Chapter 3

Facilitating MSPs – a sustainable way of changing power relations?

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Preface

The framework offered in this article has evolved over more than ten years, thanks to a wide range of experiences of different MSPs. It has also been tested and refined through the annual three-week international course on facilitating MSPs and social learning, run by the Centre for Development Innovation (CDI). Moreover, experiences with several learning trajectories in this field (with Dutch NGOs like SNV, ICCO, Cordaid and Hivos and the APF network and international organisations like IFDC, FAO and IFAD) deepened our understanding of the complex aspects of such MSPs.

At the beginning of 2011, CDI plans to publish a full-fledged booklet, in which we share our insights on the multiple aspects involved in facilitating and understanding MSPs for sustainable change. The summary given below is just a foretaste of all you can read about – and hopefully respond to – in 2011.

The multi-stakeholder framework: a deeper understanding of conflicting change processes

Increasingly, (development) organisations and practitioners are involved in initiating, being part of, supporting and facilitating a wide variety of multi-stakeholder partnerships, coalitions, platforms and processes. MSPs are understood as processes of constructive political engagement in which power, conflict and politics are central. Although there is a need for such collaboration between government, business, NGOs and citizens, the knowledge that there is nothing neutral about them, makes the practice of enabling these processes to be effective and sustainable, far from simple.

Too often MSPs are begun with insufficient thought devoted to the underlying dynamics of change, politics, process elements and capacities on which success depends.

To be effective, the people who initiate, support, take part in or facilitate MSPs have important questions to ask:

- Do the right conditions exist for an MSP?

- Who are the right stakeholders to involve, who decides on their suitability and at what point will they be involved?

- How will the process gain legitimacy?

- What risk does such a process hold for marginalised or disempowered groups?

- What role can/should an organisation play – initiator, active participant, funder, facilitator, knowledge broker, and/or learner?

- How can you monitor the influence stemming from the ever-changing context in which these processes play a role?

- What capacities do different stakeholders need, to be able to play an effective part in the process?

- What sort of process needs to be created, and what are the best methodologies and tools to use?

- When do you know that the process is successful and moving in the right direction?

The intention in answering these questions, is to offer practical advice for practitioners. This advice does not, however, come in the form of clear steps, recipes or simple facilitation tools. Rather, it comes in the form of a framework that underpins a deeper understanding of multi-stakeholder change processes. This will hopefully enable practitioners to become critically questioning, creative and flexible, in the way they engage with and support such processes. As has often been said, nothing is as practical as good theory. Deep issues of social change – directly linked to conflict and governance, with all the complexity this involves – are at the heart of most MSPs.

Certainly, the facilitation of a good process requires the effective use of participatory methodologies and high-level facilitation skills. However, to be fully equipped, a multi-stakeholder 'facilitator' must have the capacity to look more deeply at the underlying dynamics of change related to, for example, complexity, institutions, power, conflict and leadership.

There are three interlinked dimensions to the multi-stakeholder framework:[1]

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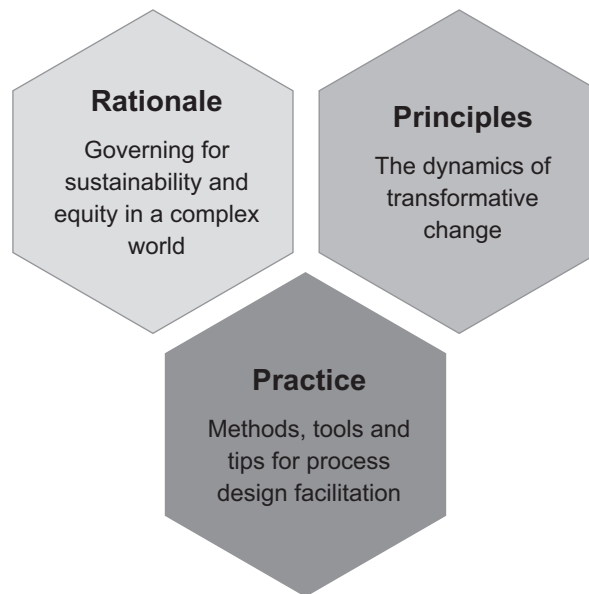
Figure 4: The multi-stakeholder framework

- The rationale: this explains why, in an increasingly complex world, MSPs are becoming important mechanisms of governance. It explains how the processes complement the more formal workings of national governments and their international relations. The rationale explores the underlying nature of sustainability and equity problems, in the context of recognising that human societies are best understood as complex adaptive systems. An understanding of this wider context is important, as it allows us to decide whether, in a particular situation, it makes sense (i.e. there is a good rationale) to engage in an MSP;

- The seven principles: our view is that MSPs can help bring about deep and fundamental change in how individuals, organisations and societies behave. This transformative change is necessary in order to tackle the underlying causes of un-sustainability and inequity. We have identified seven principles related to the dynamics of change, that experience has shown need to be considered and integrated into an MSP, in order to foster transformative change;

- The practice: MSPs don't just happen; they need to be created, supported and facilitated. There are many practical aspects related to setting up MSPs, deciding who to involve, which methodologies to use, the phases to go through, and the facilitation capacities. This dimension of the framework combines the understanding

that comes from the rationale and principles, with a process model. The aim is to show how, in practice, MSPs can be designed, created and facilitated.

