Adaptive Collaborative Management in Forest Landscapes

Villagers, Bureaucrats and Civil Society

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7 Learning from adaptive collaborative management

A participatory tool to support adaptive and reflective learning in multi-stakeholder forums

Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti

Introduction

There is interest in multi-stakeholder forums (MSFs) in global development and environmental circles in the context of the climate crisis. This popularity largely rests on the optimism associated with the role that MSFs may play as part of a wider set of actions towards addressing the environmental and social impacts of the crisis (Atmadja et al. forthcoming). Proponents emphasize the potential of these forums as a method for more equitable and inclusive collaboration and coordination processes than is common with mainstream applications of the participatory paradigm (see Sarmiento Barletti et al. [2020a] for a review). These forums are "purposely organised interactive processes that bring together a range of stakeholders to participate in dialogue, decision-making and/or implementation regarding actions seeking to address a problem they hold in common or to achieve a goal for their common benefit" (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2019b). Also known as multi-stakeholder platforms and initiatives, MSFs address different kinds of topics, including but not limited to community forest management (e.g., Nayak and Berkes 2008); participatory budgeting (e.g., Wampler 2010); and resource management (e.g., Søreide and Truex 2011).

MSFs hold an important role in current discourses regarding environmental sustainability. NGOs, donor organizations, and government actors are leading the interest in implementing and funding forums as a transformational solution to address the challenges posed by unsustainable land and resource use in tropical landscapes (Bastakoti and Davidsen 2015; Gonsalves et al. 2005; Larson et al. 2018). Although MSFs may be fashionable, they are certainly not "new." Especially at the local level, these forums are the current iteration of the participatory paradigm that was introduced to shake up rural development practice four decades ago. At the time, the paradigm was introduced as an attempt to create equitable development initiatives that were more closely tuned with the priorities and needs of the local "beneficiaries" (Chambers 1983; Chambers et al., 1989). Current debates over the transformational potential of MSFs follow similar arguments to the scholarly discussions regarding the participatory paradigm. The main questions explore whether MSFs can address the power

inequalities inherent to the interactions between their participants and whether these forums can be resilient to the wide variety of contextual factors at play in the different landscapes where they are implemented (see the contributions to Cooke and Kothari [2001] or Sarmiento Barletti et al. [2020a] for a review of the contextual characteristics that affect MSF outcomes).

This chapter contributes to the debates on the transformational potential of MSFs by engaging with the interest in how to improve equity in MSFs. To do so, this chapter engages with the findings of a multi-country comparative research project carried out by a multinational team of researchers at the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). The project sought to understand how to best enable more equitable processes and outcomes in MSFs (see Sarmiento Barletti and Larson [2019b and a] for the project's methods and analytical framework). Research was carried out with 13 MSFs in Brazil, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Peru that had been organized at the jurisdictional level to work towards more sustainable land and/or resource use. The research project's findings, described in more detail in the following sections, revealed that there is much potential in MSFs but also serious challenges. In most case studies, the optimism held by MSF organizers for more equitable processes and outcomes was not supported by purposefully designed strategies that aimed at addressing inequalities between their participants (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2021a). Fieldwork findings were supplemented with the lessons derived from a realist synthesis review of the academic literature on forums seeking more sustainable land and resource use that was carried out as part of the same research project (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2020a).[1] The review revealed the need to shift the emphasis on designing initiatives so that they are not affected by context to designing how to engage stakeholders in a context-responsive manner (Larson and Sarmiento Barletti 2020; Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020).

These two sets of findings – from fieldwork and the literature review – led the research team to conclude that the potential success of participatory approaches rests on whether or not they are designed to address the power inequalities between stakeholders. In turn, this design necessitates a deep understanding of the contextual factors associated with economic, political, and social dimensions that structure those inequalities (Cornwall 2008; Mosse 2014). Recognizing this challenge, and in collaboration with forum participants in Indonesia and Peru, CIFOR researchers identified the need for a tool to support equity in MSFs by allowing participants to monitor their processes and outcomes, understand their main challenges, and discuss how to address them. This collaboration resulted in *How are we doing?* (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2020b), a participatory monitoring tool that enables forum participants to build the principles of adaptive collaborative management (ACM) into their MSFs in order to achieve more equitable processes and outcomes. Taking lessons from ACM, the tool was developed as a participatory reflective and adaptive learning tool rather than a conventional monitoring tool. *How are we doing?* builds upon ACM's conscious effort for collaboration, negotiation, co-learning, and adapting a group's work based on the results of those processes.

As discussed below, the tool builds on ACM's emphasis on the importance of social learning, deploying it as part of an iterative learning cycle to plan, take action, monitor, reflect, and plan again for the MSF's future work based on that reflection.

This chapter starts with a short review of how MSFs have been dealt with in the scholarly literature as a concept, followed by a summary of the key findings of CIFOR's research on MSFs. This will be followed by a section on the development of the adaptive and reflexive learning tool, and its application of ACM concepts to support more equitable processes in MSFs.

Multi–stakeholder forums: Transformational change or more of the same?

