Collaborating for Resilience

Collaborating for Resilience: A Practitioner's Guide

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OVERVIEW

Whether you are a government official, a civil society organizer, an international development professional or a private sector investor, you know that the challenges facing natural resource management, livelihood security and economic development in poor, rural areas are immense. As human demands on the natural resource base intensify, diverse groups find themselves in competition — and sometimes in open conflict — for the same scarce resources. In many countries, resource conflict is a leading risk to livelihoods. For some communities, it is a matter of survival.

Yet, many development interventions aiming to address these challenges fail or fall far short of their potential. Common reasons for this lack of success include conflicting agendas, power and politics; poor local commitment and leadership; disconnected efforts or lack of coordination; and high costs and low sustainability, as programs often unravel when development finance ends (Figure 1).

Overcoming these obstacles requires a shift from typical approaches to planning, implementing and evaluating rural development and natural resource management initiatives. It requires a different approach to collective decision-making. In particular, it requires processes that enable diverse stakeholders to build mutual understanding of the roots of conflict over resources, explore options that benefit from everyone's experience, and take actions that tap people's sense of urgency and commitment.

We can never get anything useful done because the powerful people won't agree!

We keep trying to get people to understand what we need, but nobody's listening!

So much money spent on experts for program design and evaluation — and so little local commitment!

Politics and personal conflicts keep getting in the way of our work!

Too many projects — not enough cooperation!

So much money spent — so little to show for it!

When the project money runs out, it's so hard to keep things going.

The obstacle is always people higher up — or in another sector.

Figure 1. Typical complaints in rural development and natural resource management projects

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Why CORE?

This short note introduces one approach to achieving such breakthroughs in collective action. We call this approach "CORE." The name is shorthand for "collaborating for resilience." It also refers to a "core" set of concepts, principles and practices that define the approach, which can be applied adaptively in a wide range of settings.
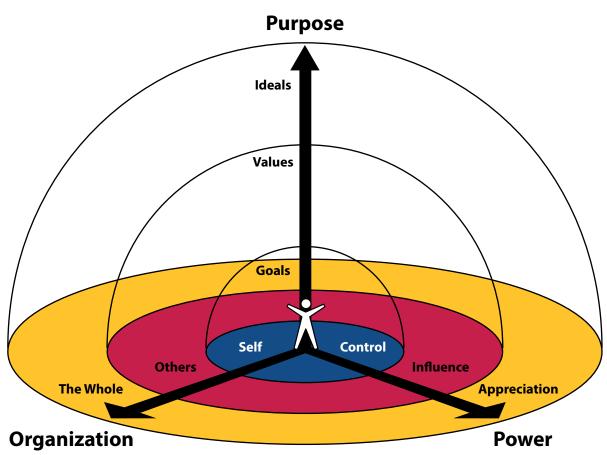
The companion suite of guidance notes aims to orient practitioners who wish to build dialogue among local actors to enable collaborative actions aimed at transforming multistakeholder competition and conflict over natural resources. By referring to "transformation" rather than "conflict resolution," we recognize that the capacity to manage competition over the long term is an essential component of resilience in local livelihood systems. Such capacity can also help reduce conflict in other domains; indeed, in some cases, cooperation in natural resource management can be an essential element of peacebuilding.

The principles outlined here draw on three decades of experimentation and practice in a diverse range of settings using a framework known as AIC, which stands for "appreciation, influence and control."[1] Past applications include building collaboration and resolving disputes over access to fishing grounds in Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake;[2] catalyzing civil society initiatives for rural development throughout Thailand;[3] creating a forum for African countries to improve relationships with multilateral development banks and design more effective development programs;[4] and overcoming entrenched conflicts to produce new policies stemming from the collapse of the electricity sector in Colombia.[5]

CORE provides a framework for understanding stakeholder interactions and organizing for social and institutional change. It is distinguished by its emphasis on whole systems, an open search for solutions and explicit treatment of power. These characteristics make the approach especially well suited to catalyzing collective action to address shared challenges of natural resource management. It is not meant as an approach to intervene in active, violent conflicts, nor to mediate between opposing groups who are unwilling to meet in dialogue and explore options for the future. In such circumstances, other approaches are needed. (See the companion guide, "From conflict to collaboration in natural resource management: A handbook and toolkit for practitioners working in aquatic resource systems.")[6] The essential precondition for CORE is a willingness on the part of key groups to meet in dialogue.

Tonle Sap Forum multistakeholder dialogue event, Siem Reap, Cambodia

Figure 2. The appreciation-influence-control model[7]

Key concepts

The CORE approach is built around a more general framework for understanding the relationship between purpose, power and organization. The underlying concepts from AIC as applied in the CORE approach are the following:

Multiple levels of purpose. Conflict is usually focused on the immediate goals and interests of competing groups. Identifying new opportunities for collaboration and collective action requires stepping back to explore commonalities and differences at higher levels of purpose. These are expressed through values — how we believe we should relate to one another — and ideals — how we ought to live or an image of a positive future.

Multiple dimensions of power. Power is often understood to mean control or decision-making authority — "power over" others. Yet the ability to influence others and engage in joint efforts toward a common purpose is also a form of power — "power with" others. So is the power to understand or appreciate the context in which we live, the perspectives of others, and new possibilities — a "power of awareness."

A whole-system approach. Addressing any resource management challenge involving competition among diverse groups requires an understanding of the perspectives of individual groups, their interactions, and the broader setting of institutions, governance arrangements and other factors that influence their choices. Bringing all key stakeholders into the process ensures that multiple perspectives are represented.

The three axes in Figure 2 visualize these concepts.

Overview of the principles

Six principles summarize the CORE approach, incorporating the concepts outlined above. These principles, presented in Figure 3, are organized around the purpose, the people and the process.

The CORE approach is **purpose**-driven. Collaborating for resilience requires transforming social relationships. As illustrated by its placement at the top of the pyramid in Figure 3, clarity of purpose is the most fundamental of the conditions for transformation. There is a tension in finding a purpose that is broad enough to bring all the key players to the table, yet specific enough to address real needs and motivate action.

People make the CORE approach work. No matter how clearly a purpose is defined, or how expertly a dialogue process is designed, it will fail if the right people are not convened to take part. This requires an explicit stage of preparation, in which organizers actively seek out key influential people to participate from the wide range of stakeholder groups necessary to address the orienting purpose. In conditions of natural resource competition, this means going beyond a particular sector to address the root causes of the problem. And it means bridging several geographic and institutional scales — engaging community, local, subnational, and sometimes national or even regional actors.

Process in the CORE approach aims at continuous development of institutional capacity to address the roots of resource competition and build resilience. While the principles of the approach can be used in small planning meetings or large dialogue events that extend over several days, the premise is that complex challenges require multifaceted responses over time. This means that action, reflection and learning from experience are embedded in the process. By participating, diverse groups not only increase their own capacity to address the challenges at hand but crucially strengthen institutional relationships that are essential to sustaining cooperation in the face of future challenges.

Together, these principles of purpose, people and process aim to transform stakeholder relationships in ways that promote collaboration, learning and ultimately resilience. The approach offers a route to tackling the common obstacles of poor local ownership, fragmented and sector-based planning, and domination by certain powerful groups that obstruct so many efforts at rural development and natural resource management.

Power imbalances in particular are often seen as an obstacle to effective dialogue and collaborative action. The CORE approach does not ignore power imbalances. Instead, it consciously addresses them by creating the conditions for effective listening, then dialogue, before focusing on decision-making, which is the domain of most power conflicts. This approach recognizes that the powers of appreciation and influence are not dependent on the control of resources, are accessible by all, and can be purposively fostered. From this perspective, power is not a zero-sum game. Enabling collaboration can have the effect of increasing the shared power of diverse stakeholders to pursue common goals.

1. Find a **purpose** that … transcends the interests of each stakeholder group, and responds to a real, pressing need.

2. Gather **people** who … represent the whole system, and give each an equal opportunity to participate.

3. Organize a **process** to … enable participants to make a balanced use of all three powers and respect the autonomy of each individual.