Who are the stakeholders, what is the process and what is facilitation?

Who are the stakeholders?

A stakeholder (or actor/player) is an individual, organisation or group which has a role to play and/or is affected by the outcome of an issue, situation or process. In turn, what a stakeholder does may influence the situation. How the situation changes will again, in turn, feed back to have some effect on the stakeholders. This type of interaction is found in complex systems. While important for understanding MSPs, complexity is not covered in any detail (see further readings for additional guidelines).

From a governance perspective, relational dynamics can be understood in terms of four main groups: citizens; private sector actors; government and civil society organisations. The inclusion of citizens, alongside the classic distinction made between government, business and civil society, is important for three reasons: first, citizens – in how they vote, the products or services they buy or use, and the way they engage with civil society – are important actors in their own right. Second, individuals have roles as both citizens and actors. An individual may well have different perspectives and interests, depending on whether she is being a 'citizen' or carrying out a paid responsibility (in, for example, government or business). Third, stakeholder processes at times fall into the trap of only engaging representatives from three of the sectors, without considering how to involve 'non-organised' citizens who self-organise in other ways, to create a future for themselves and their families (Fowler and Biekart 2008).

What is important in analysing stakeholders is not just knowing who the players are, but understanding how they relate, where their commonalities and differences lie, and identifying their different power bases. The essence of bringing together different actors is the fact that they are different. The value-assumption of a process involving and connecting multiple stakeholders is that it will enable the recognition of higher-order common goods, concerns and interests that motivate stakeholders to overcome their differences in pursuit of win-win solutions. If there is no common problem and no sense of some benefit for all who are engaged, then clearly collective effort has little point. From this precondition, combining the respective resources, connections, technical capabilities, responsibilities, interests, perspectives and knowledge on

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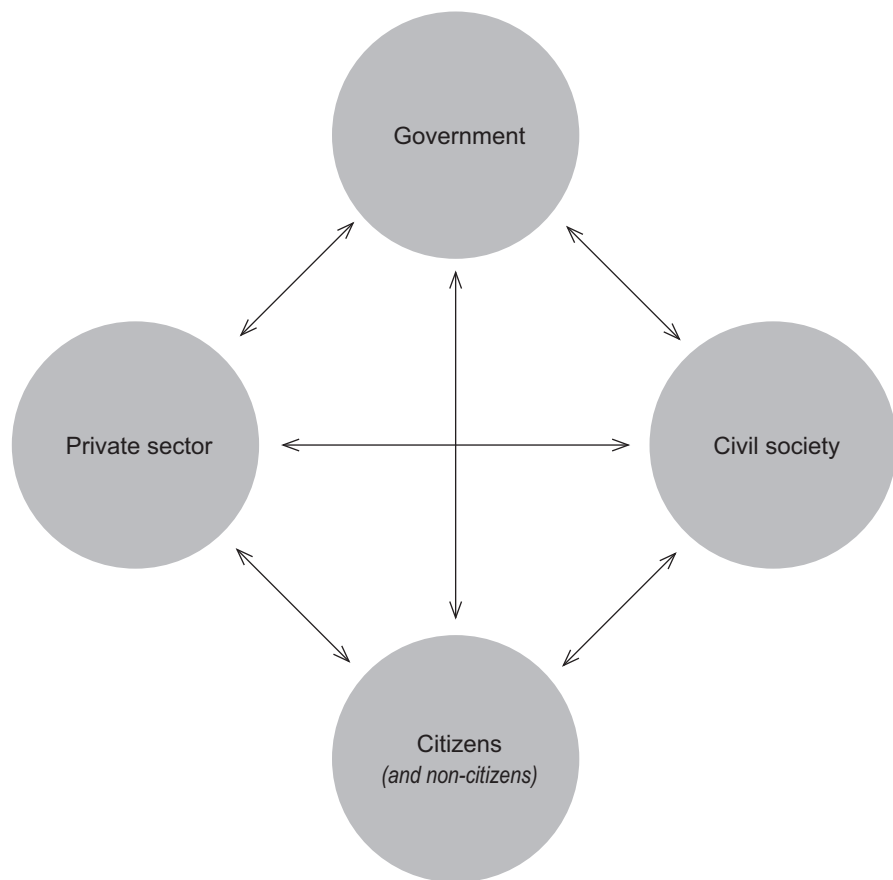
Government

Private sector

Civil society

Citizens
(and non-citizens)

Figure 5: How stakeholders relate

situations, different forms of power and ways of driving change, add up to new types of capability.

