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Demystifying Facilitation in Participatory Development

Annemarie Groot and
Marleen Maarleveld

2000

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Abstract

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Gatekeeper Editor
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IIED, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H ODD, UK
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Annemarie Groot has developed practical experience in facilitation of change processes in different parts of the world (e.g. privatisation of an irrigation project in north Senegal, decentralisation processes in Kenya and Uganda, developing a participatory extension approach within the Dutch Agricultural Advisory Service, developing a participatory and process mode of working within Dutch agricultural schools, facilitating a large number of workshops for extension professionals and researchers in various participatory methodologies). At present she is conducting a PhD at the Department of Communication Studies of the Wageningen University on the facilitation of participatory interventions.

Marleen Maarleveld is a PhD research assistant in the same department. She has a background in social and organisational psychology. In her PhD research she is developing a framework to identify, assess and facilitate social learning in natural resource management, and in particular water resource management.

2000

Executive Summary

Blueprint approaches to development have little ability to build capacities for sustainable natural resource management and food production. An emerging alternative response for democratic societies is collective action of multiple actors at multiple scales. Participatory methodologies have evolved to develop competence in joint decision-making, action and reflection. However, despite promising results, we are still not very good at incorporating multiple actor learning at multiple scales into participatory interventions. The importance of facilitation in this regard is increasingly acknowledged. However, little has been written to guide facilitators on the qualities needed and theories surrounding its actual practice.

Based on their own facilitation experience, the authors aim to make facilitation and the role of the facilitator more transparent by highlighting three different aspects of participatory interventions:

1. The reasons for the participatory intervention
2. The range of stakeholders involved
3. The style of facilitation

For each of these three choices, a number of options and their consequences for facilitation of the learning process and its outcome are presented.

Accordingly, this paper may assist facilitators and other actors involved in participatory interventions (eg. donors, ministries, farmers, NGOs) to look critically at choices to be made regarding the underlying intentions of the interventions and subsequently the type of facilitator that is required and the role they are to play. Strong institutional support, providing space for experimentation, critical peer assessment and active networking, is essential for this new professionalism to emerge.

DEMYSTIFYING FACILITATION IN PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

Annemarie Groot and Marleen Maarleveld[1]

Introduction

In the past few decades participatory interventions have become a popular means of bringing about social and technical change across the globe. Whether in research, development or policy analysis, in social forestry, irrigation management, or integrated pest management, participation is presented as the golden key to unlock the door to a more sustainable and democratic world. The task of ensuring that the golden key is used and the door is unlocked is, in general, placed in the hands of the *facilitator*: the man or woman responsible for the management of the change process in the participatory intervention. In practice this proves a complex task and the qualities needed in a successful facilitator are highly personal and hard to formalise, making it difficult to communicate, to share with others and to evaluate what is needed.

Whilst a variety of efforts have been undertaken to assist facilitators in their profession in the last decade, such as the publication of a large number of very rich and valuable training guides and other resources (eg., Van Veldhuizen *et al.,* 1997; Pretty *et al.,* 1995; Engel and Salomon, 1995; Williams, 1994; *PLA Notes; Forest, Trees and People Newsletter*), the strong focus on tools and procedures tends to leave the reader with a picture of a facilitator and his/her magic box. The underlying diversity in intentions, epistemological and theoretical assumptions underpinning facilitation practices usually remain implicit and unclear. This, unfortunately, stands in the way of a more critical, reflective understanding of the deeper determinants of technical and social change, for which participatory approaches are often criticised (eg., Richards, 1995; White, 1996).

In this paper, we aim to make facilitation and the role of the facilitator more transparent, based on our own experience in facilitation and some theoretical concepts. This may assist facilitators and others involved in participatory interventions (such as donors, governments, farmers, NGOs) to look critically at choices to be made regarding the underlying intentions of the interventions, and subsequently the type of facilitator that is required and the role they are to play in designing tailor-made learning processes.

A Theory of Facilitation?

Some work has been done on developing a facilitation theory. A number of authors have questioned the implicit theories and epistemological assumptions about facilitators in

participatory interventions. For example, Australian practitioners and researchers involved in the facilitation of Landcare groups highlight the fundamental differences between the role and required competence of facilitators operating merely as teachers within the Transfer of Technology paradigm (underpinning conventional agricultural research and extension practices), and those encouraging individual and collective learning within the participation paradigm (eg., Campbell, 1994).