Figure 3. CORE principles: Creating the conditions for transformation

Overview of the process

CORE has adopted AIC's whole-systems approach to stakeholder interaction, analysis and collaborative planning. Applicable in small as well as very large groups, the approach entails the following:

- Active listening to deepen awareness of the problem, the possibilities and the perspectives of different groups.
- Sharing and debating competing points of view to ensure a full understanding of the forces at play.
- Narrowing in on the particular realm of actions within an individual's or group's control.

In a nutshell, the CORE process aims to assist diverse, multistakeholder groups in addressing seven key questions (Figure 4). The most fundamental, orienting question is, "What is the purpose?" The orienting purpose addresses an issue or challenge that everyone feels strongly about, even if they may disagree about why it's important or what should be done. It is the foundation for convening the group; the process of dialogue allows for a full airing of opposing viewpoints and more careful refinement of the shared purpose in later stages. Following from the orienting purpose are questions that help all participants listen to and understand each other's views on possible futures, as well as the realities that constrain progress. Further questions frame a dialogue about priorities for action, and lead to individual and group choices on actions that contribute to the shared purpose.

The work of the facilitator in the CORE process is to create the conditions necessary to answer these questions. In other words, it is about creating the conditions for effective listening, dialogue and choice.

ORIENTING
1. What is the purpose?

LISTENING
2. What are the possibilities?
3. What are the realities now?

DIALOGUE
4. What are the priorities for action?
5. Who will support and who will oppose them?

CHOICE
6. What will you do?
7. Will that achieve the purpose?

Figure 4.   Seven key questions outlining the dialogue process
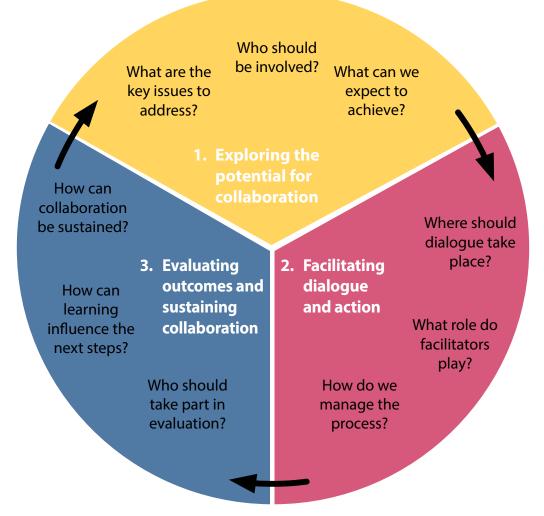
How to use the guidance notes

The three other notes in this series provide guidance on the following topics:
- Exploring the potential for collaboration (Guidance Note 1).
- Facilitating dialogue and action (Guidance Note 2).
- Evaluating outcomes and sustaining collaboration (Guidance Note 3).

Figure 5 shows some of the questions that each note helps address, and illustrates how the approach is intended to foster a cycle of action and learning.

The CORE approach is not a fixed methodology. Instead, it provides a set of orienting concepts, principles and practices that different groups — including civil society organizations, development agencies and governments — can use with methods adapted to the socio-cultural context and the particular challenges at hand.

In the guidance notes that follow, "In practice" boxes highlight particular challenges and provide examples of how those have been addressed in past experiences. "Insight" boxes explain the underlying principles in more depth.

A companion guide, "From conflict to collaboration in natural resource management: A handbook and toolkit for practitioners working in aquatic resource systems," provides background information on understanding local resource conflicts, approaches to conflict management and transformation, and approaches to learning, monitoring and evaluation. For those seeking more detailed tools, it also includes a set of exercises that can be employed at various stages in the CORE process.

Figure 5. Three stages of CORE shown as a cycle of action and learning; each stage is covered in a separate guidance note

CORE stands for "collaborating for resilience," a structured process of dialogue, action and learning that can help build capacity for collaboration and strengthen local livelihoods under conditions of natural resource competition.

When stakeholders are in direct conflict and unwilling to meet face to face, other approaches such as third-party mediation may be needed. Or the problem may need to be redefined in a way that provides a starting point for an important subset of stakeholders, with the intention of building collaboration and then reaching out to others in a subsequent round of meetings.

For this guidance note, we assume that an initial group of organizers has identified a need and aims to get the right people involved to explore the potential for building broader collaboration. Specifically, the first phase of the process is designed to do three things:

1. Define an overall purpose for the collaborative initiative that draws on different people's perspectives on the issue, in a way that provides a starting point that can bring all key stakeholders together.
2. Build a network of people, ideas and relationships so that the organizers can attract the widest possible set of resources to bear on the problem at hand.
3. Build trust by being very transparent in the initial consultation process, so that all participants feel their interests are understood and will be addressed.

The job is not to find a solution or even to narrow in on key priorities, but to broaden the discussion in a way that expands the sense of shared purpose and extends the field of people involved. At the end of this phase, we should be able to say that we have the right group of people with the widest possible set of ideas, relationships and resources to create the conditions for the initiative to succeed. The set of people will include both those who support and those who may oppose the initiative.

Mapping the context of issues and stakeholders

The consultation process can begin from many different starting points. If prior efforts are underway or have recently concluded that partially address the issue at hand, the groups involved will need to be consulted. If there has been a recent dispute or a shift in policy, environmental or economic conditions may have brought the issue to the fore of people's attention. Examples include a land tenure reform, a major drought, or a price shock for a key export commodity. The issue may be a long-term, gradual trend such as deforestation and degradation of upper watersheds, a decline in fisheries productivity, or climate change. In any of these scenarios, similar questions will need to be addressed:

- What are the key factors that influence current or potential conflicts related to natural resources and livelihoods?

- Who are the key stakeholders? In what ways do their various interests, hopes or fears help explain current competition or potential conflict?

- Who are the people who have lived through and most suffered from past conflict?

- Who are the people widely respected or seen as legitimate by different groups? How might they help articulate a set of shared interests or a sense of ideals that various groups would find compelling?

Typically, the group that aims to organize an initiative will undertake consultations to answer these questions in a pattern that moves from one group to the next, gradually accumulating new perspectives on the issues. At each encounter, the organizers are careful to ask, "Who else should we be speaking to in order to understand these issues further?" The aim is not to have a carefully "representative" sampling of views in a statistical sense. Instead, the aim is to be as complete as practical in the time available — resulting in a mapping of issues and stakeholders that allows for a growing appreciation of what might be achieved.

In practice: Purpose evolves through collaboration

The CORE approach can be employed to build collaboration around a wide range of initiatives, from local to national or regional scales. The purpose will typically evolve during the course of implementation.

For example, an action research project in Lake Kariba, which is shared by Zambia and Zimbabwe, focused on developing local capacity for co-management of lakeshore fisheries. Yet when local government, fishers, traders, chiefs and women's groups convened to explore the factors affecting local livelihoods, they decided that it was essential to look beyond their immediate context. In particular, they would have to address risks and opportunities from foreign investment in aquaculture on the lake, as well as from local tourism development. They would also have to find ways to build collaboration across the international border to address differences in regulation and enforcement that were undermining local efforts at sustainable resource management. And they would have to seek ways to address gender inequities in fisheries trade and management decision-making.

The initial dialogue event led to a range of follow-on actions involving collaboration between researchers from both nations, communities, traditional authorities, investor representatives and national government agencies. Each group finds a role to play within an expanded purpose that links local community livelihoods to the overall future development of the lake.[8]

Villagers, fisheries officer and other local stakeholders in small group discussion at a Lake Kariba dialogue event, Zambia

Defining a focus for dialogue

Once a satisfactory mapping has been completed and shared, organizers begin to experiment with different ways of communicating the purpose of a dialogue event that aims to build broader collaboration. At this point, many people who were consulted during the mapping exercise may be invited to participate in planning meetings alongside other stakeholder representatives. These discussions or "mini-design workshops" are designed to test the viability of the initiative by defining a focus for dialogue and sensing the degree of support from potential stakeholders. The focus of these meetings is not to identify solutions to the focal issues but to hone the statement of purpose and build a list of stakeholders who will engage to the point where the vision is attractive enough to ensure participation by all those required. The following are questions to address at this stage:

- What priority issues will define the focus for the dialogue workshop or workshops? What is the overall **purpose**?

