become supportive of others
- Stop or change processes where marginalised groups are being further disempowered
- Facilitate processes in a way that ensures all groups can contribute in an equitable way

NGOs in particular face difficult choices about the roles they will have in MSPs. Do they try to be the honest broker and take on the role of coordinating and facilitating the process? Do they decide that the interests of their constituencies are better served if they develop the power bases of particular sets of actors to allow them to have more influence in the process?

Both are important and legitimate roles but it is difficult for one organisation to be effective at both. Sometimes, decisions have to be made about whether to support a partisan process of empowerment or take on a more neutral, stewardship function.

As we can see in the palm oil example (see 'Palm Oil Story' box), some groups opting for a more confrontational approach can be what precipitates multi-stakeholder engagement.

Dealing with conflict

For an MSP to be effective in dealing with conflict there must be a high level of common interest. This is what makes it worthwhile for the parties to try and overcome their differences. If this does not exist, MSPs are not an effective mechanism.

Some MSPs are set up specifically to deal with conflict; for example, as part of



Harvest at an oil palm plantation in South Sulawesi, Indonesia

The Palm Oil Story

Nearly 40% of all vegetable oil traded worldwide is palm oil. It is widely used in food, cosmetics, industry and as a biofuel. Already the world's dominant oil, demand is set to grow dramatically over the coming years, especially from China and India.

Most palm oil is produced in tropical areas using land that was once rainforest. The ecological implications of this are significant, and there are also severe negative consequences for local and indigenous communities.

This is a multi-stakeholder issue that is fraught with power and conflict issues from local level right through to global level. In response to widespread concern and international campaigns, a group of NGOs and palm oil companies formed the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). This initiative was relatively successful, yet unsustainable and socially inequitable practices continued.

A coalition of local NGOs in Indonesia prevailed upon the World Bank Group to put a moratorium on any further investment in palm oil projects until the situation could be properly addressed by a global multi-stakeholder consultation process. This process was able to bring the conflicting parties to round-table dialogues.

The motivation behind the global consultation process was not to simply solve the conflict. Rather, it provided the World Bank Group with the views of all the stakeholders involved so that future investments could be made in a way that would ensure sustainable and equitable practices. Much emphasis was put on the need for better engagement and conflict resolution processes between companies and local people.

From a power and conflict perspective, the palm oil story can give us a number of interesting insights. First, the MSPs took place against a background of significant conflict – local conflict, international conflict and corporate conflict. The potential of these conflicts to have a negative impact on the brand images of companies involved in palm oil production and processing was one of the factors that spurred the multi-stakeholder engagement into existence.

The second insight we can gain from the palm oil story is that a 'good cop, bad cop' strategy was taking place successfully with some NGOs opting for a campaigning role and others supporting multi-stakeholder engagement.

Third, we can see the different sources of conflict very clearly. There are value differences about what constitutes well-being for local communities – economic growth or the preservation of traditional lifestyles and the environment. In the face of poor spatial planning and monitoring, there are major disputes over the 'facts' of the situation: exactly what impact is the production of palm oil having on the environment?

Fourth, we can see that conflict and power dynamics are leading to new forms of governance. Standards of sustainability are being developed and implemented not by government, but through the power of global NGOs and agri-food businesses. Not all governments are happy with this development.

It is clear that a variety of multi-stakeholder processes will continue to have an increasing important role in finding ways of meeting the world's demand for palm oil ... sustainably and equitably.

PRACTICE

peace-building efforts in the wake of armed violence, or to overcome conflict over the use of natural resources. In these situations a well-thought-out conflict transformation approach is a key part of the MSP. In other situations, such as the development of value chains or the provision of health services, conflict resolution will not be the main reason for setting up the MSP, yet conflict will often emerge as the process unfolds. MSPs are full of minor conflicts such as tensions between personalities, irritations over communication styles, frustrations with progress – and the normal dynamics any group goes through as its members learn to work together. When these minor conflicts are dealt with well, they can be the source of better understanding and greater trust. If they are not handled well, they can easily escalate to a point where they can dash any prospect of the MSP being effective.