Wilson and Morren (1990), like many others (e.g. Röling and Jiggins, 1998; Daniels and Walker, 1999), propose the use of (soft) systems thinking as a way to facilitate dynamic and complex processes. They contend that because we live in a complex world that people view very differently, there is need for an approach that helps to develop agreement amongst actors on key issues such as the nature of the problems experienced, what constitutes improvement and how and with whom this is to be achieved.

The concept of organisational and collective learning has become a core principle in many participatory approaches (e.g., Röling and Jiggins, 1998; Senge, 1990). Learning emerges from experience and/or human interaction during which people's different goals, values, knowledge and points of view are made explicit and questioned to accommodate conflicts so that collective action can be taken to tackle a shared problem. Facilitation ideally transforms an arena of struggling individuals into a forum for active social learning towards effective action (Röling, pers comm). This active learning finally leads to a deeper understanding about how complex issues work and why. It improves people's capacity to make sense of and adapt to an ever-changing world. Compared to learning through adopting externally-provided solutions, this active learning is supposed to promote sustainability, creativity and innovation.

In this paper, we would like to build further on this theory of facilitation of participatory interventions. We ourselves have experienced the value of a facilitation approach that embraces diversity and makes facilitators' practices more transparent, thereby improving their professionalism. For this reason we emphasise the learning perspective facilitators can use to catalyse social and technical change. We do this by making explicit three types of choices that are often only implicitly made in a participatory intervention, and discuss the important implications such choices have for the learning process and its outcomes:
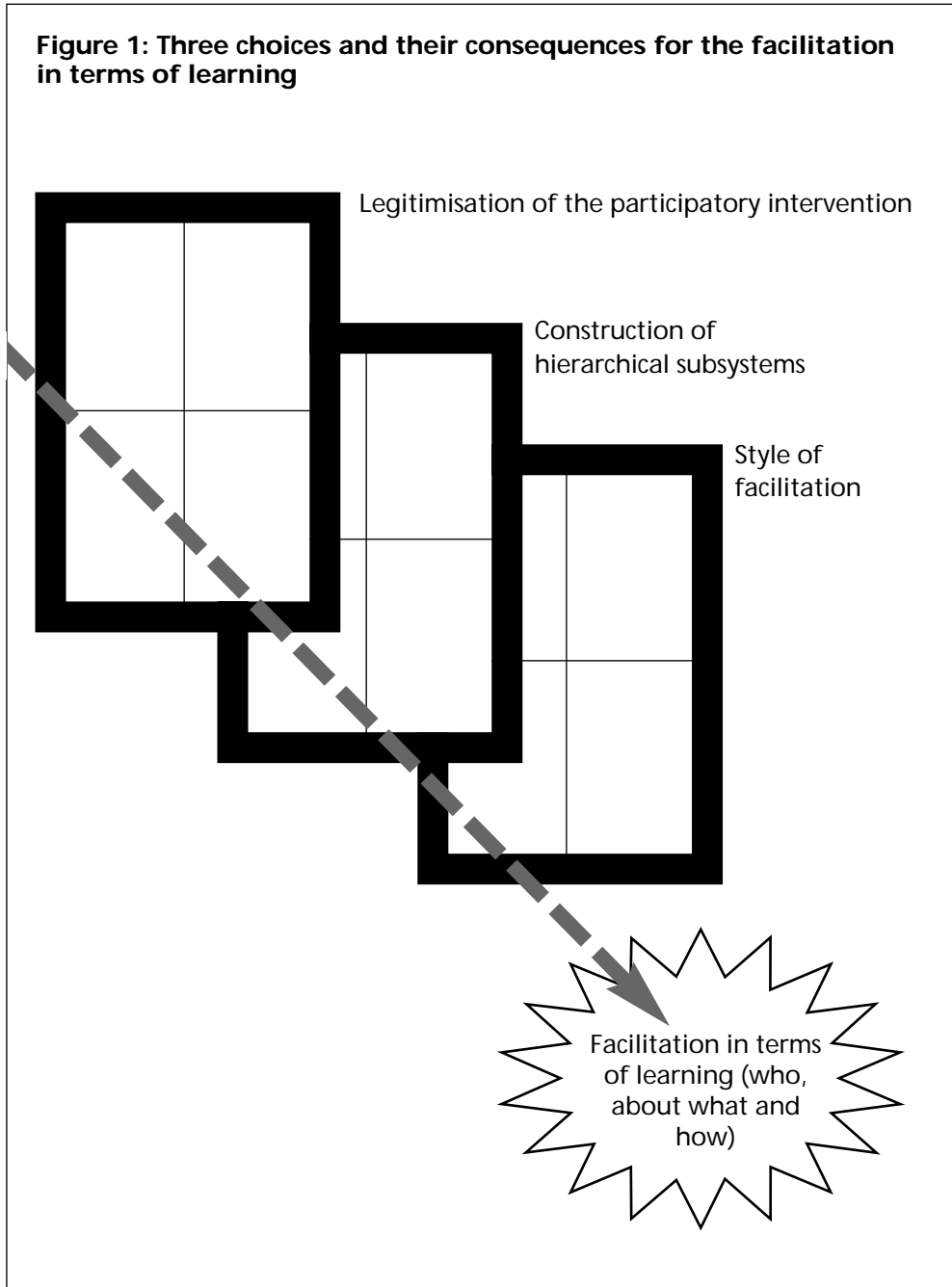
1. The reasons for the participatory intervention
2. The range of stakeholders involved
3. The style of facilitation