What is an MSP?

To begin to answer this question, let us focus on a few examples. In Recife, Brazil, local government is working with many different community and business groups on a process of participatory budget monitoring, aimed at improving the overall outcomes of public expenditure. In Uganda, the Dutch development organisation, SNV, links farmers, business and government to improve their joint management and development of the oil seeds value chain. Across many countries, governments have engaged a wide diversity of stakeholders in developing poverty reduction strategy papers and sector-wide strategies, in order to improve their formulation and implementation. In Australia, a multi-level structure exists for involving farmers, environmental organisations, government, business and researchers in tackling land degradation. In Benin, a community-based grassroots initiative involving local traders

has drawn together donors and government to improve the local market. At a global level, the World Wildlife Fund (now called World Wide Fund for Nature) has initiated a dialogue within the shrimp aquaculture sector, to help establish standards for maintaining a sustainable industry. Meanwhile, also at a global level, many players in the cotton industry are involved in the Better Cotton Initiative.

In all the aforementioned examples, stakeholders with different perspectives, roles and direct interests have come together because of a wider common problem or opportunity. They realised that their own longer-term interests depend on coordination and collaboration[2] with others, with whom they may even be, in the first instance, in conflict.

To be more precise, we will define an MSP as: 'A process of interactive learning, empowerment and collaborative governance that enables stakeholders with common longer term objectives, but different interests, to be collectively innovative and resilient when faced with the emerging risks, crises and opportunities of a complex and changing environment.'

To be clear, we see multi-stakeholder processes not as 'once-off' workshops and 'harmonious' processes involving different actors, but rather as an ongoing engagement involving a range of activities and events, often undertaken over an extended time frame, and which transforms conflicting interests.

There are many variations on this scenario: some processes may be initiated and largely controlled by the state (government). Others may be initiated by concerned citizens or civil society organisations that are, perhaps, frustrated by the failings of government. The private sector is increasingly engaged in establishing or forming part of MSPs, in response to demands for sustainable business strategies and CSR. Some MSPs are initiated jointly between government, civil society and business actors.

The core purpose of an MSP also varies – from simply stakeholder consultation (for example, about government policy) through to joint decision making and action by all the stakeholders involved. Some processes are established to enable stakeholders to explore and learn about shared problems, so they can utilise this understanding when taking action in their own domains of responsibility. MSPs also occur at and across different scales. Some are highly localised, others work mainly at a global level, while many are set up to work across different levels of, for example, authority or responsibility. Given this diversity, some common characteristics include

- dealing with a defined 'problem situation' or development opportunity (the boundary and focus may expand or contract during the process);

An MSP is defined as a process of interactive learning, empowerment and collaborative governance that enables stakeholders with common longer term objectives, but different interests, to be collectively innovative and resilient when faced with the emerging risks, crises and opportunities of a complex and changing environment.

Facilitating implies initiating the process; providing funding or other resources; mobilising the interest and engagement of stakeholder constituencies; providing leadership; establishing informal networking between different groups; creating linkages between different stakeholders; creating access to knowledge bases; giving expert advice on process design; and facilitating multi-stakeholder events.

- involving the stakeholders who form part of or are affected by this 'problem situation'/development opportunity;

- working, as necessary, across different sectors and scales;

- following an agreed yet dynamic process and time frame;

- involving stakeholders in setting 'rules' for constructive engagement;

- working with the power differences and conflicts between different groups who may have multiple and conflicting interests;

- engaging stakeholders in learning and questioning their beliefs, assumptions and existing positions on the matter at hand;

- balancing bottom-up and top-down approaches;

- making institutional and social change possible.

If these characteristics cannot be realised, a practitioner needs to consider other ways of fostering collaboration. Examples are less-formal networks, consultative forums, and other arrangements that call for less operational interaction and commitment. Collectively generated capacities, such as mutual responsiveness on a bigger scale, may still arise from looser setups.

What does it mean to 'facilitate' an MSP?

The term 'facilitate' is used here in a broad way, to include a range of functions that are all necessary for an MSP to succeed. Said functions include: initiating the process; providing funding or other resources; mobilising the interest and engagement of stakeholder constituencies; providing public and political leadership; establishing informal networking between different groups; creating linkages between different stakeholders; creating access to different knowledge bases; giving expert advice on process design; and professionally facilitating multi-stakeholder events.

Generally, the following roles are important:

- Leadership by representatives of the interested stakeholder groups;

- Coordination, networking and organisation by somebody (or some group) working on behalf of all the stakeholders;

- Provision of financial and technical support;

- Professional facilitation advice and support for the overall process and for specific events.

There may be overlap, with some stakeholders or organisations assuming or contributing to multiple roles. However, if a single group begins to dominate in all roles, it is unlikely the process will be sustainable.

Development organisations often find themselves trying to take on multiple roles. In addition, it can become unclear whether they are engaging as external supporters of the process, or as engaged stakeholders with their own interests and biases.