It is critical to try and understand the underlying causes of conflict. Is it caused by:

- Differences of opinion over data or facts, or disputes over the validity of information?
- Relationship conflicts or personality differences?
- Competing needs and interests over access resources?
- Issues related to laws, roles and responsibilities or historical differences?

- Differing cultural or political beliefs and values?
- Often conflict is the result of a complex mix of these causes. For example, having different cultural or political values may lead people to see data or facts in very different ways.

When dealing with conflict:

- Watch out for contention below the surface
- Analyse the underlying causes of conflicts.
- Assess the feasibility of MSPs, given the type and degree of conflict
- Bring groups through the phases of ‘forming, storming, norming and performing’
- Help stakeholders to remove the dimension of personality when addressing problems; to focus on interests rather than fixed positions; to explore multiple options for resolution and to establish criteria for fair decision making
- Try to understand which stakeholders will help overcome conflict and which will exacerbate it
- Work on conflict issues behind the scenes to help make multi-stakeholder events as constructive as possible

The way that MSPs are designed and facilitated dictates how constructively they will handle conflict. For example, people

should be given time to get to know each other and build up trust before trying to tackle substantial and contentious issues.

It is particularly important to use approaches that enable stakeholders to find high levels of common interest. This will motivate them to put differences aside and work on a common agenda.

There are many facilitation techniques that help people to put themselves in ‘the shoes of others’. At the end of the day, dealing with conflict requires dealing with emotions; so it is important to find ways that enable people to express their own feelings and connect with the feelings of others. <

Further reading

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- VeneKlasen L. and Miller, V. (2002). *A New Weave of POWER, People, and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. Oklahoma City, USA, World Neighbors.
- Woodhill et al. (To be published in 2011). *A Guide to Designing and Facilitating Multi-Stakeholder Processes*, Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen, the Netherlands.

Links

- MSP resource portal: <http://portals.wi.wur.nl/msp/>
- Power cube website: www.powercube.net/
- Background on the palm oil global consultation process: www.ifc.org/ifcext/agricconsultation.nsf/Content/Home

RESOURCES

ORGANISATIONS, NETWORKS AND INITIATIVES

The Change Alliance



The Change Alliance is an emerging global network that aspires to increase the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs) working for transformational social change, particularly in complex settings.

The idea for the Alliance grew out of discussions and exchanges between individuals from organisations who are engaged with multi-stakeholder learning and dialogue processes. Their aim was to forge links between business leaders, government, NGOs, donors, research institutes and MSP practitioners in order to learn about, develop and strengthen the capacity to achieve systemic change. The Change Alliance’s founding organizations include ICCO, Wageningen UR – CDI, SNV, IDS, PRIA, and the Generative Change Community.

Since its inception, the Change Alliance has worked to create the conditions and capacities for effective MSPs. It supports specific stakeholder processes called *action sites* and links them to a global learning platform. Here, the lessons that have been learned in the course of an MSP are shared with the Change Alliance members, and new knowledge and understanding is created.

Examples of the diversity of the MSPs that the Change Alliance proposes to learn from include:

- Participatory budgeting in Brazil
- Managing airport expansion in Germany
- Rebuilding tribal relations in Kenya
- Water governance on the Mekong River
- Multi-stakeholder certification and assessment processes for food, forests, corporate impact and other issues
- Reinventing community service delivery around Lake Victoria
- Round tables on sustainable production
- Creating a vision for national unity in Mozambique

Although MSPs are not new, there is a significant gap in our understanding of how best to support them. The impact they can have

on bringing about change is also often underestimated. And perhaps most significantly, there is a capacity gap when it comes to leading and facilitating these powerful processes of systemic change. It is the aim of the Change Alliance to help fill these gaps.

During 2010, the Alliance established a number of links with organisations working on multi-actor change processes in Africa. This will culminate in the Inspiring Change Event in Nairobi, Kenya in December 2010. A similar event will be held in Asia in 2011.

For March 2011, the Change Alliance is organising a learning event in cooperation with PSO, ICCO and the Partnership Resource Centre. This will address the capacity challenges faced by NGOs in their partnerships with the private sector.