For each of the three choices we will present a number of options and their consequences for the facilitation of the learning process and its outcome. More specifically, the options will be described in terms of:

• Which people are involved in the learning and why?

• How do people learn?
• What do people learn?

The interaction of these elements is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Three choices and their consequences for the facilitation in terms of learning

Legitimisation of the participatory intervention

Construction of hierarchical subsystems

Style of facilitation

Facilitation in terms of learning (who, about what and how)

Justifying the participatory intervention

First we need to define our concept of 'participatory intervention'. We consider an intervention as a way of reshaping local situations, or organising social relations that are no longer valued as valid or are ill-founded (Long and van de Ploeg, 1994). The use of an 'external' expert or facilitator to assist people in this process is indispensable. As such, facilitation is itself an intervention. An intervention is labelled as participatory when there is some form of involvement of relevant actors in the change process (Pretty et al., 1995).

Understanding the reasons behind a participatory intervention concerns the crucial factor of power and power relations. Often it is the goals of the initiating and/or funding parties which dominate the process. A useful framework to distinguish different approaches and their consequences for facilitation is as follows (Habermas, 1984; Brand, 1990):

- *Instrumental rationality* values actions in terms of their ability to achieve pre-set goals by manipulating others (things, people) as objects. One does something because it is a way of achieving one's goals.
- *Strategic rationality* shares with instrumental rationality a goal-oriented approach to action. However, people are viewed as strategic actors, rather than as objects, which need to be outwitted to achieve one's predetermined goals through others, i.e., one seeks to influence the decisions and actions of others to maximise one's own interests.
- *Communicative rationality* gives rise to interaction in which the goals and plans of action of different actors are negotiated and co-ordinated through *"use of language (or corresponding non-verbal expressions) oriented to reaching shared understanding"* (Habermas, 1984). In other words, action is taken through agreement and shared understanding. One does something because of a feeling of commitment and interdependency with others.

As participatory interventions can only be effective through purposeful interaction among people, strategic and communicative rationality are the typical rationales behind participatory interventions and subsequently influence the facilitation process and outcomes. Therefore, in this paper we will mainly refer to these two types.[2]

Strategic rationality: implications for facilitation

In the case of strategic rationality, participatory interventions are chosen for their ability to change the behaviour of beneficiaries so that predetermined objectives can be achieved more easily. The intervening actor(s), donors included, set the goals, time and financial frames. The principal reason for choosing a participatory mode of interven-

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2 *This isn't to say, however, that instrumental rationality never occurs in participatory interventions; people sometimes are used as objects to reach goals.*

tion is its presumed efficiency. People's support and commitment are expected to lead to a smooth implementation of already-prepared plans. A predictable environment is assumed. Thus, facilitation is used first to consider all options, identify and evaluate the consequences that follow from the adoption of each and then select the option most likely to achieve the outcomes. In this case, facilitation is concerned with managing situations rather than managing learning processes (Jiggins, pers. comm.).