What justifies a multi-stakeholder process? – The rationale

Nowadays, government alone is often unable to marshal the collective capacity needed to tackle the difficult issues facing a society. Consequently, at local, national or global levels, people are searching for new ways to create collective capabilities. One result has been innovative forms of governance that try to create collective capacity through MSPs in which citizens, government, business and NGOs collaborate.

These efforts call for constructive interaction between many different parties. Their success depends on being able to direct people's energies and the diverse types of capacity (which are distributed across a society) towards shared goals. It should be noted, however, that the parties involved – typically referred to as stakeholders or actors – differ in many ways. These differences are important, because they can either enable or impede social change that seeks (to mention but one example) greater justice and ecological viability.

Consequently, practitioners working to create collective capacities for change need to be aware of what makes stakeholders different, and why. This is an important point of departure for becoming skilled in understanding the way relationships work, and for selecting appropriate ways of bringing together stakeholders.

In the wider sense, the rationale for multi-stakeholder collaboration is simple. Today, the world is faced with a set of very difficult issues: the over-use of natural resources; climate change; continuing poverty; and the psychological and health-related 'downsides' of modern living. Quite simply, our existing ways of making decisions, along with our mechanisms of governance – from the local to the global level – are failing to cope with today's challenges. The sociologist, Ulrich Beck, argues that we live in a 'risk society'. Social change is driven, he believes, not by the decisions of government, but largely by what happens in the economic and technological spheres, over which national governments have increasingly little influence.

Our existing ways of making decisions, along with our mechanisms of governance – from the local to the global level – are failing to cope with today's challenges.

Increasingly, coalitions of powerful actors from across business, government and civil society are needed.

The implication is that steering change in a direction that is desirable, because it is aimed at the common good, is not something we can hope for from national governments alone. Increasingly, it seems that in order to tackle difficult issues, coalitions of powerful actors from across business, government and civil society are needed.

What leads to success? – The seven principles of transformative change

1. **Work with complexity**: create MSPs around the recognition that human systems are complex. This means that change processes are dynamic and often unpredictable. Effective change processes, therefore, require a shared understanding between multiple actors, as well as collective learning processes that enable groups with shared interests to be responsive and adaptive to uncertainty.

   Practical implications

   - Do not expect things to go as planned. Design processes around multiple cycles of reflection, planning and action, so that you can adapt to unexpected change;

   - Recognise that in complex systems change happens because of the actions of many different actors. Build a broad network of support and be wary of centralised and top-down approaches;

   - Expect and learn from failure. In the evolution of complex systems there are many failures, but only a few big successes that change the system;

   - Be entrepreneurial; look for and support those emerging successes that may be the triggers of fundamental change.

2. **Foster collective learning**: underpin MSPs with processes that enable different stakeholders to learn together from their collective experience. Such learning is based on the concepts of experiential learning; single-, double- and triple-loop learning; action research and participation. Participatory methods foster creative, open, emotionally engaging and analytically sound interaction between stakeholders.

   Practical implications

   - Design MSPs and workshops around the experiential learning cycle. This means first exploring the situation without judgement, then analysing the implications from different stakeholder perspectives, before making decisions and finally

The seven principles of transformative change are:

Work with complexity; foster collective learning; reinvent institutions; shift power; deal with conflict; enable effective communication; and promote collaborative leadership.

taking action. Jumping to snap decisions or taking action prematurely, will undermine the learning process;

- Engage stakeholders in deeply questioning, exploring and sharing their underlying assumptions about the problems they see, and why they suggest particular strategies for action;

- Design processes that involve the 'whole' person and are emotionally, creatively and intellectually engaging.

3. **Reinvent institutions**: recognise that social, economic and political change is largely about changing institutions. Institutions provide the 'rules of the game', which may be formal or informal. Formal and informal political, legal, social, cultural, economic and religious institutions all interact both as influences and constraints in terms of change. Effective MSPs need to engage stakeholders in looking critically at their own institutions and the institutions they want to affect.

Practical implications

- Engage stakeholders in questioning their own rules of the game (meaning, norms and values) which have an effect on the changes they want to effect;

- Bring stakeholders together in a dialogue (formal or informal) which is aimed at critically analysing the existing institutions which enable or block the changes they want to effect;

- Recognise that to change these institutions long-term processes are needed, which can effect a change in their behaviour.

4. **Shift power**: social change involves understanding, working with and shifting power structures related to political influence, economic wealth, cultural status and personal influence. Power is not a negative force, but rather the means by which any change is both brought about and resisted. Empowering particular stakeholder groups is often key to equitable multi-stakeholder change processes.

Practical implications

- Carefully analyse the power dynamics in the early stage of an MSP;

- Identify how personal, political and financial 'power' can be mobilised to benefit the collective process;

- Recognise that processes can be 'held captive' by the more powerful groups, which may further disadvantage marginalised and disempowered groups;

- Consider 'partisan' stakeholder processes, where the capacities and political power of disadvantaged groups are first developed, before engaging with more powerful actors.

