

# Endogenous development as a social learning process

Stephan Rist

The author perceives endogenous development as a social learning process, which is constructed by all actors involved. To enhance social learning, a methodology called Autodidactic Learning for Sustainability is used, in which the perception of both local actors and external actors are highlighted. Reflecting on differences, conflicts and common interests leads to highly motivated debate and shared reflection, which is almost identical with social learning, and flattens the usual hierarchy between local and external actors. The article shows that the energies generated through collective learning can trigger important technical, social and political changes, which take into account the multiple dimensions of local reality.

Compas promotes endogenous development as an alternative path of development. This involves building on local resources, enhancing in situ development, maximising local control of the development process, as well as recognising the needs and the values of local people. Although endogenous development is distinctly different from other concepts of development it shares a common feature with other concepts: endogenous development tells us *what* to do, without telling us *how* to achieve it in concrete contexts, such as an African or Indian village, an Andean or Maya community, or a European town. Taking into account the diversity of conditions in which Compas operates, it is clear that there is no blueprint or recipe for achieving endogenous development.

Endogenous development does not, however, leave completely open the question of how to attain the ideals associated with it. Rather, this concept can be characterised as a social learning process. Social learning is understood as a 'society-wide process that cannot be restricted to an elite of

experts, scientists or politicians' (Woodhill and Röling, 2000). At a methodological level, this means that research and action are integrated into one framework. It also means recognising the need to establish a dialogue between different actors, and the forms of knowledge they hold as part of the learning process.

## Collectively constructed knowledge

The first and most important consequence of perceiving endogenous development as a social learning process, is that it is clear that all actors involved must collectively construct it. All actors are as much students as they are teachers. Another consequence is the close interrelationship between the development of cognitive, social and emotional competencies, and the relation of these to values and ethics (see Figure1). Enhancing collective learning processes thus requires specific approaches and instruments, which can facilitate the development of all four dimensions involved (Rist et al., 2003).

In the domain of the cognitive

dimension, a social learning approach stresses the importance of the dynamics between different forms of knowledge. In addition to *explicit* knowledge there is also *tacit* knowledge, which represents the more or less dormant knowledge related to patterns of interpretation. Tacit knowledge allows meaning to be given to natural or social phenomena. As revealed in a comprehensive analysis of the life histories (Rist, 2002) and the social and spiritual kinship of Aymara peasants in Bolivia (Delgado, 2002; Rist, 2002), the dynamics of different forms of knowledge play a fundamental role in the revitalisation of local knowledge. Increasing consciousness of latent or intuitively captured patterns of interpretation - underlying indigenous knowledge - is therefore a key feature in endogenous development.

## New types of interaction

Understanding endogenous development as a process of collective learning among professionals, researchers and local people is a challenge to conventional forms of training. When no distinction is made between instructor or trainees, knowledge must be generated through exchange of experience and joint reflection between people of different social, cultural and cognitive backgrounds. Given the significant differences between the knowledge and the skills of scientists, extension workers and farmers, new types of interaction need to be created. The idea of 'knowledge transfer' must be transformed into 'intercultural communication'.

This also implies recognising that scientists and indigenous people do not necessarily relate in the same way to the different dimensions of social learning. Local people usually appreciate the increase in social and emotional competences, where intuition, empathy, respect and openness are equally



Figure 1 The main dimensions of social learning processes

### Box 1 Structure of Autodidactic Learning for Sustainability training module

- Part I: developing a basic understanding of 'how sustainable resource use is rooted in a local setting'. Exercises and texts are used to reconstruct, in a systemic perspective, what local and external participants perceive as 'natural resources', 'development', 'actors', 'the socio-political context', and the ways in which these factors are interrelated.
- Part II: focuses on the question of 'how to identify non-sustainable use of natural resources'. Joint reflection takes place on the interconnected ecological and socio-cultural problems, and the impacts of non-sustainable resource use at the local level.
- Part III: addresses key aspects of 'strategies that aim to promote sustainable development'. The strategies identified are condensed and formulated into community-based development initiatives. After they have been validated in community assemblies, they are often used in communicating with external supporting institutions.

important as or even more important than reflection. External actors tend to focus more on the cognitive dimension. In order to facilitate an equitable dialogue, the one-sidedness of the different forms of knowledge involved must be overcome.

Enhancing social learning processes therefore requires creating conditions that can meet the different needs of the actors involved. For this it is important to create platforms that allow local people to meet with development workers, researchers and university staff. These platforms can facilitate collective learning processes that, in addition to the cognitive level, integrate the development of social and emotional competence.

### Autodidactic Learning for Sustainability

In order to enhance social learning processes more systematically, the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern in Switzerland developed, together with its southern partners, an instrument called 'Autodidactic Learning for Sustainability' (ALS). It starts by understanding sustainable resource management as a normative concept. The ALS

concept differs slightly from endogenous development in relation to the starting point, but otherwise the learning processes are similar (CDE, 1998). It focuses in a similar way on the use of local sustainable resources, how to identify the non-sustainable use of resources, and strategies that aim to promote sustainable development (see Box 1).