In a recent review, Atmadja et al. (forthcoming) synthesized five elements that scholarly and practice-oriented publications note as key to catalyse "transformational change" in the context of the climate crisis. Two of those elements – "collective learning and reflection" and "consultation and participation" – are evident in the interest, optimism, and funding that is currently placed in MSFs. This interest is relevant in international agreements; for example, partnerships are central to Sustainable Development Goal 17 (Franco and Abe 2020), which seeks to "strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development."[2] This renewed interest in the participatory paradigm is also supported by environmental discourses that recognize the role of Indigenous and other forest-dependent communities as environmental stewards, which has increasingly led to the inclusion of their representatives in forest management at different levels (Nikolakis and Hotte 2019; Pinkerton 2019). The participation of these communities in MSFs dealing with more sustainable land and resource use and governance is part of the appeal of these participatory processes (Lyons et al. 2019). This interest is also linked to Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 10, which call for better integration of women and other marginalized groups, respectively.

MSFs have gained much attention from policymakers and development and conservation practitioners around the world due to their potential to improve collaboration between different actors, sectors, and governance levels in order to address complex challenges that cannot be resolved by one actor alone. This attention reflects the growing awareness that environmental problems cannot be addressed without the effective engagement of the actors that determine resource and land-use practices on the ground, or the fact that such problems cannot be resolved within a conservation community when the drivers are located in other sectors. In theory, MSFs may produce more effective and sustainable outcomes by getting those sectors and actors that have commonly held contradictory development priorities to coordinate and align goals through discussion, negotiation, and planning (see Larson et al. [2018] for a review).

Furthermore, advocates for MSFs highlight their potential for participatory processes that are more collaborative, transparent, inclusive, and horizontal

than mainstream applications of the participatory paradigm. MSF proponents argue that bringing stakeholders together to discuss a common challenge or opportunity addresses power inequalities among participants, leads to solutions that reflect the priorities of historically underrepresented actors (as opposed to top-down decision making or bilateral negotiations), allows more powerful participants to understand the perspectives of vulnerable groups, and includes actors that can affect the implementation and effectiveness of consensus outcomes (see, among many others, Buchy and Hoverman 2000; Dougill et al. 2006; Faysee 2006; Hemmati 2002; Reed 2008; Tippett et al. 2007). This optimism builds on the notion that creating avenues to include citizens more directly in governance, and to improve their communication with government actors, has the potential to improve democratic practice and enable more equitable and effective governance than unilateral, expert-driven, and/or top-down decision making (Avritzer 2002; Cohen and Sabel 1997).

However, despite expanded avenues for participation, the involvement of marginalized groups in broader scale forums has been an exception rather than the rule. This exclusion is despite the recognition of participation as a right for Indigenous Peoples in international agreements such as the International Labour Organisation Covenant 169 and the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples and local communities have not been able (or allowed) to participate in decision making regarding land and resource use issues and/or the design of initiatives that may affect their rights, territories, lives, and livelihoods (Espinoza Llanos and Feather 2011). When these groups have been included in participatory processes, there have been questions about the sort of impact that they may have over mainstream development agendas or the interests of powerful groups driving deforestation and forest degradation (Castro and Nielsen 2001; Lane 2003).

In fact, some analysts have noted that participation in these spaces may further marginalize underrepresented actors (see the contributors to Cooke and Kothari 2001). This is a reminder of how power inequalities are challenging for MSFs organized to address unsustainable land and resource use, commonly in landscapes with contexts marked by deep histories of inequalities, conflict, and land dispossession. Trade-offs are inherent in these contexts and the stakeholders involved are significantly diverse in characteristics, ranging from their land and resource priorities to their access to said land and resources (Barnes and Child 2014; Robbins 2012). Furthermore, although research has shown optimism among Indigenous representatives for participation in MSFs, they also understood participation as a potentially flawed avenue for representation. This is due to experiences of not being able or allowed to participate effectively, which is part of the reason why participation is only a part of wider representation strategies that include political, legal, and social action (Rodriguez and Sarmiento Barletti 2021).

Proponents argue that MSFs improve on mainstream governance by leading to outcomes that better reflect the priorities and perspectives of historically underrepresented actors, from women to Indigenous Peoples and local

communities (Bastos-Lima et al. 2017; Estrada-Carmona et al. 2014; Sayer et al. 2013). MSF proponents claim that stakeholders are more likely to take ownership over initiatives they have participated in designing, implementing, and monitoring and that participation in these spaces has allowed local peoples greater say over the initiatives that affect them and their territories. These forums are described as able to address the main point of criticism levelled at the participatory paradigm – its inability to address the power inequalities and access between different participants (see Chapter 8), especially in cases related to historically conflictive issues such as access to land or control of natural resources (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Warner 2006). These inequalities in access should be taken seriously by anyone interested in participatory processes, as recent experimental research on collaboration and reciprocity has noted that inequalities undermine cooperation (Hauser et al. 2019). As revealed by the results of the research project discussed below, MSFs must be organized and implemented with strategies to address inequalities in order to fulfil their promise of more equitable outcomes and processes.

A comparative research project on jurisdictional multi-stakeholder forums

Responding to the interest in MSFs, a team of researchers at CIFOR embarked on a multi-country comparative project aiming at assessing the MSF potential for more equitable processes and outcomes. The research team was multi-disciplinary and truly diverse, with researchers from Brazil, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Peru, Spain, and the United States. The team embarked on a research project, carried out between 2018 and 2020, through which they worked with 13 MSFs in Brazil, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Peru (see Table 7.1 for a summary of case studies). All cases were selected after scoping research according to whether they fulfilled four criteria: they were organized to address unsustainable land and/or resource use; they were organized at the subnational level; they included a forum for in-person interactions; and their participants included at least one government and one local actor. Subnational MSFs were selected because they were closer to the geographical spaces of resource and land-use planning and management, and due to the current interest in jurisdictional approaches to tackle climate change and deforestation (e.g., Fishman et al. 2017).

