

# Effective partnerships: Creating the conditions for multi-actor research dialogues

## Introduction

Research dialogues between organizations in Northern and Southern countries, and between those only located in Southern countries are an important way to work in partnership with stakeholders and can ensure that research is demand-led. They can also facilitate the uptake of research findings and improve regional and inter-regional cooperation.

Even though the importance of good communication is widely acknowledged and dialogue is used as a means of planning, implementing and evaluating research for development, these dialogues are often short-term and limited in their effectiveness and sustainability. This means that they do not provide long term improvements in the ways knowledge is exchanged and in the degree to which research results feed into policy and practice. Rather, they can actually increase the random communication of research knowledge and can serve to maintain the unequal opportunities offered to participants, thereby preventing sustainable capacity building among partners.



## The purpose

An important SPLASH activity is to improve understanding of multi-actor research dialogue procedures, identifying key challenges in North-South and South-South communication and providing guidance on how to improve their effectiveness and sustainability. Inclusive and effective dialogues are known to increase the relevance of research for policy and practice, and to speed up the transfer of knowledge into practice and improve the coordination of research activities. This fact sheet presents the main elements for successful dialogues.

## Headline facts

The major determinants of effective and sustainable multi-actor research dialogues are:

- systemic factors such as the political context, funding provision, and academic procedures which affect the resources available and the level of incentives for collaboration; and
- structural factors such as reliable and sustainable access to financial resources, realistic time frames in which to complete the work, and the inclusion of capacity development components.



There are three core parameters

that determine the success of multi-stakeholder dialogues:

- The first is understanding where the balance of power lies in the dialogue process, in terms of the actors' access and their opportunities to influence the way it works. This is important to avoid conflicts and increase the commitment of participants.
- The second is to understand how the interaction processes work, especially in terms of capacity development. This is important for increasing overall efficiency and clarifying the responsibilities of those involved.
- The third is building the network of knowledge stakeholders, which leads to better interaction and a developing habit of knowledge sharing, joint learning and alliance building.

## Recommendations

- A multi-actor research dialogue requires a degree of flexibility in its funding, as well as being able to draw on additional funds for communication and associated learning processes. This allows research partners to plan, coordinate and facilitate dialogue at all stages from the initial planning phase through to the dissemination of the research.
- Factors which contribute to the sustainability of any dialogue process are: a more equitable balance of dialogue, effective interaction; and a functioning network of stakeholders.
- Developing an internal code of conduct for a research dialogue can help govern the discussion, as well as set any procedural rules and clarify a common understanding on the particular problem addressed, the objectives to be achieved and collaboration procedures.
- Knowledge on how to improve research collaboration and stakeholder dialogues already exists and needs to be communicated and incorporated into the way research dialogues operate.

## Find out more

Dore, John (2007). Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MSPS). Unfulfilled Potential. In: Lebel, Louis et al.: *Democratizing Water Governance. In the Mekong Region*. USER Mekong Press: Chang Mai. P. 197-226.

Gaillard, Jacques F. (1994). North-South Research Partnerships. Is Collaboration Possible Between Unequal Partners? In: *Knowledge and Policy* Vol. 7 (2): 31-63.

Hemmati, Minu (2001). *Multi-Stakeholder Processes. What are They About? And How Should They be Done?* UNED Forum: London.

KFPE (1998). *Guidelines for Research in Partnership with Developing Countries*. 11 Principles. Swiss Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries: Berne.

Maselli, Daniel, Lys, Jon-Andri, Schmid, Jacqueline (2006). *Improving Impacts of Research Partnerships*. Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries: Berne.

Warner, Jeroen (2006). More Sustainable Participation? Multi-Stakeholder Platforms for Integrated Catchment Management. In: *Water Resources Development* Vol. 22 (1): 15-35.



## Further information

This is one of a series of SPLASH fact sheets available on the SPLASH website [www.splash-era.net](http://www.splash-era.net)

If you would like to receive the quarterly SPLASH newsletter 'Making a SPLASH', please contact [era-net@dfid.gov.uk](mailto:era-net@dfid.gov.uk)

SPLASH is funded under the EC 6th Framework Programme (FP6) Photographs: Kyung Shik Chung (UN Cote D'Ivoire) and Hazel Jones (WEDC)