4

The Concepts: Key Values and Ideologies of MSPs

As with any other problem-solving or governance approach, there are certain ideological fundaments or value bases underlining the promotion of multi-stakeholder processes. The list of values and ideological concepts discussed below is not meant to be exhaustive or distinct. These concepts are being mentioned in debates on public participation and various mechanisms of stakeholder involvement, and in the wider debate on governance and governance reform. Many of them are also discussed in Agenda 21 and other international agreements, and are closely linked with the overarching concept of sustainable development.

All of these concepts are being interpreted slightly differently in different cultures. What we are trying to do is to outline their key aspects as they relate to MSPs.

Particularly with regard to the ethical-normative bases of MSPs, we have to keep in mind that the values that people subscribe to only influence their actual behaviour to a rather limited extent. This finding is well-established in psychology and other disciplines, and one which we can easily recognize in our own lives. To put values into practice, desirable behaviour needs to be reinforced by rewards, education, regulation, social images and desirable identities, and by providing information and appropriate options: 'If we are to expect people to act morally and to cooperate, then we surely have to provide them with processes for participation that are both fair and competent' (Renn et al, 1995, p366).

We have structured the list of values and ideological concepts using a two-tiered approach: fundamental (first-tier) concepts are discussed first, followed by a set of second-tier concepts which can be derived from the first set.[1]

<div align="center">FUNDAMENTAL VALUES</div>

Sustainable development

First and foremost it is the concept of sustainable development itself which provides the ideological underpinning of multi-stakeholder processes. Having been put forward by the Brundtland Commission (1987) and embraced by the international community in the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 (1992), it is based on the fundamental values of respect for nature, respect for an all-encompassing interdependence of people and the planet, and of inter- and intragenerational justice.

Basic societal processes related to sustainability are economic and social processes, and those of governance and political participation, such as 'participation in, and the responsiveness of, decision making processes, but also the capability of institutions to accommodate changing conditions' (Becker et al, 1997, p19).

Sustainable development requires a process of dialogue and ultimately consensus-building of all stakeholders as partners who together define the problems, design possible solutions, collaborate to implement them, and monitor and evaluate the outcome. Through such activities, stakeholders can build relationships and knowledge which will enable them to develop sustainable solutions to new challenges.

In fact, the multi-stakeholder approach reflects some of the most frequently and fervently discussed issues in discussions on governance, democracy, equity and justice of recent years – transparency, accountability, corporate social responsibility, solidarity, good governance, economic justice, gender equity, and so on.

Good governance

<div align="center">

BOX 4.1 GOVERNANCE

</div>

Exercise of authority; direction; control manner or system of government or regulation. (*Websters Dictionary*, 1992, p420)

'Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs.' (Commission on Global Governance, 1995, p2)[2]

Good governance is a core concept and includes many of the other aspects discussed here or that relate closely to them. It comprises the rule of law, predictable administration, legitimate power and responsible regulation. It is indispensable for building peaceful, prosperous and democratic societies. Good governance demands the consent and participation of the governed. Here, the full and lasting involvement of all citizens in the future of their nations is key (see Annan, 1997). Good governance creates an enabling, non-distorting policy environment for all actors of civil society.

Participants at an international UNDP workshop in 1996 identified the following core characteristics of good governance systems (UNDP, 1996; see Bernstein, 2000):

- Participation, which implies that all stakeholders have a voice in influencing decision-making. Participation is the foundation of legitimacy in all democratic systems.

- Transparency, which implies that the procedures and methods of decision-making should be open and transparent so that effective participation is possible. Transparency is based on the free flow of information so that processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them.

- Accountability of decision-makers to the public and to key stakeholders; checks and balances as they exist in national governance systems are mostly lacking at the level of global governance.

- Effectiveness and efficiency in carrying out key functions.

- Responsiveness to the need of all stakeholders.

- Grounded in the rule of law, which implies that legal frameworks guiding decision-making must be fair and enforced impartially.

- Gender equity, which implies that all institutions and organizations of governance have responsibilities for ensuring gender equality and the full participation of women in decision-making.

As a new governance tool, MSPs should be developed further and defined through experimentation, particularly as regards their linkage with (inter)governmental decision-making processes and in the design of their implementation. MSPs have the potential for enhancing people's ability to govern themselves.

Democracy

BOX 4.2 DEMOCRACY

A theory of government which, in its purest form, holds that the state should be controlled by all the people, each sharing equally in privileges, duties, and responsibilities and each participating in person in the government, as in the city-states of ancient Greece. In practice, control is vested in elective officers as representatives who may be upheld or removed by the people. A government so conducted; a state so governed; the mass of the people. Political, legal, or social equality. (*Websters Dictionary*, 1992, p261)

Etymology: Middle French *democratie,* from Late Latin *democratia,* from Greek *demokratia*: government by the people; *especially*: rule of the majority: a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections: a political unit that has a democratic government: the common people especially when constituting the source of political authority: the absence of hereditary or arbitrary class distinctions or privileges. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)[3]

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (2000) had this to say about democracy:

> *We need to understand that there is much more to democracy than simply which candidate or party has majority support . . . Yes, democracy implies majority rule. But that does not mean that minorities should be excluded from any say in decisions. Minority views should never be silenced. The minority must always be free to state its case, so that people can hear both sides before deciding who is right.*

In this context, MSPs represent an advanced mechanism of participation and indeed one step further in the development of democracy. Democracy ensures that the people express their agreement with their government; free and democratic elections provide alternatives for

people to choose from. However, elections only allow people to choose between different versions of broad policies being promoted by one or the other candidate or party. They do not allow for citizens to influence day-to-day decision-making on the precise strategies chosen to implement such broad policies. For that to happen, there is a need for effective participatory mechanisms.

People First, a trust promoted by Development Alternatives, India, state in their 'Earth Charter Initiative' that in

> *a democracy, all power flows from the people who are the sovereign power. Democracy can therefore be truly defined as how the common people would like to be governed, not how some people, including elected representatives, think they should be governed.*

They outline a Gandhi-inspired vision of local empowerment of grassroots democracy, effective transparency laws over the right to information, the right to be consulted through public hearings and to participate in planning and other key issues, and the power to decide through referendum. Mirroring the 1992 Earth Summit outcome, People First suggest that councils should consist of representatives of the disadvantaged communities, religions, women, trade unions, farmers, industry, professionals and NGOs, among others.[4]

MSPs and multi-stakeholder institutions, such as the National Councils on Sustainable Development (NCSDs) (see Chapter 8), are (or could be) the logical next step for implementing Agenda 21 at national level. Based on the concept of the 'Independent Sector', Agenda 21 identifies key stakeholder groups, the so-called Major Groups, acknowledging that they need to be involved in developing solutions and implementing them. The NCSDs do vary in their make-up and independence from government. The Earth Council has worked extensively with National Councils to draw up guidelines on the development of NCSDs. To some, this might be understood in a narrow sense, where governments consult Major Groups and invite them to hearings. In the true sense of participatory democracy, however, MSPs would go further than hearings or consultations. It would mean that governments (or other facilitating or decision-making bodies) gather all stakeholders for consultations, dialogue and/or consensus-building and/or for ongoing implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes.