Research participants included representatives of organizations from government agencies, Indigenous or local organizations, NGOs, research institutions, donor organizations, and the private sector. In each case study, the research team interviewed MSF organizers and participants, actors who were not part of the forum for different reasons but were stakeholders to the issues discussed in it and key context informants. A separate semi-structured questionnaire was designed for each group (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2019b). Given the multi-country nature of the project, research materials were translated into Amharic, Indonesian, Portuguese, and Spanish in order to interview

Table 7.1 MSF case studies in CIFOR's research (table by Nicole Heise)

Country	Jurisdiction	MSF	Goal	Purpose	Organizer	Type of participants
Brazil	Para	Green Municipalities Program	Reduce deforestation, improve rural environmental cadastre, decentralize enforcement mechanisms to the municipal level, and engage municipalities in the PMV.	Decision making, management	Subnational government	Government, NGO, private sector, Indigenous Peoples
	Acre	Ecological Economic Zoning Commission	Address land-use conflicts; acknowledge the demands raised by grassroots movements; include historically marginalized actors; and bring diverse actors together to build Acre's Ecological Economic Zoning in a participatory fashion.	Knowledge sharing and decision making	Subnational government	Government, NGO, private sector, academia, Indigenous Peoples, local communities
	Mato Grosso	Social-Economic and Ecological Zoning Commission	Conduct a participatory and inclusive Social-Economic and Ecological Zoning process.	Knowledge sharing and decision making	Subnational government	Government, NGO, Private Sector, Academia, Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities
Ethiopia	Oromia	SHARE Bale Eco-Region	Contribute to sustainable land use through an inclusive design and process that brings together stakeholders from different sectors to discuss common problems and find solutions that benefit them all.	Knowledge sharing and decision making	NGO	Government, NGO, Local Communities, Academia
	Oromia	Jamma-Urji Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration	Increase biological diversity, forest carbon stock, and natural forest regeneration; transform local people's livelihoods by channelling carbon revenues and access to environmental benefits.	Knowledge sharing and decision making	NGO and academia	Government, local communities

Country	Region	Initiative	Description	Function	Leadership	Stakeholders
Indonesia	West Java	Integrated Citarum Water Resources Management Investment Program	Established as part of an agroforestry project that aimed to build connections between farmers and the subnational government at provincial and district levels, and to obtain political and financial support to ensure the sustainability of interventions.	Knowledge sharing and decision making	Donor and academia	Government, NGO, local communities, academia
	East Kalimantan	Regional Council on Climate Change	Coordinating body for East Kalimantan's climate change–related programmes.	Knowledge sharing	Subnational government	Government, NGO, academia
	Central Kalimantan	INOBU-UNILEVER Palm Oil Initiative	Effort to solve the overlapping land-tenure issues, promote sustainable agriculture practices, and help small-scale farmers obtain ISPO/RSPO certification to access better markets for their palm oil products.	Management and decision making	NGO	NGO, private sector, government
	Jambi	Regional Peatland Restoration Team	Raise awareness about the negative impacts of conversion of the community's forest and loss of its natural resources; formulate a solution for customary forest management and conservation together with the local community.	Knowledge sharing and decision making	Academia and NGO	NGO, academia, government, local communities
Peru	Ucayali	Platform for Community Forest Management	Multi-stakeholder coordination to promote sustainable and competitive management of forests on the lands of Indigenous communities.	Knowledge sharing	Subnational government, donors; previously, NGO	Government, NGO, private sector, Indigenous Peoples, academia
	Loreto	Commission for the Protection of Isolated Indigenous Peoples	Inform and articulate an inter-institutional response to the delay in the approval of reserves for isolated Indigenous Peoples	Knowledge sharing	National government and NGO	Government, NGO, Indigenous Peoples
	Madre de Dios	Amarakaeri Communal Reserve Management Committee	Support the co-management of the Reserve by SERNANP and ECA-Amarakaeri	Knowledge sharing	National government and Indigenous Peoples	Government, NGO, private sector, Indigenous Peoples, academia, donor
	San Martin	Alto Mayo Protection Forest Management Committee	Support the co-management of the Protection Forest by SERNANP and Conservation International	Knowledge sharing	National government	Government, NGO, private sector, Indigenous Peoples, academia

more than 500 research participants in their national languages. The range of actors that were interviewed by the research team stemmed from the consideration of important differences between participants in an MSF based on their differentiated access to power, which then led to different experiences of participation in their MSFs. This included who organized and convened the forum, who funded it, what kind of participation in decision making was available to different participants, and who was not taking part in the process (and why), among other characteristics. Recognizing these differences and the interests in the scholarly debates on participatory processes, research was framed to understand power inequalities among MSF participants. The project's analytical framework recognized the multidimensional nature of power as central to any examination of whether and how MSFs may enable transformational change. The framework not only differentiated between sources of power, but also between the different mechanisms through which power was exercised in the MSFs and in the wider context where they were organized. This approach was set with the conviction that research could not engage with interviewees as if they were all able to have the same impact on the outcome of an MSF. The challenge, then, was understood as not merely "more coordination," but "better" coordination. The research team sought to examine what this meant in the different countries and jurisdictions where research was carried out.