- Which key stakeholders must be involved to reflect the **whole system**? In other words, who are the groups that **influence decisions** concerning the resource system at hand or that are directly affected by those decisions?

- What ongoing or upcoming **decision-making processes** should be targeted? Examples include local planning exercises; basin, watershed or coastal zone planning; infrastructure planning; new development investment proposals or reviews; and intergovernmental meetings.

- What **outcomes** might be achievable? Specific changes in behavior might include improved relations between certain actors, collaboration on certain issues or resolution of certain disputes.

A list of potential outcomes may be prepared to indicate the scope of the program and to make it more realistic and attractive to the potential stakeholders, but it must be clear to potential participants and supporters that this list is illustrative only. The participants in the dialogue event or events will be creating the actual action plan.

In practice: Using video to build awareness

The use of video can enhance the attractiveness of a proposal for a collaborative initiative in its formative stage. It can help build new participants' awareness as they join the process, and will often communicate better to a broader audience than a written report. Later, the same video can provide a critical "baseline" snapshot of people's hopes and fears, their sense of possibilities, and the constraints as they existed prior to the implementation of an initiative. An important feature is to capture diverse stakeholder perspectives on the issues at hand. The video can feature interviews with different stakeholders, as well as images selected by stakeholders to illustrate the most important issues from their points of view. Some programs have worked with local stakeholders to help them produce such videos on their own.

Photo Credit: Ryder Haske/People's Television, Inc.

Community fisheries leader in a video interview explaining competition over water, land and flooded forests, Stung Sen River, Cambodia

Forming a group to lead the process

During the process of mapping and consultation, the initial group of organizers will identify other individuals who bring important new perspectives and networks of contacts among a different set of stakeholders. These people should be invited to form a multistakeholder working group. This may begin with just a few members, and will typically grow to include seven to twelve members — large enough to represent the diversity of stakeholder groups, but small enough to build commitment and work as a team. Much more than a legitimizing or coordination body, the working group acts as a source of influence to champion the purpose of the initiative, to identify participants for dialogue workshops, and to persuade them to attend.

Some working groups may require a designated facilitator to guide the process, especially when there are tensions among members that make it challenging to step back and look at the big picture together. Other groups may be able to rotate the role of discussion leader among the members. In either case, it is vital that each person's voice is heard, and that the group actively encourages a diversity of perspectives. Questions to address include the following:

- Who else would be most suitable to take part in a working group to plan and organize the dialogue events? It's important to have each broad type of stakeholder group — civil society organizations, local community groups, the government and the private sector — represented, though not necessarily each organization.

- Are these individuals ready to commit? It's important that the group maintain consistency during the planning process for the dialogue event. Consistency makes the process more efficient and helps build trust.

- What preparations are needed? Be alert to the need for local consultations prior to a national or subregional event, background research on certain issues, or preparatory sessions with key groups to help them be ready to articulate their perspectives and participate effectively.

Probing past experiences to assess future options

Insight: Validating what's possible, identifying risks

The initial consultation process can be considered a form of preliminary assessment or risk analysis; that is, it identifies the values evoked, supported and opposed by potential partners and other stakeholders in advance of program implementation. Often this will lead to significant changes in the focus of dialogue and planning events, as well as in the ultimate shape of the initiative. This can prevent or avoid some of the major factors that account for most program failures — unintended and unforeseen consequences, lack of commitment or political will, institutional blockages, and failures of communication.

In Cambodia, for example, initial consultations for an effort to support the resilience of Tonle Sap Lake fisheries identified concerns among civil society groups who feared they could be punished for speaking openly about their mistrust of local officials. Likewise, the national fisheries administration was growing concerned about its mandate and its ability to build the local cooperation needed to enforce the law. Building mutual trust between these groups to assess the underlying problems and plan joint actions became a defining element in the design of the dialogue event that followed.[9]

- What is the most appropriate convening platform? While logistically it may be simplest to have a single convening organization, it is typically most effective if a dialogue event is presented as a joint undertaking, co-organized by a cross section of organizations such as those represented in the working group.

Once the working group is satisfied that it has mapped the issues and stakeholders involved in the development challenge, clarified a purpose for a dialogue process that will serve to gather the whole range of stakeholders around that common issue, and engaged the key stakeholders in shaping plans for that dialogue, it is time to move on to the more detailed design of an event or series of events. Guidance Note 2, "Facilitating Dialogue and Action," describes how.

In practice: Getting the right people involved

What if key people needed to address the priorities are not participating? The most important part of the process is engaging those who have a stake — the power to support or oppose the initiative. The initiative is unlikely to succeed unless the organizers can say at the end of the exploration phase, "We have persuaded enough of the right kind of people to engage." The right kind of people aren't necessarily those in the highest positions, but the kind of people who have real influence and respect within their stakeholder group. The process is designed to discover whether the organizers have the right purpose, and stemming from that clarity of purpose, whether they have enough power of influence to engage the people needed to pursue that purpose.

The process proceeds from a small circle of influence — the organizers. Then, through meetings and design workshops, the circle of influence begins to increase. If it seems impossible to include an essential stakeholder group, the organizers then have to examine the influence they have and revisit the purpose to see if by enlarging it or reducing it they can garner the influence to proceed.

In other cases, involving an additional group is the key to expanding influence. An initiative in Zambia, for example, identified private sector investment in aquaculture on the shores of Lake Kariba as a critical development challenge, yet local chiefs were initially unwilling to raise questions, fearful of driving away the investors. Department of Fisheries officials, having earned the confidence of community members, were able to play a brokering role, help reassure the chiefs and bring investors to the table. As a result, the aquaculture investors proved much more willing to participate than expected. Community members were eventually able to negotiate agreements with investors, ensuring access to travel routes and fishing grounds, and securing commitments that quality environmental impact assessments would be implemented. These measures averted the conflict that appeared likely in the absence of dialogue.[10]

Photo Credit : Dyster Hasker/Peoples Television, Inc.

The traditional chief (in robe) played a pivotal role linking government, community and private investors in dialogue in Lake Kariba, Zambia

CORE is an organizing process adapted to the challenge of building collaboration amid conditions of competition and conflict over natural resources. The CORE approach brings together participants representing the whole range of stakeholders, and calls for a purposeful focus on the three phases of listening, dialogue and choice. (See Overview.)

This guidance note assumes that a working group has been formed representing diverse stakeholders, that this group has undertaken some initial mapping of the context of issues and actors, and that the group has developed at least a general statement of purpose for a structured workshop. (See Guidance Note 1, "Exploring the Potential for Collaboration.") This note focuses on the design and implementation of such a multistakeholder workshop.

Designing the event

A full workshop is designed once stakeholders with enough influence to ensure the collective success of the initiative are recruited. Three days is a typical duration for a dialogue workshop, though it may range from one and a half to five days. In many instances, it may be desirable to stage the workshop process in several steps over time. A sequence of three events of one and a half days each, separated by several weeks, may be appropriate when there is a need to build confidence and support particular stakeholders in preparing for the next phase.

It may be appropriate to hold a sequence of workshops covering the three phases first at local sites to gather local insights and initiative. Then the process can move up to national level, while at the same time working to address broader institutional or policy challenges. For example, a dialogue workshop process at Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake consisted of five one-day village-level workshops, each immediately followed by a half-day provincial-level workshop. These culminated in a national-level workshop several months later. A sequence of events over time may also be appropriate when the issue is particularly contentious or when organizers anticipate that participants will need additional interactions

between phases of the process to build trust and prepare for collaboration. Finally, the skill and experience of the lead facilitator and facilitation team should be taken into account: For teams new to the CORE approach, it can be useful to have a break in between each stage to assess and regroup.