A strategic approach leads a facilitator and other participants to focus on the leading question *"What strategy should we apply in order to achieve our objectives?"*. Related questions such as *"how can we solve the problems we face?"*, *"how can we avoid the mistakes we are making?"*, *"who should do what, when and how?"* are less important than accomplishing pre-set objectives. Accordingly, the subject of learning is framed by these objectives as well as the choice of who should be involved in the learning. The learning is about procedures, incentives and responsibilities, or 'single loop learning' (Box 1). Objectives can be adapted during the process, but only within the predetermined boundaries. The final choice about who should participate in what way during which part of the project cycle is driven by the desire of a successful programme implementation which involves the use of tools like ODA's stakeholder analysis (ODA, 1995). Usually, at the start of the intervention a thorough analysis of potential actors is made in terms of their influence, importance and the intervention's likely impact on them. With respect to how change occurs, we contend this involves adoption of techniques rather than learning processes. Thus, communication methods are used which inform and persuade the intended beneficiaries and intermediaries about the objectives and strategy (eg. mass media, public hearings).

Box 1. Understanding different levels of learning

Learning loops are a useful concept for understanding learning (Argyris and Schön, 1996). There are three types of collective learning: single, double and triple loop learning. The different levels refer to the type and degree of change brought about by the learning process.

- Single loop learning occurs when the intervention brings about changes in people's existing practices without significantly changing their vision, objectives, norms or values. Changes of behaviour are at the level of 'more of the same, but better'.

- In double loop learning, changes take place not only in existing practices, but also in underlying insights and principles. It strives to achieve collective knowledge and understanding by learning about assumptions and goals behind routines.

- Triple loop learning occurs when essential underlying principles are questioned to the extent that it includes (re)designing the norms and protocols that govern single and double loop learning. Thus it entails learning about single and double loop learning.

Communicative rationality: implications for facilitation

The potential of facilitation to manage change purposefully is entirely different when a participatory intervention is framed in terms of communicative rationality. The process unfolds over time and aims to develop and strengthen people's capabilities to learn individually and/or collectively. The emphasis is on the process, with special attention given to interaction amongst those involved. It also focuses on empowerment, self-reliance, personal development and dialogue. People are not regarded as passive pawns to be manipulated, but as rational human beings capable of shaping their environment to realise their own interests through interaction with others. Interventions based on communicative rationality assume that there is no single reality but multiple perceptions of reality.

This principle of multiple perspectives has important implications for the choice of who should be involved in the learning process. The facilitator will look for diversity rather than for simplifying complexity by limiting the number of participants. All those expected to have different interests, opinions, experience or rights with regard to the issue at stake are considered relevant and are encouraged to participate. The choice of who should participate in the learning is often made by the participants themselves, who also have a major role to play in determining the subject of learning. In this context, facilitation focuses on a combination of single, double and triple loop learning. Existing practices, rules and regulations, as well as goals, norms and values underpinning these routines are questioned. The various individual models of reality and mental frame works for interpretation are made explicit, to improve mutual understanding. Facilitation is guided by questions like *"what is the common ground on which concerted action can be built? And what could be clarified or tested through further investigation and be the basis for shared learning?"*

The learning is guided by the ideas and principles of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), where learning occurs through iterative cycles of reflection, planning, action, monitoring and reflection again. Facilitators choose methods and techniques that enhance communicative interaction amongst actors. In particular, they will make much use of visualisation techniques to make visible how people perceive their own reality and the learning that emerges through action research and experimentation. Dialogue to share values and improve mutual understanding and agreement is preferred over argument in which individuals pursue their own interests.

Facilitation practice: intertwining strategic and communicative rationales

In practice, the distinction between strategic and communicative rationalisation is not always as clear as the above suggests. In fact, perhaps all interventions are by definition rooted in a strategic rationale as they are purposefully designed to trigger change.

Moreover, in many situations strategic and communicative rationales intertwine, for example:

• Where an intervention is based on a communicative rationale, but is implemented in a very strategic way.
• Where different intervening parties (eg., facilitating team and donors) base their actions on different rationales. For instance, a donor whose intentions are based on a strategic rationale can decide to finance a participatory intervention, while the facilitation team can take a communicative approach.
• Where the rationale may change over time. An intervening party could start an intervention based on a strategic rationale that over time is changed into a communicative rationale.
• Where one intervening party (in the case of the example in Box 2, the facilitation team) can purposefully mix up both rationales.

Box 2. Intertwining of strategic and communicative rationales

In the Senegalese Irrigation Project *Ile a Morphil* a participatory intervention was designed to guide the process of phasing out. The marketing of rice, input supply and the financing of technical and organisational assistance were no longer guaranteed by the Dutch and Senegalese donors. Privatisation was considered the appropriate response to this disengagement. Within this set frame, old (eg., farmers, project staff) and new actors (eg., traders, banks, neighbouring farmers) were encouraged to develop operational strategies through discussion and negotiation to learn about new roles, tasks, relationships and institutions to guarantee successful privatisation (strategic rationality). The facilitators encouraged the actors to take part in joint problem analysis, visioning, strategising, fact finding and reflections to increase mutual understanding, trust and commitment for planned follow-up activities. The way actors collaborated in these actions was continuously reflected upon to learn collectively for improvement in terms of outputs, participants and institutions (communicative rationality) (Groot and Bakker, 1994).

In order to make the choice of approach transparent in practice, we suggest that the objectives of the participatory intervention should be clear. Thus, predetermined and inflexible production goals are an indication of an instrumental or strategic rationale, whereas open goals that are flexible and continuously adjusted by the participants indicate a communicative rationale.
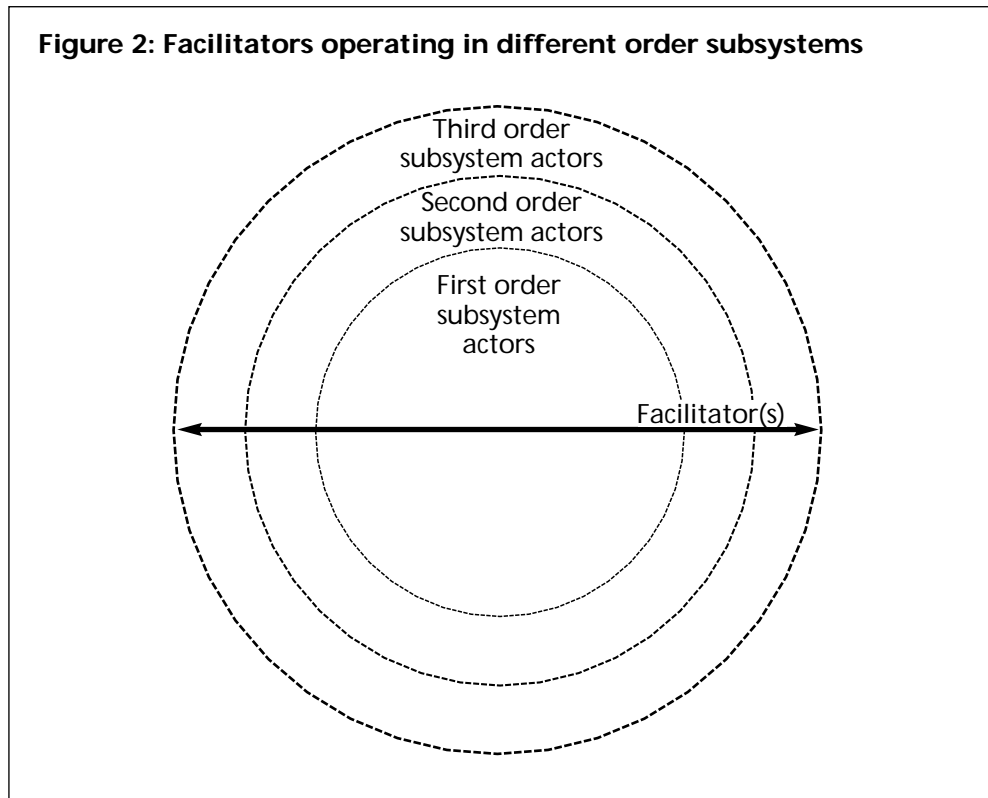
Hierarchical subsystems: consequences for participants' learning and facilitation practice

A number of authors advocate the use of system (or systemic) thinking and practice to assist facilitators in designing learning processes to deal with complex problems (e.g.,

Daniels and Walker, 1999; Wilson and Morren, 1990; Checkland, 1989). Yet practice shows that very few facilitators explicitly refer to systemic thinking and practices (Jiggins, pers. comm.). Unfortunately, when no systemic approach is used there is a risk that only the symptoms will be treated rather than the source of the trouble. Facilitators who use system thinking do more than just consider the multiple parts making a whole. They also recognise interrelationships amongst the parts, emergent properties and systems hierarchy. We elaborate on this last feature below as it can be a particularly helpful concept for facilitators designing tailor-made learning processes for different types of people involved in an intervention.