5. **Deal with conflict**: conflict is an inevitable and normal part of any MSP. Understanding, surfacing and dealing with conflict is essential for MSPs to be effective. In fact, conflict is often necessary and desirable for change to occur.

   Practical implications

   - Carefully analyse the attitudes, behaviours, perceptions, contexts and underlying structures of conflicts, in order to propose an effective conflict transformation strategy;

   - Understand the conflict process, as it will help you determine whether the situation is such that interventions may be accepted;

   - Identify possible ways in which to deal with conflict, for instance through dialogue (informal or organised), (principled) negotiation, interest-based bargaining and mediation;

   - Carefully try to find out who the most important actors are (or could be) in dealing with or transforming the conflict at hand.

6. **Enable effective communication**: underlying any effective MSP is the capacity for people to communicate with each other in an open, respectful, honest, empathetic and critical way. This requires the capacities of being able to listen to others and of clearly articulating your own perspectives and ideas. Weak basic communication skills are often a barrier to multi-stakeholder collaboration (a key area for capacity development as a foundation for the process).

   Practical implications

   - Engage stakeholders in questioning how they communicate, listen and try to define, as well as how they judge and integrate their perceptions in the way they communicate;

   - Bring stakeholders together in other forms of dialogue, ranging from debate to non-violent communication.

7. **Promote collaborative leadership**: leadership patterns and capacities have a profound influence on the direction of MSPs. Formal leadership of stakeholder constituencies; respected community figures; political leaders; informal leaders and the leadership and facilitation of the stakeholder processes are all important. Effective MSPs require the strong influence of

collaborative leadership, where those taking a formal or informal leadership role are supportive of and promote the collaborative principles on which such processes depend. Facilitation in the absence of collaborative leadership can be difficult or near impossible, and developing collaborative leadership capacities can be an important aspect of helping to create an effective MSP.

Practical implications

- Understand the existing status, traditional values and capacities of the stakeholders, in order to promote constructive leadership styles for taking forward the change processes in which they are involved;

- Carefully analyse the linkages (hierarchical, social, familial, economic, political) between the different stakeholders, in order to distinguish leadership qualities;

- Engage stakeholders in critically analysing different leadership styles and their consequences in terms of advancing (or stalling) the on-going processes.

Supporting these seven principles for effective multi-stakeholder engagement are four fundamental core qualities:

- **Trust**: building trust between different stakeholder groups and in the processes itself, is critical;

- **Emotional engagement**: people behave the way they do and change what they do largely because of their emotions. After all, we are emotional beings. To be effective, MSPs need to engage with people at an emotional level. This means offering inspiration; dealing with fear; and creating an environment that, in the broadest sense of its meaning, is loving;

- Creativity: new ideas and innovative solutions flow from the human capacity for creativity. Effective MSPs need to use methods and create the space/environment that makes possible and harnesses human creativity. This means combining intellectual analysis with visual methods, art, music, drama, and out-of-the-box methods and approaches.

- **Critical and informed analysis**: in itself, bringing together different stakeholders is no guarantee for creating intelligent and well-thought-through outcomes. An effective MSP needs to draw on the best available information; make use of science and research; and subject the views and opinions of different stakeholder groups to a critical analysis of the context and the envisioned change.

The four core qualities underlying effective multi-stakeholder engagement are trust, emotional engagement, creativity and critical and informed analysis.

How can MSPs be supported? – The practice

The practice of creating and supporting MSPs has three elements:

- A process model, that outlines the main phases of an MSP and the key process considerations for effective stakeholder collaboration;

- A toolbox of participatory methodologies and tools, that can be used to help create interactive learning processes which uphold the principles and qualities of effective multi-stakeholder engagement;

