

Analysing stakeholder power dynamics in multi-stakeholder processes: insights of practice from Africa and Asia^{1,2}

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This paper examines different practical methods for stakeholders to analyse power dynamics in multi-stakeholders processes (MSPs), taking into account the ambiguous and uncertain nature of complex adaptive systems. It reflects on an action learning programme which focused on 12 cases in Africa and Asia put forward by 6 Dutch development non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The authors facilitated this action learning programme in 2011-12, and supported a team of 12 local researchers who worked with stakeholders to better understand the dynamics of power in MSPs, and learn practical ways of dealing with power imbalances when dealing with, participating in or embarking on MSPs. The cases range from a Nigerian NGO coalition dealing with oil spills in Niger Delta, to gold mining negotiations in Ghana, to a seaweed value chain in Philippines, to land planning for palm oil in Indonesia.

The ambition of this programme was to translate academic insights into easy-to-use packages, suitable for researchers and facilitators with limited academic experience. In trying to make this work, lessons were learned on how to ensure quality action learning across different cultural and sectoral backgrounds. Also, lessons on developing capacity for action learning on power in MSPs are shared. Finally, the authors report insights on the process of synthesizing data from all 12 cases into generic and shared conclusions.

Keywords: multi-stakeholder processes; power analyses; research; learning; cases; Africa; Asia

Multi-stakeholder processes, initiatives, platforms and partnerships represent forms of cross-sector collaboration which have become common practice over the last decade. They range from formal roundtables aiming for certification processes at global level, to informal coordination mechanisms to manage a local forest. And although the functions and forms of these multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs) vary widely, they have in common that interests of stakeholders are very diverse and stakes are very high.

This leads to challenges in dealing with power dynamics in MSPs, and a growing concern that less powerful stakeholders are poorly represented. There is also growing concern that MSPs, as mechanisms believed to help deliver sustainable and innovative development results, will not live up to this expectation if power dynamics are not managed in a more equitable and

effective way. However this is not an easy task as multi-actor collaboration is characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity, and does not lend itself to be ‘managed’ in any traditional sense, taking into account the ambiguous and uncertain nature of complex adaptive systems³. This paper reflects on an action research programme on power dynamics in MSPs, which focused on 12 cases in Africa, Asia and Central America put forward by 6 Dutch development NGOs: These NGOs are: Cordaid, Fair Trade Original (FTO), WASTE, Both Ends, ICCO and ETC. The cases range from a Nigerian NGO coalition dealing with oil spills in Niger Delta, to gold mining negotiations in Ghana, to a seaweed value chain in Philippines, to land planning for palm oil in Indonesia.

We have organized our writing in the following way: first we review in section 2 the current importance of MSPs as a way to shape collaborative action. In section 3 we ask what power analysis could contribute to MSPs. In section 4 we share our experience of designing and facilitating action research around power in MSPs with a diverse and dispersed group of local researchers. This is followed in section 5 by presenting five insights that emerged during this programme, illustrated by several case examples. In sections 6 and 7 conclusions are drawn.

MSPs as power arenas

We define MSPs as a process of interactive learning, empowerment and collaborative governance that enables stakeholders with interconnected problems and ambitions, but often different interests, to be collectively innovative and resilient when faced with the emerging risks, crises and opportunities of a complex and changing environment (Woodhill and van Vugt 2011). MSPs often have a formal platform, or common space, that is collectively owned by all stakeholders, where negotiations, sense making and coordination can take place.

MSP advocates often argue that, because of the interdependence of stakeholders in solving the complex issue at stake, MSPs create trust-based relations that enable the empowered and active participation of all. However, in our experience, ‘putting the right people in one room or space’ does not automatically generate an inclusive and equitable process and does not automatically produce more effective and sustainable solutions. Warner (2007) describes two fundamentally opposing views which can be behind MSPs: one in which people change things by cooperative learning (‘cognitive school’), and one in which things only change by changing the power balance (the ‘power school’). A power approach sees negotiations as zero-sum with winners and losers, a cooperation approach sees a win-win, where everyone wins (or loses).

In our experience as facilitators of action learning and change processes, we see the ‘power school’ more often in MSPs than the ‘cognitive school’. For many civil society stakeholders - often less powerful in MSPs - the only thinkable solution is to gain more power in MSPs by taking it from other, more powerful, stakeholders. For us, the challenge is to explore with stakeholders whether power shifts could also come about in a different way – through cooperative learning. However, NGOs are often victims of power games of stakeholders from the public or private sector. From the perspective of NGOs, it is hard to conceive that working and learning together may really change the decision making rules. Still, from a systemic perspective to social change it is evident that new thinking and solutions to complex issues

usually emerge from interaction between diverging perspectives, rather than from tug-of-war (Westley, Zimmerman and Patton, 2006). The composition of a multi-stakeholder platform is often influenced right from the start by perceptions of unequal power relations. For example, in a Central American MSP the participating civil society organisations don't see the government authorities as part of their platform but as the object of their lobby and advocacy for change (Kruiter, 2012).

Making the case for power analysis in MSPs

Failure to recognize the existence of power imbalances and the reasons behind power dynamics before and during the engagement in an MSP, and to strategically deal with them, results in some stakeholders dominating others and less powerful stakeholders being abused, overruled or excluded. The outcome of the process will then not reflect the interests and needs of less powerful stakeholders (often representing the grassroots level - but could also include weak representatives of powerful organisations), so they won't have gained anything from participating.

On the other hand, various examples are known where disadvantaged stakeholders who participate in MSPs are quite successful in transforming power relations and influencing the outcome⁴. This demonstrates the need for a thorough understanding of power dynamics in MSPs. Such understanding should enable less powerful stakeholders to make a conscious decision whether or not to participate in MSPs, and to develop their strategies accordingly.

But apart from benefiting disadvantaged stakeholders, these insights would also enable more powerful stakeholders to step in these processes more consciously, for example by realizing the interdependence of stakeholders. Even powerful stakeholders realize that the systemic challenges they face can only be addressed through collaborative action and policy dialogue. More insights in power dynamics should also enable researchers and practitioners to effectively improve the conditions of MSPs, and contribute to the empowerment of disadvantaged stakeholders. Lastly, it should sensitize those who design and facilitate MSPs to the influence of power imbalances in and during the process, and to think about ways to mitigate this.

Methodology and questions

The agenda: who wanted this and why?

The basic driver for this programme was that Dutch development NGOs came together around a common learning agenda. This agenda was to find ways to assist their partners in dealing more effectively with power differences in MSPs. It was not designed to be an initiative to facilitate MSPs better or different, but rather as an initiative to learn how to deal strategically with power differences in MSPs.

The convening group of NGOs, all member of the umbrella organisation of Dutch development organisations PSO and many also active in the Change Alliance⁵, approached PSO for support, and entered into a design process to find out which methodologies would

suit them best in dealing with this agenda. Only at this stage the idea of action research came into play.

Getting started

The action research programme received co-funding from PSO, and was started in August 2011 and ran until October 2012 (see Figure 1). Each of the Dutch NGOs selected two cases. In total 12 cases were selected in eight countries. Some of the action learning sites are already established MSPs, whilst in other cases communities are pushing for such a space to be created. In all sites local researchers were recruited who knew the area and issues, but did not have a direct interest in the issue or with one of the partner organisations. These researchers were not recruited as facilitators per se - but in some cases grew into a facilitation role, depending on their personal competence and at the request of core stakeholders.



Figure 1: Timeline of the process

Table 1: Research questions and action questions

Research questions	Action questions
1. Who are the key actors involved? Understand the different degrees of power among MSP actors, their bases of power and the manner in which they use their power.	1. Are these the right actors? Do other actors need to join the MSP?
2. What are the interests/goals of the different actors? Actors have common longer-term objectives, but may have different interests and inter-dependencies which may be a source of conflict, strength or ineffectiveness.	2. How can common interests be strengthened? How can different interests be overcome? What other options are available?
3. How is the problem framed and by whom? Actors in control of agenda-setting can exercise their power. Participatory and empowerment tools are needed to balance the level of influence of all actors in the MSP.	3. What is needed to strengthen the influence of the least influential? How can empowerment be promoted?
4. What are actors' key resources (e.g. material, immaterial political, economic, social, institutional)? How does control over resources affect each actor's ability to exercise influence?	4-5. How can inter-dependence at the level of resource access and control be realised? Which capacities of which actors need to be strengthened?
5. What are the (resource) dependencies between actors? Different actors have different access and control over resources that determine their influence and their capacity to realise their interests.	
6. What are the decision-making rules? Understand the institutional dimension of the MSP. What are the rules? How and by whom are they set? How are they enforced, arbitrated and sanctioned?	6. What are the constraints in the decision-making process? Can governance agreements be changed?
7. To what extent are different interests reflected in outcomes of decision-making? The decisions taken are an expression of the results of the power dynamics in the MSP.	7. How can decision-making be organised such that all actors benefit and see results that meet their interests?

It was essential that all local researchers together with the convenor group to co-design the conceptual and methodological framework. During two days in November 2011, organised by Wageningen UR/CDI and ETC, this group of 30 participants exchanged ideas, got introduced to each other's cases, received theoretical inputs and eventually agreed on 7 research questions that all cases would focus on. In addition these research questions were translated into action questions (see Table 1). The group received valuable input from an external reference group⁶, which actively participated in guiding and coaching the action learning sites.

An accompanying toolkit (Brouwer et al, 2012) for stakeholder analysis and power analysis was drafted by WUR CDI to help the local researchers select tools for their specific situations, mostly based on existing material from various sources. This enabled the researchers to undertake stakeholder analysis with local communities and other players, followed by power analysis (Annex 1 and Table 2).

Table 2: Stakeholder and power analysis tools

Stakeholder analysis tools:	Power analysis tools:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rich picture 2. Problem tree analysis 3. Interest/influence matrix 4. Stakeholder characteristics and roles matrix 5. Spiderweb network diagram 6. Fast arrangement mapping 7. Stakeholder interests, roles and skills 8. Community institutional resource mapping 9. Institutional analysis 10. Four quadrants of change framework 11. Value chain mapping 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Power cube 2. Sources and positions of power 3. Expressions and faces of power 4. Spaces and levels of power 5. Power ranking 6. Net-map (tracing power and influence in networks) 7. Power matrix 8. Political analytical tool 9. Biocultural community protocol 10. Circle of coherence

Keeping in touch: e-conference

After the first months we developed a 3-week e-conference based on the common issues, initial findings, and problems encountered. We used a combination of webinars and asynchronous D-group discussions.

Synthesizing results

The final reports were received in July 2012. In August 2012 the whole group of local researchers and Dutch development NGOs gathered for 3 days to synthesize and enrich the analysis. The local researchers were the facilitators of MSPs themselves not the representatives of stakeholder groups.

The external reference group also joined to ensure that a good balance between academic input and field experiences was struck. Five insights were formulated which are presented and illustrated in the next section. These are documented in detail in a publication and with video. Finally a reflection on the learning process took place. External evaluators with a specific

brief for harvesting learning outcomes were engaged in the synthesis workshop and closing seminar.

Insight 1: Tipping the power balance requires mutual respect and trust among key actors

The first insight looks at the psychological dimension of power. Many local researchers reported difficulties in using the word 'power' with groups of stakeholders, as it may put powerful stakeholders 'in the hot seat' and evoke a defensive response. We decided to not use the word power extensively, but used 'trust building' and 'interdependencies' to discuss it. The maxim 'Be the change you wish to see in the world' (Gandhi) hints at the psychological dimension of power. Trust is a measure of one party's belief in the honesty, fairness, or benevolence of another party. For stakeholders to be able to address power dynamics, a basis of trust is needed. If trust is not already present within the MSP, it has to be created. To be able to start believing in the honesty of other stakeholders, MSP actors have to reflect on their own honesty, fairness or benevolence– 'be the change you wish to see' – before being able to see it in other stakeholders.

Insight 2: Explore key actors' visible and/or hidden power

How are stakeholders linked to power? Once a basis of trust and willingness of key actors to engage has been established, a next step is to jointly explore different expressions, faces and understandings of power. Key actors' power is often related to resources, spaces and terms of engagement. Many expressions of power are hidden. Hence, any facilitator who embarks on power analysis should have facilitation skills and good knowledge of the cultural 'rules of the game'.

MSPs operate in a complex context. Part of the complexity can be a long history of the least-powerful being abused, overruled, neglected and excluded. In many cases, a peace and reconciliation process, at individual or collective level, is needed before it is possible to engage constructively with all kinds of tools that may reinvigorate all kinds of historical power plays. The case of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil demonstrates the need for caution and indicates the difficulty of addressing systemic power differences:

Even if the parties are willing to engage in dialogue on an equal basis, systemic differences exist in the balance of power, capacity and resources. There are uneven levels in terms of access to resources and information, as well as experience in understanding and dealing with financial issues. These systemic differences inevitably spill over and affect the process. In the case of indigenous communities faced with company power, most of them feel highly insecure about their rights and are easily waylaid by short-term cash inducements or promised benefits, such that without proper understanding they easily give up their rights.

Actor power

If we explore power from an actor's perspective, two cases offer interesting examples: one involving a police officer in Philippines and the other a traditional earth priest in Ghana. The police officer in the Philippines MSP explained to the local fisher folk that his power to fine illegal groups using dynamite in fishing is limited, due to the political context. Local politicians have hidden power as they are linked to criminal groups. Thus, when these

individuals are caught fishing illegally with dynamite, the police officer has to release them as instructed by higher police authorities. Despite his lack of resources to deal with criminal activities and illegal fishing, he was very motivated to play an active and positive role in the MSP in solving threats to seaweed farmers. He was an unexpected ally to the fisher folk and seaweed producers.

Culture shapes power dynamics. Based on the traditional beliefs of local communities in northern Ghana, earth priests are vested with significant authority, including over land issues. Through the MSP process in Ghana, the earth priests agreed to travel to a regional town to defend their views. This was seen as a huge effort from the local level to engage with powerful stakeholders in a town, who can employ several means to underscore their power position such as formal procedures for meetings.

Hidden power

One of the local researchers, Paul Goldsmith, dealing with the Lamu case in Kenya, elaborated on hidden and invisible power structures:

The concepts of hidden and invisible power represent the most useful contribution of the MSP toolbox for the Lamu case study. Hidden power manifests itself as a matrix of informal and externally imposed rules on the local level. The power of narratives helps explain how hidden power sustained the systematic social exclusion of indigenous coastal Africans, the Arab-Swahili communities, pastoralists and other minorities that characterize post-independence governance in Kenya.

In terms of local, cultural knowledge of the ‘rules of the game’, it is important to reflect on communication, the use of language and how local stakeholders proudly use proverbs, sayings, metaphors and poetry.

Creating spaces

Empowerment of disadvantaged stakeholders often starts with becoming aware of their ‘power within’. A next step can be to jointly mobilize this ‘power within’ as ‘power with’. This calls for collective action. To create or even claim spaces for engagement is important for disadvantaged stakeholders to engage in the MSP. The fact that disadvantaged stakeholders also have power was a revelation for many least-empowered stakeholders in several cases.

Many local researchers in this programme expressed that it was hard to combine research and facilitation roles. Getting involved in the MSP inevitably leads to increased expectations. It was considered much simpler to just collect data as a researcher, and present it at the end, than to design the action research as a collective sense-making and learning opportunity for all stakeholders. However, the action research approach to power dynamics helped stakeholders gain more ownership of the process and potentially could lead to more sustainable results.

Insight 3: Use specific tools to clarify power dynamics in MSPs

The toolbox presented in the methodological framework was developed after the inception workshop in December 2011. According to the external evaluators, Russell Kerkhoven and

Marc Coenders, the toolbox added value in this Thematic Learning Programme by providing the local researchers with a practical way to set up the action research process.

MSP train in Fair Trade Citrus, Ghana

The MSP train concept (Figure 1) explains how the stakeholders are interlinked and interrelated in the citrus value chain. It shows that the standards and principles set by fair trade give the direction of the value chain. A dynamic MSP is therefore needed to provide good quality ‘fuel’ and the best ‘driving or piloting skills’ to make the fair trade value chain successful. The concept therefore explains that the stronger the machine – the MSP – the whiter the smoke. Thus, the strength of the MSP determines the success of the citrus value chain. A video clip by Kobina Esiah-Donkoh explains the MSP train.⁷

The great house of power, Lamu, Kenya

Stakeholder power analysis is crucial to inform advocacy and negotiation. During the second MSP meeting, the power cube was discussed with members of the Save Lamu coalition and representatives from ethnic communities, such as hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, farmers and fisher folk. The dimensions of the power cube were written in English and the local researcher, Pilly Martin, translated the concepts into Kiswahili. To facilitate understanding, the power cube became a powerhouse, using analogies of Islamic architecture in Lamu. People were asked how they would fit themselves and other groups involved in the LAPSET project into the powerhouse. This led to a very animated discussion. For example, in Figure 3:



Figure 2: Image by William Okyere (2012)

- The door represents the visible economic power of the communities at local and national levels, and is a powerful symbol of Lamu culture.
- The closed window represents formal/closed power, crossing the local and national levels, e.g. the Government of Kenya Vision 2030, which communities are unable to participate in.
- An example of internalized power is the BCP that communities have been developing. It is internalized because it reflects their histories, cultures and customary governance of resources.
- People felt that elected local leaders had hidden power since they only have power when they talk to local people, but are not listened to at the national level. A window with dotted lines represents this.
- The half-open window represents invited space at local and national level. For example, the government created the Lamu Port Steering Committee, which Save Lamu coalition members are now invited to participate in. However, they are not involved in agenda setting.

Pilly Martin explains the power house in another video.⁸

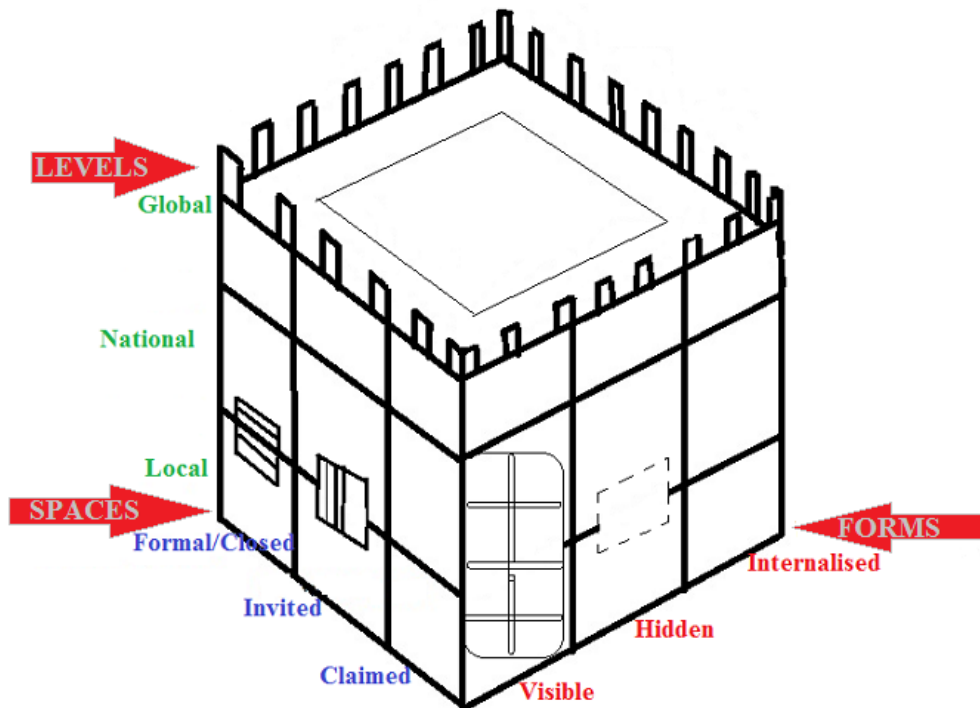


Figure 3: Power House (Source: adapted version of the Power Cube (IDS 2011) www.powercube.net)

The various tools for power analysis are very useful, but in several of the action research assignments it was difficult to test the tools in-depth, mostly due to time and opportunity constraints. In the case of NACGOND in Nigeria, no meetings lent themselves to the feasible application of the tools. The NGO coalition, government, oil companies, judiciary, media and donors did not meet in an MSP setting during the action-research period. A first meeting was

organised in August 2012, and whereas it was initially planned to be in the region where the conflict becomes apparent (Isiolo), it was later shifted to the capital Nairobi. The researcher did, however, apply the rich picture tool and the tools for power ranking and expressions of power during individual conversations with key stakeholders.

Insight 4: Facilitate stakeholders to create improved decision-making rules

The twelve cases selected for action research were very diverse, and also relied on interventions conducted by diversely skilled local researchers. This implies that we often had discussions about what the common denominator of the cases was: e.g. their degree of 'MSP-ness'. The convener organizations balanced between creating coherence on the one hand (emphasizing the seven common research and action questions) and allowing for context-specific solutions on the other (offering a menu of tools which researchers could pick from and adapt as they deemed fit). Skills for action research and facilitation indeed often resembled cord-dancing skills: balancing different power positions of stakeholders, 'dancing' from negotiation skills to dialogue skills back and forth on a thin line, keeping all birds 'in tune'. The stakeholders in the audience keep a close watch on the facilitator's abilities and the balance between negotiation and dialogue, between internal and external stakeholders, and between involvement and neutrality.



Figure 4: A Balancing Act (Image by Ada Breedveld)

An MSP is more than meetings

In reflecting about MSPs, we often think and talk about roundtables, and the importance of getting people to the table. However, roundtables – the meetings in themselves - are only a (small) part of the MSP. The MSP takes place in all kinds of formal and informal or bilateral settings, due to a complex pattern of relations among key stakeholders. If a multi-stakeholder approach is the strategy of a donor or an international NGO, they have to understand this complex pattern of relationships and see themselves as an essential part of the MSP, even if they don't take part to the formal meetings. In addition, the MSP doesn't limit itself to formal dialogue, but incorporates all kinds of informal relations as well. People combine resources, knowledge and relations from different networks, including donors.

Action research and change

It is not easy to attribute changes for disadvantaged stakeholders to the action research process. However, the following trends emerged from many of the cases:

- an improved sense of clarity about the purpose of the cooperation, roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved and improved internal communication of the stakeholders involved;
- new engagement in the cooperative process by stakeholders involved;
- a strengthened sense of ownership over the process of cooperation (less donor motivated);
- greater coherence in the cooperative MSP platform.

In many of the action research projects, it was quite difficult to create opportunities to effectively work with the whole stakeholder group at the same time in the same locality. Stakeholders involved in the cooperative process are often overburdened with their 'own' organizational activities and find it difficult to give sufficient time to action research in the cooperative process. Once this takes place, it demonstrates engagement in the process and motivation to learn from practice and seek ways to overcome constraints. Participants have a recognized stake in the action research and its results.

Based on the perceived identities and interests, power is attributed to certain stakeholders. It is important that facilitators are explicit about their roles, including their possible interest in a particular outcome or a stake they might have in the outcome of the MSP. Does this violate the principle of neutrality of a facilitator? In our experience, total neutrality of facilitators is a myth. Even if facilitators are external, they are often paid by one of the stakeholders. If they are internal to the MSP (eg. employed by one of the stakeholders), they are at risk to being seen as biased, even if they claim to work 'on behalf of the whole stakeholder group'. The best way to handle issues of neutrality is to be explicit about one's stake, walk the talk, and to ensure shared responsibility within a broader facilitation team. The tools in the toolbox also help to clarify the interests of the facilitator; if for example the facilitator is also included in the power ranking tool or the power cube.

A space to say 'no'

If local communities feel highly insecure about their rights, as in the case of communities in Kalimantan faced with land conflicts due to expanding oil palm plantations, this introduces the need to build capacity to enable them to gain a full understanding of their rights. This could include training in negotiation skills. This way they can be given the space to say 'no' if they choose to. Van Huijstee (2012) provides practical guidance on strategic choices for civil

society organizations regarding whether or not to engage in multi-stakeholder initiatives.

Empowerment could begin with the opinion makers and the influential members of the community, who could mentor and guide others. Among the communities themselves, building of consensus is important for meaningful negotiation and communication with other parties.

Insight 5: ‘Make no mistake: the poor also have power!’

This action research was implemented in the context of a climate crisis, financial crisis and food crisis and aims to contribute to finding ways of effectively addressing these crises. Our 21st century reality is one of interconnected people and ecosystems, and the consequent complexity and multi-layered nature of issues. Has the action research resulted in major changes for the disadvantaged stakeholders, who are often the ‘resource-poor’? Within the methodological framework of the action research programme, some insights can be derived from answers to question 7: Have the least empowered been able to influence rules of decision-making? Table 3 presents the tools applied by the local researchers and the reported changes brought about by this action research. However, a note of caution: it is tempting to directly link the reported changes to the tools used. This causal link cannot be made; the focus in this programme was on consciously learning about facilitation of power dynamics. Tools did contribute to the reported changes, but also other processes and dynamics played their roles.

Table 3: The 11 cases

Convener organization / MSP issue	Tools used	Reported changes
Case 1: Both Ends: community rights and palm oil land planning, Indonesia	Stakeholder analysis: Community case study, Influence matrix, Stakeholders interests and roles Power analysis: consensus document with controversial issues forwarded to government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust as an emergent property among NGOs, the local and national government • Decision-making rules invented along the way. • Yet, villagers are still worried about ownership of the land, feel powerless and vulnerable. There is hope, but nothing has been achieved yet. Is negotiation ‘a show’ to keep people quiet?
Case 2: Both Ends: RSPO Dispute Settlement Facility (DSF)	Stakeholder analysis: Semi-structured interviews and Rich picture Power analysis: Sources and positions of power, Power matrix	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity needs for DSF identified: education, communication • Companies need to understand the DSF, particularly the recognition of customary rights of indigenous peoples • Local community training needs: awareness of their legal rights; traditional leaders to understand customary and legal rights; support to allow them to choose their own representatives through customary decision making • Suggestion for DSF to establish a fund to pay for costs of a mediator
Case 3:	Stakeholder analysis:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSP train image to clarify interdependencies of key

FTO: Citrus value chain / conflicting interests	Stakeholder characteristics & roles Power analysis: Sources of power, Forms of power, Using proverbs to understand power dynamics	stakeholders in value chain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tools adapted for literacy level primary audience Manual 'How to conduct capacity needs assessment of citrus farmer-based organizations in Fair Trade Value chains' developed Role of local researcher was innovative in the process of trade throughout the supply chain. Issues like power within and how to deal with other stakeholders had a capacity building effect.
Case 4: FTO: Fair Trade assessments / stakeholder engagement	Stakeholder analysis: Stakeholder characteristics & roles, Value chain mapping Power analysis: Forms of power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FTO manual on assessments developed in Asia and tested in South Africa More clarity on stakeholder power dynamics in fair trade value chains and assessments Awareness that transparent and regular communication, especially on market developments, can create stakeholder cohesion and more regular engagement with fair trade principles
Case 5: ICCO: ACOFOP / community influence & gender focus	Stakeholder analysis: Key informants, Focus group discussions, Value chain mapping Power analysis: Stakeholders characteristics & roles, Stakeholders interests and roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender strategy developed based on participatory process using the Four Quadrants of Change model Organizational development: deeper reflection on successes and failures of ACOFOP and priority setting Women and family interests recognized as mutually reinforcing Women's voice more heard in organizational fora
Case 6: ICCO: Seaweed value chain	Stakeholder analysis: Stakeholder analysis, value chain mapping, Power analysis: influence/importance grid; Forms of power; institutional analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger awareness of position and power in network Increased risk awareness Succeeded to explore power with provincial police, thus a relationship change More numbers + more organization = more power
Case 7: ETC: Biocultural Community Protocol (BCP) in Kenya	Stakeholder analysis: Problem tree, Mapping of stakeholder interests/roles , Power analysis: Power cube became Power house; Drafting Biocultural Community Protocol,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MSP allowed trust building among different ethnic communities The MSP meetings enabled some level of trust building between the District Commissioner and the Save Lamu coalition Adaption of the power cube tool to a local 'Lamu power house' enabled community members to understand the concept of hidden power The BCP enhances the MSP process and prepares the community in negotiations with other powerful stakeholders, e.g. oil companies
Case 8: ETC: Biocultural Community Protocol (BCP) in Ghana	Stakeholder analysis: Community Forum, Community Institutional Resource Mapping Power analysis: Power cube, Drafting Biocultural Community Protocol, .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community forum was a good approach for understanding interests and emerging power dynamics evidenced by the positions of different stakeholders Support from the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice educated the communities on contemporary and customary laws and conventions on their stewardship rights

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The BCP represents community interests and provides standards of interaction for external actors to negotiate with them
Case 9: Cordaid: Role of CSOs in Oil Spill Regulatory Mechanism	Stakeholder analysis: Rich Picture, Spider network diagram Power analysis: Sources of Power, Forms of power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement of management structure of NACGOND, to give members more equal footing (Unequal voting rights not yet solved). • Relationships with oil companies is changing from confrontational to more cooperation – without co-optation
Case 10: Cordaid HBC Home Based Care / commitment	Stakeholder analysis: Spider network diagram, Focus group discussions Power analysis: Problem tree, Power ranking tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder analysis does not reveal all important stakeholders immediately. It's a complex picture of relations. • Because of her specific gender knowledge, the researcher notes the lack and need of gender transformation as well as the need for attention for other chronic diseases then HIV/AIDS only.
Case 11: WASTE: Evaluation franchise concepts in sanitation services	Stakeholder analysis: Stakeholder Characteristics & Roles Matrix, Power analysis: Sources of Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement on creation, appointment and selection of an independent sanitation ombudsman who will oversee agreements and effective action. • MSP facilitator was accepted as a bridge between the stakeholders

Conclusions

The external evaluators, Russell Kerkhoven and Marc Coenders, indicated in their report that the action research programme's focus on power in MSPs is:

...an exciting attempt to explore an often recognized, but seldom addressed issue of power in multi-stakeholder programmes. Although there are many academic studies of power, there is only limited evidence that indicates impact at the community or stakeholder level. The details of this impact appear through the reports of the action researchers: better or different working relations between the powerless and those who have more power emerged. (Kerkhoven and Coenders 2012, p6)

In the conclusions, we reflect on the methodological framework and how it was applied by the researchers.

Applying the framework

A webinar, an online seminar facilitated with guiding questions and feedback shared between participants in writing, was organised in which most local researchers could participate. The general conclusion was that the methodological framework provided a good basis for doing power analysis. The researcher of the Malawi home-based care case commented:

The methodological framework makes it easier to have a structured way of understanding the MSP starting with simpler questions that enables the researcher to understand the actors involved in the MSP and then moving to more complex or sensitive issues such as those involving power decision making finances. It has provided not only a direction, but also a focus especially when relating them with the tools.

Useful tools

The webinar also discussed the usefulness of the tools and concluded that for the researchers, stakeholder analysis tools are relatively easy to apply. Applying tools for power analysis appeared to be more complex, needed more time and more guidance. Some researchers interpreted power issues already during stakeholder analysis. As explained by the researcher of the Seaweeds case:

Tools for analyzing the sources and bases of power, and concepts like 'power within', 'power with' and 'power over' were utilized for power analysis. But also facilitation skills of the researcher (e.g. explaining about power dynamics in a workshop) and the interactions of the stakeholders along the process tackling their roles, resources and dependencies, had somehow created a favourable environment to proceed in further discourse on power relations.

Stakeholder feedback on the tools

It was discussed that in the facilitation process, the key stakeholders could give feedback on the usefulness of the methods and tools. This was not always agreeable. As one researcher notes:

We are concentrating on research questions, we used those tools only when we thought it was useful. There would be a change in the research if we are going to ask them to reflect on the tools as well, that is not the aim of our research. We think it makes it more complicated. (Fair Trade Assessments case)

Coaching needs

The local researchers were supported by several professionals with experience facilitating MSPs, mobilised from Nijmegen University, Wageningen University and ETC Foundation. During the webinar, the researchers wanted to have the opportunity to discuss in detail on how to apply tools specifically in their MSP. In some cases, the researchers were able to link up with other researchers and engage in peer learning. In the MSPs supported through ETC Foundation, researchers from Kenya travelled to Ghana to participate in a reflection meeting with different stakeholders and discussed the methodological issues at stake.

Reflections

In closing, we offer three general reflections on dealing with power in facilitating an MSP.

Drawing out the elusive power dimension

One main lesson that emerged from this thematic learning programme is that local, disadvantaged organizations can strategically utilize their ‘power within’ and their ‘power with’ when engaging with powerful external stakeholders. Power is deeply influenced by culture, beliefs and norms, and is therefore often referred to as ‘invisible power’. Much of the stakeholder interactions in the MSPs are visible, but these visible interactions are only ‘the tip of the iceberg’. The iceberg depicts the complexity of power dynamics – often material, tangible and agency-related dynamics. What lies below is a huge proportion of dynamics that we cannot see well – structural forms of power that we internalize, cultural language, values and ceremonies that influence stakeholders and that are difficult to change. Power often resides beneath the surface and this is where local organizations have an advantage as they often deeply understand and exhibit these cultural norms and beliefs. In some cases, these deeply rooted structures, culture, behaviour and norms can lead to conservative, ‘entrenched’ positions. It may not be easy to change these, but experience has shown that inventive approaches such as working with theatre or cartoons can create entrances to discuss these positions.

Broadening the power base

‘Power with’ refers not only to having strength in numbers, but also to the quality and extensiveness of networks that stakeholders have access to. Local organizations can be empowered by supporting their capacities to connect and engage with other stakeholders. These can be like-minded stakeholders who together can form a common front, but also stakeholders with completely different interests and mindsets. Developing the capability to interact and network with these different stakeholders can be a real asset in becoming a more strategic player in an MSP.

Taking sides, or not?

Many researchers emphasized the importance of *NGO support* to weaker or less powerful stakeholders, often communities, to deal with power dynamics. This can take the form of financial resources, facilitation of meetings, application of power analysis tools or capacity building to ensure effective community participation in the MSP. Several researchers produced a manual or guide that will enable the less-powerful stakeholders to better deal with power differences.

Is a good facilitator one who ensures effective participation of powerless stakeholders? As a minimum, he or she has to know the context and be familiar with specific power analysis tools throughout the MSP process. Facilitators come in and locate themselves in the MSP. Can they be fully objective and neutral, when the aim of their support is to empower the less powerful? Can they connect to all stakeholders, build trust, but also challenge stakeholders?

Researchers in this programme believed it to be important that facilitators create a space in which all stakeholders can participate, be heard and be seen. It is an art of hosting, of being inclusive. But who is reflecting on the facilitator’s neutrality? Should neutrality and trustworthiness be primarily acknowledged by the local organizations, often the less powerful within the MSP? Or is it important that all stakeholders affirm this neutrality? Or, as stated in Insight 4, does neutrality not exist and is being explicit about one’s stakes in an MSP outcome the best that can be done?

One strategy that stakeholders can employ to ensure that the space they create remains neutral, is to practice collaborative leadership. This implies not one person (eg. facilitator, convenor, chairman) to be in charge, but create teams of stakeholders who together can 'balance the line' as real cord dancers.

Epilogue

'We can't be creative if we refuse to be confused,' said Margaret Wheatley (2003). If you go on a learning journey with over 30 people representing different organizational, cultural and academic backgrounds there is bound to be confusion every now and then. We experienced some confusion about the definitions of power and about the different roles of civil society in policy advocacy. The question is whether confusion is worth its price in the end. The external evaluators of this programme concluded that there were 'impressive nodes of learning and inspirational results within the network of people and organizations that took part in this action research programme'. This indicates that some of the emerging confusion eventually led to new insights and practices. The creativity involved was also demonstrated by the adaptations of research design and tools by many action researchers.

Many of the convener organizations have on-going programmes through which the learning from this programme continues. This includes the international value chain work of Fair Trade Original, ETC's work on Biocultural Community Protocols and Both Ends' work with various global commodity roundtables, to name just a few. The formal network that has been created through this programme will cease to exist, but the connections made will be a sure asset in any further work its members undertake around the topic of power in MSPs.

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Hettie Walters is Coordinator Capacity Development at ICCO Cooperation, the Netherlands. Hettie: 'I am fascinated by learning and change in organizations and society and have made this into my profession. Key for me is that it is all about people but that structures and underlying systems count when you intend to change sustainably. Change processes are never neutral, power issues are always involved. Having worked a long time on gender equality and women's empowerment I have learned that lesson. How to involve people in deep change, especially those that don't have a *voice* yet is one of the most crucial questions underlying my and the development sector's work'.

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Materials and cases of this action learning programme are available on the Ning site of the Change Alliance, the global network for multi-stakeholder engagement for development (requires login). Specific links to cases are provided in the text. A synthesis publication of the programme can be found on Wageningen UR/CDI's MSP Resource Portal. Video interviews can be found at the Youtube channel Power in MSPs.

Annex 1: Research questions, action questions and tools

Research questions	Action questions	Tools (with case numbers)
1. Who are the key actors involved? Understand the different degrees of power among MSP actors, their bases of power and the manner in which they use their power.	1. Are these the right actors? Do other actors need to join the MSP?	Stakeholder analysis: 11, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 Power analysis: 6, 7
2. What are the interests/goals of the different actors? Actors have common longer-term objectives, but may have different interests and inter-dependencies which may be a source of conflict, strength or (in)effectiveness.	2. How can common interests be strengthened? How can different interests be overcome? What other options are available?	Stakeholder analysis: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 Power analysis: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
3. How is the problem framed and by whom? Actors in control of agenda-setting can exercise their power. Participatory and empowerment tools are needed to balance the level of influence of all actors in the MSP.	3. What is needed to strengthen the influence of the least influential? How can empowerment be promoted?	Stakeholder analysis: 1, 2, 4, 9 Power analysis: 6, 8, 9, 10
4. What are actors' key resources (e.g. material, immaterial political, economic, social, institutional)? How does control over resources affect each actor's ability to exercise influence?	4-5. How can inter-dependence at the level of resource access and control be realised? Which capacities of which actors need to be strengthened?	Stakeholder analysis: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 Power analysis: 6, 7
5. What are the (resource) dependencies between actors? Different actors have different access and control over resources that determine their influence and their capacity to realise their interests.		Stakeholder analysis: 1, 4, 7, 8, 11 Power analysis: 2, 6, 8, 9
6. What are the decision-making rules? Understand the institutional dimension of the MSP. What are the rules? How and by whom are they set? How are they enforced, arbitrated and sanctioned?	6. What are the constraints in the decision-making process? Can governance agreements be changed?	Stakeholder analysis: 9 Power analysis: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10
7. To what extent are different interests reflected in outcomes of decision-making? The decisions taken are an expression of the results of the power dynamics in the MSP.	7. How can decision-making be organised such that all actors benefit and see results that meet their interests?	Stakeholder analysis: 3, 6 Power analysis: 8, 9, 10

¹ This article builds on three other recent articles: Hettie Walters (2012); Herman Brouwer, Wim Hiemstra and Pilly Martin (2012); Wim Hiemstra, Herman Brouwer and Simone van Vugt (2012)

² An earlier version of this article was presented at the 19th Annual Conference on Multi-Organisational Partnerships, Alliances and Networks (MOPAN), Wageningen, 02-04 April 2012.

³ We have tried to focus on the practical dimension of doing action research on power in MSPs. For a more theoretical reflection please refer to the MOPAN contribution of two of our external reference

group members: Elbers, Willem & Art Dewulf (2012) Conceptualizing power in Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for development.

⁴ See for example Edmunds, D. and Wollenberg E. 2002. [Increasing the benefits to disadvantaged groups in multi-stakeholder forestry negotiations](#). CIFOR Infobrief, Number 3. Other case stories suggesting power shifts towards disadvantaged groups in MSPs are often found in the field of value chain facilitation.

⁵ The Change Alliance is a global learning network on multi-stakeholder engagement for development. www.changealliance.org; <http://thechangealliance.ning.com>.

⁶ This group consists of Dr Art Dewulf (WUR-Public Administration & Policy group); Dr David Millar (University of Development Studies, Ghana); Jethro Pettit (IDS) and Dr Willem Elbers (Radboud University Nijmegen).

⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBSw9P-H6Gc&feature=youtu.be>

⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rvopx9Kp3zY>