Most of the participants in the 13 case studies, regardless of their backgrounds, agreed that MSFs had the potential to empower marginalized actors (Larson et al. n.d.). Interestingly, although this might suggest an optimistic view of the potential of their forums to empower Indigenous Peoples and local communities, most of the 13 case studies were not explicitly designed for empowerment (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2021a). The optimistic view on the potential of MSFs to empower marginalized actors is also framed by another of the project's findings. Most MSF organizers from across actor types recognized that there were power inequalities between their participants yet believed their forums fostered equity by inviting more actors to the table (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2021a). In practice, they placed little effort on designing and implementing strategies that would address those power inequalities. Some of these inequalities were longstanding given the history of the areas where the MSFs were organized.

Interviews revealed that many Indigenous and local community representatives stopped participating because they did not feel heard, did not see the MSF as leading to a fair outcome, or could not afford to participate (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2021a). Representatives of Indigenous Peoples and local community organizations in some of the project's case studies noted that they were in an unequal position in forums and described experiences of unequal access to technical knowledge (which their forums prioritized) or funds to cover the costs of travelling to meetings (commonly held in jurisdictional capitals) or to make up for their lost income during their participation. Some of those representatives said that they had been unable to participate in an MSF at some point because they had no free time to do so, while NGO and government actors

participated in those same MSFs as part of their paid jobs (Gonzales Tovar et al. 2021b; Rodriguez and Sarmiento Barletti 2021). Research with two MSFs in the same Ethiopian jurisdiction revealed that the more successful one included funds to cover the travel expenses of local actors. The other one did not have funds to do so, and local community representatives found it challenging to participate as they could not afford to set aside their livelihood practices to attend meetings (Yami et al. 2021).

Most of the MSF participants interviewed in four case studies in the Peruvian Amazon said that their forums had the potential for more horizontal decision-making processes than the status quo. More generally, Indigenous and local community participants across case studies noted that MSFs encouraged open debate with more powerful actors (Gonzales Tovar et al. 2021a), and also between the men and women of their communities (Yami et al. 2021). Respondents agreed that to fulfil this potential their forums needed to implement strategies that had been explicitly designed to build more equitable interactions between their participants and empower underrepresented participants such as Indigenous Peoples and local communities (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2020b). In fact, for some of the Indigenous and local community representatives interviewed as part of the project, MSFs were promising but limited. They only considered their participation in forums as one part of their wider representation strategies (Rodriguez and Sarmiento Barletti 2021). These strategies also included bilateral meetings with government actors, protests, and suing the government in international courts.

Thus, despite much optimism for participation and democratic practice, the research team's work is further evidence that bringing people together is not enough in every context, as laudable as the interest in MSFs may be. Scholarly work on participatory approaches over the past few decades has noted that power inequalities limit the possibility of horizontal collaboration, potentially leading to agreements that only benefit powerful actors and are legitimized by the participation of less powerful actors (see Colfer [1983] and the contributions to Cooke and Kothari [2001] on the challenges of communication between "unequals" in development). Most of the MSF organizers interviewed as part of the research project did not think that their forums would address the local interests and development priorities that were driving unsustainable land and resource use (see also Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020a; Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2021). In fact, researchers in Madre de Dios and San Martin regions of the Peruvian Amazon noted that forums only reached their objectives when their processes and outcomes did not challenge the land and/or resource use priorities held by local government and private sector actors (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020b).

Similarly, the Roundtable for Isolated Indigenous Peoples in Loreto (also in the Peruvian Amazon) has been unable to achieve the recognition of Indigenous reserves for Indigenous People in isolation due to the infrastructure and extractive development priorities held by Loreto's government (Rodriguez and Sarmiento Barletti 2021). Rather, the forum has been used by

government officers to challenge the creation of the reserves in areas that were earmarked for extractive concessions and roads. As those reserves are part of the rights recognized for Indigenous Peoples in Peru, this case study also shows the potential limitations of MSFs' spaces to raise awareness of the rights of vulnerable peoples and coordinate the implementation of actions to support such rights. This is only effective when participants hold a shared respect for those recognized rights rather than allowing them to be up for discussion.

The Amarakaeri Communal Reserve and its multi-stakeholder management committee is another example of the potential limitations of MSFs. Amarakaeri's MSF is part of a progressive effort by the Peruvian government to include Indigenous Peoples in the management of protected areas in their ancestral territories (Palacios Llaque and Sarmiento Barletti 2021). However, the area's history is framed by competing land and resource use interests, best illustrated in the jurisdictional government's support for the extraction of gold from the area at the time of research. This meant that although the reserve's management committee was inclusive as it contained representatives from all the Indigenous communities in its buffer zone, addressing the conflicts created by gold extraction was completely out of their power. Thus, the MSF may inform a more equitable management of the reserve, but it may have little impact in terms of the effectiveness of conservation, given Madre de Dios' development priorities.

MSFs are evidence that portraying inequalities as obstacles that can be overcome by empowering disempowered people through participation is insufficient to enact change (Cornwall 2008). MSFs need strategies to address inequalities in their planning, design, implementation, and monitoring, or else they may reproduce such inequalities under the appearance of effective participation and inclusive decision making. Taking time to recognize the interconnections between individuals, groups, and institutions is important for designing initiatives that address inequities and the challenges that emerge as the initiatives progress (Friedman et al. 2020; Gallina 2010; Stanturf et al. 2017). The following section moves to another set of the projects' research findings to explain what this design might look like.