Anyone interested in connecting with like-minded people can become a member of the Alliance; and organisations can become partners.

You can contact the Change Alliance secretariat at Wageningen UR Centre for Development Innovation, Tel: +31 317 486 800 or register on the website.

www.changealliance.org

Multi-stakeholder partnerships as a donor strategy

Paradox or synergy?

The Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO) is a Dutch donor agency engaged in facilitating and funding multi-stakeholder partnerships. Its unique approach has been adopted by five other organisations in the ICCO Alliance.



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Hettie Walters is ICCO's capacity development (CD) coordinator. She promotes learning alliances and knowledge development, specifically in relation to ICCO's programmatic approach and to CD. In an interview with *Capacity.org*, Hettie explains how this approach can be applied to multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs).

Hettie, why does ICCO engage in facilitating MSPs?

As a donor agency, our focus for many years now has been on matters relating to, among other issues, accessing basic services, financial services, international and local markets, democratisation and conflict transformation.

We have learned that we cannot address these issues by giving support to single organisations. In order to bring about what we call 'systemic change at the institutional level', it's necessary for multiple actors to become involved. That's why over the last four years our programmatic approach has gradually moved towards mobilising multiple actors to collaborate and bring about change.

Learning to think in terms of systems is a core element of this approach. Systems can be small and linked to a specific local problem, or large enough to encompass a whole value chain. By systems we mean, for example, the structures that create or limit

the opportunities for children who live in remote mountain areas to attend school and receive an education through their own language; or the structures that ensure that men are regarded as the heads of households and hold the titles to the land, while women have no property rights and cannot operate independently in the marketplace.

Another example of this sort of system is the one that excludes young people from effective health care by preventing access to information on sexual and reproductive health and rights. In all these systems, families, community organisations, NGOs, government agencies and the private sector tend to interact in a way that ensures the system stays as it is.

Where does ICCO's involvement with an MSP start?

Our point of departure is usually the organisation with which we already have a funding relationship. This is normally an NGO, a community-based organisation or a social movement. In this context, we bring together partners who have an interest in addressing a specific problem. We jointly analyse the system and determine which other actors need to get involved in the process – actors such as government or private-sector organisations. We brainstorm

about possible solutions, and identify a common purpose focused on the changes that we think the system needs.

In the beginning, we noticed that efforts to widen the circle of actors were met with some resistance. Partners feared that they would have to share funding with the newcomers. As a donor organisation, we are always confronted with something of a paradox when striking a balance between funding and facilitating MSPs.

We deal with this by reassuring partners that the level of funding will not be affected if other actors come in. Funding and facilitation are strictly separate channels and handled by different people. For facilitation, we try to hire local consultants whenever possible. Also the facilitation cycle is different from the funding cycle. It is shorter and focused on getting the process started. Our approach also has an inbuilt exit strategy.

As a donor, you are in a powerful position. How do you avoid exerting influence to the extent that it undermines local ownership of the process?

Well, you can call this the second paradox of being a donor and a facilitator at the same time. This has been one of the subjects of our learning process since we first started to engage with MSPs. As donors, we need to be aware that MSPs do not necessarily need the involvement of ICCO or other external agencies. We need to be sensitive to the existence of endogenous MSP processes. And when we find them, we should make sure they are nurtured – if this is necessary.

When we become involved with an MSP – whether as a catalyst or in a nurturing role – we have to be careful not to impose our programme implementation agenda. This is a delicate balance. It demands great skill on the part of the facilitators. We are making steady progress in mastering these skills but I would not claim that we have arrived where we want to be.

We are still learning but I am confident that we can work in synergy with local actors in an MSP and make an important contribution to change by empowering them. <



Children attending a school in Ladakh, India

Interview by Heinz Greijn



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Competencies needed to design and facilitate MSPs

What it takes

Multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs) are playing an increasingly important role in sustainable development. Designing and facilitating MSPs depends on a set of diverse competencies.

Multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs) are processes that aim to bring together all major stakeholders in a new form of communication and decision finding (and possibly decision making) on a particular issue. Multi-stakeholder approaches became a 'buzz' term and the concept was promoted in a number of international processes including the UN Global Compact and the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002. Since then, donors have amplified their emphasis on public-private partnerships and entrepreneurial multi-sector initiatives. Looking back, we can say that the expectations of these partnerships may have been slightly naive.

We have learned – yet again – that communication is challenging, even more so between different stakeholders and across cultures. Collaboration not only requires commitment, but also entails genuine readiness for change, which is quite rare. Creating innovative 'win-win' situations where everybody's interests are integrated is extremely difficult, and where it is not possible, reaching a compromise can be very cumbersome. Another thing we have learned is that MSPs take considerable time, effort and resources. Because of this, they need to become part of people's job descriptions and key performance indicators in order to allow them to convene, lead, facilitate and participate. We are also learning that even then, we cannot assume that people have everything it takes to proceed successfully.

When we think about the competencies needed for designing and facilitating MSPs, many areas of knowledge, skills and experiences come to mind. These belong to a range of disciplines and professions, and include cognitive, emotional and social abilities. Many can be acquired through reading and listening, and others largely depend on practise and experience so that together they constitute a combination of *art, science, and skill*.

This multi-layered, epistemological mix is uncomfortable for some people, at least initially, as it can seem eclectic and lacking a solid and consistent theoretical base. However, this set of competencies is grounded in values, principles and a constantly growing body of experience.

In practice, it is most important to find *what works*, and, in particular, *what works for each of us* as an individual process professional. The field is in constant development, and we need to continuously learn from our own experiences, from peers, networks, and from new research in order to fulfil our tasks successfully and responsibly.

The following headings introduce some of the main competencies necessary for designing and facilitating successful MSPs.

Understanding the context

We often hear people debate about whether facilitators should be knowledgeable about the issues at hand. If they are, they will have opinions about the issues, and that can create challenges in terms of neutrality in the process and being trusted by all stakeholders. However, I have not seen a well-designed and facilitated process where the facilitator was uninformed about the systemic context that the MSP was operating in. Process professionals should at least be familiar with the main terms, the pros and cons of the problem; the key characteristics of the relevant stakeholders, such as their worldviews, interests and theories of change; and the main (power) dynamics in the system. The more knowledge we have, the more important it is to *demonstrate neutrality* by communicating transparently about opinions and how we are keeping them out of the process.

Knowing and developing yourself

Self-awareness is essential when operating in a multi-stakeholder environment, and facilitation requires significant levels of individual development. Self-awareness includes awareness of one's own characteristics and behavioural tendencies, particularly in dialogic situations. It takes account of your awareness of how others react to you and awareness of your own assumptions, feelings and blind spots. Self-awareness also involves understanding that we *use ourselves as tools in the process* – as tools of perception, diagnosis and intervention. Essentially, we are using *ourselves* to genuinely connect with participants, model authentic communication and get to know individuals, groups and

issues that sometimes deeply affect us. Facilitators often hold the process together emotionally by reaching out to each and every one, showing friendliness, respect, confidence and good humour. As in other, similar professions such as training, teaching, coaching and therapy, the idea of self-awareness and working with oneself as a tool is grounded in careful reflection, constant establishment and re-establishment of boundaries and attentiveness to one's own limitations and needs.

Individual development is necessary in order to *exemplify the principles* of the process and evoke trust and trustworthiness, authenticity, flexibility, honesty, goal orientation, a keen sense of justice and excellent empathy from all participants. Process professionals should have developed the ability to exercise dialogic core competencies such as voicing opinions, listening carefully, respecting the 'other' and suspending judgement. Individual development also helps us to not be afraid of conflict, crisis, protests or expressions of distrust, and enables us to turn these into opportunities for reflection and creative problem solving.

In my experience, these rather psychological aspects of the work often get overlooked. Yet they are essential if MSPs are to succeed – and equally essential in protecting process professionals from exhaustion and burnout.