Whatever the duration of the dialogue workshop, the design should allow for roughly equal amounts of time for each of the phases:
1. Building a shared awareness of the issues, the possibilities for the future, and the constraints and opportunities of the current situation (the listening phase).
2. Debate over different possible courses of action to pursue a common purpose, including an assessment of the groups that may support or oppose such actions (the dialogue phase).
3. Deciding on an action plan comprised of commitments by individuals and multistakeholder teams, including a reflection on the degree to which these actions will achieve the common purpose (the choice phase).

The workshops are structured around seven framing questions. The first question deals with the orienting purpose, and the other six are used to stimulate the work unique to each of the three phases. The questions help participants use their powers of effective listening (appreciation), effective dialogue (influence) and effective decision-making (control) in turn (Figure 6).
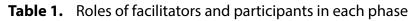
LISTENING
2. What are the possibilities?

DIALOGUE
4. What are the priorities?

CHOICE
6. What will you do?

1. What is the purpose?

7. Will it achieve the purpose?

5. Who will support and who will oppose?

3. What are the realities?

Figure 6.   Seven framing questions, illustrating the tension in each phase

The essential task of facilitation is to establish the conditions for participants to answer the seven questions most effectively. The facilitators' role — and the participants' role — therefore changes in each phase (Table 1).

The composition of groups also changes in each phase:
- In the listening phase, we organize groups intentionally to represent a mix of stakeholders in order to be sure everyone has an equal chance to listen to and be listened to by everyone in the meeting or workshop.

- In the dialogue phase, we organize groups based on common interests or values rather than knowledge or responsibility. This is to ensure that a wider perspective than professional knowledge or technical experience is brought to bear on the initiative.
- Only in the choice phase do participants join groups from their own organization, profession or area of responsibility. Ultimately, it is commitments from those responsible that mobilize actions to achieve the purpose.

Phase	Role of facilitators	Role of participants
Listening	• Actively establish conditions in which all participants feel equal, are treated equally and have opportunity to express their appreciation of the situation **without being judged**.	• Express your sense of the whole situation — the potential and current reality. • Listen **without comment** to other participants as they express their appreciation of the situation.
Dialogue	• Create an environment for **open dialogue**, helping participants to explore the implications of different options.	• Speak to the issues you are passionate about. • Your job is to **discover and debate options** — not yet to decide which option is best.
Choice	• Ensure participants have the resources they need to **make decisions** and plan. • Encourage reflection back toward the orienting purpose.	• Make **clear commitments** you can follow through on, and encourage others to do the same. • Discuss how each action contributes toward the overall purpose.

Table 1.   Roles of facilitators and participants in each phase

Insight: Principles of power in the three phases

An understanding of the nature of power is central to the design process. Each of the phases in the process asks participants to exercise a different sort of power — the power of appreciation (listening), of influence (dialogue) and of control (choice). Each of the three powers derives energy from opposing forces:

1. In the listening phase, the opposition is between the possibilities derived from ideals for the future and the reality of the current situation, as viewed from multiple perspectives. The tension between these creates the energy to move forward. When the appreciative energy is satiated, the process moves naturally to the dialogue phase.

2. The opposition in the dialogue phase is between thinking and feeling. Participants express what they think the priorities should be, and the listeners judge those priorities against their feelings about the effects. They also explore the tension between groups that could support or oppose certain actions. This tension concerns the possibilities — and the limits — of influence.

3. The opposition in the choice phase is between action and reflection. Some participants press for immediate action, and some want to reflect on whether the actions will achieve the purpose. The process recognizes and draws value from both perspectives. This tension helps participants reach decisions about actions they can take within their domain of control.

Local leaders at council meeting, Anand district, Gujarat, India

Small group work outdoors helps draw out new perspectives at a workshop in Anand, Gujarat, India

In practice: Choosing a place

In designing the workshop, look for a place that:
- **Is neutral**. Choose a place that does not give advantage to any particular organizer or stakeholder.
- **Enables a visual record of progress**. For example, statements of purpose and outputs of various exercises are often made on flip chart paper, and then posted on walls or large pinboards.
- **Encourages focused interaction**. A retreat setting that brings participants outside of their normal working environment can help people open up to new perspectives.

If practical, different stages in the process may be held in different places:
- Listening phase — places of great cultural or historical significance or that encourage use of the imagination, such as a traditionally sacred site, historic building, art gallery or children's museum.
- Dialogue phase — a politically neutral place, conducive to creative exploration and debate over different courses of action.
- Choice phase — a place suited to the operational work to be done, with resources available to assist in planning.

Introducing and refining the purpose

The CORE approach distinguishes a hierarchy of different levels of purpose, corresponding to broad ideals, group values, and finally, specific goals to be pursued. (See Overview.) A workshop that brings together diverse stakeholders to explore the potential for transforming natural resource competition and conflict will necessarily entail a diversity of goals and values. Therefore, the presenting purpose is typically at a fairly high level, invoking ideals such as "environmental sustainability," "public welfare," "resilient livelihoods" or "economic development." Organizers have defined a purpose that in essence brings everyone into the same room. Eventually, the purpose will be reformulated in more specific terms as more concrete goals — the sum of all the commitments obtained by the end of the workshop.

Key question 1: What is the purpose?

This question can be asked in different ways. For example:

For the issue we have gathered to address, what are the things you would most hope to see come true?

What are the elements of shared purpose — the things we would all hope to see?

At the outset, participants are asked to share their individual understandings of the collective purpose in a way that exposes all the participants to the diversity of views present. This can be done informally as part of the warm-up on the first afternoon or evening of the workshop. Or it can be done as a full exercise in which random groups of participants share with each other their own reasons for wanting to participate in the dialogue. In either case, lists of individual purposes can be recorded on flip charts for review.

During this opening phase, the goal is simply to begin to appreciate the commonalities among the participants, and the different ways the broad statement of purpose can be interpreted. Therefore, this is not the time to discuss — and especially not to debate — each participant's expression of purpose. The meaning must be left to each individual. If time allows, all individuals or groups may be given an opportunity to express what the combined list means to them.

Outputs of this opening phase include the following:
- The presenting purpose.
- Bullet points or a similar record of each individual purpose.
- Summaries by each participant or group characterizing what the whole purpose means to them.

In practice: Setting the tone

Late afternoon and evening are the best times to carry out the initial, most appreciative part of the workshop process. Include organizers, facilitators or stakeholders known for their artistic, cultural or historic competencies. Encourage them to add ideas to the design and contribute to lunch and dinner entertainment, or conduct icebreakers. Establishing an atmosphere of constructive, relaxed, joint exploration is vital. The success of icebreakers is very culturally determined — so it's a good idea to have local facilitators choose customary and popular methods that put people at ease.

It's essential that the process take on the color of the local context. At a dialogue workshop at Lake Victoria, Uganda, for example, several women participants arrived with their babies. This helped immediately break the ice, prompting informal discussions of family concerns, which subsequently became central in the dialogue and action planning.

An outdoor dialogue session at Lake Victoria, Uganda

The listening phase

The listening phase is focused on increasing awareness of everyone who is affected by the issue at hand. The perspective extends into the future beyond any current conflicts and into the past before any current conflicts. While we use the term "listening," in practice we encourage participants to use their full abilities of observation and understanding to appreciate others' perspectives. It is important at this stage that there is no judgment, critique or debate.

Key question 2: What are the possibilities?

This question is asked to take people outside of the current situation, its difficulties and its constraints. The wording of the question is different in each case but includes some reference to the purpose — particularly to ideals, the highest level of purpose. For example:

If you had the power to do anything you wanted, what would you include in your ideal initiative to address the purpose we have just discussed?

What are the essential elements that would contribute to sustainability, equity and resilience in this resource system? Draw a picture of these.