Designing for engagement: An adaptive, context–responsive approach to MSFs

Starting from the notion that bringing people together around a table is insufficient to change things, and with an awareness that participation may not always be the best alternative in every context, CIFOR researchers originally sought to synthesize the available evidence into lessons regarding how to organize MSFs that would be resilient despite the different contextual factors that they may face in the landscapes where they were organized. It was clear for the research team that the processes and outcomes of MSFs – like other initiatives – are impacted by their contexts. The team approached forums analytically as framed by the existing networks and relationships in the landscapes where

they were introduced. This research approach recognized the lessons of an older issue faced by mainstream development and conservation planners and implementers that understood and dealt with context as a challenge to over-come in order to achieve real "progress" (Escobar 1995; UNDP 2017). These approaches to context as an obstacle to otherwise carefully (and technically) planned "progress" tend to place the blame for unsuccessful initiatives on locals (in their guise as "beneficiaries") rather than on those that designed the initiative (Ferguson 1995; Gardner and Lewis 2015).

The findings from the Realist Synthesis Review were clear in terms of the wide variety of contextual factors – stemming from different levels – that may have an impact on an MSF's process and outcomes. The evidence on successful multi-stakeholder forums in the Realist Synthesis Review called for a shift in attention from how to *design initiatives* to overcome context to how to *design engagement* in order to build the initiative within and with its distinct social and political context. In a series of publications, CIFOR researchers have pro-posed *designing for engagement* as a shift in MSFs – and participatory initiatives more widely – through four interwoven factors (Larson and Sarmiento Barletti 2020; Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020a; Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2020a, Forthcoming). The four factors were synthesized from the evidence regarding MSFs that had different experiences of success in promoting the participation of historically underrepresented actors, including Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women.

The first factor is commitment to the initiative, its process, and its partici-pants. This factor stems from findings that successful MSFs had enough time, economic, and human resources to work towards its outcomes. These were accompanied by an effort to ensure that participation goals were met, and that, when they existed, policies were followed and laws were respected. For example, committed government actors are needed to establish (and respect) legal frameworks that recognize the participation of underrepresented peo-ples in decision-making processes (see Palacios Llaque and Sarmiento Barletti [2021] and Rodriguez and Sarmiento Barletti [2021] for two examples in the Peruvian Amazon). Commitment is also illustrated in the design and imple-mentation of practices – such as participation quotas, capacity development for more effective participation, and creating separate collaboration spaces – to assure the effective participation of historically underrepresented actors (see Gonzales Tovar et al. [2021a, b] and Yami et al. [2021] on examples in Brazil and Ethiopia, respectively).

The second factor is engagement with implementers, key brokers, and gov-ernment officials at different levels. This engagement is important as these are the actors who have a major say in what happens on the ground and thus can facilitate or challenge the sort of change sought by an MSF. This is especially so in cases where the MSF may have goals (e.g., sustainable resource use) that run against those of powerful actors (e.g., large-scale resource extraction). Engaging these different actors at different levels will allow for the identification of any potential bottlenecks or capacity gaps that may challenge the forum later down

the line. It also means assuring everyone is on the same page, with concepts and goals (see Chapter 3). The research team revealed evidence that MSFs are more successful when they are part of a multilevel effort to address the driving forces of unsustainable land and resource use, rather than just addressing unsustainable practices on the ground (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2020a; see also Fisher et al. [2017] on similar findings in land-use planning in Indonesia).

The third factor is openness to learning from all stakeholders, especially from those with traditionally weaker positions and knowledge systems that do not fit with mainstream definitions of "technical" knowledge (see Evans et al. [2020] on a similar approach to the co-production of knowledge). There is evidence of how critical it is to take the time to research and map local stakeholders and institutions, assess the legitimacy of representative organizations, understand power relationships between stakeholders, and be open to their different ways of knowing (Rodriguez and Sarmiento Barletti 2021; Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2021a; Yami et al. 2021). This approach to learning is key as for most MSF organizers interviewed for CIFOR's research, their own forum *was the plan* to manage power inequalities (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2021a). Few organizers had carried out research to understand the local context before implementing the project (Tamara et al. 2021; Yami et al. 2021). In other cases, local communities were unable to participate effectively and their representatives lost any motivation to participate as they did not feel heard (Palacios Llaque and Sarmiento Barletti 2021).

The fourth and final factor is adaptability to the results of the learning process. MSFs need to be designed so that they are able to adapt to implement the lessons learned. This may include changing its process or the kind of outcomes that it pursues in response to those lessons, and if necessary, to be open to prioritize the needs of its participants with weaker positions or support them in challenging the institutions that reinforce inequality (Yami et al. 2021). In the research project's case studies, these approaches allowed for the creation of trust between participants and, in some cases, created a sense of local ownership about the initiative over time (Tamara et al. 2021; see also Butler and Schultz 2019] on similar findings from collaborative efforts in the United States). Adaptability also recognizes the changing nature of the challenges MSFs address, the shifting relationships between its participants and even their shifting conservation and development priorities through time (Klenk et al. 2013). Thus, MSFs require enough time to negotiate challenges as they arise, to learn from practice, and to develop the capacities of local actors so that the responsibilities regarding the MSF can be passed on to them (Stringer et al. 2006). This sort of adaptability may lead to forums that are more resilient in times of crises (e.g., funding cuts) or changes in policy or political leadership that are outside of their control (see McDougall et al. 2013).

All four factors are related to ACM. ACM is a framework that brings together the stakeholders of forested areas in order to collaborate in planning the implementation of activities, collectively monitor those activities, and learn from the impact of their actions to adapt future work to the lessons that arose

from the monitoring process (CIFOR 2008; Colfer 2005). Although different as ACM is a long-term facilitated process that is not necessarily multi-stakeholder, it still shares some of the most optimistic traits associated with MSFs. They are both spurred by democratic ideals, justice and equity concerns, and place importance on the process as a source of empowerment for underrepresented peoples. ACM, put into practice in an MSF, would consciously reinforce its process in terms of communication, collaboration, negotiation, and collective learning on the results of their actions – all related to the four factors described earlier. An ACM-oriented forum would place great importance on social learning, bringing stakeholders together to share their different perspectives, knowledge, and capacities (McDougall et al. 2008). The point is for participants to critically reflect on their shared challenges and collaboratively design possible solutions. Importantly, ACM – as some of the more successful case studies reviewed for the previously mentioned Realist Synthesis Review show (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2020a) – invites participants to be aware of the interconnectivity of their initiative with other scales to make things work.

Designing for engagement builds on some important aspects of ACM. Following the research phase and the conversations held with MSF organizers and participants during research dissemination workshops, the research team started to think about the best way to implement the attention to learning and adaptability to enable more equitable forums, while building engagement and commitment. The following section discusses the development and method behind the reflexive and adaptive learning tool as a way to build the principles of both *designing for engagement* and ACM into the work of MSFs.

How are we doing? A tool to reflect on the process, progress, and priorities of multi-stakeholder forums

Findings from both field and desk research were clear in terms of the importance of purposefully designing MSFs if they are to have more equitable processes and outcomes than those that have resulted from mainstream participation processes. However, research findings were not proof of the failure of MSFs. Rather, respondents saw them as flawed yet with a potentially positive role to play in improving decision making and coordination in their landscapes given the lack of multi-stakeholder participatory and coordination platforms. After discussing findings with research participants across field sites, the team noticed that only two forums – both protected area co-management committees in Peru – had been periodically applying a tool to monitor their work. However, participants in both groups noted – which the research team corroborated by examining the available handbooks and guides – that the tool was applied as a top-down exercise to evaluate their existence as an MSF (as both are a legal requirement) rather than how well they worked internally.

An important finding from research with the management committees for the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve and for the Alto Mayo Protected Forest was that different stakeholders had different ideas of what the objectives of

their MSF were, who should be participating in it and who should not. This is unsurprising given the different agendas and priorities that participants brought with them to the forum. However, research showed that these different perspectives – and others, including how to fund their activities and how to communicate their work to other stakeholders who did not participate in the MSF – had not been discussed as a group. For example, the lack of effective communication of both forums' work was considered by local peoples as a lack of transparency on the side of its organizers.

Furthermore, both MSFs faced problems in terms of funding their activities, including their actual meetings as many participants did not have funds to travel to the urban areas where meetings were held or to stay there overnight.

Finally, both MSFs faced equity challenges as their participants did not reflect the diversity of actors in the landscapes where they were organized and were challenged by their lack of inclusion of non-Indigenous local populations. For example, although the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve has been successful in including Indigenous actors as co-management partners, the reserve's multi-stakeholder management committee has been unable to establish a dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous local stakeholders, as migrant gold miners have been excluded from participating in it. This has prevented non-Indigenous actors from participating in the reserve's management and having conversations that could help resolve conflicts over land and resource use by finding a middle ground between conservation and extractive activities (Palacios Llaque and Sarmiento Barletti 2021).

In a similar vein, the management committee for the Alto Mayo Protected Forest excluded local communities that refused to leave their farms within the Protected Forest, as they had been working that land before the area was ringfenced as a protected area. MSF organizers discussed those communities' issues as something to be resolved by the police rather than to be resolved through the MSF (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020).

Given these challenges to MSFs and their participants' desire to explore ways to address them, CIFOR researchers began a collaboration with participants in those two MSFs, and also included a third forum in Indonesia – East Kalimantan's Provincial Council on Climate Change (*Dewan Daerah Perubahan Iklim*, DDPI) – that showed interest in co-developing a tool to monitor their process and outcomes. From the start, the team decided that the tool would be participatory in two ways – it would be developed with forum participants, representing a wide range of actors, and it would be designed to be implemented by MSF participants themselves rather than external evaluators, as some participants were used to. In facilitating the collaborative development of a participatory monitoring tool, the research team sought to engage with the current interest in this approach to monitoring.

Participatory monitoring tends to be understood as a mechanism to inform how "local knowledge" can support "technical knowledge," or how the former can make the latter more "transparent" (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2019b). Researchers note the need to include local populations in monitoring the

initiatives that are implemented in their territories and that affect their liveli-hoods and wellbeing (Evans and Guariguata 2016). As the specialized litera-ture shows, participatory monitoring can lead to more effective processes in forest-based landscapes, encouraging social learning, and empowering local stakeholders (see Guijt [2007] on ACM monitoring; see also Danielsen et al. 2010; Fernandez-Gimenez et al. 2008; Funder et al. 2013; Pinto et al. 2014). When designed and implemented in an equitable manner, this sort of monitoring can lead to information that allows for social learning and adaptive management (Evans et al. 2014; Reed et al. 2016). Participatory monitor-ing tools tend to be developed for implementation by or with local peo-ples to (usually) collect and analyse data. However, it is uncommon that the actual indicators and implementation methods are developed with those same local peoples. The development of local indicators as part of ACM research, though initially routine, is now an exception (e.g., McDougall et al. 2008; Mutimukuru-Maravanyika and Matose 2013; Nyirenda and Kozayani 2007; or Chapter 6), as is more recent work examining the role of gender in the governance of Indigenous and local communities (CIFOR and ONAMIAP 2020; Evans et al. 2019).