Envisioning the process

This refers to the ability to imagine and design the whole of the MSP over time, embedded in the systemic context and subject to dynamics from within and outside the system. Envisioning an MSP includes the ability to consider whole systems as well as social groups, institutions and structures, the individuals within them, and all inter-relations between such entities.

Short- and long-term thinking and planning, and the ability to communicate and encourage these is vital. Many process professionals work with one of the MSP life-cycle models and they cultivate a profound understanding of the *dialogic approach* as a way to connect and collaborate with individuals, groups and

cultures. They move between different perspectives and world views, exemplifying role taking, and understanding the benefits of conversations that foster shared understanding and allow new solutions to be generated.

Epistemology and theoretical knowledge

Everyone approaches the MSP from the perspective of what is true for them. But, no one, including the facilitator, can claim to hold 'the truth'. This is a basic epistemological assumption that underpins MSPs. Our viewpoints depend on our position and roles in society. Recognising that there are different 'truths', held by different stakeholders, can help to build commitment to the process, and foster respect for one another – not necessarily for our respective opinions but for the fact that opinions are indeed diverse.

In an MSP, the challenge is how to respect every stakeholder's truths while creating integrated solutions. Facilitators are expected to design a process towards that goal, proposing plans, methods and agendas. However, the facilitator's 'truth' can, and will, be questioned. In such cases, facilitators need to be able to share the reasoning underpinning the process design – explaining why, at times, meetings should be closed, stakeholders should work in small groups first, separate task forces are needed, draft agreements should be discussed line by line, and so on.

Models, methods, tools

These are what we use to put our understanding and design of an MSP into practice. They include tools that allow quick stakeholder identification and analysis as well as numerous meeting and documentation formats for different purposes. Facilitation literature is full of creative ideas, conditions and goals – and new ones are being developed all the time. For example, when the objective is to promote understanding and transform conflict, tools such as *Open Space* or *World Café* are particularly useful. And when the aim is to explore future views, *Future Search* and *Scenario Building* are useful instruments.

Many process professionals do not emphasise monitoring and evaluation as much as they should – methods such as *Outcome Mapping* are very useful for planning and monitoring, and engage participants in a continuous process of observation and meta-communication, which in itself helps MSPs to succeed.

Being able to identify appropriate tools is an essential skill. While individual preferences and experiences play a role, we should not limit ourselves to a small set of methods. Rather we should choose from the wide range of available methods – in consultation with a core group of stakeholders. On the basis that *form follows function*, purpose and desired outcome should guide our choice of tools, while the



Villagers with their advisers explore the potential impacts of the Narmada dam in India on their livelihoods

context and framework conditions will dictate what can be done.

Teamwork

All the competencies described above are necessary for designing and facilitating successful MSPs. But does one individual need to hold all of them, or can a group of people with a combination of these competencies make a successful team? By sharing tasks, people learn more intensely from each other. I have often observed how stakeholders and experts pick up facilitation methods and hone their skills during an MSP and by working with a process professional.

Creating a core team consisting of the facilitator, process conveners and main stakeholders is a way of pooling necessary competencies, as well as creating shared ownership within an 'MSP nucleus'. Creating and working with such a team requires another crucial competency on the process professional's side: the ability to act as part of a team. Facilitators who tend to view their work as some kind of magician's performance may have difficulties sharing their competencies freely and bringing them into a mix of equally important competencies from other members of the team. Maybe there is a tinge of narcissism, maybe the desire to remain needed, and indeed paid. Neither is helpful in an MSP nucleus team, and this again highlights the importance of self-awareness and individual development.

Getting what it takes

When working with MSPs, attending to the competencies described above is a matter of professionalism and quality control. In my experience, an understanding of the epistemological and theoretical underpinning of the work, along with self-awareness and self-development, are the competencies that are least developed among the broad and

varied group of sustainable development professionals engaged in MSPs. Often, the 'big' issues tend to dwarf the 'small' ones – staying on top of issues such as poverty or climate change seems to demand more attention than perfecting your observation skills in a dialogic setting, for example. Those working on the 'outer world' challenges often do not easily relate to the 'inner world' phenomena. Yet investing the time and resources in all competencies is necessary to achieve maximum effectiveness and sustain change. This also has a political dimension of ensuring that funders keep providing resources for MSP design and facilitation: only successful processes, and long-term data about success factors, will speak to this investment in the long run.