In practice: Art to communicate possibilities

Art encourages participants to use their imaginations and communicate their insights. Having participants draw an image of their ideal future is a common technique. Telling a story can also be very effective. Some are able to produce poems or a song. A typical exercise involves three parts. For example, use the following steps to create a drawing:

1. Work alone (practice control): Produce an image on a small paper.
2. Work in small groups (practice influence): Compare images and make a group image. Discuss the joint creation but do not comment on or judge individual contributions.
3. Work with the whole (practice appreciation): Share group images, having participants or groups say what the whole set means to them.

A Tonle Sap Forum dialogue event included a trip to view the ancient fish reliefs at Bayon temple in Siem Reap, Cambodia

Key question 3: What's the reality now?

This question is posed to encourage participants to build awareness about the current situation from multiple perspectives. It provides individuals and groups a chance to express the diverse situations they face. For example:

What is the situation now? What are the factors that constrain or enable progress toward that desired future?

If we were to take action toward the ideals suggested by your images from the question above, what realities would you face? How would people react?

The key element is to identify the tension between the ideal vision of the future and current obstacles or constraints. When time is short, especially in shorter meetings and mini-design sessions, questions 2 and 3 are often asked together. When participants are asked to visualize their responses, the contrast between the possibilities and the current reality is often very striking.

Sample output contrasting future possibilities and current realities

In practice: Tension between ideal and reality

In shorter workshops where participants are asked to produce images of both future possibilities and current realities, it is relatively easy to see which current conditions or constraints are related to which possibilities. However, in longer workshops where these are separate exercises, participants may need to be reminded to relate their descriptions of constraints and opportunities specifically to each of the possibilities raised in the previous exercise.

The tension between an ideal or a future possibility and the current reality creates an energy that animates people. An illustrated timeline is often an effective way to prompt discussion and insights about how things are now and how they became that way, while at the same time encouraging people to reflect on how much has changed and what opportunities exist to influence future patterns of change. When sufficiently animated, participants naturally want to move to the next stage, which is focused on influence.

Probing questions and active listening are required to understand different perspectives on a possible future

Creating the conditions for listening

In the listening phase, participants are asked to share their insights equally, without regard to status or position. To encourage openness to diverse perspectives, the exploration of future possibilities and current realities should be done in mixed groups, chosen either randomly or intentionally representing the full range of stakeholders in each group.

Outputs of the listening phase are the following:
- Individual images, stories, art or other means of illustrating the tension between future possibilities and current realities.
- Group summaries of possibilities and realities. Flip charts from each team show images or summarize stories about possibilities and realities. Individual small papers are generally posted around the group flip chart.

Role of facilitators	Role of participants
• Create the conditions in which all participants feel equal, are treated equally, and have the equal opportunity to express their appreciation of the situation without judgment; i.e., without being influenced or controlled. • Treat everyone equally — in regard to invitations, titles and seating arrangements. • Participants may be anxious and may ask many questions. Don't get caught up in giving lots of explanation. • Let them know there are no right or wrong answers. Anything that comes to their minds is okay. Keep it moving. Get people doing the work. • Create small groups with mixed or random membership to encourage openness to diverse perspectives, and keep numbers to seven or less so each can share. • Find your own creative ways to minimize people trying to exercise influence or control; for example, choose icebreakers that emphasize equality or the common human side of people. • Allow all participants to reach their own appreciation, so don't summarize what the reports say. Leave that to each individual or group.	• Be present as a human being rather than in your official position. • Express as genuinely and deeply as possible your sense of the whole situation — the potential and current realities. • Listen in silence, without comment, to all other participants as they express their appreciation of the situation. • Use your imagination more than your reason in coming up with possibilities and describing current conditions. • Once you understand the instructions, don't spend a lot of time thinking — just answer with the first thing that comes to mind. It will be as good or better for this purpose than anything too studied.

Table 2. Roles of facilitators and participants in the listening phase

In practice: Disruptive or dominating participants

An important role of the facilitator is to protect participants from undue influence, even if it is well-intended. Right from the beginning — within the first fifteen minutes — the facilitator must demonstrate that in the appreciative phase everybody has equal voice and ensure that people's natural tendency to judge or critique others is minimized as far as possible.

So, in the appreciative phase, the facilitator establishes very clear norms about listening in silence, allowing everyone to have equal time, and making no attempts to influence others. Most participants who disrupt or become dominating do so because they feel the need to influence or place limits on some options. The facilitator's primary defense is to follow the norms of the phase. Positive ways of responding include the following:

- Your issue X is a very important idea, and it will be very useful in the next or final phase.
- Your issue X shows that you are ahead of the game. We will get there and you will be very helpful to us when we do. (The facilitator can designate a flip chart or board to record issues that are better addressed at a later stage, which can then be referred to at the appropriate time.)
- For now, we want to get everyone on the same page by looking at the big picture. So if you bear with us, we'll get to your issue in the Y exercise.
- It is easier to do this exercise than it is to explain it. When you see the results, the answer to your question will become clear. If not, let's discuss it then.

Reasserting principles of open dialogue can require a very active stance by the facilitator

Debating who could support and who could oppose a given action helps identify next steps for stakeholder engagement

The dialogue phase

Building on the shared appreciation established in the listening phase, the next phase provides a forum for participants to exercise judgment. When participants truly care about the issues at hand, and when a broad range of stakeholders is present, this phase is characterized by intense debate. These are the essential conditions for a good dialogue: convergence and divergence in values are made explicit and explored, participants negotiate and aim to influence one another, and respect is maintained.

Key question 4: What are the priorities?

This question is asked to help participants identify the key challenges that need to be addressed if they are to make progress toward their ideals while taking into account current realities. Again, the question can be modified in many ways to suit the specific situation. For example:

Given the possibilities and the constraints identified, what do you believe are the key priorities that should be worked on to pursue our shared purpose?

What are the potential strategies? What are the merits and risks of alternative paths?

In this phase, we want people to appreciate and influence one another, but not to reach decisions yet. So we encourage them to develop as many options as possible, and to debate the advantages and disadvantages of choosing different priorities.

We are concerned in this phase with the interrelationship between priorities and their combined impact. So, in this phase the primary output is some form of mapping that relates different potential actions. For example, individuals may initially work on their own to develop a priority and some of the subfactors that affect its success. Each participant then presents this in a small group and explains his or her reasoning. The group's joint map is then presented to a plenary. Again, there is discussion and debate, but the objective at this stage is to better understand the alternatives rather than eliminate them or come to one set of agreed priorities.

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In practice: Gender equity

Working in places where women's voices are typically excluded or given less importance in public discussions, organizers and facilitators need to pay particular attention to strategies that will encourage a more gender-equitable dialogue. Often this will dramatically influence the priorities that emerge in a dialogue, as well as the social energy or commitment to achieving these.

In Lake Victoria, Uganda, for example, women's concerns about public health and sanitation shaped the focus of community-led actions to improve welfare in lakeshore communities. Yet women from the communities were reluctant to raise these concerns publicly in the dialogue event. Attentive facilitators noticed that women were having animated conversations about sanitation on the margins of the formal dialogue workshop. A separate, private consultation with a female health official helped validate their concerns, and the group of women agreed to have the project team introduce the issue into the plenary dialogue. Subsequently, local leaders such as the chair of the local Beach Management Unit, fisheries officials, and other men endorsed these concerns, and women community members felt they now had the space to discuss the issues more openly.[11]

For organizers and facilitators, this experience reinforces the importance of encouraging multiple channels of communication. Side conversations in between the formal sessions of a workshop or over meals, or discussions held on a boat or in a villager's home, may point to key constraints or priorities that participants have hesitated to voice. Once these issues have been introduced into the full dialogue, there is an opportunity to validate or probe to what extent the issue is a shared concern.

Photo Credit: Ryder Haske/People's Television, Inc.

Side discussions outside a formal workshop setting provide key insights to identify concerns or opportunities that have so far gone unspoken

Key question 5: Who will support or oppose those priorities?

This question is designed to uncover the interests of people affected by the priority actions identified who may not be in the room but who will have an effect on the success of the initiative. This is an essential reality check — not only to identify obstacles, but also to identify pathways to change that take into account the competing interests and power relationships at play. For example:

In your priority areas, who are the most important stakeholders involved? What are their interests and values, and how would these be affected by the choice of this priority?