Participation

BOX 4.3 PARTICIPATION

Participate: to take part or have a share in common with others; partake. Participatory: based on or involving participation, especially active, voluntary participation in a political system. (*Webster's Dictionary*, 1992, p708)

The act of participating: the state of being related to a larger whole. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)

Public participation can be defined as 'forums for exchange that are organised for the purpose of facilitating communication between government, citizens, stakeholders and interest groups, and businesses regarding a specific decision or problem'. (Renn et al, 1995, p2)[5]

> *[A] distinction needs to be made between democracy and participation . . . Democracy entitles them [the people] to choose leaders with broad policies most acceptable to them. Participation in public affairs enables them to influence the details of policy-legislation, and to continuously monitor their implementation.* (Mohiddin, 1998)

An important prerequisite for meaningful participation is capacity, such as information and knowledge, time and resources. Ultimately, the overarching vision is as follows:

> *[a] world, in which every person – regardless of citizenship, country of residence, wealth, or education – has access to the information and the decision-making processes necessary to participate meaningfully in the management of the natural environment that affects them. This greater and informed public access produces more effective, legitimate, and just decisions on projects and policies. It ensures sustainable development by acting as an antidote to ignorance, greed and corruption and building social capital.* (World Resources Institute, 2000)

In many cases, this will primarily mean to mainstream civil society access to information and participation since the private sector typically already has access and is well represented.

Participation works on the basic assumption that all views of stakeholders are being subjective and therefore limited.[6] MSPs take advantage of stakeholder participation, as bringing in the wealth of subjective perspectives, knowledge and experience increases the likelihood of better decisions.

Stakeholder involvement and collaboration beyond 'hearings' are revolutionary in the sense that we have not acted or interacted that way before. They are not revolutionary, however, in the traditional sense as aiming to replace one party (or group/class/person) with another one. It is part of a significant development in democracy aimed at replacing one power with many and creating a situation where decisions taken are informed and owned by all relevant stakeholders.

Thus, participation serves two major objectives: increasing the quality of decisions and generating necessary commitment.

Box 4.4 Commitment

Commitment: the combined forces that hold the partners together in an enduring relationship.

Norm of social commitment: the shared view that people are required to honour their agreements and obligations. (Smith and Mackie, 1995, Glossary)

To commit: to pledge or assign to some particular course or use. (*Merriam-Webster's Pocket Dictionary*)

Many of the decisions to be taken along the path to sustainable development will imply significant changes in many people's lives. Such decisions can only be effective if they receive general support among the people. Participation creates ownership. By taking part in the initial communications and, ultimately, the decision-making process itself, people are much more likely to take ownership of the decisions that emerge. Without stakeholder participation, commitment to solutions will be low and implementation will not work. Participation often seems to be very difficult, time-consuming and expensive. However, the cost of failing to engage stakeholders can be orders of magnitude greater.

Participation is also not only a citizen's right. It also involves duties and responsibilities. For all stakeholder groups in MSPs, requirements such as representativeness, democratic structures, transparency and accountability are required. They are key elements of a stakeholder's legitimacy (see below).

An important question concerns the appropriate measurement of the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms in sustainable development. It will be important to develop monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for MSPs. This needs to be done in collaboration with practitioners and academic researchers. Case studies of individual MSPs have been published and more are under way. These also provide comparative analysis and general conclusions (for example Montreal International Forum, 1999; Reinicke et al, 2000). Local Agenda 21 processes have been surveyed and analysed (for example ICLEI, 1997; Church, 1997). Work by Wiener and Rihm (2000) specifically focuses on short-term indicators of the impacts of LA21 (an important component as it helps officials to justify expenses for participation). Estrella (2000), for example, provides work on participatory monitoring and evaluation. Renn et al (1995) have based their development of indicators of fairness and competence in citizen participation on a comprehensive theoretical analysis of such participation. It will be necessary to develop shared sets of indicators and standardized tools for evaluation in order to further develop MSPs and to promote those features and components which have indeed proven to work.

Equity and justice

BOX 4.5 EQUITY

Fairness or impartiality; justness. Something that is fair or equitable. (Law) A justice administered between litigants which is based on natural reason or ethical judgment. That field of jurisprudence superseding the legal remedies of statute law and common law when these are considered inadequate or inflexible for the purposes of justice to the parties concerned. (*Webster's Dictionary*, 1992, p330)

Justice according to natural law or right; *specifically*: freedom from bias or favouritism. *Related Words*: equitableness, justness. *Contrasted Words*: bias, discrimination, partiality, unfairness. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)

Norm of equity: the shared view that demands that the rewards obtained by the partners in a relationship should be proportional to their inputs. (Smith and Mackie, 1995, Glossary)

BOX 4.6 JUSTICE

Etymology: Middle English, from Old English and Old French; Old English *justice,* from Old French *justice,* from Latin *justitia,* from *justus.* The maintenance or administration of what is just especially by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments: the administration of law; *especially*: the establishment or determination of rights according to the rules of law or equity: the quality of being just, impartial, or fair: the principle or ideal of just dealing or right action: conformity to this principle or ideal: righteousness: the quality of conforming to law: conformity to truth, fact, or reason: correctness. The action, practice, or obligation of awarding each his just due. *Synonym:* equity. *Related Words*: evenness, fairness, impartiality. *Contrasted Words*: foul play, inequity, unjustness; bias, leaning, one-sidedness, partiality. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)[7]

Equity can be understood as fairness, the standard by which each person and group is able to maximize the development of their latent capacities. Equity differs from absolute equality in that it does not dictate that all be treated in exactly the same way. While everyone has individual talents and abilities, the full development of these capacities may require different approaches. Access and opportunity need to be fairly distributed so that this development might take place. Equity and justice are intertwined conditions of a functioning society. Equity is the standard by which policy and resource commitment decisions should be made. Justice is the vehicle through which equity is applied, its practical expression. It is only through the exercise of justice that trust will be established among diverse peoples, cultures and institutions.

'A consensus process provides an opportunity for participants to work together as equals to realize acceptable actions or outcomes without imposing the views or authority of one group over another' (Canadian Round Tables, 1993, p6). This can represent an enormous challenge since many MSPs bring together stakeholders of very different perspectives and power – such as local or indigenous communities and transnational corporations (see Hemmati, 2000d). To do justice to the various points of view and interests, participants need to treat each other as equals. They need to work out which interests are most important or if they are equally important, and if, ultimately, all interests can be met. This requires tolerance, mutual respect, the willingness to find consensus and a strong sense of justice. It is equity in practice.