Yet, opportunities for honing MSP-related competencies are rare. The goal is not to create a more homogenous group of process professionals – there is great diversity in MSP facilitation, and that is welcome as it speaks to a very diverse range of people and contexts. Supporting these professionals in their learning and development, however, is an important investment.

As we continue learning, researching and evaluating multi-stakeholder processes, I favour combining more traditional ways of studying with an action learning approach. Practitioners need courses and materials, and they need peer groups and coaches that help them reflect, improve and develop further. <

Further reading

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Links

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From token inclusion to transformative participation



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Indian cities are chaos personified - vast heterogeneous conurbations where individuals and groups represent all shades of economic, social, religious, cultural and professional identities. The fast pace of urbanisation often leads to impromptu and thoughtless expansion, with little consideration given to basic services such as water, sanitation and roads. Inclusive and participative city planning can be challenging to achieve; but it offers an ideal opportunity to implement processes that make planning responsive to the needs of multiple stakeholders, with particular focus on poor and marginalised members of society.

Embedding citizen participation in city planning is problematic because of the sheer scale of cities, the wide gaps in knowledge and power between stakeholders, the lack of technical expertise and the prevalence of political patronage that favours elites. Traditionally, expert-driven planning processes have been so entrenched that there was hardly any space for the poor and marginalised to participate. In addition, the lack of updated data, weak local governments and political resistance to participatory processes has widened the schism between citizens and city plans.

Recently, the idea of participatory planning has become rather fashionable. Projects led by both government and private developers use terms such as 'stakeholder consultation' and 'people-friendly plan' in their project briefs. But the reality of participatory planning is that it tends to be limited to meetings with a few elite groups, where city issues are

Although labelled 'participatory' many urban planning processes in India involve only select elite groups. This article explains what is required to achieve genuine participation involving all stakeholders, including the poor and the marginalised.

discussed - and then the professionals take the decisions on any future development. Sadly, such tokenism means that people's control over decision making remains elusive. This will continue to be the case as long as professionals involved in the project receive no training for facilitating meaningful participation in highly fragmented societies, and as long as multiple stakeholders and interest groups including women, children, youth, the elderly and other marginalised people are excluded from consultations.

The greatest need is to facilitate citizens' involvement in the planning of their cities and localities, and to transform their contribution from mere nominal or consultative participation into instrumental and transformative participation.

The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) is one of the very few civil society organisations in India that takes a different approach to city planning. Over the course of the past twelve years, we have attempted to transform rigid planning processes into processes that are more people friendly, flexible and inclusive. In this article we will share the lessons we have learned. More specifically, we will describe the experiences we had preparing participatory city development plans for two small towns and how we helped institutionalise social accountability mechanisms in five cities - four of which are state capitals.

For PRIA, it is a given that urban planning is a participatory process. Staff are trained to reinforce this perspective in the way they engage with the elected representatives. When preparing the participatory development plans, PRIA held workshops for stakeholders to help clarify the political and developmental importance of the planning process. Discussions held after the workshops reinforced the view that the councillors and the citizens together are the initiators and owners of the planning process.

After the workshops and preliminary discussions, PRIA organised citywide campaigns to ensure that as many people as possible knew about the development plans.

This was an essential step in creating an enabling environment for a multi-stakeholder process to succeed. It meant clarifying information that was often skewed, sensitising the 'upper classes' to the negative consequences of perpetuating existing inequalities and giving confidence to marginalised groups and individuals.

The next stage was to jointly analyse the current situation to see what changes needed to be made to achieve the desired result. All the stakeholders contributed to this. However, it was necessary to limit the influence of some of the professional groups such as local academic institutions, media groups, and various professional and business associations. Such stakeholders can contribute enormously to making the planning process an open and transparent 'public deliberation', but they need to modify their expectations to ensure that the poor and marginalised can still lead the process, or at least participate in a meaningful way.