What roles could each actor potentially play in either advancing or blocking progress?

The same small groups then take their priority area and its key factors and identify the key stakeholders involved. They specify the following:
- The role of each stakeholder.
- The actions they might take.
- The positive and negative effects these actions might have for the initiative.

Each interest group produces a map or uses a similar technique to illustrate the range of factors affecting success in their chosen priority area, as well as the relationships of key players. The plenary presentation of these priority and stakeholder maps is designed to allow discussion and debate over differences. The facilitator plays a key role in encouraging that debate, typically following each group's presentation. When there are differences in opinion within the group, participants are encouraged to voice the reasons for their differences.

Creating the conditions for dialogue
In this phase, groups self-select into areas they believe are most important, whether or not they have any personal responsibility or expertise in that area. This allows people to channel their energy toward the priorities they feel most motivated to address. The key to success is that participants are allowed to say what they think and feel about key priorities and the positive and negative effects these could have. Such exchanges can become quite heated, but intervention is only necessary to prevent people from arguing over specific solutions. They should limit discussion to the reasons for their choice or how they feel about others' choices. Once people have said everything they can about reasons and feelings, that is enough.

Collaborative analysis of stakeholder relationships and patterns of influence, Barotse floodplain, Zambia

In practice: Facilitating dialogue about options

Creating the conditions for influence requires a distinct type of preparation and intervention by the facilitator, aimed at maximizing the exchange of thoughts and feelings about options for advancing the common purpose. The facilitator is in more of an influencing than a controlling role. Some tips:

- Choose a location or venue that symbolizes the importance of the issues at hand.
- Let participants choose their own priorities and join a group with similar priorities regardless of position or expertise.
- Reduce discussion to major options and who will support and oppose them.
- Allow everyone to say what they think and feel about each option and its major components.
- Make sure other options proposed by individuals and groups are also recorded; these can be incorporated into action plans in the next phase.

A network of local leaders from neighboring villages discusses plans for an upcoming dialogue with government, Gujarat, India

Role of facilitators	Role of participants
- You were very much in control during facilitation of the listening phase, but you are now in more of an influence role — an equal partner with the participants. - Help participants group by areas of interest, which they decide. Following interests often leads people to choose groups addressing issues outside of their direct area of responsibility. - You may suggest a mapping process, or participants may be more comfortable with other techniques. Anything is fine so long as it addresses the framing questions. - Don't be concerned that discussions become heated. This shows people are engaged. Only intervene if you feel they are trying to "solve the problem," which is the work of the next phase.	- In this phase, you are members of interest groups. An interest group may not correspond to your official role, but addresses an area you are passionate about. - Your job is to discover and debate options — not to arrive at a decision about which option is best. - Your emphasis is to discover the reasons for and the feelings behind support and opposition to key priorities so that you can better deal with these in the next phase.

Table 3.   Roles of facilitators and participants in the dialogue phase

Insight: Setting the stage for learning

In addition to establishing the conditions for well-informed choices by individuals and groups in the next phase, the dialogue phase provides an essential foundation for the longer-term learning process. It allows organizers to assess what factors and actors are important in influencing the initiative and why. The participation of key stakeholder groups provides a real-time validation of this emerging analysis, which can provide a basis for subsequent evaluation of outcomes. Reconstructing this quality of information after an event is, by contrast, very difficult and costly.

The choice phase

The choice phase is a time for individuals and groups to make choices about actions that they are prepared to commit to; in other words, it focuses on each person's particular realm of control. Space is provided to develop plans of action, make explicit commitments and take first steps. Participants choose their commitments without coercion, motivated by their specific appreciation of their unique areas of responsibility but now also informed by a broader set of needs and possibilities.

In this final phase, participants are divided into groups that align with their areas of responsibility for carrying out the actions they agree upon. The focus is on actions that each group can undertake.

Key question 6: What will I do?

This question may be phrased in a variety of ways. For example:

Given your own area of responsibility, what will you commit to do?

What specific actions are you (or your group) ready to commit to in pursuit of a shared purpose? How will you gather the resources required, monitor progress and increase capacity to achieve these goals? Who else do you need to engage?

The task of each group in the choice phase follows the appreciation-influence-control steps in reverse (Figure 7). The group begins by focusing on commitments to action, taking everything they have heard at the workshop and asking what it means for their area of responsibility and what they are willing to commit to do about it. Next, the group explores what and whom they need to influence in order to achieve their goals. Now that they understand in more practical detail the collaborative actions to be undertaken, the group finally considers what others must appreciate to increase the chance that these actions will succeed.

What I will control	**What I need to influence**	**What we all must appreciate**
• Activities (What will be done?)	• People (Supporters? Skeptics?)	• Hidden opportunities (Policy change? Learning?)
• Methods (Where? When? How?)	• Organizations (Regulation? Financing?)	• Relationships beyond our influence (How will we assess these?)
• Resources (What's needed?)	• Events (Communication opportunities?)	• Knowledge constraints (What do we not know?)

Figure 7. Sample action planning matrix, illustrated with examples of factors that can be included

In practice: Action planning

In the choice phase, select or design a setting that encourages people to focus on effective decision-making and action planning. Make sure that the resources needed to reach decisions are available (e.g., reports from background studies, reports produced within the workshop, charts, lists, telephones and Internet access). Focus discussion on major activities that must be completed.

Recognize too that individuals and groups may be willing to commit to different sorts of actions at different stages in a long-term initiative, or as the context changes. Initial commitments may include, for example, plans to solicit a meeting with a higher-level official not present in the dialogue event, to scope the possibility of engaging a new partner, or to bring media attention to an issue.

At Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake, communities set an objective of piloting a new approach to community-based fisheries management that would incorporate commercial production to raise local incomes and funds for conservation. Fisheries Administration officials who had initially been reluctant to explore a new approach quickly became strong supporters after the prime minister announced a major policy reform in the sector. Under pressure to show progress in improving livelihoods for community fishery members, fisheries officials agreed to support an experimental approach that pushed the boundaries of existing regulation, and committed to an ambitious timeline for implementation. The scope of what seemed feasible only months before had shifted dramatically.[12]

Following a major policy reform, fisheries officers, police and community fishery members take part in a joint patrol on the Tonle Sap Lake, Cambodia

Insight: Commitments to action

A commitment to action is very different from a recommendation. A commitment corresponds to an individual's domain of choice or control, while a recommendation is addressed to someone else. Quite often in planning processes, recommendations are addressed to groups that are not present or who may not even be specifically defined. A commitment to action, on the other hand, stems from an individual's personal motivations. Moreover, when commitments are declared before others in social networks that will continue to interact, groups are more likely to hold individuals accountable to their commitments.

Developing an action plan for multi stakeholder dialogue with government and coastal communities in the Philippines

Photo Credit: Sree Kumar/Foundation for Ecological Security

Participants return from their small groups to the plenary with a plan that addresses what will be done, as well as when, where, how and with what resources. Because many of the other stakeholder groups are present, actors are able to negotiate items they wish to influence directly with the appropriate stakeholder at the session.