The training module of autodidactic learning for sustainability includes a methodology for the creation of platforms that foster social learning processes. It is based on bringing together local and external actors in mixed learning groups in a 'real world' learning environment. This allows horizontal interaction between the group members. Moreover, the interaction must be intense and last long enough to permit the growth of social and emotional competences, as an integrative part of the processes of exchange of knowledge and joint reflection.

This training module consists of a two to three week-long workshop. The members of the mixed learning group reflect the diversity of local and external actors, including different generations, gender, areas of specialisation, religions, professions and responsibili-

ties. The workshop takes place in a rural community and consists of a sequence of interrelated exercises and working sessions, which take into account both local and external conditions. The exercises are mainly based on participatory rural appraisal methods, such as transects, participatory mapping, Venn diagrams, role-playing, and story telling. These are elaborated in such a way that the participants collectively reconstruct and interpret life in a systemic perspective.

### Empowering local visions

The moderators of the workshop are responsible for organising the exercises, which form the main part of the workshop, as well as preventing a retreat into traditional hierarchical patterns of interaction. Only in this way is it possible to examine the different visions of the actors about natural resources, nature, society and culture, and the ways these interact.

The fundamental contrast between this methodology and the conventional participatory rural appraisal procedures is, that in this case the focus is not only on the perceptions of local actors, but on those of the external actors as well. The results, systematised according to the different groups of participants, are fed back in the plenary sessions. There the whole group can reflect on the differences, conflicts or common interests. This process leads to intense interaction and shared reflection, which is practically identical with social learning (see example in Box 2, next page).

This process is a powerful instrument for flattening the often hierarchical relationships between local and external actors, and the forms of knowledge they represent. Opening the external perceptions to the collective learning process often implies clear 'de-powerment' of outside actors. At the same time, it represents a visible



Farmers and technicians (centre with white cap) collaborated in building a model of the territory to support the presentation of groupwork. This is an excellent way of creating common understanding



Drawing participatory maps not only represents the view of local actors, but also helps to train them in abstraction from everyday practices. This allows local actors to feed them into the dialogue with outsiders.



Preparing extension materials jointly is a good way of enhancing dialogues between local (right) and outside (left) actors.



## Box 2 Experiences of an ALS workshop in Bolivia

As a first exercise during a workshop in Bolivia, moderated by Agruco and CDE, participants made a transect walk through the community and registered the natural resources they observed and the social actors related to these. Before going out into the community, mixed groups of farmers and professionals had to determine how they would register the results. While the external actors suggested registering them separately, the farmers argued that this was simply 'useless'. For them resources form an organic unity, which is also embraced by the earth's mother (Pachamama). In the presentation of the results of the transects, participants agreed that local people have their own understanding of natural resources. Besides soil, plants, animals, water and so forth, the farmers also registered the clouds, rain, sun, wind, sacred water sources, mountains and caves as important 'natural resources'. In the plenary session, external participants indicated openly that they were surprised by the degree of holism underlying local visions. A fascinating dialogue emerged, in which external actors explained to themselves and to the farmers the limitations of their way of looking at nature and society. The participants debated this experience and came to the following conclusion: *"Interaction between external and local actors often fails because professionals make their own vision prevail and local actors normally do not dare to bring their own views into the discussion."*

empowerment of local actors, who are normally not allowed to learn about external values and knowledge. This creates room for a more horizontal form of interaction, a fundamental requirement for the social learning process.

### Learning or diagnosing?

During the workshop an abundance of material, including maps, drawings and sketches, is generated. Because of the systemic structure of the programme, this material can be easily condensed into a community diagnosis. But, as an external participant in the workshop in Bolivia put it, when she was asked about the differences compared with conventional participatory community diagnosis: *"Participatory rural assessment is normally pre-structured or*

*semi-structured. The community fills in the tables and maps and makes sketches. Of course, this also facilitates participation, but here we apply another method that is much more participatory. This is a great achievement, because we deepen our understanding of the community, based on a joint analysis. If you come to the point where farmers expose you to their own understanding of development it really de-structures you... Even if you do a conventional rural appraisal, you normally tend to validate your own concepts of development."*

Another external participant added: *"At the beginning it was difficult, but towards the end we achieved conscious and interactive participation among peasants and professionals. The farmers felt that we were part of them, that they were better able to identify with us and we with them, and we began to be part of the community."*

The farmers pointed out the importance of the chance for joint reflection and analysis: *"The workshop helps to create more awareness and makes it possible to think about the future. Some things I didn't understand well in the past are clear to me, now that we have learned together. I could expand my knowledge in this way. This kind of workshop makes us reflect on many things and this will be very useful for the community as well."* Another farmer stated: *"... it was hard to come to a common understanding, but it was good to make an effort to engage in joint reflection and share ideas with them (the professionals)." Other farmers' voices confirmed this: "Living and working together is very useful because it makes us reflect together about the knowledge and experience on both sides. Local knowledge in this area must be enhanced for the future. This means revitalising the forgotten cul-*