The PRIA facilitators then collated all the information, presented it to the stakeholders, and asked for validation and feedback. Everyone's comments were incorporated and the final plan was prepared and submitted to the municipality. From that point onwards it was mainly up to the municipality to maintain the momentum and commitments of the various stakeholders. However, given the current resource-starved nature of local governments in India, it may not be possible for institutions to implement the plans in their totality.

The lessons we learned

The demand and supply side of accountability

Participation requires a two-way process between citizens who demand accountability, better services and a defining role in decision making, and a local government that acknowledges the equal importance of all stakeholders and responds appropriately and transparently. Facilitators must place themselves as an interface between the

'supply' and 'demand' sides of the process. (This is easier said than done, particularly when the facilitator is a pro-poor, civil society actor aware of skewed power relationships that favour elitist governance structures.)

In earlier projects, citizens had been encouraged to participate but it was soon clear that amplifying the voice of the citizens would have little effect if nobody was listening. Learning this helped us to bridge the rift between supply and demand. A very interesting example of this was support for the creation of systems to redress grievances in some municipalities. The citizens were encouraged to flood the municipality with service-related complaints. Simultaneously, the municipal officials and elected representatives were sensitised and given the capacity to respond by making strategic changes in their complaints systems. Even the most advanced complaints redressal systems become defunct if citizens do not use them, while municipalities would never realise the importance of social accountability mechanisms unless there was a demand.

The importance of inclusiveness

Enhancing capacity and promoting knowledge exchange are crucial. Facilitators must be present on site throughout the course of the intervention and they must forge relationships with local civil society groups and citizens' organisations. The exchange of knowledge allows local people to give their perspectives on issues related to the socio-economic, cultural and planning aspects of the city. Facilitators must make sure that they inform the citizens and local partners about all relevant policies, schemes and entitlements, and that they present the technicalities of planning in an accessible way using local languages. It is essential to be aware of and use existing social networks such as religious groups and neighbourhood groups, as well as professional associations such as colleges, trades associations and chambers of commerce to expand the stakeholder base to include the entire city. Then knowledge and ideas can really be generated from different fields.

Including women

Women are the real agents of change because they are the best representatives of many of the silent and marginalised groups. Women have higher hopes that, with the help of external support, their efforts could make things better – and they tend to be free of local political allegiances. Instead of being highly critical, they organise themselves and get things done. In the cities of Raipur and Ranchi, women organised themselves into neighbourhood groups and demanded public taps, toilets and dustbins – and they got them.

However, this was not the case in the small towns we worked in, where women were reticent about coming out into the public domain. It took months before a gender balance could be achieved in community meetings. In these cases, it was



Women collect their daily water ration from a new community tap in Mumbai, India

important to emphasise that they should participate actively (merely being there was not enough) and recognise that they had important issues to share. It was interesting to observe that while men contributed to physical infrastructure issues, women, when they started speaking, shared insights into issues such as the lack of higher education institutes, which caused their children to go away; or the absence of street lights, which restricted their mobility. They spoke too of the dearth of maternal care centres, and told many stories of women having their babies while travelling to distant clinics.

Do not discard technical expertise

Technical expertise that is on the side of the poor and marginalised changes the power equation. It is important that development professionals respect technical expertise because they expect technical experts to accept the necessity of participatory processes. It is important that architects, planners, urban designers and other experts interact directly with the people. Certainly, there is a need to place participatory planning in college curriculums, but it is even more important that it is instilled into the psyches of the technical experts. A good illustration of this is the story of a community that was demanding a water pipeline in their area, but the municipality was asking them to shift to another area if they wanted better services. It escalated into a huge misunderstanding with the people in the community feeling very mistrustful of the local government. The problem arose because the settlement was partially situated on hard rock through which water pipelines could not be drilled. A planner and geologist intervened, a compromise solution was reached and in-situ resettlement was carried out to make water available for every family.

Technical expertise can also be useful in assessing the priority of people's needs and explaining about the equitable distribution of limited resources. For example, people from better-off economic backgrounds sometimes suggest planning ideas for

airports and shopping malls when their town still lacks proper basic services such as water and sanitation.

