Report

The biggest single opportunity we have is dialogue

Dialogue seminars as a methodology for transformative social learning and conflict resolution in international environment negotiations

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Content

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Maria Schultz, Thomas Hahn and Claudia Ituarte-Lima work at SwedBio/Stockholm Resilience Centre and Niclas Hällström at What Next Forum

Cover image:
Participants at Quito I in a Panel discussion, from left to right Yolanda Teran, International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity; Valerie Hickey, The World Bank; Chee Yoke Ling, Third World Network and Arild Vatn, Norwegian University of Life Sciences. Photo. Niclas Hällström

Abstract

In formal international negotiations on environment and development there is limited scope for transformative social learning, since the format for negotiations might prevent negotiators from truly listening to each other. Other platforms are needed and we propose 'Multi-Actor Dialogue Seminars´ as a methodology to contribute to transformative social learning and conflict resolution. We use the Quito Dialogues under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as a case study. The starting point was the breakdown in the negotiations at the formal CBD negotiations in 2010 regarding 'innovative financial mechanisms'. Two Quito Dialogues were organised to provide an informal setting for open exchange of socio-economic realities and worldviews

"The most important effect of the seminar was that it created trust, after the seminar it was much easier with dialogue between negotiators with different views"

– Participant from Latin America

among diverse actors, identifying policy options that are tailored to different cultural-political and value systems. Evaluations suggest that these Dialogue Seminars contributed to bringing actors out of their deadlock, and thereby paved the way for reaching more concrete results in the formal CBD negotiations.

Keywords: biodiversity financing mechanisms, bridging organisations, ecosystem services, international environmental governance, adaptive governance, trust-building, payments for ecosystem services, financialisation, biodiversity offsets, safeguards

1. Introduction

A necessity in times of global change is awareness of uncertainty and surprise, and the will to experiment, innovate and learn within and between different actor groups, knowledge systems and cultures to respond to these changes. Costanza (2010) suggests that one of the root causes of our inability to make progress towards sustainability seems to be that we live in a society where groups with different backgrounds – whether in government, civil society, academic disciplines, northern industrial countries or low income countries – tend to cast complex problems as polar opposites. This is an obstacle in international environmental negotiations, and an observed problem also in other international negotiations like peace and conflict negotiations, that share the need to increase cooperation, coherence, and efficiency (Galluccio, 2015). There is a need to include understanding of the negotiators' culture, their religion, their native language, and the epistemologies (way of knowing) and cognitive heuristics (cognitive rules) they use (Dowd, 2015). To help build a shared vision of where our societies want to go and initiate broad agreements about the framing of these future pathways, we need better dialogue and learning across cultures, interests, and various actor groups (Rockström & Schultz, 2011). Multi-stakeholder dialogues represent key innovations in this context (Bäckstrand, 2006).

> **"It eased the tension that complicated the negotiations at COP 10 in Nagoya."**
> *– Participant from Europe*

Social learning – how people together learn and understand behaviours, values, and attitudes by listening to, observing and interacting with one another (ref, this is almost a definition of SL) – is key for such transformations. Habermas (1979) regards social change as a process of social learning, and Webler et al. (1995) see social change as a process of coordinated learning with cognitive and normative dimensions. According to Capra (2007) social learning has been described as a shift away from expert-based teaching, and toward transformative learning. This challenges all actors to consider alternative perspectives and their use of information, "making learning a dynamic and potentially transformative process" (Keen et al., 2005, p. 4). Cundill (2010) concludes that social learning theory sheds light on the ways in which the perceptions, values, and beliefs that

underpin behaviour and assumptions shift through collaborative processes, and therefore the ways in which innovation occurs.

Similarly, dialogue may improve relationships "in ways that create new grounds for mutual respect and collaboration" (Saunders, 2009, p.379). Sustained over time and rigorously practiced, dialogues may enable re-evaluation and transformation of conflictual relationships (Saunders, 2009). Putnam (2004) has described transformation as moments in the conflict process which redefine the nature of the conflict or the relationship among the parties.

The paradigms of social learning and dialogues can be contrasted to orthodox economic frameworks which seek optimisation based on fixed preferences. However, some economists argue that valuations and preferences emerge and are shaped in a decision context, they do not just exist a priori, ready to be collected (Bromley, 2004). Amartya Sen has even called for "value formation through public discussion" (Sen, 1995, p. 18) to solve complex issues. Despite recent advances in the social sciences, international negotiations are still organised according to the orthodox economic paradigm of seeking solutions without tapping into the potentials offered by the learning and dialogue frameworks. Emphasising dialogue in international negotiations would mean a shift from the 'realist paradigm' focusing on political power to the 'relational paradigm' (Saunders, 2009, p.377). Multi-actor dialogues aim to "enhance mutual learning by generating and evaluating divergent knowledge claims and viewpoints, i.e. problem structuring" (Cuppen et al., 2010, p. 579).

In this paper we describe and discuss a methodology, 'Multi-Actor Dialogue Seminars' (MADS), which we have developed to make international environmental negotiations more productive. We use the two 'Quito Dialogue Seminars' related to negotiations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as a case study. We co-organised these Quito Dialogues whose topic concerned the use of financing mechanisms in relation to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems. The aim of the paper is to stimulate discussions on how to inform and improve future international environmental negotiations. The research question concerns what methodological factors of multi-actor dialogue seminars (MADS) are decisive to impact transformative social learning and international conflict resolution.