The collaboration with the organizers and participants of those MSFs led to the development of four research-based indicators, derived from the team's own analysis (see Table 7.2), and ten "local" indicators derived from a series of workshops carried out with all three MSFs between 2019 and 2020 (see Table 7.3). In Peru, a separate workshop was held with groups of Indigenous women living close to and inside the buffer zone of the Alto Mayo Protected Forest, and another workshop with the participatory governance team in Peru's Protected Areas Service (SERNANP) to develop indicators that were specific to management committees for protected areas. The development of those indicators led to a separate tool that is specific to those committees (see CIFOR and SERNANP [2020] for the tool and its development).

Table 7.2 Research-based indicators

We are all aware of what our MSF's objective(s) is/are.
Our MSF includes everyone who should be present.
We are learning what we need to know in order to participate effectively.
We have a positive impact beyond our MSF.

The team proposed the four research-based indicators to MSF collabo-rators as they covered key elements about MSFs that had arisen from the research. The rest were developed through exercises where groups of par-ticipants reflected on the characteristics they would want their forum to have "in an ideal world" where they had enough funding and commitment from key stakeholders to be able to work towards their goals. Those group dis-cussions were then synthesized into indicators, designed as statements for participants to agree or disagree with based on their own perceptions of the MSF's process and outcome(s).
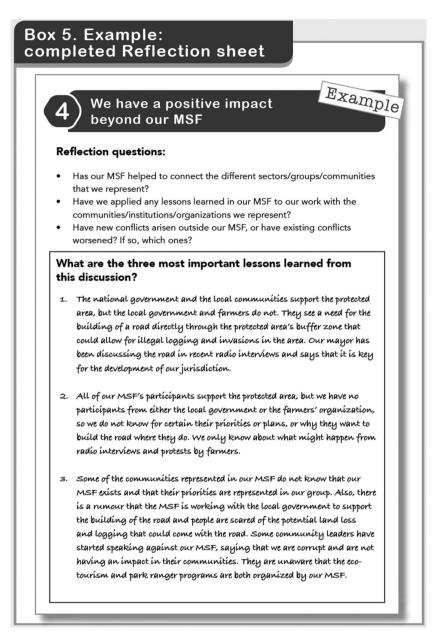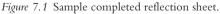
Table 7.3 "Local" indicators

We are all treated as equals in our MSF.

We have sought sources of funding for our MSF to achieve its objective(s).

We have implemented strategies for the women of Indigenous and local communities
  and their organizations to participate effectively and equally in our MSF.

We have identified the role of local populations (e.g., Indigenous, customary, and peasant
  communities) and their grassroots organizations in achieving our MSF's objective(s).

We have effectively communicated our work to the communities, organizations, and
  institutions that do not participate in our MSF.

We are all clear on our own and everyone else's role in our MSF.

We have engaged with other institutions/organizations/entities and/or other
  participatory spaces that impact our MSF's objective(s).

We have engaged with the interests of actors whose objectives differ from those of our
  MSF.

We have identified what capacities we need to develop to be able to participate
  effectively in our MSF and have made an effort to develop them.

We have supported research studies (e.g., carried out by different organizations or by our
  members) to reinforce our MSF's objective(s).

After deciding on a first draft of statements, the research team suggested the development of a set of reflection questions for each statement. This would allow for deeper conversations about each statement, reflection on their answers, and on why some people agreed and others disagreed with each statement. The purpose of this reflection would be to learn from the past, consider progress and obstacles, and collectively plan how to achieve the forum's goals in the future. Following reflection, participants note down the three main lessons arrived at from the discussion questions. This discussion then leads to the recognition of the three main challenges to improving the indicator by the next monitoring period and how they would address those challenges (see Figure 7.1 for an example of a completed reflection sheet). These discussions would then feed into the MSF's annual work plan.

Participants in the tool development process agreed that the tool would use ten statements for its implementation – the four research-based indicators and six other indicators selected from the bank of ten statements. This method was selected as it would allow MSF participants to change the elective statements in different implementations of the tool if their priorities or the context where they worked should change throughout time. The research team went through a few drafts of the full-text tool with all the participating groups until they were all happy to run the version of a tool with their own MSFs. The tool was also peer-reviewed by a group of researchers, practitioners, government actors, and Indigenous and local community organizations.

How are we doing? facilitates participatory monitoring that does more than inform how "local knowledge" can support "technical knowledge," or how the former can make the latter more "transparent." These ideas, common in

Box 5. Example: completed Reflection sheet

4   **We have a positive impact beyond our MSF**

Example

Reflection questions:

- Has our MSF helped to connect the different sectors/groups/communities that we represent?
- Have we applied any lessons learned in our MSF to our work with the communities/institutions/organizations we represent?
- Have new conflicts arisen outside our MSF, or have existing conflicts worsened? If so, which ones?

What are the three most important lessons learned from this discussion?

1. The national government and the local communities support the protected area, but the local government and farmers do not. They see a need for the building of a road directly through the protected area's buffer zone that could allow for illegal logging and invasions in the area. Our mayor has been discussing the road in recent radio interviews and says that it is key for the development of our jurisdiction.

2. All of our MSF's participants support the protected area, but we have no participants from either the local government or the farmers' organization, so we do not know for certain their priorities or plans, or why they want to build the road where they do. We only know about what might happen from radio interviews and protests by farmers.