Unity in diversity

BOX 4.7 UNITY

The state, property, or product of being united, physically, socially, or morally; oneness. Union, as of constituent parts or elements: national unity. Agreement of parts: harmonious adjustment of constituent elements; sameness of character: the unity of two writings. The fact of something being a whole that is more than or different from its parts or their sum. Singleness of purpose or action. A state of general good feeling; mutual understanding; concord: brethren dwelling together in unity. (*Webster's Dictionary*, 1992, 1057)

The quality or state of not being multiple: a condition of harmony: continuity without deviation or change (as in purpose or action): a totality of related parts: an entity that is a complex or systematic whole. The condition of being or consisting of one <*unity* – the idea conveyed by whatever we visualize as one thing>. *Synonyms*: individuality, oneness, singleness, singularity, singularness. *Related Words*: identity, selfsameness, soleness, uniqueness, uniquity. *Antonyms*: multiplicity. *Synonyms*: harmony, concord, rapport. *Related Words*: agreement, identity, oneness, union; solidarity; conformance, congruity. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)

BOX 4.8 DIVERSITY

The state of being diverse; dissimilitude. Variety: a diversity of interests. (*Webster's Dictionary*, 1992, p286)

Diverse: Differing essentially; distinct. Capable of various forms; multiform. (*Webster's Dictionary*, 1992, p286)

Synonyms: variety, diverseness, multeity, multifariousness, multiformity, multiplicity, variousness. *Related Words*: difference, dissimilarity, distinction, divergence, divergency, unlikeness. *Antonyms*: uniformity; identity. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus*)

Unity or consensus are concepts associated with multi-stakeholder processes which include decision-making and implementation. In a dialogue, a frank exchange of views and learning about each other's interests, motivations and opinions is sufficient. In a dialogue, ambiguity, disagreements and mutually exclusive positions can be simply recorded as they are. Once we want to move into common action,

however, we need to find consensus about the appropriate path of action. While we do not have to agree on each and every point (unanimity), we do need to come to a point where everybody can live with the 'whole package' (agreement, compromise). In an MSP, consensus and unity stand in contrast to uniformity – the concept is rather unity in diversity. The MSP approach cherishes the diversity of expertise, talents, interests, variegated experiences, cultures and viewpoints among stakeholders and individuals inasmuch as they contribute to a creative process of finding innovative solutions. The immense wealth of diversity is vital to sustainable development; and diversity of views is an important component of high-quality decision-making. Maintaining and celebrating diversity are indeed among the major reasons to embark on designing MSPs, and the integration of diverse views is the major challenge.

Diversity often implies conflict of values, goals and interests which can lead to highly conflictual debates, anger, frustration, mistrust and hostility. When attempting dialogue in a conflict situation, the experience might be negative and discourage people from further interaction. In some cases, it will therefore be advisable to work at first with the different groups separately before bringing them all together.

The fact that emerges strongly from the scientific research on group dynamics and from studying a number of MSP examples, is that groups who come together in MSPs tend to build a group culture and identity, including a certain degree of loyalty and commitment to the group.[8] This is indeed a useful effect as it helps people to listen and come to agreements. However, once people have developed a common group identity within the MSP, they might agree more quickly and compromise before they have exhausted all points of discussion. Thus the group might lose some of the benefits of its initial diversity. The challenge for all participants, but especially for NGOs (and, one might add, for United Nations bodies), is to strike a balance between a serious commitment to a process and its success (which implies commitment to mutual learning and openness to change) and keeping their own identity.

Leadership

BOX 4.9 LEADERSHIP

The office or position of a leader; guidance. (*Webster's Dictionary*, 1992, p556)

Leadership: a process in which group members are permitted to influence and motivate others to help attain group goals. (Smith and Mackie, 1995, Glossary)

The office or position of a leader: capacity to lead: the act or an instance of leading. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*)

Leader: one who leads or conducts; a guide; a commander. That which leads, or occupies a chief place, as the foremost horse of a team. (*Webster's Dictionary*, 1992, p556)

Lead, to: to go with or ahead of so as to show the way; guide. To draw along; guide by or as by pulling: to lead a person by the hand. To serve as a direction or route for: the path led them to the valley. To cause to go in a certain course of direction, as wire, water, etc. To direct the affairs or actions of. To influence or control the opinions, thoughts, actions of; induce. To begin or open: to lead a discussion. To act as guide; conduct. To have leadership or command; be in control. (*Webster's Dictionary*, 1992, p556)

'Collaborative leadership: a style of leadership where leaders view their roles primarily as convincing, catalyzing, and facilitating the work of others. Collaborative leadership focuses on bringing citizens together and helping them build trust and the skills for collaboration.' (Markowitz, 2000, p161)

> *The world has for so long been run by those who have usurped the power to run it, and in the manner that is to their best advantage, we frequently forget that they have no more right to do so than anyone else.* (Khosla, 1999)

Autocratic, paternalistic, manipulative and 'know-it-all' modes of leadership, which are found in all parts of the world, tend to disempower those whom they are supposed to serve. They exercise control by over-centralizing decision-making, thereby coercing others into agreement.

Those who exercise authority have a great responsibility to be worthy of public trust. Leaders – including those in government, politics, business, religion, education, the media, the arts and com-

munity organizations – must be willing and indeed seeking to be held accountable for the manner in which they exercise their authority. Trustworthiness is the foundation for all leadership.

Visionary, empowering and collaborative leadership will be necessary to inspire those in power, stakeholders and individuals to overcome their preoccupation with narrow-minded interests and to recognize that the security and well-being of all at local and national levels depend on global security and require sustained commitments to long-term ecological and human security.

One of the difficulties in thinking about leadership is that our usual perception is that leadership is what leaders do – leaders lead and followers follow. However, the emergence of 'servant' or 'collaborative leadership' has contributed to a shift in orientation – namely, an orientation to leaders as *serving* the needs of 'followers' so that the followers are in fact the leaders. And visionary leadership tends to shift our concept of leadership away from leaders and towards shared purpose and vision (images of success in serving a purpose). When purpose and vision are clearly understood and people honestly care about them, then people can lead themselves and work together to bring *their* vision into reality.

Within the framework of sustainable development, leadership no longer means 'to issue orders' or 'to be in control'. Rather, it will express itself in service to and empowerment of others and to the community as a whole. It will foster collective decision-making and collective action and will be motivated by a commitment to justice and to the well-being of all humanity. MSPs represent a model where new forms of leadership can be explored and developed. Among those new forms are ones in which leaders are servants.

Credibility and public opinion

Finally, there is a related issue in support of MSPs. This is the need for governance processes to engage those partners who – although not elected – enjoy wide public support, trust and credibility. For many years, public opinion polls around the world have suggested that several leading advocacy organizations enjoy higher public esteem that corporations or even governments. Generally speaking, such polls indicate that the public tends to give greater credence to information provided by organizations like Greenpeace and Amnesty International than media or official sources.

These results tend to reinforce the MSP approach for at least two reasons. First, as noted above, to ensure that groups which have good information and creative ideas about how to move ahead are brought

to the table in a framework that is outcome-driven. Second, to give those sectors which suffer (rightly or wrongly) from a lower public opinion an opportunity to define, defend and develop their perspectives in a policy forum where they can engage directly and methodically on areas of difference.