*ture of our ancestors. Then we can achieve the free expression of our culture in our country and also face foreign countries."*

### From reflection to action

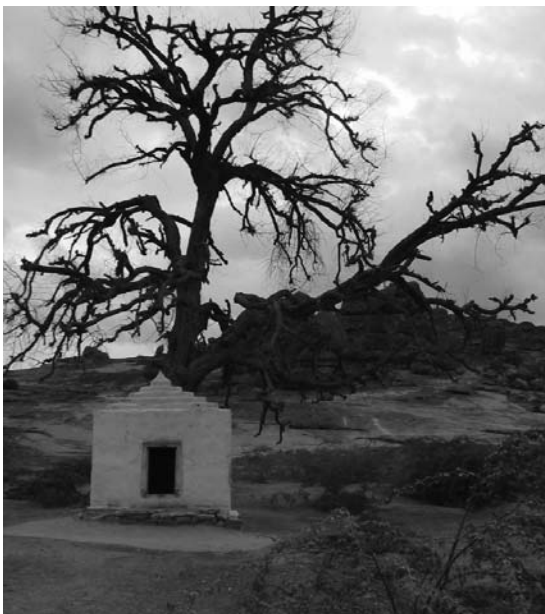
Experience has shown that, once a mutual learning dynamic has been established among the participants, which usually occurs after some six to eight days, discussions of the current situation automatically lead to plans for concrete action to improve it. Thus the subsequent phase in the learning process implies a move towards the definition of specific actions, that will make better use of existing resources both at local level and at the level of external actors. By the end of the workshop participants normally have elaborated between three or four draft development initiatives, which are submitted to community members in a final presentation.

Later, community meetings deliberate on the initiatives formulated during the workshop, leading to approval, modification or rejection (see Box 3). As the example from India shows, the social energies generated through collective learning can trigger important technical, social and political changes.

### Some final remarks

This methodology is of course more time consuming than conventional ways of doing participatory appraisals, but has the great advantage of extending participation, and showing up the 'black box' found in many participatory development projects, consisting of differences between farmers' and outsiders' interpretation and analysis. Moreover, it stimulates a more comprehensive form of participation, which opens up horizons for intercultural dialogue practised throughout the process of development. The whole process, ranging from definition of problems and potentials to analysis of underlying factors and forces, and the implementation and evaluation of activities, becomes a social learning process.

To gain greater insight into the changes triggered by this kind of social learning, Sampak from India, the University of Cochabamba in Bolivia (Agruco), a network of ALS moderators in Mali (RM-FAD), and CDE are currently engaged in a research partnership on 'Social Learning for Sustainability' (SOLES). This international research group helps to evaluate the impact that can be achieved when development is understood and supported as part of a collective learning process. Placing more emphasis on the cultural and spiritual dimensions of development will



*The recognition of sacred places in the landscape is an important element for understanding 'living geography' connecting social, natural and spiritual spheres of life.*



Village meeting in Bikanalli in India where local actors and NGO representatives explain to a representative of the state government their own project developed during an ALS workshop.

### Box 3 Water management and the campaign against corruption in Bikanhalli

The Indian NGO Sampak organised an ALS workshop in the village of Bikanhalli, in the semi-arid district of northern Karnataka. It soon became clear that people were suffering a severe livelihood crisis, which had been worsened by three years of heavy drought. The problem of water scarcity is central in this part of India. Groundwater is exploited at the individual level by people digging more and more bore-wells. As a consequence the water table has sunk dramatically. Additionally, high-input agriculture, combined with salt water has caused severe degradation of the soil. People were very aware of the deterioration of their natural and social resources. During the workshop, joint reflection revealed that the families of the village do not think of water as a community asset, nor do they have community meetings to discuss the state of natural resources, or plan to restore them collectively.

By the end of the three-week workshop, local participants wished to maintain the platform that had emerged, because they wanted to overcome their individualistic approach to resource management. Motivated by regular follow-up meetings supported by Sampak, local participants of the workshop formed a farmers' *sangha*, or group, committed to sustainable land and water management. The sangha made an initial proposal for investment in their land, based on the insights developed during the workshop, and presented it to the Ministry of Rural Development. Although the government approved only a small portion of the requested funding, the release of these funds was delayed until payments or bribes to officials had been made. In a long meeting, the people of the sangha and other village members decided to transform their small rural development proposal into a pilot project, which would also address the problem of corruption. Together with Sampak they are now engaged in social mobilisation, claiming their right to the entire amount approved by the government. One participant explained that he had learned in the workshop "that having water without the civil right to get integral public funding - without bribes - is like having a pump without water".

constitute an important broadening of the current concept.

We hope to learn more about this through CDE's participation in the Compas network. Meanwhile, Compas can learn from the Autodidactic Learning for Sustainability methodology.

Dr Stephan Rist  
Centre for Development and  
Environment (CDE)  
Steigerhubelstrasse 3  
3008 Bern / Switzerland  
E-mail:Stephan.Rist@cde.unibe.ch

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