3. Some of the communities represented in our MSF do not know that our MSF exists and that their priorities are represented in our group. Also, there is a rumour that the MSF is working with the local government to support the building of the road and people are scared of the potential land loss and logging that could come with the road. Some community leaders have started speaking against our MSF, saying that we are corrupt and are not having an impact in their communities. They are unaware that the eco-tourism and park ranger programs are both organized by our MSF.

Figure 7.1 Sample completed reflection sheet.

Box 5. Example: completed Reflection sheet cont...

4 We have a positive impact beyond our MSF

Example

What are the three main challenges to improve or maintain this statement's score for the following period? How will we address them?

We had an average score of 2.5 for this statement. Our three main challenges are:

1. There is a conflict between our role in support of our protected area and the local government's plans to build a road for farmers to take their products to sell in our regional capital.
2. There are land conflicts between local communities and farmers in the buffer zone of our protected area.
3. Some of the communities that we represent do not know that our MSF exists or that it represents them

To address these challenges, we will:

1. Start a radio campaign about the threat of the road to the protected area and the services it brings to local populations.
2. Bring in representatives of local farmers to learn about our MSF and for us to learn about their needs and find middle ground.
3. Encourage participants to report to their communities after each of our meetings and actively advertise our activities on our Facebook page and look into designing and printing flyers explaining our work.
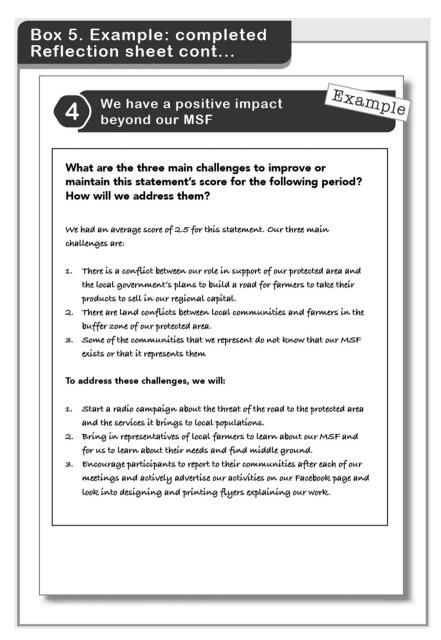
Figure 7.1 Continued.

participatory monitoring tools, tend to be linked to a wider point about monitoring processes – that they have to be "unbiased." De Sy et al.'s (2016) case for independent monitoring approaches calls for "unbiased data, tools and methods (…) that stakeholders involved in land-use sector mitigation activities can rely on for their own goals."

The research team approached this idea with caution. The emphasis on technical approaches and their replicability as a perceived strength may over-simplify what happens on the ground, especially in terms of equity that is not a simple experience to measure, yet is central to the current appeal of MSFs. *How are we doing?* is based on local peoples' perceptions as the statements were designed based on their ideas of what is important to monitor and reflect upon, and the monitoring process itself is based on bringing their personal perspectives together. Thus, it is biased as, in this case, these perspectives sit on different interests and priorities regarding land and resource use and wider experiences of unequal interactions between stakeholders, and between stakeholders and actors with decision-making power.

Closing remarks

Research results are clear in that MSFs need strategies to address inequality in their planning, design, implementation, and monitoring, or else they may reproduce and further entrench inequalities under the appearance of effective participation and inclusive decision making. MSFs are evidence that portraying inequalities as obstacles that can be overcome by empowering disempowered people through "participation" (understood as a seat at the table) is insufficient to enact change. This chapter has provided evidence to show how taking time to recognize the interconnections between individuals, groups, and institutions is important for designing initiatives that address inequities and the challenges that emerge as the initiatives progress.

How are we doing? is a reflexive and adaptive learning tool based on principles that resonate with the approach proposed by both ACM and the proposal of *designing for engagement*. ACM proponents have noted that "addressing climate change will require moving forward with more process-oriented approaches that look to the future, acknowledge local capabilities and opportunities, and build analytical and adaptive capacities at several levels" (CIFOR 2008). As *How are we doing?* is a participatory tool seeking to support such processes at the jurisdictional level, it may be a potential pathway to support upscaling ACM from the local to the subnational level; this has been noted as a challenge by ACM proponents (Colfer 2011). The potential for this pathway is reinforced by the fact that the MSFs that took part in tool development were among the few multi-actor coordination spaces in their landscapes, and included participants representing governmental and non-governmental organizations from the local, subnational, and national levels. In fact, the lessons learned from research on MSFs summarized in this chapter and that informed *How are we doing?* are in close conversation with other ACM proponents. These improvements to MSFs are a potentially rich field in which to continue to develop ACM.

It is premature to assess the results that *How are we doing?* will have on MSFs, but early results and the sorts of conversations that MSF participants had during the first set of implementations of the tool are promising. Most conversations were set around the need to create strategies for the more effective participation of women in their forums, collaboratively developing ways to adapt their work based on what they had learned from their reflections. The research team will continue to implement the tool, developing different versions of the same reflexive and adaptive method that seeks to bring the key objectives of ACM into MSFs (CIFOR and SERNANP 2020) and territorial governance (CIFOR and ONAMIAP 2020), and publishing their results as they are available.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   The Realist Synthesis Review method allows for the systematic and comparative analysis of how contexts affect an initiative's outcome, revealing "what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and why" (Pawson 2013). The method allowed the reviewing team to consider how contextual factors affected the transition from theory (design) to practice (implementation) in each MSF case study (see Sarmiento Barletti et al. [2019] for the research protocol).
2   https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg17.

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