If public opinion polls are any guide, the MSP concept is likely to prove an appealing approach to the resolution of the many outstanding sustainability issues.[9]

DERIVED CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES

(Economic) success

Increasingly, there is recognition of the need for businesses to win a 'licence to operate' in the public domain. Against the background of continuing low public opinion poll ratings, it is not enough that businesses produce goods, services and a profit. They also need to act as responsible citizens. They need to show not only that they do 'no harm', but that they 'do good'. Within this framework, many commentators believe that without the agreement of stakeholders to business policies and practices, businesses will not be sustainable. In short, businesses need to engage with their stakeholders to ensure their businesses' success.[10]

More progressive sectors of business now acknowledge that business practice itself was a major contributor to environmental and social problems in the past. Business associations lobbying against tougher workplace and environmental standards and poor performance on the ground in many cases prompted the rise of advocacy organizations seeking safer factories, cleaner production processes and less waste.

For some, this is today more obvious than for others. Corporate share values nowadays significantly depend on 'soft factors' such as social performance, environmental responsibility and management personality. Good practice achieved through pressure on large corporations (for example via media attention) can lead to appropriate regulation and self-regulation. Thus it can lead to to increased compliance also by small and medium-sized businesses whose performance is less controlled and controllable by civil society stakeholders.

Successful solutions are those which create mutual benefits: win–win situations rather than win–lose situations. Corporations have been vocally advertising the virtually infinite possibilities of creating win–win business options. It is for them, in partnership with their stakeholders, to deliver the creativity required to develop these options.

Learning

Life-long learning is a common characteristic of all human beings and a main initiating factor of change. MSPs will only work if all participants are willing to learn from each other. In a successful MSP, everybody will learn and therefore, to some degree, change.

MSPs themselves also need to take a learning approach. This emerges very strongly from the review of scientific literature as well as from studying the examples.[11] Social and organizational psychology indicates that processes and mechanisms, modes of leadership and facilitation, and the means of communication have to be flexible. MSPs need to strike a balance between an agreed, foreseeable agenda and process on the one hand, and the ability to respond flexibly to changing situations on the other.

Renn et al (1995, p7) claim that 'it should be possible to move away from a subject-centred view of participation to shared values and interests'. Developing new values and acting upon them is a learning process triggered by sincere dialogue: speaking openly and honestly, and listening rather than hearing.

Learning is related to self-reflection, role-taking and change of perspective, and to the ability to embrace change. The courage to venture into 'unknown territory' is essential within a dialogue or consensus-building process, not only to make it a true group process but also an individual adventure into new, 'unexplored space'. In that space, we will find ideas and solutions which could not have emerged without the process of interaction.

Embracing change and moving out of our comfort zones is not easy. Human values, thinking and behaviour are very resistant to change. We don't necessarily have a problem embracing new ideas but breaking old habits is very difficult. Our habits of thinking and behaviour form a large part of our identity, ourselves. Particularly in Western cultures, where individual identity is closely associated with autonomy, self-control and self-consistency, the experience of under-going change through social interaction can be rather disquieting.

Therefore, even when change is strongly and wholeheartedly perceived as beneficial, it tends to elicit fear (of the unknown, of peers' reactions, and so on) – hence security and encouragement from a trustworthy source can be essential.[12]

PARTNERSHIP, COLLABORATION AND SOLIDARITY

BOX 4.10 PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

The state of being a partner: participation. A legal relation existing between two or more persons contractually associated as joint principals in a business: the persons joined together in a partnership: a relationship resembling a legal partnership and usually involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities. *Synonyms*: association, affiliation, alliance, cahoots, combination, conjunction, connection, hook-up, tie-up, togetherness. *Related words*: consociation, fellowship. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)

Collaboration: to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavour: to cooperate with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected. *Etymology:* Late Latin *collaboratus,* past participle of *collaborare* to labor together. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)

BOX 4.11 SOLIDARITY

Unity (as of a group or class) that produces or is based on community of interests, objectives, and standards. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)

A feeling of unity (as in interests, standards, and responsibilities) that binds members of a group together <*solidarity* among union members is essential in negotiations>. *Synonyms*: cohesion, solidarism, togetherness. *Related Words*: cohesiveness; oneness, singleness, undividedness; integrity, solidity, union, unity; esprit, esprit de corps; firmness, fixity. *Contrasted Words*: separation; discord, dissension, schism; confusion, disorder, disorganization. *Antonym*: division. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus*)

Individual pursuit of self-interest coupled with the possibility of using a 'free-ride' position has been a main cause for environmental degradation. By contrast, sustainable development requires stakeholders – all of whom are polluters in some form – to build partnerships based on a sense of solidarity, collaboration and trust. Participatory approaches such as MSPs should be designed 'to catalyse people into adopting an attitude that is oriented to cooperation rather than pursuit of individual interests' (Renn et al, 1995, p365) and forge new partnerships, even of unlikely partners.

What does a partnership approach mean? Is 'stakeholder dialogue', for example around (inter)governmental decision-making, forging partnerships and leading to common action? Or is it entertainment for officials – perhaps some kind of 'cathartic entertainment' or ritualistic show-event? Are the stakeholders merely like jesters at medieval court, the only ones able to speak of higher values and essential goals, of love and justice, vis-à-vis a 'real world' of power and capital?[13] Invited to relieve the ones in power, articulating some 'higher thoughts', and enabling decision-makers to assert they have listened to the voices of ideals, visions, even religion? So that negotiators then may return to the conference room to make a decision, oblivious to what they have heard?

This does happen, and purely informing processes around official decision-making seem to be particularly susceptible to it. It can leave stakeholders frustrated and less inclined to contribute next time. Stakeholders' criticism of this kind of process does not mean that stakeholder participation should (always) be part of decision-making. However, for participation to develop into partnerships, official bodies need to make clear to stakeholders – and themselves – what they embark on, what stakeholders are invited and expected to do, and how reliable that role will be.

Partnerships need to be based on trust, equality, reciprocity, mutual accountability and mutual benefit. There are fundamental differences between sharing versus personalizing control and benefits; between listening versus imposing relationships; and between creating a shared vision versus winning and losing in a 'business relationship'. All parties face the challenge of understanding the needs and concerns of the others and of cultural and behavioural change in order to create successful partnerships. 'Common objectives or shared interests are obviously the most powerful motives for forming a partnership; but they are not sufficient in themselves. There are other factors which are necessary for both creation and sustainable operation of a partnership. These are trust, respect, ownership and equality. Without trust between people partnership is impossible' (Mohiddin 1998). Trust is promoted when:[14]

- there is a high likelihood that participants will meet again in a similar setting;
- interaction takes place face-to-face in regular meetings over a reasonable period of time and people have a chance to get to know each other;
- participants are able to secure independent expert advice;
- participants are free to question the sincerity of the involved parties;
- stakeholders are involved early on in the decision-making process;
- all available information is made freely accessible to all involved;

- the process of selecting options based on preferences is logical and transparent;
- the decision-making body seriously considers or endorses the outcome of the participation process; and
- stakeholders are given some control of the format of the discourse (agenda, rules, moderation, and decision-making procedure).

For some stakeholders, the issue of collaboration versus co-option has emerged within the context of increasing involvement in dialogues and MSPs at various levels. This is a serious issue, particularly for NGOs whose ability to play their role effectively is largely dependent on their independence. When NGOs participate in MSPs of any kind, they are exposed to the influence of other participants whose political and economic powers might be used to divide or dilute the positions taken by the advocacy community.

We would argue, on the basis that nobody holds the ultimate truth or key to the single best solution, that the attractions and advantages of mutual learning need to be an explicit part of the motivation of people entering an MSP.

Furthermore, in some cases where NGOs are invited to join an MSP, there is reason to suspect that the invitation is extended to ensure a higher degree of legitimization for the process which might not be coupled with the willingness to take NGOs' contributions fully into account. In these cases, such suspicions should be carefully examined and exposed as a lack of seriousness about dialogue and the idea of change.

In this context, Paul Hohnen (2000a, p9) has asserted:

> *To the extent that multi-stakeholder engagement processes sharpen the capacity to define, refine and integrate diverse viewpoints, and bring together the principal actors, they are to be encouraged. Where they tend to ignore, dilute, distort, or otherwise weaken independent viewpoints, they are to be discouraged.*

Transparency

BOX 4.12 TRANSPARENCY

The quality or state of being transparent: something transparent; *especially:* a picture (as on film) viewed by light shining through it or by projection. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)

MSPs require transparent communication channels. People need to be able to know who is talking to whom, when and about what. Lobbying and bargaining behind the scenes can undermine trust which leads to weakened commitment. On the other hand, decentralized, flexible, and spontaneous communication opportunities are desirable, as informal modes of communication are suitable to build trust and discover commonalities. There is a need to strike a balance between those benefits and the need for transparency.

The procedures and methods of decision-making should be open and transparent so that effective participation is possible. Transparency is based on the free flow of information so that processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those interested in them.

In the same vein, MSPs need to be as transparent as possible towards the outside. Lack of disclosure of information of any of the aspects, decisions or steps related to an MSP will decrease its credibility and, consequently, its effectiveness. Obscure or unclear structures and processes create an open door to the abuse of processes or accusations of abuse. It is in the interest of an inclusive process to enable participants and non-participants to comment, question and input. MSPs can be designed to include individuals as representatives of stakeholder groups or in their individual capacity.[15]

At every step of an MSP, crucial decisions need to be taken regarding what information should be available to the public, or at least to the core constituencies involved.

Access to information and informed consent

BOX 4.13 THE RIO DECLARATION, 1992: PRINCIPLE 10

'Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.'

Disclosure and access to information are a key element of accountability. For MSPs to work, equal access to information for all involved is

absolutely essential. Some examples show that there are difficulties providing equal access to information, and in some cases non-participating stakeholders and/or the general public have not been sufficiently informed.

MSPs rely on information-sharing. The principal and most cost-effective strategy is for participants to bring their own information into the process. Developing a common information base is a priority task at the beginning of each MSP and needs to be maintained throughout the process. A common information base does not need to be in one place, but all information needs to be accessible to everyone.

Access to information enables participants to be fully competent partners. As the competence of all involved is an essential fundament of success, it is in the interest of all to allow free and equitable access to information. Financial inequalities need to be levelled to allow for the effective participation of all groups (for example computer equipment and communication budgets).

While disclosure of all relevant information is crucial, there is also a need to consider carefully the means and channels of information dissemination that are being used. For example, some processes we studied have used the Internet for a large proportion or even all of their communication, relying on websites and email. There are numerous and significant advantages of internet-based information dissemination and communication. These include speed, low costs and the ability to interconnect a theoretically unlimited number of people and stakeholder groups. However, in global processes, involving countries and regions with limited internet connectivity, and disadvantaged social and linguistic groups (ethnic minorities,[16] women, the poor), there are huge gaps in access. The digital divide runs alongside traditional divides: between South and North, between women and men, between poor and rich, ethnic minorities and majorities, and so on (UNDP, 1999; UNED Forum, 2000).

Closely linked to access to information is the requirement that those who agree to something must understand its implications and consequences. Any MSP needs to ensure that individuals and the stakeholders they represent fully understand all information exchanged and all decisions they may be asked to make.

This may require making information and suggestions available in the appropriate language. Translations into other languages or translations into non-jargon (non-UNese!) are examples. It seems that this can be a major challenge for some MSPs where stakeholders experienced in such processes need to work with others who are new to them. Scientific research indicates the value-added of such mixed groups, but achieving that requires finding a common language.

This concept also requires everybody involved to ask for explanations in case something is not understood. An open and equitable

atmosphere helps people to ask what they might perceive as 'stupid questions'. The general rule should be that 'we're all here to learn'.

Inclusiveness

Box 4.14 Inclusive

Synonyms: all-around, comprehensive, general, global, overall, sweeping; encyclopaedic, comprehensive. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)

MSPs try to bring the main interest groups into the process of dialogue and/or decision-making and implementation, especially those who are usually left out, such as minority stakeholders, poor people, 'uneducated' people, rural people.[17] In some processes, the public is represented by individuals from organizations who have relevant expertise. In others, it is both logistically possible and more appropriate for the individuals involved to attend meetings in person.

As a general rule, MSPs should be inclusive and not exclusive. 'Exclusion breeds resistance' (Asmal, 2000). Inclusiveness is generally beneficial as it allows all views to be represented and increases the legitimacy and credibility of a process. In structuring an MSP, the question is more 'Have we integrated all the major viewpoints regarding the issue?', rather than 'Do we have all the important players?'. As history has amply demonstrated, major shifts (take universal suffrage) were initially catalysed by a small number of people with a clear vision of how society might be improved.

However, there are also limits to the breadth of inclusiveness. If processes employ selection criteria for participation, these need to be agreed by all those involved. To avoid any suggestion of 'self-selection', the criteria and the reasons for adopting them should be made public, and participants need to be prepared to discuss, defend and change them if necessary.

Size, too, is a functional constraint. If a group is too large there is a risk that it will not be able to hold effective plenary discussions. As a general rule, however, caution should be exercised where exclusion may be involved, and processes need to be developed to deal creatively with the challenge.[18]

Legitimacy

BOX 4.15 LEGITIMACY

The quality or state of being legitimate.

Legitimate: lawfully begotten; *specifically:* born in wedlock: having full filial rights and obligations by birth <a *legitimate* child>: being exactly as purposed: neither spurious nor false: accordant with law or with established legal forms and requirements <a *legitimate* government>: conforming to recognized principles or accepted rules and standards. *Synonym*: lawful, innocent, legal, licit, true, rightful. *Related Words*: cogent, sound, valid; acknowledged, recognized; customary, usual; natural, normal, regular, typical. *Antonym*: illegitimate, arbitrary. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)

'*Legitimacy* is generally understood as the right to be and to do something in society – a sense that an organization is lawful, admissible and justified in its chosen course of action.' (Edwards 2000, p20)[19]

MSPs need to be perceived as legitimate in order for the process and its outcomes to be accepted by all concerned. Legitimacy is an important resource, especially in largely communication-oriented systems like MSPs. Actors, processes and issues which do not fulfil basic requirements and are not perceived as legitimate will either be ineffective in the long run or at least be vulnerable to undermining by opponents (Neuberger, 1995b).

The fact that MSPs may also create larger coalitions and thus more influence makes the question of their legitimacy all the more important. MSPs and their individual participants need to reflect upon the question of their legitimate role within the governance system, be it at the local, national or international levels. The following are among the preconditions of legitimacy:

- The design of the MSP has been agreed in a democratic, transparent and equitable manner, including the identification of stakeholder groups and participants, the framing of agenda and work plan.[20]
- The majority of those concerned – within and without the process – perceive the process as legitimate; minority views regarding legitimacy are being addressed by the process.
- Participating stakeholders are perceived as having legitimacy.
- The process addresses the question of its own legitimacy and the legitimacy of its participants.

The issue of civil society engagement is both a very important and a difficult point which needs to be addressed within the global governance debate in general and in MSPs in particular. The legitimacy of NGOs, for example, has been raised as a critical point by various actors, in a more or less constructive way (see detailed discussions by Edwards, 1999, 2000). Some of the criticism – for example with regard to democratic decision-making within NGOs or the question of who they effectively represent – can be raised equally with regard to other stakeholder groups such as business associations or trade union federations. For the purpose of the discussion here, we want to underline again that the legitimacy of a process depends on the democratic, transparent and equitable structures that the process as well as its participants operate.

MSPs are meant effectively to give 'a voice, not a vote' (Edwards, 2000, p29), or rather, voices, not votes. This principle, 'structured to give every interest in civil society a fair and equal hearing – is crucial to resolving the tensions that have emerged over NGOs and their role' (ibid). For this principle to be an acceptable guiding line, certain conditions have to be met. Options include certification and self-regulation, and increased equity between various civil society actors (Edwards, 2000). Certification could certainly be a way forward; yet the question of who should govern or control a certifying body remains unsolved. In many cases, NGOs have been developing mechanisms of self-governance to ensure democratic, transparent and truly participatory processes as a basis of their mandate. Some networks have been organizing themselves within frameworks of agreed rules and procedures. Increasing equity will be very important – between different stakeholders, such as business and NGOs, between stakeholder representatives from developing and developed countries, between women and men, rich and poor, ethnic majorities and minorities and Indigenous Peoples, and so on. In international processes, equitable regional representation is particularly important; NGO participation from developing countries needs to increase much more and it needs more predictable, reliable support.

It is also worth noting that a large number of developments which aim to increase the legitimacy of processes has been coming from the NGO community. For example, within the CSD process, the NGO community's preparations (dialogue background papers, selection of participants) are widely considered to be the most transparent. NGO Issue Caucuses' around the CSD also employ measures of additional inclusiveness by taking on input from Major Groups caucuses. The same applied to the preparations for the Bergen Ministerial Dialogues. It is also NGOs who usually have the least problems with publishing their views and (self-)criticism regarding a process.

The legitimacy and credibility of processes and participants also depend on the competence and expertise of the actors involved. Equitable access to information and capacity-building, where necessary, should be provided to ensure competence on all sides.

The involvement of high-level representatives from stakeholder groups also adds legitimacy as these people both represent larger groups and have the authority to implement any outcomes.

The legitimacy of a process also needs to be evaluated in the context of the goals it seeks to achieve. If it is an informing process, where an organization wants to learn about the views of particular stakeholders, the choice of issues and relevant stakeholders and setting the agenda might not, by themselves, raise the question of the legitimacy of the process. If an MSP aims to arrive at decisions on further action, however, the question of who identifies the participants, sets the agenda and so on, becomes crucial to its legitimacy.

Accountability

BOX 4.16 ACCOUNTABILITY

The quality or state of being accountable; *especially:* an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions *accountable. Synonyms*: responsible, amenable, answerable, liable. *Contrasted Words*: absolute, arbitrary, autocratic; imperious, magisterial, masterful. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)

'Accountability simply means that individuals and institutions are answerable for their actions and the consequences that follow them. Democratic accountability means that decision-makers must be answerable to the public, "we the people". Without it, decisions lack legitimacy. Accountability may take many forms, from merely "taking into account", so that those affected by decisions are consulted or considered, to independent inspection, external monitoring, public reporting, judicial review and elections.' (Alexander, 2000)

Titus Alexander (2000) describes accountable decision-making as follows:

> *Accountable decision-making tends to be better, because it takes a wider range of views and experiences into account. Accountable decisions are more likely to be consistent and rule-governed, rather than arbitrary,*

since they are open to challenge and set precedents. Accountability also means that mistakes are reduced, because decision-makers think harder before acting, and when mistakes occur, they are more likely to be spotted and rectified. Public accountability also contributes to greater social stability, since it is easier to identify grievances, correct mistakes or remove officials without massive social upheavals, as occurs in unaccountable political systems.

**BOX 4.17 MEASURING ACCOUNTABILITY
AND TRANSPARENCY**

Charter 99 and the One World Trust, UK, are leading a campaign for greater democratic accountability in international decision-making, arguing that the issues of democracy and accountability at the global level have been neglected. As more and more decisions are taken on the international stage the pressure is increasing to find ways of ensuring that decision-makers are accountable to 'we the peoples'. The new project, the *Charter 99 Global Accountability Index*, addresses these concerns, identifying the key criteria for an international organization to be open, democratic and accountable. Like UNDP's Human Development Index, the new index aims to rank organizations according to the degree they fulfil this criteria. The index is likely to become an important advocacy tool for promoting global democracy. By highlighting good practice, the index will provide clear and practical reform proposals for institutions lacking democratic accountability.

More information about the Global Accountability Index campaign can be found at http://www.charter99.org/, from info@charter99.org or by writing to Charter 99, c/o 18 Northumberland Avenue, London, WC2N 5BJ, UK.

In the context of MSPs, accountability means to employ transparent, democratic mechanisms of engagement, position-finding, decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Accountability of all participants towards all is one primary goal of designing and conducting MSPs based on agreements by all stakeholders participating.

Towards non-participating stakeholders and the general public, accountability needs to be ensured by making the process transparent and understandable for everybody. In addition, all those who initiate, facilitate and participate in an MSP should be prepared to engage in open dialogue about it with those seeking to comment or inquire.

Responsibility

Box 4.18 Responsibility

The quality or state of being responsible: moral, legal, or mental account-ability: reliability, trustworthiness: something for which one is responsible: burden.

Responsible: liable to be called on to answer: liable to be called to account as the primary cause, motive, or agent: being the cause or explanation: liable to legal review or in case of fault to penalties: able to answer for one's conduct and obligations: trustworthy: able to choose for oneself between right and wrong: marked by or involving responsibility or accountability: politically answerable; *especially:* required to submit to the electorate if defeated by the legislature – used especially of the British cabinet. *Synonyms*: responsible, answerable, accountable, amenable, liable. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)

Social Responsibility: 'An organisation's obligation to maximise its positive impact and minimise its negative impact on society.' (The Copenhagen Centre)

'The social responsibility of a the private sector (also referred to as corporate social responsibility) concerns the relationships of a company not just with its clients, suppliers and employees, but also with other groups, and with the needs, values and goals of the society in which it operates . . . social responsibility go beyond compliance with the law, beyond philanthropy, and, one could add, beyond public relations. Corporate social responsibility therefore requires dialogue between companies and their stakeholders.' (UN Secretary General, 2000, A/AC. 253/21, p2)

Stakeholder involvement and meaningful participation are the means to ensure more responsible decisions and actions. MSPs create the space to bring all concerns into the process of planning and decision-making. Relevant information, particularly about possible impacts of decisions, is made available to decision-makers, enabling them to act responsibly, ie to take into account the concerns and effects which might otherwise be not known to them. This can range from realizing that more information needs to be provided to stakeholders, to changing policies, or to overthrowing decisions due to new information.

Within the framework of sustainability, responsible action means to take into account the effects of one's actions with regard to the environment, and economic and social development. It requires active investigation into solutions which will ensure environmental protec-

tion, enable healthy and sustained economic growth and increase social equity. Hence, it requires the inclusion in the decision-making process of those who might be affected economically and socially, and those who work to ensure environmental protection, otherwise the necessary expertise will not be available. This cannot be delivered by 'experts' alone. In fact, 'a genuinely democratic society is one in which both experts and nonexperts alike contribute to the understandings . . . that are eventually settled on' (Sampson, 1993, p187).

Industry's role and responsibility is increasingly being addressed, particularly with a view to corporate responsibility, as some businesses explicitly recognize the need to contribute to the good of the communities in which they operate. In many cases, industry's participation in dialogue processes needs to increase and to be based on long-term commitments to work with advocates and those affected by their activities.

Governments' responsibilities include providing an enabling and protective legal and administrative framework for meaningful negotiation of stakeholder agreements, such as between owners of land and natural resources and those seeking access for business purposes. Governments also have responsibilities to support full and equal participation of under-represented groups.

The responsibility for an MSP outcome lies with all those involved – the more equitably the process has been conducted, the more equitably will responsibility be spread.

Ground rules for stakeholder communication

Box 4.19 Communication

An act or instance of transmitting: information communicated: a verbal or written message: a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour *also* exchange of information or opinions: personal rapport: (plural) a system (as of telephones) for communicating: a technique for expressing ideas effectively (as in speech). *Synonyms*: message, directive, word, contact, commerce, converse, communion, intercommunication, intercourse. Interchange of thoughts or opinions through shared symbols. *Related Words*: exchange, interchange; conversing, discussing, talking; conversation, discussion, talk; advice, intelligence, news, tidings. (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*)[21]

Stakeholder participation and cooperation are forms of social inter-action. MSPs aim to create space for such interaction that will allow people to *dialogue*. This is not an easy task and for many reasons. Therefore, it seems all the more important to consider carefully which modalities of communication and interaction are desirable for multi-stakeholder processes and to suggest some ground rules.

Many MSPs gather people who often would not even talk to each other, but would begin – and end – with arguing.[22] Sustainable develop-ment requires dialogue and forging collaboration and partnership wherever possible. Many of the decisions we face in the years ahead demand that we find ways to listen to opposing points of view, find ways to accommodate deeply held and differing values and satisfy opposing interests. Traditional systems of governance and decision-making tend to repeat the pattern of domination that has characterized most societies throughout history: men have dominated women; one ethnic group has dominated another; the rich have dominated the poor; and nations have dominated nations. Conventional communication and decision-making mechanisms in what Deborah Tannen (1998) has labelled our 'argument culture' tend to exclude rather than include diverse interests, focusing on two opposite sides rather than a multi-tudes of views. They are not designed to cope well with the complexity of sustainability issues.

In contrast, MSPs bring together stakeholders of very different cultures. Corporations, for example, follow the principles of profit-orientation and the protection of intellectual property, efficiency and speed, while many NGOs promote the principles of equity, sharing, participation and the protection of vulnerable groups, and do not see market mechanisms as the fundamental basis of societies and their development. MSPs need to employ ground rules of communication that allow clarification of cultural differences, differences in the understanding of values and information, and help to integrate them in relation to a particular issue.

Another major issue is the challenge of dealing with *power gaps* between stakeholder groups. They clearly exist and need to be dealt with, including through the appropriate modes of communication. Minorities are at a specific disadvantage.[23] Research on group dynamics has shown that minorities are less listened to and are more often interrupted; that minority members tend to speak less and that their contributions are taken less seriously. Powerful stakeholders and their representatives often find it difficult to 'take a back seat'. Particularly in traditional international fora governments, donor agencies and business representatives show difficulty in listening to other stake-holders such as NGOs, women's groups and Indigenous Peoples.[24] For the sake of equity, fairness and justice, but also for the sake of allowing real ownership of the process to develop on all sides, it is essential

that everyone involved should be given genuine access and employ equitable modes of communication. Ensuring this is also an important part of the role of facilitator of an MSP, and dialogue aimed at mutual understanding is one of the best modes of communication.

But how do we communicate best when we present our views, dialogue, or consensus-build? How do we deal with power gaps between different stakeholder groups? What practical mechanisms, attitudes and individual behaviour are required to ensure the potential benefits of stakeholder communication?

There are a great number of sources for guidance on the conduct of successful dialogue and consensus-building, including social scientific research (see Chapter 6); philosophical models; standards of qualitative research methodology, and models used by faith communities, to name but a few. They provide a basis for practical conclusions about the appropriate size of consulting groups, and successful ways of chairing, facilitating and structuring meetings. They also address aspects of individual attitude and behaviour which promote dialogue and successful consensus-building. Below, we summarize a few of the most interesting examples. The choice is subjective, but has been guided by their close relevance to the needs of the MSP approach.

First, Jürgen Habermas (eg 1984, 1989), a German philosopher and dominant figure in the tradition of critical theory, developed a framework called the 'ideal speech situation'.[25] It is an attempt to describe the presuppositions that discourse participants must hold before *communication without coercion* can prosper. Habermas defines four conditions of discourse:

1 All potential participants of a discourse must have the same chance to employ communicative speech acts.[26] Everybody needs to have the same chance to speak.
2 All discourse participants must have the same chance to interpret, claim or assert, recommend, explain, and put forth justifications; and contest, justify, or refute any validity claim.[27] Everybody needs to be free to challenge whether what has been said can be verified.
3 The only speakers permitted in the discourse are those who have the same chance to employ representative speech acts: everybody needs to have the same chance to contribute to the issue at hand.
4 The only speakers permitted in the discourse are those who have the same chance to employ regulatory speech acts: everybody needs to have the same chance to contribute to the process of communication.

These conditions can be thought of as 'rules for discourse'. Participants abiding by these rules will produce an agreement (or at least understanding) based on rational arguments, as opposed to one created

through manipulation and coercion. Habermas' normative theory outlines an unconstrained model of discourse, where values and norms can be discussed and agreed upon, free of coercion.

Dietz (2001) has used Habermas' approach to define the criteria of 'better decisions', considering 'a good decision as one that:

1   makes full use of available information about the facts of the situation and about people's values;
2   allows all those affected by a decision to have a say;
3   takes account of the strengths of individual and group information and decision-making; and
4   provides individuals and society with a chance to learn from the decisions'.[28]

Second, standards of qualitative research methodology are a useful resource when trying to design a situation of productive dialogue (eg Sommer, 1987). Developed through empirical research experiences in psychology and sociology, they are designed to create a communication situation where researchers will be able most successfully to obtain data from research participants (interviewees). Some general, practical rules have been established:

•   The researcher enters into the dialogue/interview with a respectful, non-judgemental attitude.
•   Interviewees/participants are presented with rather open questions.
•   Interviewees/participants are allowed to impact the agenda/questionnaire and to decline answering questions.
•   Interviewers react flexibly to the information given, leaving defining the course of the interview to the interaction of those involved rather than prescribing a set agenda.
•   Every finding is fed back to research participants, including for further comments; finalizing a research outcome depends on agreement from all involved.

Third, there are models used by faith communities, eg the Bahá'í model of 'consultation'.[29] Individual development involves investigating the 'truth' for oneself.[30] Continual reflection, based on experience in applying this truth, is critical to the process of individual (spiritual) development. For collective investigation of the truth and group decision-making, consultation, which draws on the strength of the group and fosters unity of purpose and action, is indispensable. Consultation plays a major role in Bahá'í communities because it is seen as the only way to get all relevant expertise to the table, to come to consensus about future action and to create the commitment to implement solutions. The basic assumption is that no member of a

community has some kind of exclusive access to the 'truth' (see note 30), and that everybody's subjective views and knowledge have to be integrated in order to achieve the best results. Bahá'í communities and elected assemblies conduct consultations on the basis of detailed rules – for example the rule of honesty; openness and not holding back any views; group ownership of any ideas; striving for consensus if possible and voting if there is no consensus.[31]

Box 4.20 Consensus-building?

One commentator contributed an example illustrating how inappropriately some people deal with consensus-building. A person, supposedly funding and running a consensus process, was heard to reply when asked how the process was going, 'We've nearly convinced them, the bastards.'

Seeking consensus 'requires that individuals not hold fast to personal opinions simply in order to have their views prevail. Instead, they must approach matters with a genuine desire to determine the right course of action. If consensus cannot be achieved, the majority vote of a quorum prevails, and the decision is equally valid and binding' (US Bahá'í Community).

With regard to openness, Bahá'ís assert that the clashing of diverse views will spark off the best ideas whereas holding back one's views is counterproductive. People are encouraged to air their opinions even if an individual is the only one with an opposing view.

Interestingly, this coincides with the kind of advice that the acclaimed management expert Peter Drucker (1967) offers the decision-making executive:

> *. . . disagreement alone can provide alternatives to a decision . . . There is always a high possibility that a decision will prove wrong – either because it was wrong to begin with or because a change in circumstances makes it wrong. If one has thought through alternatives during the decision-making process, one has something to fall back on, something that has already been thought through.* (p153)

> *Above all, disagreement is needed to stimulate the imagination. One does not, to be sure, need imagination to find the right answer to a problem. But then*

> *this is of value only in mathematics. In all matters of true uncertainty . . . one needs creative solutions which create a new situation. And this means that one needs imagination – a new and different way of perceiving and understanding.* (p155)

There are, of course, many more guidelines being employed by faith communities which we are unable to outline here. They all stress the importance of a moral attitude and prioritizing of the common good over self-interest. They promote love and respect for the human being, no matter if they be friend or foe, and maintain that mutual trust and respect depend on a basic attitude of tolerance.

The bases for ground rules of stakeholder communication outlined above are meant to be just that: fundaments or ideals. We do not believe that an 'ideal speech situation' or indeed perfect selflessness and devotion to a community can be achieved. Nor can any researcher be completely open and non-suggestive. The concepts are rather meant as ideal rules which, if adopted as objectives by participants, help to create a situation which is more likely to generate successful dialogue and consensus.

Some aspects of the different normative systems outlined above are contradictory as regards the practical recommendations that emerge from them. For example, one of the main reasons for using Habermas' theory as a basis for developing criteria of appropriate modes of stakeholder communication, is its fundamental link to the concept of *individual autonomy*:

> *In the tradition of critical theory . . . individuals ought to be free of all forms of domination. Once they are free, people are able to enter into social relations that encourage personal development as well as social and cultural reproduction. The key is critical self-reflection. Habermas promotes introspection among free and autonomous beings so that they will think about the type of society that they want, before committing to new relations.* (Renn et al, 1995, p9)

However, some have argued that this concept is specific to the Western, Anglo-Saxon cultural context and there is indeed empirical evidence supporting this view (eg Triandis, 1989, 1995; see discussion in Chapter 6). Different cultures have different understandings of identity and priorities for the individual. For example, in more collectivistic cultures, we will not begin by looking at self-reflection, individual societal ideals and their impact on the individual choices people make as regards their social relations. Rather, we will start by looking at what the collective

tradition and culture identifies as benefiting the collective and where it should be going. That will include shared norms of behaviour for the individual who is expected to make the best possible contribution to the collective and its goals, effectively placing the priorities of the collective above those of the individual.

The notion of individual versus collectivistic cultures affects, for example, the second condition that Habermas puts forward: that everybody should be able to address the question of other participants' claim to validity. In societies with strong collectivistic norms, such open questioning of individuals may not be appropriate. The condition also contradicts other normative systems' rules of not openly questioning the honesty of dialogue partners as this is seen as undermining the building of trust within the group. Accordingly, in our conclusions towards practical guidelines to designing MSPs (Chapter 8), we have suggested different options. Choices will depend on the respective cultural contexts and individual participants. Quite specific answers to these questions will have to be found in each process, through dialogue and experimentation.

BOX 4.21 'PARTING THE WATERS' IN THE DEBATE OVER DAMS

'Starting on December 10, 1998, two hundred pro- and anti-dam forces from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Nepal converged upon our first meeting in Colombo, with a real potential to explode. Instead, we sat the protagonists opposite each other and asked them to explain to the Commission, in words of one syllable, their opposing perceptions. First, that dams, if done right, are critical tools for governments to use. Second, that over-centralised planning can devastate nature, cut off water that had been the lifeblood of villages for generations, and flood religious and cultural sites and homes with minimal concern for those affected. To be sure, there were heated moments. Government officials spoke passionately of growing populations, increasing demands for food, power and drinking water, national development goals and their responsibility to the people. Affected peoples responded equally passionately of their villages destroyed, resettlement in inadequate sites and the impersonal nature of the State when faced with real people living real lives with little food security and real livelihood risks. For three full days they talked. We listened. We absorbed a clash of perspectives. And we built on common ground, noting and respecting divergences. We made progress if only due to the fact that people felt they finally had the chance to put their case in a neutral arena, and that the Commission had listened to all sides. No crackdowns. No arrests.

But perhaps that was just beginner's luck.

In São Paolo, Brazil, on August 11, 1999 we had no sooner banged the gavel than word came that our meeting would quickly be overrun by nearly a thousand people who had been displaced by dams in Brazil. They had not been invited, but were moments away. Should we contact the police? Disband? Instead, we welcomed most of them inside, while the rest queued peacefully, sat listening to the debate and departed as quietly as they had come, their points made, listened to, and documented.

In Cairo, December 8, 1999 we had to grapple with the delicate Middle Eastern politics of trans-boundary waters between Turkey and Syria, Jordan and Israel, and even protests from people directly affected by dams financed in large part by South Africa where I was Minister for water affairs. Again, we left unscathed, having brought both sides closer together.'

(Kader Asmal, Chair of the World Commission on Dams, 2000)