2. Methodology

Primary and secondary sources were used in this paper in order to address the above-mentioned inquiry. Observations at CBD-COP10 (2010), CBD-COP11 (2012) and CBD-COP12 (2014) as well as at associated preparatory negotiation meetings laid the foundation for understanding the emerging conflicts, and evaluating the outcomes, of the two Quito Dialogue Seminars in 2012 and 2014. Written records were systematically kept throughout the dialogue process. At the end of the first and second dialogue seminar, Quito I and II, participants were asked to respond to an evaluation questionnaire with their views on the Dialogue. For Quito I, 24 participants out of 80 filled in the evaluation and for Quito II, 19 out of 90. In addition, a questionnaire was sent to all participants eleven months after Quito I and four months after the formal negotiation meeting CBD-COP11 had taken place in order to assess the impacts of Quito I. 23 persons responded. Interviews were made with nine Quito I participants in January 2013 for the planning of Quito II. More details and background on the Multi-Actor Dialogue Seminars methodology are provided in Farooqui & Schultz (2012) and Ogwal & Schultz (2014).

The analysis of the methodology used in the Quito Dialogues as well as of the corresponding results drew on the above evaluations as well as on both scientific and grey literature, including policy documents such as CBD-COP Decisions and Decisions from the pre-cop meetings. The inclusive process from planning to evaluation that charac-terised the Quito Dialogues was inspired by coaching techniques and positive psychology, including Appreciative Inquiry, which argues that a "strength-based collaborative inquiry is a pathway to cultivate positive emotional experiences, which can be used to build relational strength" (Sekerka & Fredrickson, 2010, p. 86).

We built on experiences of organising and facilitating international dialogues within the two organisations: (i) SwedBio, a Sida financed programme at Stockholm Resilience Centre, acting as a bridging organisation with long experience of facilitation of processes such as international dialogues; and (ii) What Next Forum with its roots in the Dag Hammarskjöld foundation and experience of conducting seminars and dialogues for decades. The methodology for the Quito Dialogues also built on lessons learned from processes such as Crucible II , that distinguished itself from other research initiatives in the field at its time by its informal, multi-stakeholder, non-consensus consensus modality (i.e. reaching consensus on where consensus as well as disagreements exist, without attempting to force consensus on the issues themselves), and a neutral forum, that promoted open discussion between participants with distinct views who would otherwise perhaps never sit at the same table. Over two years, the group around Crucible II debated differing approaches to the use and ownership of genes, trade in biological resources, preservation of biological diversity, indigenous peoples' rights, and international food security.

Smaller working groups took place throughout the seminars. Photo: Niclas Hällström

3. Multi-Actor Dialogue Seminars (MADS): the emergence of a methodology for transformative social learning and conflict resolution

The process of negotiation, where the search for mutual exchange is shaped by persuasion and political power, is almost contrary to the communication patterns of dialogue and conflict transformations (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001). A visualisation of some negotiations is the Chinese finger trap: When you push your fingers into each end of these straw tubes and then try to remove them, the tube diameter shrinks and grabs the fingers firmly. The more you struggle, the more your fingers are trapped. The only way to create enough room to get your fingers back out is to do something counterintuitive: push them deeper into the tube, which only then relaxes its grip (Hayes, 2007).

We have observed international negotiations where governments and other actors have acted as polar opposites, sometimes even refusing to talk to each other out of mistrust and anger instead of trying to understand what other parties are trying to express. Some of the conflicts are of course due to different political views, commitments and mandates that negotiators have from their respective governments. However, it is clear that some conflicts can be dissolved by providing an arena for dialogue where the experiences and perspectives of all actors, including marginalised groups, are acknowledged ("put on the table") in an atmosphere of active listening. This can bring more nuances to understanding the landscape of ideas, values, assumptions, interests and power relationships. Such dialogues may be separated in time from the formal negotiations; we will return to this.

> **"A dialogue can be defined by three qualities: (i) Equality and the absence of coercive influences; (ii) Listening with empathy; and (iii) Bringing assumptions into the open."**

The methodology of MADS is based on key characteristics of dialogue. Dialogue differs, as a way of talking and listening, from negotiation, mediation, debate and argument (Saunders, 2009).

Rather than perpetuating one's own positions under the debate or negotiation mode, the dialogue mode allows people to step back and explore what other parties are actually trying to bring forward (Tannen, 1998).

Yankelovich (2001) has defined dialogue by three qualities: (i) Equality and the absence of coercive influences; (ii) Listening with empathy; and (iii) Bringing assumptions into the open. For contentious issues and with asymmetric power structures among participants, it is important to listen openly without looking for flaws in the argument of others or to immediately present counter-arguments. In this sense, trust-building and acceptance of diverging experiences and perspectives can be important steps towards building a common understanding (Johannessen & Hahn, 2013). The purpose is to identify areas of agreement and disagreement, to build trust and understanding, and to identify policy solutions that are flexible enough to possibly be tailored to different cultural-political and belief systems (Hahn et al., 2015).

Some caution should be mentioned: social learning should not be assumed to result in sustainability outcomes (Reed et al., 2010). