

Engagement and Communication for Implementation and Review

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Introduction

This paper is addressing a few aspects of how to go about implementation and review of the SDGs / Agenda 2030. In my presentation, I will illustrate main points with examples from practice at the local, national and international. I will be happy to discuss them in more depth during the meeting.

I am drawing on my background as a social and organizational psychologist, and – probably more so – on my work on multi-stakeholder processes and dialogue over the past 17 years. In particular, I am using the CatalySD S | C paper on *Multi-stakeholder Engagement and Communication for Sustainability* (2015); the *MSP Guide – How to Design and Facilitate Multi-stakeholder Partnerships* (2015), as well as work done in recent years on local climate action in Germany and internationally (see *ICCA2015*).

Implementation and Review of the SDGs as a Transformation Process

We see the implementation of the SDGs as a transformation process. This implies the need to foster long-term process thinking, considering all dimensions of change, and learning to navigate complex systems and their developments rather than planning and executing in a top-down manner. Transformation requires effective communication and engagement with all stakeholders, and will be supported by taking note of recent research, models and approaches to societal transformation.

Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Development Agenda implies transformation and, hence forth, an explicit commitment to transformation is required. It is critically important to understand that transformation is a process. This is a new narrative that is in need of further attention. We should develop it further and articulate it together.

Implementing the SDGs can be understood as a multi-stakeholder system transformation process, or rather, as a series of transformation processes at all levels. The SDGs are part of a process, not an end itself. We need to articulate what kind of transformation process the SDGs are part of and which vehicles we need to put in place to advance them and achieve our goals.

Transformation implies that fundamental changes need to become possible. We need to consider the system as a whole and effect changes that not just tweak a few variables here and there, but rather fundamentally develop the system by changing the rules and relationships that shape and maintain it.

Thinking and working in processes - rather than in silos, with set structures and rules - implies that professional communications and systems of knowledge management are needed. Professional process design and facilitation is required, within institutions, between them, and of larger platforms bringing all stakeholders together. Ultimately, all actors, all stakeholders, and all citizens needs to be informed and engaged.

Working on transformation processes means to invest in processes that produce outcomes, rather than making top-down decisions, identifying pre-set strategies and implementing them letter-by-letter. Literally all aspects of transformation processes develop over time – including goals, objectives, engaged actors, scope, financing, governance, and so on. Transformation processes are journeys that cannot be planned and rolled out – quite the contrary, they need to be initiated, and navigated.

We need to develop abilities and willingness to communicate and collaborate in order to achieve transformation. The will to transform can develop over time, and this can be supported. This is what leadership should look like today.

Bringing the SDGs Home and Engaging Everyone in Action and Review

The complexity of societal transformation can be described – for the purpose of analysis and discussion – in four dimensions of change outlined in the table below. This framework represents an integration of two important streams of work: the literature on social conflict and conflict transformation, which identifies four dimensions in which conflict creates change and

where change must occur for conflict to be transformed to lasting peace¹; and the four quadrants of Ken Wilber's Integral Theory. Each quadrant represents a distinct approach to change, focusing on changing individuals, relationships, structures, or culture.

<p>Individual: <i>Personal transformation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help individuals grow and develop greater self-awareness • Education to broaden knowledge base • Training to broaden competency base • Attention to mental and spiritual health and growth • Make explicit and examine assumptions, mind-sets, mental models • Transformations not only in “<i>what</i>” one knows, but “<i>how</i>” one knows (epistemology) 	<p>Relationships: <i>Transforming relationships</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconciliation / conflict transformation • Building trust • Promoting respect and recognition • Increasing knowledge and awareness of inter-dependence • Changing patterns of dysfunctional relations
<p>Culture: <i>Transforming collective patterns of thinking and acting</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing the “rules” and values that sustain patterns of exclusion • Exploring and transforming taken-for-granted collective habits of thinking and behavior • Promoting more inclusive, participatory culture of “civic engagement” • Transforming patterns of overly simplistic and distorted discourse 	<p>Structures / Systems: <i>Transforming structures, processes, mechanisms</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobbying for more just policies, greater transparency and accountability, institutional rearrangements • Just and equitable allocation of resources and services • Reforming processes

Using the national level as an example, the following describes what needs to be done to communicate the SDGs and engage all actors, all stakeholders, and ultimately all citizens, in realising the goals.

It is important for governments to share with everyone what obligations they are undertaking on behalf of the citizenry. It is key that when governments sign up to the SDGs that they communicate the 2030 Development Agenda, the goals and targets widely to all citizens, underlining the universality and the transformative nature of the agenda, and how important it is for everybody to engage in the process of implementing them.

Governments enjoy the convening power, the legitimacy, and the main role, if not in implementing all the goals and targets themselves (which they cannot by themselves), but in bringing about the implementation processes – by creating the right legal and financial frameworks, by negotiating accordingly with other governments, and by convening everyone. It is about creating the spaces for everybody to come together, enhancing the understanding of issues, contexts, actors and possible intervention points, and then to jointly strategize and implement.

Initiating Transformation

At international, national and subnational levels, initiating transformation towards the SDGs begins with inviting all relevant stakeholders and actors into dialogues on what the contexts of SDGs are – e.g. in a particular region, country, province, or city. In order to do that, people need to develop a shared understanding of the context, the actors, the needs and opportunities. This is done by getting everyone concerned into the conversation in various forms and groups, paying special attention to designing the process in such a way that it is accessible and attractive to everyone.

During the course of the conversation(s), it will allow to continuously build the picture of what the current situation is, which changes are needed, which initiatives already exist and can be built upon, and which further actions seem feasible.

The necessary integration of different developmental, environmental and economic aspects of goals and targets is greatly helped by bringing people together who primarily work on the different angles. Joint analysis can be extremely useful for integrating the three threads of economic, environmental and social aspects. If we do not achieve building a shared understanding across the borders of stakeholders and sectors working on different aspects of essentially the same issues, we will remain in the silos that work in isolation – i.e. being weaker, or even undermining each other's efforts.

¹ Developed by P. Thomas and the Generative Change Community in 2007. See Lederach, J. P., R. Neufeldt, et al. (2007). *Reflective Peacebuilding: A Planning, Monitoring, and Learning Toolkit*. The Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame; and Wilber, K. (2003). *Introduction to Integral Theory and Practice: IOS Basic and the AQAL Map*.

In order to be practical, processes can run parallel streams of dialogues and planning, and existing platforms should be used as much as possible. However, a lot of crossing over and getting back together needs to be facilitated, so that people have a chance to continuously understand the big picture while making their specific, targeted contribution. In essence, such sustainability processes will be iterative and complex.

Governments should communicate widely about the SDGs in a manner that is understandable and that provokes interest and by doing so invite everyone to join efforts of implementation by creating such platforms. They can use the traditions of dialogue and deliberation inherent in their respective cultures, and combine these with professionally facilitated methods to build wide public conversations and broker collaborative efforts, including using modern communication technologies and social networks. These discussions should be captured, packaged and communicated effectively in order to support on-going, further engagement.

Not all governments will immediately have the means to convene this way – they would need support through financial, logistical and human resources. However, as this is mostly new to most governments, it is also an important focus of joint review and learning over the coming years. Hence, reviewing the progress made on the SDGs at the international level should include sharing experiences with communication and engagement.

When governments initiate SDG action as suggested above, they need to be aware that each process requires a bespoke approach. There is no “one size fits all” solution or standard procedure. Rather, anyone communicating and engaging for the SDGs, should pay attention to the four dimensions of change, i.e. the individual, the relationship, the institutional and the cultural dimensions - each with challenges that are to be expected. Investing in all four dimensions will be necessary in order to achieve transformational change – for example:

Individuals

Managers of implementation and review require specific and dedicated skills, including communication, negotiation, networking, coordination, diplomacy and facilitation skills. Such communication and management competencies help to enable learning, creativity, conflict resolution, and negotiating trade-offs and multi-benefits (between different SDGs, for example).

Individuals playing a leadership role also need to be ready and able to deal with complexity and the uncertainty and imponderability of complex system change processes. They need to understand societal processes, and different sectors, and how they work. Mind-sets and values of respect for the other and for human diversity are equally important.

Relationships

For successful dialogue and collaboration, relationships of trust and respect are extremely important. At least a minimum ‘seed’ of trust needs to exist between different actors, so that a shared understanding can be built. In the process of working together, trust can grow further. When initiating engagement processes for the SDGs, relationships between different sectors and stakeholders need to be considered: is there a history of dialogue and collaboration? Or has there been no contact, or even conflict between different groups? If relationships are strained or non-existent, a fundament needs to be built – sometimes in many individual steps between small numbers of people – before the work in a plenary of all concerned can begin. Such steps can be used, however, to build shared understanding, and need not hold the process up. The important bit is to consider relationships carefully, and design the process so as to build what is necessary, and use what is there. In order to strengthen relationships and benefit the transformation process as a whole, it is also important to celebrate ‘successes’ explicitly with the whole group of engaged people and organisations – be it a successful meeting, a first joint “picture” of the situation, a refined strategy, or steps of implementation.

Communication and engagement need to be based on key principles such as transparency, accountability, equity, integration of perspectives rather than domination of one; inclusion; trust and trustworthiness; learning; and shared ownership; among others.

Every group has their particular circumstances, set-up, environment, and goals. Every issue has its stakeholders and their history, and their power relations to deal with. Not only need stakeholders to agree on principles, but learn how to work them in their particular case. This is also an important step of building the kind of working relationships that will provide a good fundament for a partnership. For example, sharing risks is an important component of collaborative initiatives – but there are different risks (financial, reputational, and so on), and different partners are exposed to different risks. Negotiating these openly helps to avoid frustrations and experiences of inequity.

Institutions

Governments need to review legal frameworks vis-à-vis the 2030 Development Agenda and the SDGs – internally at the national level as well as regards foreign and trade relations.

In government, businesses, NGOs, research institutions, and other sectors, organisations also need to adjust Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of individuals and departments, and similar instruments, to be able to engage in SDG initiatives, particularly those of a multi-stakeholder nature as this is often not included in work plans and time budgets but needs to be

so that individuals can represent, and in turn, inform and coordinate, their respective institutions, and collaborate effectively. It needs to be possible, and beneficial to individual careers to communicate and collaborate effectively across organisational and sectoral borders.

Structures and systems need to be put in place that enable effective knowledge management, informal cross-departmental exchange, and joint review and learning forums.

Each SDG initiative has to have in place a bespoke results framework against which it reports. This ensures that the value of the initiative remains optimally visible. It also allows to learn from experience and align implementation as closely as possible to the initiative's strategic objectives.

Culture(s)

Our discourse on the SDGs and development, implementation and review needs to take note of new research, experience, and innovative ideas on societal transformation, dialogue processes and universal participation. We have gained knowledge about continuous learning processes, and there is useful research about connections between diversity and innovation.

We also now have more effective communication and communication products at our disposal with which to drive both our understanding and take-up further to various target audiences and demographic groups. All this should be put to use to develop, and advocate, a new narrative about positive change, making communication and engagement of all the new 'standard'.

The SDGs need to be presented as one strategy, one effort. This will help people understand and take part in transformational sustainability processes that use engagement and communications to reinforce each other for positive and transformational change.

Governance

Transformation also impacts governance. What will happen to our governance systems in the long run, when and if we promote and pursue communication and collaboration across sectors and levels?

In order to pursue a transformational agenda, governance will need to ensure fairness and justice for the good of all while navigating a process of complex system change. Hence, governance structures are likely to evolve ever more into governance processes. These will be highly consultative, transparent, and as flexible as necessary, while staying predictable, and accessible to all that are needed and all you want access to the process.

All decisions should be made in consultation. Governance processes need to abide by certain principles such as transparency, fairness, equity, predictability, etc. At the same time, process principles need to be operationalized specifically in every context, in response to every challenge.

That is an essential balance to achieve: between principles being the steady fundament of our governance processes, and the way we operationalize them walking that principled path with flexible feet.

Because communication and collaboration are absolutely central to governance processes, the quality of our conversations is key. We need to invest in creating high-quality communications, from public information campaigns about issues like the SDGs to professionally facilitating dialogue sessions as part of transformation processes, and building individual capacities for listening and speaking.

Governance structures and processes should be designed specifically to suit particular situations. If not, we end up in silos and pillars once again, which will neither achieve the integration and synergies we desire, nor will we be able to identify suitable compromises. In other words, by building, maintaining, evaluating and optimising dialogue and collaboration we not only implement changes we need to achieve, but also create and effectively test governance processes for sustainable development.

There is little doubt that we need to build processes and institutions of a new nature, and our existing institutions need to be capacitated and equipped to work with all groups in society, and with all kinds of platforms, initiatives, networks, and communities.

Collaborative initiatives, or partnerships, for example, are sometimes exposed to criticism that they allow undue influence from the private sector in order to grow, or to gain legitimacy.² Still reeling from the aftershock of the recent economic meltdown, governments, in particular, are – and should be – weary to hand over governance decisions to the private sector that is seen to be more risk prone and not taking decisions in the interest of the public, putting profits before people, and benefitting a few instead of all. A recent discussion on the establishment of a Private Sector Facility under the Green Climate Fund is a good case in point. We need collaboration to implement the changes we want to see. In democratic systems and open markets, there is no other way. However, we need to manage their risks really well.