Hierarchical subsystems

One way of dealing with complexity is to identify the different types of stakeholder groups according to their influence and involvement in a situation. This can be done by distinguishing nested or hierarchical subsystems, ie., system models in which smaller subsystems of actors are 'nested' in larger systems (Box 2). Each subsystem is distinct from others in terms of different units of actors with different learning needs due to different positions, roles, experience or rights. Facilitation in participatory interventions can catalyse the learning of actors operating in the same or different subsystems to achieve desired outcomes (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Facilitators operating in different order subsystems

Third order
subsystem actors

Second order
subsystem actors

First order
subsystem
actors

Facilitator(s)

In the Senegalese experience (Box 3) the facilitators encouraged the participants themselves to negotiate the social boundaries of the system as a whole and its hierarchical subsystems.

Box 3. The social construction of a hierarchy of subsystems: an irrigation project in Senegal

In the privatisation process of the Senegalese irrigation project (Box 2), the facilitators distinguished three hierarchical subsystems. In the *"first order subsystem"*, the facilitators managed an intensive learning process in which *"first order actors"* (farmers, representatives of farmer organisations, extension workers, researchers, input suppliers, representatives of projects and NGOs) were involved. First order actors were those actors who had directly affected or were affected by decision making and who were locally present. These actors interacted face-to-face and negotiated strategies and means to tackle a common issue. This first order system formed part of a wider environment or was nested in a *second order subsystem* composed of *second order actors.* These actors were considered to be a second order because of relatively lower interest in the issue at stake and/or because they were not locally present (eg. banks, farmer organisations outside project area), but provided the administrative, financial and wider institutional context. Special activities were facilitated to encourage interaction between first and second order actors to learn from each other, to accommodate/consolidate objectives and strategies. Moreover, the second order subsystem was considered to be nested in *a third order subsystem with third order actors* representing the administrative, political and other influential actors at the higher level (e.g. SAED, Dutch donor, Dutch embassy, "Association de jeunes in Dakar"). Here learning took place through negotiations resulting in minor adaptations in current ideas, objectives and practice (Groot and Bakker, 1994).

Hierarchical subsystems: approaches for designing participants' learning

Those actors who influence the social construction of the subsystems determine *"who will be involved in the learning and why"*. This brings us to linking the concept of hierarchy of subsystems with the rationale for the participatory intervention. When the rationale for the intervention is strategic, facilitators themselves become strategic actors in the process of creating the subsystems by setting distinct social boundaries and sustaining these during the entire intervention. The actors of higher order subsystems (usually more influential) frame the learning of those actors of lower order subsystems by setting objectives, time and financial frames. Facilitators strategically intervene in lower level subsystems and manipulate actors to join the projects proposed by actors of higher level subsystems. Facilitation predominantly entails single loop learning.

By contrast, in a participatory intervention whose rationale is communicative, the boundaries between hierarchical subsystems are usually more fuzzy. In fact, facilitation

often aims to re-define or break down boundaries by managing integrated learning processes, i.e. encouraging networking activities among actors of different hierarchical subsystems and being involved in different learning loops. 'Real life' complexity is not dealt with by isolating the learning in one subsystem from the learning in an adjacent subsystem. Facilitators act upon two (or more) subsystems simultaneously as a unified whole, as well as on their interface.

How does learning occur within these subsystems? Often at the start of a participatory intervention, subsystems are characterised by poor interaction and communication. The individuals do not understand each other very well and interact with each other on the basis of stereotypes and prejudices. The expected individual benefit is the main driving force for people to participate. When a facilitator encounters such poor inter-action and communication, learning methods and activities can be chosen to encourage people to share perceptions and experiences as well as to discover the value of collaboration. Interactions are needed in order to negotiate visions, goals, strategies, and, physical and social boundaries. The facilitator predominantly acts as a mediator focusing on the reasons behind individuals' interests, incentives, conditions etc. The facilitator will enhance learning about learning to encourage the innovative compe-tence of the (sub)system.

Facilitation practice

As shown above, the concept of hierarchical subsystems has great value in helping tailor appropriate learning to collective and individual needs. However, in practice few facil-itators use this approach. Typically, facilitation only takes place at the grassroots or lower level subsystem. Higher order subsystems are considered frames in which only lower level learning processes will take place. Consequently these higher order actors are left out. To us this is a key reason for the problems often faced in trying to scale-up participatory interventions. Facilitation should also include learning in higher order subsystems and as such becomes a balancing act of bringing grassroots issues to a higher level to attract higher authorities and donors, at the same time as solving problems at a local level to satisfy the learning needs of local communities.

The style of facilitation

Making facilitation a more transparent process also implies acknowledging personal differences in style and competencies among facilitators and understanding their conse-quences for learning. The types of people facilitating the change process can thus be a critical variable. Here we discuss three facilitation styles and their consequences for the learning process.