Ensure that all participants identify and declare their commitments to an action plan. Note that it is not necessary to merge the action plans of individuals or groups into one overall action plan for the initiative. While such a summary may be helpful to present conclusions to others, within the workshop it is important to respect the uniqueness of each particular commitment. In a situation of competition or conflict over natural resources and other elements of local livelihoods, asking participants to agree on a single overall action plan can often dilute the energy and commitment behind individual actions. It also risks making participants reluctant to put forward the actions they feel will be most impactful if they are concerned that only those that win the approval or consensus of the whole group will be supported.
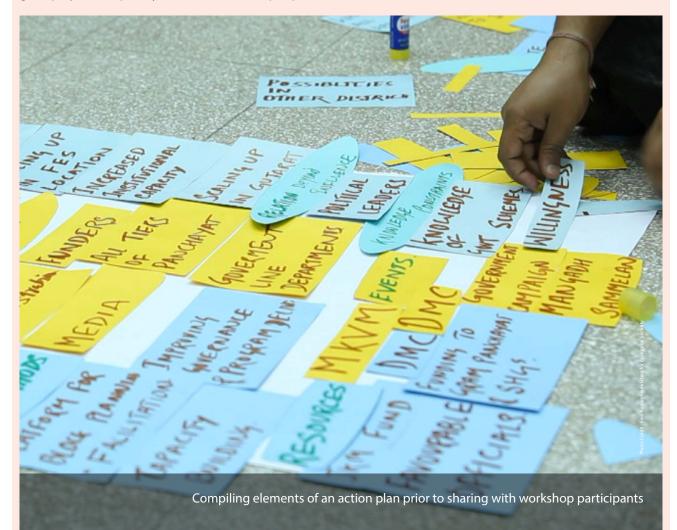
Role of facilitators	Role of participants

• Your facilitation role in this phase changes from influence to appreciation.
• Participants are now in charge of their areas of responsibility and you help by responding to their requests.
• Recognize that they will take direct responsibility for implementing results.
• You may also offer your help to facilitate the plenary session, in which case you would return to your influence role, ensuring that all groups and participants have an opportunity to voice their views.
	• You are now in your everyday role with your actual areas of responsibility.
	• Given everything you have heard, list your commitments.
	• Reflect and expand on these commitments:
	  - What will you actually do?
	  - Who will you need to influence? About what?
	  - What will others need to appreciate about your situation for you to succeed?

Table 4.   Roles of facilitators and participants in the choice phase

Insight: Reflecting on purpose

Returning attention to the overall, shared purpose focuses participants' attention on the reflective, evaluative dimension of choice. It also introduces an essential element of the longer-term learning process. Collaborating groups will need to regularly return to the question, "Are we achieving the purpose?" The new challenges that emerge in response to this question will provide guidance on future actions needed.

Asking groups to reflect on what we all need to appreciate has enormous value in creating trust. People often reveal profound insights about issues that are generally left unsaid but which have a great effect on the culture or the particular context for action, which in turn have a great effect on groups' joint capacity to achieve their purpose.

Compiling elements of an action plan prior to sharing with workshop participants

Key question 7: Will these actions achieve the purpose?

This question is designed to help participants step back and assess how effectively the sum of commitments addresses the shared purpose of the group. The question can be posed in different ways. For example:

How much of the purpose can actually be realized through the specific commitments that people are willing to make?

What else may need to be done to achieve the purpose we've defined?

After considering the questions individually and in small groups, each stakeholder group returns to the plenary to reflect on whether the joint set of commitments from all of the groups will achieve the purpose. This step is meant to enable a convergence between top-down and bottom-up approaches to the problem. This step is also important to establish a practice of reflection and learning from action that should be carried on during implementation.

Creating the conditions for choice

The conditions for this phase most resemble the normal work life of the participants. If available, groups should have their own room or space separate from others. Where there is a need for influence — for example, when one group's actions depend on choices made by another group — they should be encouraged to meet to work on these issues. So, each group will need to know where the other groups are meeting. Time may be too limited to complete the whole task, so each group should also arrange a schedule for a first follow-up action meeting.

The working group that organized the workshop is often well-suited to continuing to play key roles that ensure continuity of effort, including the following:

- Monitoring progress on implementation of the actions and evaluating results.

- Providing a forum for negotiating differences between stakeholders.
- Collecting new insights and bringing new ideas to encourage ongoing collaboration among the stakeholders or to reach out to new groups.

The working group then becomes a hub of learning and influence for the community or issue, spreading new ideas and practices. Its composition may change, and it may appoint specialists to support these key roles as well. Guidance Note 3, "Evaluating outcomes and Sustaining Collaboration," provides more discussion of the vital role of this core group in sustaining collaboration and learning, as well as extending the influence of an initiative over time.
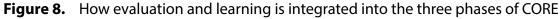

Multiple action groups taking shape at the end of a forum on the future of community fisheries in the Tonle Sap Lake, Cambodia

Many multistakeholder dialogue or collaborative planning efforts quickly lose momentum after a main event or focused series of interactions because relatively few resources are devoted to follow-through. Yet, a major workshop is only as valuable as the actions it catalyzes and the outcomes these yield over time.

Recognizing this, the CORE process is designed as a cycle of reflection, action and learning. Where Guidance Note 1 addressed preparations, and Guidance Note 2 detailed the process of facilitating dialogue, this note focuses on the longer-term challenges of monitoring progress, evaluating outcomes, learning, and expanding and sustaining collaboration.

The key task of the follow-through is to enable a core group of stakeholder representatives to act as a hub of communication and learning. This group also acts as a point of leverage to extend the progress of the initiative into other areas. By design, the set of action commitments that emerge from a dialogue event correspond to the motivations of individuals and groups, oriented toward a larger shared purpose. There is power in this joining of many perspectives and motivations, so it would be counterproductive for a core group to attempt to manage or direct all activities. Yet it is essential that the group provide a means to monitor what is happening, reflect on this, discuss issues that arise, and arrive at resolutions. A group that works well together can do much to enhance the sustainability of the collaborative initiative.

Figure 8.   How evaluation and learning is integrated into the three phases of CORE

The cycle of action and learning

While evaluation and learning do require focused effort by a core team, these should not be seen as separate activities that occur only at discrete intervals. Instead, they are embedded in each stage of the CORE approach. As illustrated in Figure 8, exploring the potential for collaboration includes explicit questioning to evaluate previous efforts. The dialogue phase includes an appraisal of what made other initiatives fail or succeed. As the groups involved take new actions in support of shared goals, there is a particularly strong need for systematic monitoring of what has been achieved, obstacles encountered and opportunities that arise, as well as structured reflection on how to adapt.

The CORE approach aims to address the very pitfalls that undermine typical development projects. For example, designing an initiative around a purpose that local stakeholders shape and refine, as well as planning actions based on commitments of participating groups, are essential to maintaining local ownership and leadership. This also encourages creative and efficient use of available resources, reducing dependence on external financing. Explicitly addressing the factors that can undermine progress toward shared goals is essential to helping collaborating groups navigate conflicting interests, power and politics. Similarly, an effective process of monitoring, evaluation, learning and reflection can be critical to sustaining collaboration across diverse stakeholder groups, spanning sectors and scales.

In practice: Local initiative and sustainability

For organizers who have been involved in conventional development projects, which often require a detailed plan at the outset that specifies a budget, deliverables, timeline and expected outcomes, there can be a bit of culture shock in shifting to a mode of engagement that sees outsiders as supporters of locally defined development initiatives.

At Zambia's Lake Kariba, members of the core team were surprised to see that the village development committee had decided on its own about next steps and proceeded with them without waiting for approval. "In the first instance," said Elias Madzudzo, a member of the organizing team, "we thought we needed to be the ones directing it. Then we realized — no, we can let it go."