² See, for example, Civil Society Reflection Group 2015

Multi-stakeholder Engagement and Communication

Multi-stakeholder engagement and communication (MSEC) is now widely acknowledged as imperative in driving sustainability forward. Especially at the national level, MSEC has become an indispensable part of the way in which we take action and implement initiatives on sustainable development and other agreed development goals.

High-quality multi-stakeholder engagement and communication (MSEC):

- allows us to effectively initiate transformation processes through convening the necessary actors, develop a shared understanding of the context and the challenges, create strategies and action plans, implement in whatever constellations are appropriate, and learn together what works and what doesn't;
- allows us to deal with conflicts, including between the goals and targets of different SDGs, and the conflict over natural and financial resources to achieve them, and transform conflict into integration and win-win solutions;
- increases the quality of decisions through including more knowledge and perspectives;
- increases the likelihood of effective implementation through outreach and increased ownership;
- increases the perceived legitimacy of decisions and actions; and
- accelerates learning among all actors and stakeholders.

Investing in high-quality multi-stakeholder engagement and communication is necessary at the programming level when governments convene for the purpose of initiating transformation towards the SDGs, as well as when brokering, creating, and facilitating collaborative initiatives. It is equally important in the context of review (see below).

Using multi-stakeholder engagement and communication to work towards sustainability can include a whole range of potential activities – from one-off hearings and specific dialogue events through regular dialogues to collaborative action and joint review.

It is important to include in or thinking not only the engagement and communication regarding actors and stakeholders outside our respective organisations, but also within organisations: inter-departmental communication and coordination can be equally challenging, as different interests and 'cultures' meet when planning, finance and controlling, and issue-focused sectoral departments come together. It is important to invest in communication, coordination and knowledge management within organisations in order to achieve the integration and learning that is necessary working on sustainable development.

Communications

Planned, integrated and pro-active communications are extremely important for all MSEC activities. On the one hand, it can provide support for SDG initiatives to achieve their strategic objectives, communicating the progress and value-add, it assists in keeping the wider network informed, engaged and committed and can assist greatly with reporting requirements. On the other hand, thought-through and innovative communications can also play a very strategic role. It can frame global issues within a local context, providing compelling narratives, bringing a "face" to the work of an initiative, and effectively supporting meaningful participation, engagement and learning.

Maximum sustainability and impact can only be achieved when the two mutually reinforcing pillars of engagement and communications are employed in tandem. This means to promote and drive meaningful engagement through communications, engaging stakeholders in the process and capturing the experience and learning, and then disseminating these more widely through innovative and smart communication products that, in turn, lift the audience, conversation and participation in the process.

Quality of Interactions

The quality of our engagement and communication co-determines the potential quality of outcomes of our interactions. A well-conducted meeting is likely to yield higher-quality decisions, increased ownership of outcomes by all participants, and increased likelihood of implementation. This seems a common, maybe even banal, thought. However, we are not paying enough attention to this connection. We often leave our meetings planned at the last minute, chaired rather than facilitated, and mostly conducted in a traditional manner. We pay little attention to where we conduct meetings and of the spaces and furniture are conducive to open exchange, dialogue and learning. This may be even more so regarding inner-organisational engagements than those with external actors.

In the context of the 2030 Development Agenda and the SDGs, and the need for transformation implied by them, it is even more important to use all available possibilities for improving the quality of our interactions – our communication, engagement, and collaboration. This includes seeking professional facilitation support to provide process design fit for purpose and neutral moderation of meetings. It will also be important to invest in communication, facilitation and engagement knowledge and skills of people working on the Development Agenda, particularly those coordinating departments, disciplines, and stakeholders.

Building Knowledge and Promoting Successful Approaches

There is a lack of connection between the sectors, on the one hand, and areas of work and experience, on the other, that needs to be addressed if we are to maximise learning and create an enabling environment for sustainable development.

Areas of work and communities of practice that should be connected better include:

- Policy makers who frame sustainability policies, goals, indicators and learning systems;
- Practitioners from government, business, and civil society NGOs, working on any of the SDGs and related issues;
- Facilitators who broker, manage, and moderate initiatives, and coach and train leaders and managers;
- Researchers who study the policy making arena on sustainability as well as those studying and evaluating implementation and review; and
- Funders who support system transformation processes and dialogic interventions and systemic approaches, collaborative networks, and/or participatory learning and knowledge management.