- *Inside or outside the process.* Some facilitators consider themselves as insiders or as actors involved in the change process with a specialist role like any other actor. They believe their intervention changes the phenomena under study and acknowledge

having a part in the joint construction of 'realities'. Others act as outsiders manipulating the process of others. They believe that their presence does not directly change the phenomena being studied and pretend to be detached from the object of study in the name of objectivity and neutrality (Selener, 1997).

- *Reflective versus problem solving.* A reflective facilitation style highlights reflection so that individuals' learning can be on-going and sustainable. This reflective facilitation style highly values the process of building people's capacity for problem solving, adaptation, negotiation and conflict resolution. The reflexive facilitator thinks and acts contextually rather than analytically and helps people to manage the process of systemic change (Stacey, 1992; Wheatley, 1992).

  The problem solving facilitation style focuses more on the problems than on the people solving the problems. The problem solver helps people to manage the problem situation. In this facilitation style problem-solving is considered a linear process taken in a series of steps: identifying problems, analysis, formulation of solutions and implementation.

- *Integrative and distributive mediation style.* Facilitators often act as mediators to assist negotiations between people for joint decision-making. There are two negotiation styles: integrative and distributive (Pruitt and Carneval, 1993). Integrative negotiation seeks a win-win situation serving the interests of all parties. Distributive negotiation represents a win-lose situation in which one party wins at the expense of the other. A facilitator can prefer a mediation style that serves one party (eg. donors, government) at the expense of others, or an integrative style that takes into account the interest of all actors.

There are a number of implications for learning when one or more facilitation styles is applied in a participatory intervention.

Facilitators taking up an *insider* position embrace flexibility and diversity in the use of qualitative methods and open learning processes and acknowledge multiple perspectives and broad participation. On the other hand, *outsiders* value quantitative analysis for the purpose of achieving 'truth' and 'objectivity'. The outsider style gives importance to written reports loaded with recommendations. Insiders are usually accountable to the other participants; outsiders to their employers and peers.

A *reflective* facilitator encourages participants to learn about systemic processes to analyse actor-actor linkages as well as actor-physical environment relationships. She/he promotes triple loop learning to encourage participants to gradually take over the facilitator's role in designing the learning process. The learning processes are action oriented and form iterative cycles of reflection, planning, action, observing and reflection. The methods for learning are selected to encourage communication, listening, interaction, trust building, critical reflection and peer assessment. This choice is also related to the

ability to make visible trends and changes in the subsystem; for example, changes between the past and present (eg., timelines), changes between locations (eg., farmers visits), or future trends (eg., future search conferences).

In the *instrumental problem solving style,* the learning is set by the perceived problem, its perceived causes and effects, and possible solutions. The learning methods focus on linear thinking, analysis and planning (eg. logical frameworks). They are characterised by being product-oriented and able to contain and transfer information.

In an *integrative mediation style* the focus is on participants' interests, the reasons behind these interests, norms, values and perceptions. The mediator needs to be competent in methods which highlight different perceptions and needs and support joint decision making (eg., dialogue, stakeholder analysis, network analysis). When a *distributive mediation style* is required the focus is mainly determined by the goals and strategies of the party being mostly served by the facilitator. The facilitator is likely to be a dealmaker. Preferable methods are persuasive communication methods (eg., debate and argument).

Facilitation practice: Bringing the styles together

Facilitation style and context are reciprocal. The context tends to shape the facilitator's style, and conversely a style influences the context. A participatory intervention rooted in strategic rationality is likely to look for a facilitator with an instrumental problem solving style, who will focus on single loop learning for improving efficiency and effectiveness. Right from the start, objectives determined by actors of higher level subsystems provide the main drive for problem identification and analysis by low level subsystems (eg., grassroots communities). Once actors' interests become clearer, negotiations start in which the facilitator acts as a mediator with a distributive style. Usually, the facilitator will try to remain a neutral outsider in the process.

However, when the rationale for a participatory intervention is communicative, facilitators with a reflective style are required. In terms of hierarchical subsystems, the facilitator purposefully operates in various subsystems focusing on a combination of single, double and triple loop learning processes. And they sometimes decide to intervene at the interface of two subsystems to facilitate integrated learning processes between participants of different order subsystems. An integrative mediation style can encourage people to understand differences in interests and perceptions in others. Finally, the role of the facilitator is to help participants accommodate different perceptions and objectives in order to move forward. Participants' ownership of the learning process and its opportunities for improvement is considered essential. The facilitator will purposefully manage the process in such a way that what is learned, why, when and how, are increasingly decided by the participants themselves. The moment the facilitator intervenes she/he becomes an actor in the process with a particular task and expertise like any other participant.