Small achievements

Small achievements sow the seeds of huge successes. Getting a small tap installed or rehabilitating one slum settlement proves to the people that efforts yield results. Such victories build trust and enthusiasm and encourage more people to participate. They also enhance the quality of participation considerably once people realise that their efforts can make a difference.

Small successes are also important for the local governments to showcase their willingness to become responsive. This is especially so in political environments where the devolution of resources and power are still very much the gift of the higher echelons of government.

Access to information

Information and knowledge are power – and giving the poor and marginalised access to them leads to their empowerment. Historically, information about policies, planning standards, the provision of services and entitlements to development resources was largely inaccessible to the marginalised majority – and even when it was made available, it was presented in incomprehensible language that rendered it inaccessible. One of the roles of facilitators is to decode such planning jargon, not only for the common citizens but also for elected representatives. Equipped with the right information and analysis, people can start to take charge of interventions and produce sustainable solutions.

But if they are to move beyond pilot projects to schemes with larger coverage and greater impact, they must have the support of national and district governments; as only governments can provide the huge resources needed for the next step. <

A longer version of this article is available on www.capacity.org

Working with power and love



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Conventional approaches to solving problems cannot deal effectively with increasingly complex social crises. Our efforts to address ‘tough’ issues in this way often cause us to become ever more confused, polarised and stuck.

Why is this so, and what do we need to do to get ‘unstuck’?

Social challenges can be complex in three distinct ways. They can be *dynamically* complex, meaning that cause and effect are far apart in space and time; dynamically simple situations can be addressed piece by piece, but dynamically complex situations can only be addressed systemically. They can be *socially* complex, meaning that different stakeholders have radically different understandings and interests; socially simple situations can be addressed by experts, but socially complex situations can be addressed only by the stakeholders themselves. And they can be *generatively* complex, meaning that they are fundamentally unfamiliar and unpredictable; generatively simple situations can be addressed using past best practice, but generatively complex situations can only be addressed by learning through doing.

So when we try to address complex challenges conventionally using approaches that are piecemeal, authority-driven and based on past experience, we inevitably get stuck. To move forward, we need to adopt unconventional approaches that are systemic, participative and emergent.

Over the past 20 years, my colleagues and I have sought ways to develop and deploy such unconventional approaches. We bring together

business, government and civil society leaders who have been working separately to address tough challenges in their complex social systems, but who have been unable to find solutions alone. With our help, such multi-stakeholder leadership teams learn to work together to construct a shared understanding of their current reality – and of what’s needed to change it. We then help them to prototype, pilot and institutionalise a new reality.

Irreconcilable human drives?

One of the most important lessons I have learned, working on many challenges and in many countries, is that leading such systemic, participative, emergent change processes requires us to be able to work simultaneously with two fundamental human drives that are usually thought of as irreconcilable: power and love. Here I am using Paul Tillich’s definitions of power as ‘the drive of everything living to realise itself, with increasing intensity and extensity’ and love as ‘the drive towards the unity of the separated.’ The essential dynamics that underlie multi-stakeholder social change processes arise from the interplay of these two drives – at the levels of individuals, groups, and larger social systems.

This way of understanding social change processes is useful because most of us, whatever level we are working at, tend to favour either power or love. But power and love are not alternatives to be chosen between – they’re a paradox or dilemma to be worked with. When we mistakenly choose *either* power *or* love, we get stuck in re-creating existing realities. Tillich’s most famous student, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr, described the complementary relationship between power and love very clearly: ‘Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic.’ If we want to address complex social challenges in both our social systems and in *ourselves*, then we have to learn to work with both drives.

This diagnosis and prescription provide us with a basic curriculum for building our capacity to address complex social challenges. In convening and facilitating multi-stakeholder teams to undertake such work, we need to attend to both power and love. This means working on two fronts: seeing and supporting each stakeholder’s self-realisation, their drive to get their particular job done; and also seeing and supporting the drive to unify these diverse roles into an integral self-realising whole. Only with this unconventional approach can we move forward, peacefully and sustainably, to solve our toughest problems. <

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