Platforms of linkages need to be created for learning and knowledge building purposes, but also for brokering and action planning purposes. We need to use the potential of high-quality communications and engagement, the potential of relations, networks, growing trust, aligning vision and strategies. This will increase transformative action and success towards the SDGs. At international and regional level, we need to create and continuously facilitate learning networks – as exchange platforms coupled with monitoring mechanisms.

Review: How to Ensure Effective Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) has to be part and parcel of the transformation process as well and needs to include quantifiable indicators, as well as qualitative measures of change. Many new methods and tools have been developed in recent years that support such MEL. There are also new tools allowing to include citizens, 'beneficiaries', and stakeholders in MEL activities in order to realize a participatory approach to MEL that widens perspectives, adds important information, and helps build ownership among citizens. This may include using new communication technologies, such as mobile devices, to obtain feedback on strategies and measures, but also local and national dialogue processes enabling everyone to take part.

Transformation processes need to be monitored in a way that ensures learning and provides strong accountability towards stakeholders (horizontally) as well as towards the system of institutions that needs to gather the data about progress on the SDGs overall (vertically). MEL needs to be designed to serve internal purposes (as knowledge management within institutions and initiatives) as well as external purposes (reporting to monitoring bodies that oversee overall implementation of the respective set of SDGs).

Every project or activity begins with certain assumptions on the issues, the context, the actors, and how the process will work. However, we always learn along the way, and our views and expectations change as our understanding deepens. In essence, monitoring and evaluation are about learning, and going about it in a structured and systematic manner.

The MEL process will help to work in an iterative, adaptive way. Involving people in designing useful MEL procedures creates additional opportunities for building ownership and fostering empowerment. Bringing in external perspectives for evaluation, and reviewing results together can complement this. Thus, MEL serves as a way in which to communicate issues among those involved: it offers opportunities to discuss how things are going. Collective evaluation and self-assessment procedures (e.g., participatory stakeholder surveys and focus groups) can be used to measure a variety of indicators. These include long-term impact and structural changes (including policy changes, incremental institutional change); ideas generated; skills learned, and/or attitudes changed.

Reviews and learning need to be documented and made available. The system supporting SDG implementation at the international level could provide simple templates of MEL procedures that can help with internal knowledge management as well as external reporting.

Importantly, reporting needs to be seen as constructive and not punitive: associated with clear and concrete benefits – such as internal knowledge management, membership in useful learning networks, opportunities to participate in exchanges, award schemes celebrating best practice, and the like.

Accountability mechanisms need to be designed so that they also serve the learning, networking, and communications needs of partners and their initiatives so that there are real incentives in place for individuals and institutions to participate and contribute.

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About the CatalySD Group

The CatalySD Group was founded in recognition of the need for high-quality multi-stakeholder engagement and communications (MSEC) for sustainable development. The CatalySD Group is a consortium of two organisations:

CatalySD S | C (Sustainability | Communications)

A sustainability communications agency based in the United Kingdom and founded in recognition of the need for high-impact, innovative and effective communications and engagement expertise to drive sustainability forward (est. 2011); and

CatalySD e. | V.

An international charitable association based in Germany and working to support and promote high-quality, effective multi-stakeholder engagement and communication towards sustainability (being est. 2015).

In close collaboration with our strategic partners from the public, private and civil society sectors we plan, develop and implement and move seamlessly from strategy to execution.

Visit us on www.catalysd.com

About Minu Hemmati

Dr. Minu Hemmati is a clinical psychologist with a doctorate in Organisational and Environmental Psychology. She was a Senior Lecturer at the University of Saarbrücken, Germany, 1992-1998. Since 1998, she has been working as an independent advisor with NGOs; governments; international agencies; women's networks; corporations; and research institutions.

Minu is focusing on transformation processes towards sustainable development, gender equity, and good governance. In particular, her work includes designing, facilitating and coaching change initiatives that use dialogue and multi-stakeholder partnerships; leadership development; training and teaching; and research and advocacy on participation and on gender issues.

Minu has experience with multi-stakeholder processes at all levels; international policy making on sustainable development and related issues; local and national level implementation as well as evaluation in the field. She has published two books and over 50 articles, book chapters, and reports.

Minu is a Board Member of EcoAgriculture Partners, a co-founder of GenderCC – Women for Climate Justice, and is serving on the Jury of Swiss Re's International ReSource Award.

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