In practice each person has talents for a particular style. But by no means do we want to argue that a facilitation style is an unchangeable attribute. Through influence of the social context or new experiences, a facilitator might change styles, or acquire a range of styles. However, as illustrated in Table 1, changing from a reflective facilitator towards a problem solver or from a mediator with a distributive style towards one with an integrative style demands fundamental changes in one's motivation, one's competence in systems thinking practice, and one's ability to enhance double and triple loop learning.

Table 1. Facilitation styles compared				
	Reflective Facilitator	Instrumental problem solver	Distributive mediator	Integrative mediator
System thinking and practice involved	Yes	No	No	Yes, likely to be
Rationale	Communicative	Strategic	Strategic	Communicative
Position of facilitator	Facilitator is one of the actors in the process	Facilitator is outsider assisting participants in solving problem situation	Facilitator is outsider manipulating participants as strategic subjects	Facilitator is one of the participants in the process
Learning loops involved	Single, double and triple loop learning	Single loop learning	Single loop learning	Single, double and triple loop learning

While the above summary gives the impression that facilitation practices are rather orderly and predictable, our experiences suggest a far more complex process. For example, one can imagine a context in which the rationale for an intervention itself is the subject of conflict because different actors have different action motivations. Regardless of the style preferred by the facilitator, facilitation becomes a balancing act of pushing, pulling and compromising. After all, we should not underestimate the power of a facilitator's personal motivation in framing the contextual or ultimate rationale of the participatory intervention.

Conclusions: Improving facilitation professionalism

Blueprint approaches to privatisation, liberalisation and centralisation have little ability to build capacities for sustainable natural resource management and food production

(e.g., Ostrom, 1994). An emergent alternative and potentially feasible response for democratic societies is collective action of multiple actors at multiple scales (Röling and Maarleveld, 1999). Participatory methodologies have evolved to develop competence in joint decision-making, action and reflection. However, despite promising results, we are still not very good at incorporating multiple actor learning at multiple scales into participatory interventions. In addition, participatory approaches seem to be increasingly used by strategically acting actors, including facilitators themselves, to achieve pre-determined objectives more efficiently and effectively. In these cases the ideological goals of participatory methodologies are bypassed as the beneficiaries do not fully own and drive the process.

Improved facilitation professionalism can help to make these paradoxes transparent by acknowledging the diversity in motivations for participatory interventions, in the social organisation of hierarchical subsystems and in facilitation styles. By making explicit the consequences these differences have for the facilitation of participatory interventions in terms of who learns, why, how and about what, the participants in the interventions can critically assess their own learning process. This is certainly no easy matter. Extensive research on the difficulties of double loop learning shows that early in life we seem to have learned rules and behaviour that prevent us from questioning our basic assumptions and beliefs. We typically use strategies like saving face, avoiding losing and suppressing emotions. People seem to act in ways that prevent them from learning about discrepancies between their intentions and actions and thus their learning behaviour remains unchanged (Argyris and Schön, 1996; Dörner, 1996).

One of the most important roles of a facilitator is to understand and question the rationale behind a participatory intervention. Although three types of choices relevant to facilitation were explored in this paper, we believe the rationale for a participatory intervention is the most fundamental as it influences the choice of participants in the learning process, what they will learn about and how they are influenced. The facilitator can make visible the consequences of this choice for learning and the outcome of the intervention. In addition, the facilitator can identify and create space for changing the motivation behind an intervention.

Strong institutional support, providing space for experimentation, critical peer assessment and active networking, is essential for this new professionalism to emerge. A facilitator who has experienced the value of communicative action, of double and triple loop learning and systemic thinking and practice is challenged to improve his/her own expertise in these fields. Gradually he or she will be able to help others to diagnose and change their own resistance to double and triple loop learning. But this calls for a conducive environment enhancing inquiry into and possibly alteration of the underlying determinants of social and technical change which can be realised structurally using the learning perspective as applied in this paper.

We hope the challenge to train such facilitators will be taken up by agricultural univer-

sities, colleges and other organisations and networks. Consequently (and for some maybe, unfortunately), the facilitator's tool box will lose its magic character as the application of methods and techniques becomes subordinate to a more profound learning process.

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