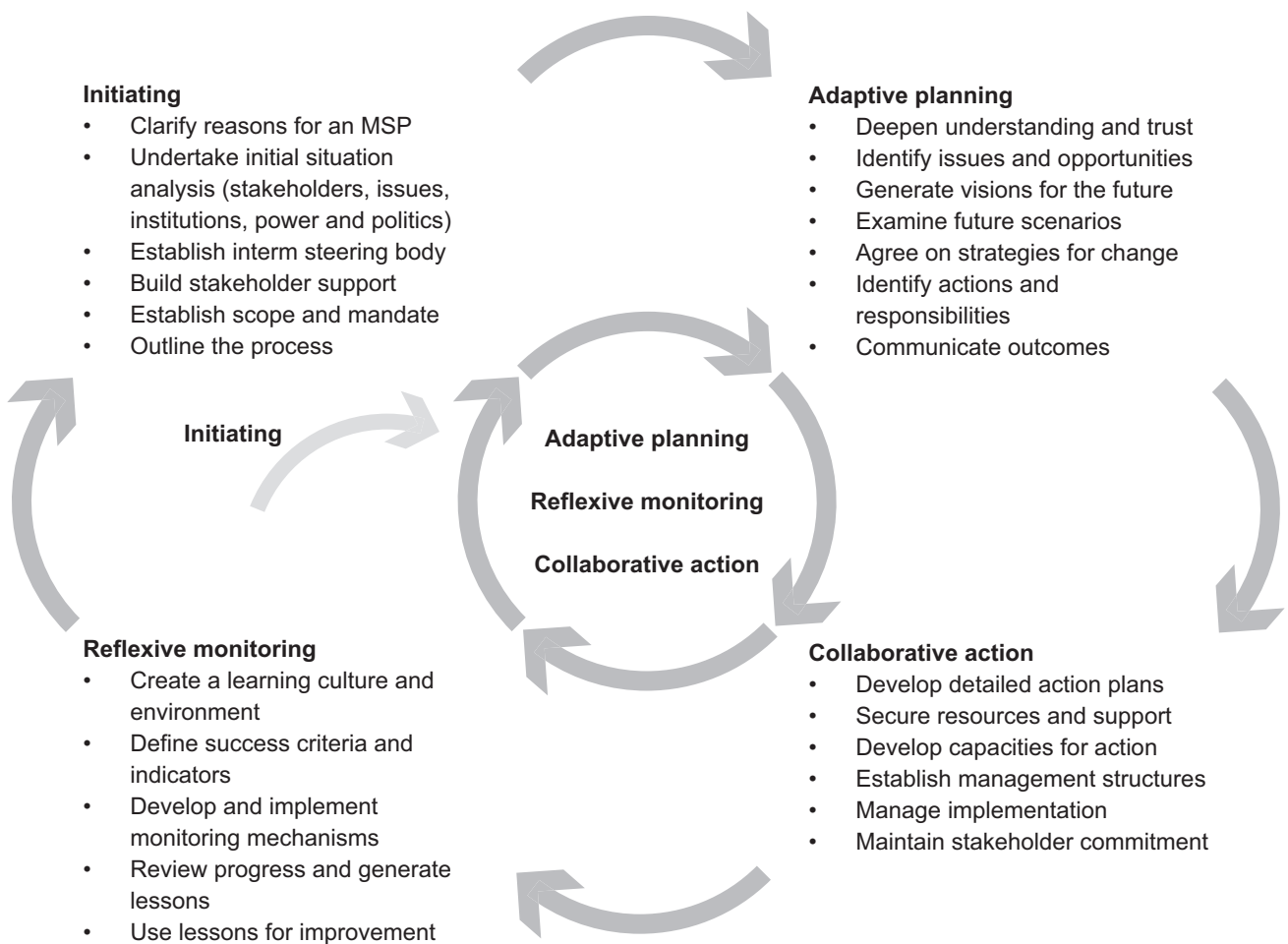- A set of facilitation competencies, as required by those designing, managing, leading or facilitating MSPs.

Initiating
- Clarify reasons for an MSP
- Undertake initial situation analysis (stakeholders, issues, institutions, power and politics)
- Establish interm steering body
- Build stakeholder support
- Establish scope and mandate
- Outline the process

Adaptive planning
- Deepen understanding and trust
- Identify issues and opportunities
- Generate visions for the future
- Examine future scenarios
- Agree on strategies for change
- Identify actions and responsibilities
- Communicate outcomes

Initiating

Adaptive planning

Reflexive monitoring

Collaborative action

Reflexive monitoring
- Create a learning culture and environment
- Define success criteria and indicators
- Develop and implement monitoring mechanisms
- Review progress and generate lessons
- Use lessons for improvement

Collaborative action
- Develop detailed action plans
- Secure resources and support
- Develop capacities for action
- Establish management structures
- Manage implementation
- Maintain stakeholder commitment

Figure 6: The stakeholder process model

What are the elements of an effective process?

Designing any type of MSP requires clarity on many fronts. How do you get going? Who should you involve at the start? Are you dealing with major disagreements or big imbalances in power between the stakeholders? What sort of information and analysis are needed to move the process forward? Is a short-term or long-term process needed? What sorts of meetings, workshops and events would be appropriate? Importantly, the design must be flexible and continuously adjusted as the process unfolds.

Every stakeholder process is unique and will follow its own path and logic. Nevertheless, experience has shown that there are some common phases and process considerations that, if followed, will improve the effectiveness of the process. These have been captured here in what we call the process model. Moreover, the phases can be considered as iterative and should not be regarded as linear step-by-step elements.

The phases of the process model are:

- **Initiating**: this is when an individual or a group of stakeholders first starts thinking about and organising an MSP. This phase is critical. If, for example, mistakes are made regarding who to involve early on, or the politics of the situation is misjudged, it can spell disaster for the entire process. There is no 'right way' to get an MSP going. However, there is a set of tips that, if carefully considered, will give the process a better chance of success;

- **Adaptive planning**: stakeholder processes need to engage the different interest groups in processes of problem analysis, vision building, strategy development and action planning. In recognising their complexity, these processes are not seen as linear or as a blueprint for change, but rather as an on-going process of adaptive planning;

- **Collaborative action**: ideas and plans for change need to be acted on. Often, MSPs fail or lead to disillusionment, because the ideas and plans generated through multi-stakeholder engagement are not acted on or put into practice. Taking action requires different levels of commitment and resources, than those used during the adaptive planning phase. Significant resources are often required, while different management and organisational arrangements may be needed. Not all MSPs enter the collaborative action phase: some are purely designed to be consultative;

- **Reflexive monitoring**: very few stakeholder processes effectively embed monitoring in the process. We use the term 'reflexive

The phases of the process model are: initiating, doing adaptive planning, taking collaborative action, and doing reflexive monitoring.

An effective facilitator is self-aware, self-critical and able to adapt his/her facilitation behaviour to the needs of a particular situation, individual or group.

monitoring' here to refer to a type of monitoring that enables the actors to learn about their process as it unfolds, and to adapt it. It is important to monitor not just the anticipated outcome of the process, but also the expectations and quality of the process itself. Engaging stakeholders in a discussion about what, for them, would constitute quality processes, and then setting up systems aimed at monitoring and regularly reviewing these, can be a very powerful tool for improving the processes.

What competencies do facilitators need?

An effective facilitator is self-aware, self-critical and able to adapt his/her facilitation behaviour to the needs of a particular situation, individual or group. Facilitation capacities need to be seen not only as the skills to facilitate a stakeholder workshop, but also as the ability to understand the culture and politics of a situation, and to design and manage a long-term societal learning process. A facilitator needs a good grasp of the theoretical, methodological and institutional aspects of societal learning and dialogue. This calls for a new type of 'facilitation professional'. Such a person needs multi-disciplinary training, alongside a high level of personal awareness about the role they are playing, as well as the influence of their own character.

Unfortunately, potential facilitators are often given a mixed bag of participatory methods to use, but little other in-depth facilitation training. This has led to the mechanical application of methods in often inappropriate and ineffective ways. The knowledge, skill, experience and training required for the effective facilitation of societal learning should never be underestimated.

To be an effective facilitator you need

- a clear vision of what you are trying to achieve;

- a general understanding of the philosophical foundations and paradigms underlying interactive processes;

- a set of theories, assumptions and values about how to effect change;

- to be able to choose from a set of participatory and learning methodologies that will guide your actions;

- a set of techniques and tools to put the methodologies into practice;

- adequate knowledge of the content area;

- to think creatively about how to create inspiring learning processes;

- be able to help groups bring conceptual clarity to a situation;

- specific personal qualities and skills to take on a facilitation role, amongst which are the ability to

    – listen actively

    – clearly express ideas

    – do constructive questioning

    – recognise and value difference

    – understand and express emotions

    – give constructive feedback

    – value people

    – deal with difficult personalities

    – manage group dynamics

    – understanding power dynamics and manage conflicts

    – use facilitation techniques effectively

    – handle cross-cultural communication

    – do self-critique, and be self-aware

    – initiate tasks and role plays

    – debrief

    – do reflective practice

    – show political awareness

    – design interactive learning processes

    – exhibit analytical clarity.

How to choose methods and tools

The wide-spread use of participatory processes has led to the development of diverse methodologies with varying purposes. An MSP is likely to utilise some or many of these methodologies in various combinations, and a skilled process and learning facilitator will adapt such methodologies or create his/her own specific methodology to meet the unique circumstances of the particular situation. A key part of facilitating the learning process is being able to choose, at the right moment, the right set of tools and methodologies, and to take into account the situation and the moment of the process. It is, therefore, vital to use methods and tools that enable people to visualise and understand issues, communicate with each other, analyse options and reach decisions in a structured way.

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Notes

1   The framework brings together a key set of concepts from fields of work that include: experiential and adult learning; systems thinking; complexity science; the sociology of reflexive modernisation; cognitive science; participatory/dialogical democracy; power analysis; globalisation theory; and conflict management, to mention but a few. These ideas reflect the theoretical discussions that have evolved over the past 20–30 years, as environmentalists, sociologists, economists and political scientists have tried to make sense of the emerging trends of globalisation, environmental degradation and continuing poverty and inequality.

2   A wide range of terms is used to describe such engagement, for instance: dialogue; citizen participation; stakeholder engagement; multi-actor collaboration; multi-stakeholder platform. Multi-stakeholder process or MSP is used here, as it is the most commonly used term.

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Addendum
Tips for running a successful workshop

Running a successful workshop

Any MSP will involve a series of workshops and meetings. The following tips will help to make your workshops and meetings more time-efficient, productive and rewarding.

General structure for workshops

- Explain the background and context of the workshop, along with the intended outcomes;

- Let participants introduce themselves and, if appropriate, conduct some sort of 'ice-breaker' that establishes a rapport between participants and generates a few laughs;

- Explain the agenda and process of the workshop, as well as the role of the facilitator;

- Invite participants to make a statement about what they would like to achieve during the workshop. For example, ask: 'What would make this workshop a success for you?';

- If necessary and appropriate, revise the agenda based on participants' needs;

- Move through the activities of the institutional and policy mapping methodology selected for the particular workshop;

- Clarify the outcomes of the workshop and agree on future actions;

- Ask participants to provide a written evaluation of the workshop (optional);

- Close the proceedings by inviting participants to say what the workshop has meant to them;

- Write up the workshop and report back to participants as soon as possible. Listing the participants as authors reinforces their sense of shared ownership of the process.

Working with different-sized groups

The ideal number of participants for an interactive workshop is between 20 and 25 people. This enables the workshop to be structured around three or four small groups, and makes for easy plenary discussion. With this number you get a good balance between a diversity of ideas and representation, with an easily manageable group size. In many instances it may be necessary to work with much larger groups.

It is quite possible to hold an effective interactive workshop with 70 or 80 participants. With larger groups, however, you will have to lower your expectations of what can be achieved within a given period of time. Reporting back from small groups and simply marshalling people in and out of coffee and lunch breaks will take that much longer.

For larger workshops to succeed, consider the following:

- Use co-facilitators to work with the small groups;

- Limit the report-back from small groups to just a few key points;

- Use a 'marketplace' for sharing the work of small groups, whereby participants walk around the room to see what other groups have done;

- Enforce very strict time management and make it clear at the beginning of the workshop that this will be necessary;

- Use small buzz groups of three to four participants within a larger plenary discussion – this will give everyone a chance to get talking.

Additional tips

- Be clear about the objective and intended outcomes of the workshop for the participants, the funding body, the client or the wider community, as well as for the facilitator and organisers;

- Have a well-prepared but flexible plan which includes alternative scenarios. Think carefully about the structure and sequence of activities, and discuss these with others with a view to improving those aspects;

- Prepare very clear instructions and focusing questions for each session. It is usually best to present the questions in written form, so participants can refer back to them;

- Keep proceedings as simple as possible;

- Be very time conscious; do not be too ambitious about what can be achieved;

- Avoid over-facilitation, where people feel they are being manipulated into an outcome they do not fully agree with;

- Use activities to create an atmosphere that breaks down barriers between people and is non-threatening;

- As far as possible, record all material on butchers' paper and stick finished sheets to the walls. This will remind participants of what the workshop has achieved at that point, and will give them something to refer back to;

- Appoint helpers to write up discussions in detail – the summarised versions on butchers' paper are often not detailed enough, when it comes to compiling the workshop report;

- Write up the workshop as soon as possible;

- When working with larger groups, use assistant facilitators who are trained in the techniques being applied, and who are well prepared for their role;

- Alternate between small groups and plenary sessions, but do not overdo it;

- Frustration and conflict are healthy features of any workshop. Learn how to manage these and do not be intimidated by disagreements;

- Take risks with workshops. Do not worry too much about getting it perfect. People like to discuss and share ideas; if they have the opportunity to do so, chances are they will have found the workshop worthwhile.

Logistics

Here are some tips for organising workshops and other events. We focus on the venue, timing and scheduling, and budgeting. Logistical considerations should not be overlooked, as good organisation is one of the keys to success.

Venue

Choose a suitable venue: the right atmosphere, without distractions, space for small group work and plenary sessions, and lots of wall space or many display boards for putting up butchers' paper or cards.

A local venue offers advantages in terms of gathering information and attracting local participants. Consider factors such as comfort, additional equipment (photocopier, telephone, fax) and cost. The available options are rarely perfect, so consider what implications this will have for the effectiveness of the workshop. It is always advisable to visit the venue beforehand, so you can be prepared for any limitations (e.g. seating arrangements or sources of distraction).

Timing and scheduling

Try to ensure that the main activities of the MSP do not coincide with busy periods of the year, as this may prevent key stakeholders from participating. Hold meetings, workshops and interviews at times which are suitable for group members. Consider the special needs of different stakeholder groups in terms of timing. For example, women may have responsibilities which impede them from participating at particular times. Organise activities well in advance and give participants plenty of notice.

Take note of the participants' energy and concentration levels, and be prepared to adapt the programme if it becomes apparent that the planned timing is no longer suitable. Also remember that participants need time to unwind.

Budgeting

If you need to develop a budget for an MSP or workshop, consider the following:

- Human resources (organising, professional facilitator, documentation);
- Equipment (telephone, fax, photocopies, paperwork);
- Workshop materials;
- Venue (meeting room, meals, beverages);
- Daily allowances, if applicable;
- The transport and travel costs of participants;
- Catering.