At Lake Victoria, organizer Clementine Burnley recounted a similar shift in expectations upon learning that representatives from two of the three communities participating in a dialogue workshop had returned to their villages, consulted more broadly and promptly modified their plans. "At first I was annoyed," she said, "then I realized it was because people were really engaged … What we did that was different was open up the space." Bringing together representatives from the three communities had encouraged people to reflect, compare their experiences and ultimately rethink their plans. One community shifted focus from entrepreneurship training to a more practical investment in fish-drying equipment that would help raise incomes for all. Another community mobilized local funds, trucks and building materials for construction of public toilets and a biogas facility that would benefit the whole community. This newfound capacity for collective action soon attracted interest from other development investors keen to see the innovations spread.[13]

Community-led projects demonstrate strengthened collective action in Kachanga village, Lake Victoria, Uganda

Defining the purpose of monitoring and evaluation activities

Efforts to address the roots of resource conflict and build collaboration require a structured process of learning to support the actors involved. The action plans and commitments that emerge from a dialogue workshop will orient people's efforts, but no amount of planning can anticipate all the challenges that will arise or the opportunities that will emerge over time. While in many cases some form of independent monitoring or evaluation will be required to demonstrate progress or document results for investors or supporting institutions, the focus here is on participatory monitoring and evaluation. (See the companion Handbook and Toolkit for more detail on both.)
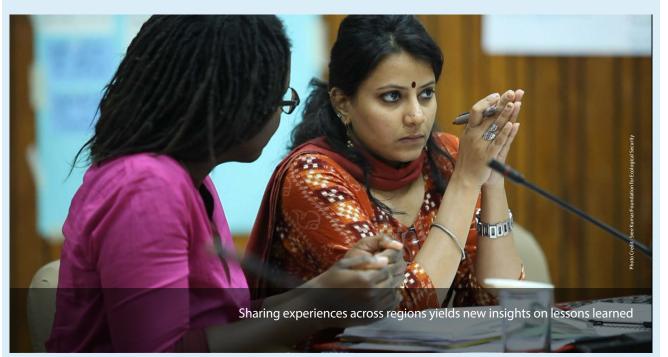
In participatory monitoring and evaluation exercises, a central purpose is always to enable learning among the key actors involved in the initiative so as to help them more effectively meet their goals. Communication products and activities summarizing evaluation findings may also be geared toward additional audiences, including current or potential funders, authorities or policy officials at higher levels, stakeholder groups in related sectors, non-governmental organization networks that may help extend the lessons to other sectors or regions, or local resource users who are not yet involved in activities of the initiative.

The team planning monitoring and evaluation activities needs to ask the following questions:
- What do we want to learn?
- Who needs to be informed? How will the information be used?
- What do people sense are the most significant changes to explore and document?
- What are the opportunities for institutional development or new partnerships that an evaluation exercise could promote?

In practice: Learning from unanticipated outcomes

The most significant changes discovered during an outcome evaluation exercise may be unanticipated. They can also be the source of rich learning. For example, an evaluation of activities aimed at addressing the sources of resource competition around Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake sought to understand why local stakeholders in some villages managed to access national-level policy intervention and win changes in regulation, while others had not. This proved to be a key question for strengthening civil society institutions and improving the responsiveness of central government authorities. Indeed, when community organizations and NGOs around the lake learned of that early success, many wanted to know how it came about, and became motivated to join in a larger campaign to expand community access rights and resource management authority.

Photo Credit: Sree Kumar/Foundation for Ecological Security

Sharing experiences across regions yields new insights on lessons learned

Using monitoring and evaluation to promote learning

Ideally, the core group created during the stages of exploring collaboration and organizing dialogue will take a lead role in defining the purpose and approach for monitoring and evaluation activities. They may also directly undertake some portion of the individual interviews, focus group discussions, participatory exercises and other methods selected. Where a range of discrete activities are underway in different sites, it is often useful to have teams organized to support monitoring and evaluation in each, followed by a structured process of comparison.

A wide range of tools are available that can help stakeholders reflect on the immediate outcomes of their actions and the obstacles they face, as well as more fundamental progress in managing and transforming resource competition and conflict. (See the companion Handbook and Toolkit.)

Insight: Learning and adaptation beyond individual projects

Forming a core group to lead efforts at participatory monitoring and evaluation fills a gap that is found in most multistakeholder efforts — the need for a central point of organizing that can nurture sustainability of the initiative. Typically projects are seen as discrete organizing efforts. The CORE approach sees every project that relates to the shared purpose as part of a larger action-learning process.

Acting not as a control mechanism but as a center of influence between individual projects and community and national interests, the core group becomes a source of learning that can help a whole range of projects, agencies and organizations adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities. This capacity for adaptation is an essential component of resilience, and can be an important contributor to conflict prevention.

If an independent evaluator or team is brought in to lend a new perspective or to add particular expertise, it is essential that the findings still be reviewed and discussed in a working meeting, so that key stakeholders have an opportunity to take part in analyzing and reflecting on the findings and their importance for future work. Such review meetings should also be timed so that there is ample opportunity to apply the lessons to next actions.

Different audiences have different preferences for the way evaluation findings are presented, as well as particular perspectives on judging the validity and representativeness of findings. Local stakeholders, for example, may be uninterested in the details of survey design or quantitative summaries of results, but will be impressed by a first-person recounting of successes or lessons from someone they can relate to and trust. This may be presented in person, through video, television or radio broadcast, etc. External funders, by contrast, will often require some element of impartial measurement, and will want to see findings documented in writing, with a description of methodology that is adequate to judge their quality — particularly for outcomes at the end of a funding period.

Different stages of the CORE approach can also make use of different kinds of information. During the stage of exploring the potential for new collaboration, for example, assessments of impact from past projects or activities are most useful when presented in a way that speaks to people's imaginations, allowing people to see new possibilities for the future and new interpretations of past reality. Videos and art are impactful ways to communicate this, especially when they complement the more direct presentation of past outcomes.

In the dialogue stage, there is a need to appraise the value and appropriateness of alternative priorities for action. This requires an understanding of the perspectives and interests of diverse stakeholders, who may support and oppose various actions. For this reason, monitoring and evaluation findings that highlight competing perspectives are especially useful. This may help not only in assessing opportunities but also in assessing the risks of different courses of action and how to mitigate these.

Photo Credit: Ryder Haske/People's Television, Inc.

Small-scale fish traders buy catch from the Tonle Sap Lake to take to market; scaling out institutional change often requires engaging new actors

The action and learning stage requires reflection on the effectiveness of actions in relation to the overall purpose. Routine monitoring of follow-through on individual and group commitments can be useful, as can simple data on performance. Statistical analysis of outcomes may also be appropriate if the users are prepared to evaluate and make use of such data. In complex initiatives involving multiple stakeholders, people will often have different perspectives on what outcomes are attributable to what actions. Rather than simplifying the story artificially, it can be very instructive to acknowledge this ambiguity and use it as an opportunity to probe further and learn as a group.

Sustaining collaboration

The same group that was formed to guide the planning of a stakeholder dialogue workshop (see Guidance Note 1) can continue to provide the coordination for an action-learning process going forward. Often, new players emerge at the dialogue workshop who then become members of this core group. The group can undertake the following:

- Reach outward beyond members' specific programs to provide and receive information to and from the larger community, region, country or international networks.

- Provide a safe haven for airing new ideas, sharing and publicizing the accomplishments of the initiative, while bringing in news, videos and training from external sources.
- Provide a source of advice and support to members' own communities of professionals and other local groups.
- Provide a forum for negotiations between stakeholders, helping spread the principles of conflict management and transformation.

The task of the core group is not only to look inward among participants in the initiative to ensure accountability for the activities they have committed to; ideally, the group also looks outward to become an agent of resilient, sustainable development for the wider community or region. The lessons from monitoring and evaluation can provide vital input into future efforts to explore the potential for new collaboration, to extend dialogue to include new groups, and to launch activities that involve private sector or government leaders at higher levels or address challenges at broader geographic scales.

In practice: Moving up

If an initiative aims for broader change, it will always require reaching out to other stakeholders who did not participate directly in the dialogue workshop. Typically it requires "moving up" to engage decision-makers at higher levels. How can this be done?

1. The principal way is to define and articulate a purpose that will interest that person.
2. The second way is to recruit a person who the higher-level actor will listen to.
3. The third way is to show what progress has already been made — new ideas, important stakeholders recruited, initial outcomes achieved and emerging outcomes anticipated.

It may not be necessary for a high-level figure to be directly engaged. Often it is enough that they are aware, and that they do not block the initiative. High-level figures sometimes don't want to take risks because they fear the downside of new initiatives. In such cases, arrange actions so that the high-level figure is not blamed for obstacles or setbacks that may occur but can still take some credit if the initiative succeeds. In this way, an official who was initially skeptical or reluctant to lend support may become an advocate for subsequent efforts after some early achievements have been made.

A research team member from the Department of Fisheries in Zambia meets with the director to share outcomes from the dialogue process and explore policy implications

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