

The Change Alliance

Using stakeholder processes and complexity thinking in governing for sustainability and social justice

A Global Learning Alliance

Catalysing Change

Multi-stakeholder processes¹ are increasingly important in strategies for achieving sustainability and social justice. Yet they often do not realise their potential, and this shortfall limits the ability of government, business, civil society and citizens to work constructively together on a common agenda. The Change Alliance is an emerging global network of organisations joining forces to increase the effectiveness of such processes. It aims to improve the quality of the process design, dialogue, learning, and facilitation, on which multi-stakeholder collaboration depends.

Over a five-year period, the Alliance will mount a number of action inquiry initiatives, through which we aim to deliver improved outcomes and enhanced impact in a diverse set of multi-stakeholder processes. Capacity development for the individuals and organisations that participate will be a significant part of this work. The Alliance will contribute to developing capacity more broadly by creating a global learning platform that will link the action inquiry initiatives to each other and make the learning widely accessible. Through the global learning platform and engagement of leaders in government, business and civil society, the Alliance aims to stimulate greater investment in and support to create the enabling conditions for more effective multi-stakeholder processes.

Looking Deeper

The program proposed by the Change Alliance is based on a view that in multi-stakeholder processes the process itself is just the ‘tip of an iceberg’. Achieving concrete results requires addressing underlying challenges and questions, for example, about social, economic and political change, power dynamics, different forms of governance and democracy and, the effectiveness of facilitation and leadership. If multi-stakeholder processes create good conversations but gloss over these deeper issues, they run the risk of being rejected as naive and doing more harm than good. The Alliance seeks to develop capacities to work with this full range of issues by bringing the most relevant theory and practice to bear in critical reflection on real-world experiences.

“I am, personally very interested in getting a better understanding of alternative approaches to climate negotiations as one such multi-stakeholder process seeking to establish a new [form of] climate governance. We are currently locked in camps who behave more like a bunch of school kids on the play-ground than as parties to a really challenging common agenda ... A question I constantly ask myself in those circumstances is: to what extent do the current approaches of negotiation contribute to or stand in the way of a true multi-stakeholder process, and how could we create the enabling conditions that would make this process more efficient?”

E-mail to a member of the Alliance from a government official engaged in climate change negotiations.

In addition, because most multi-stakeholder processes deal with complex issues, the practical application of complexity thinking is central to the proposed work of the Change Alliance. In complex adaptive systems such as the economy, society and ecosystems, cause and effect

¹ The term multi-stakeholder process is used here to cover a diverse range of learning, dialogue and innovation processes that complement formal governance mechanisms. Such processes bring citizens and stakeholders from government, civil society and business together to tackle difficult issues in ways that build trust and understanding and enable collective action. They are designed to be open, creative, learning orientated and empowering. They offer spaces to go beyond formalised negotiation, adversarial politics and conventional advocacy.

relationships are often difficult to fully understand. Further, change happens fast and may be quite unpredictable, risks are often high and the consequences of failure may be severe. These conditions demand ways of intervening that go beyond established approaches, which tend to be linear and mechanistic, to steer change in ways that are less top-down and control oriented and more decentralised, responsive and adaptive. The Change Alliance will focus on understanding the implications of this reality for multi-stakeholder processes and for the mechanisms of governance more broadly. It will contribute to translating these ideas in improved practice.

Practical Support

Members of the Change Alliance are committed to looking critically at their own successes and failures with multi-stakeholder processes. They also seek to gain access to a wider network of expertise and support by linking with other organisations to explore the challenges they face. The program of the Alliance aims to deliver practical support on both these fronts to those who participate and to others involved in multi-stakeholder processes. This support will be through two main mechanisms: action inquiry initiatives and the global learning platform.

The **Action Inquiry Initiatives** are new or established multi-stakeholder processes in which the Alliance partner organisations are involved. For example: improving food production and marketing systems in Ethiopia; overcoming youth violence in Central America; a multi-stakeholder approach to local service delivery around Lake Victoria in Eastern Africa; territorial development in south America; improving water Governance in the Mekong; or enhancing global level dialogue on water issues. Through access to expertise and knowledge, financial support and a practitioner network, the Alliance can strengthen and improve such initiatives and enable them to be developed, implemented and reflected upon with a depth and quality otherwise not possible. The contribution from the Alliance may include:

- Linking those involved in the initiative with others who have relevant experience and expertise
- Providing access to a pool of experienced process experts and facilitators who could offer practical guidance and support on process design and facilitation and any emerging problems
- Assisting with capacity development and training support
- Assisting with setting up and supporting an ongoing process of reflection and learning within the initiative
- Access to web-based knowledge resources
- Access to a process management “help-desk”
- Linking the initiatives into a wider learning processes with the Alliance partners

The **Global Learning Platform** will provide both physical and virtual spaces that enable learning, innovation and sharing across Alliance partners and initiatives. It will also ensure that the work of the Alliance has reach and impact beyond the Alliance itself. The platform will enable practitioners, who would otherwise remain isolated, to come together with academic experts and experienced process leaders to: work on practical challenges; capture and share lessons; enhance capacities and establish a joint programme of research, learning and quality improvement. The Learning Platform will focus on adding value to the work of the individual members of the Alliance and share its lessons learned with a wide audience. It will provide research, learning, knowledge management and capacity development functions that only become feasible and cost effective when supporting a wide network of partners. Activities of the learning platform include:

- Learning and coaching workshops for members of the action inquiry initiatives
- Establishing and implementing collaborative research activities on challenges and constraints to effective multi-stakeholder engagement
- Providing web-based and interactive resource portals

- Hosting regional and global learning and innovation workshops
- Collaborative capacity development and training programmes with regional educational institutions
- Documenting, communication and promoting the work of the Alliance
- Working with political, government, civil society and business leaders on how to create the enabling conditions for effective multi-stakeholder processes and on how to apply complexity thinking to policymaking in international cooperation.

Linking Content and Process Across Sectors

Different issues and sectors have their own unique challenges when it comes to stakeholder engagement. The Change Alliance sees that content and process must always go hand in hand, at the same time it is responding to a clear interest for sharing across sectors. Current members of the Alliance are presently engaged in multi-stakeholder processes in relation to the following themes/sectors:

- Poverty-reducing market development and growth
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Deepening democracy
- Social inequalities and gender
- Sustainable food systems
- Water, forests and ecosystems
- Peace and conflict
- Corporate social responsibility
- Aid effectiveness

Funding and Governance

The activities of the Alliance will be funded by combining the existing resources and initiatives of partners with raising additional resources from funding agencies and foundations to link, support and add value to existing initiatives. To realise the overall ambitions of the Alliance, it is estimated that between three and five million Euro would be needed over a five year period. A decentralised network-based model of raising and administering funding is envisaged. A key principle of the funding model would be to stimulate innovation.

A **Responsive Fund** will enable innovative proposals for research, action inquiry, capacity development and strategic engagement to be supported with both financial resources and expertise on a competitive basis.

A simple and efficient governance mechanism will be developed to ensure the conceptual and intellectual quality of the Alliance's work and to enable good organisational and logistical support for activities.

Seed funding for 2008/9 is being provided by ICCO², the GCC and Wageningen International.

² See list of partners for full names of organisations.

Partners in the Emerging Alliance

The idea for the Alliance has evolved from a wide set of conversations between individuals in organisations who are engaged with multi-stakeholder, learning and dialogue processes. Those who, so far, have indicated strong interest in participating are listed below³.

The formation of the Alliance has been initiated by the GCC, Wageningen International, IDS, Learning by Design, SNV, ICCO, and DGIS. It is envisaged that the strength of the Alliance will lie in having a good balance between Southern and Northern partners who represent implementation agency, business, NGO, government and research interests.

A Foundation Group has been formed to support the establishment of the Alliance.

Alphabetical list of potential Alliance partners (have expressed interest to engage)

- CDRA - Community Development Resource Association
- CGIAR-ILAC - Institutional Learning and Change Initiative
- Cordaid
- ECDPM - European Centre for Development Policy Management
- EcoAgriculture Partners
- GCC - Generative Change Community
- IDS - Institute for Development Studies
- ICCO - Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation
- ICRA - International Centre for Development-oriented Research in Agriculture
- IRC - International Water and Sanitation Centre
- iScale
- IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature
- IUCN - REWARD Programme
- Khanya – African Institute for Community Driven Change
- Rimisp - Latin American Centre for Rural Development
- MDF - Management for Development Foundation
- MeTA - Medicine Transparency Alliance
- M-POWER - Mekong Program on Water Environment and Resilience
- PicoTeam - Institute for People, Innovation and Change in Organisations
- SNV - Netherlands Development Organisation
- Oxfam Great-Britain
- Oxfam-Novib
- PRIA - Society for Participatory Research in Asia
- PSO - Capacity Building in Developing Countries
- SEI - Stockholm Environment Institute
- UNDP Democratic Dialogue Project
- Volans - The Business of Social Innovation
- Wageningen International – Wageningen University and Research Centre
- World Water Council
- WESSA - Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa

³ Please note that not all the partners listed have so far had the opportunity to comment on or endorse this particular draft of the concept note.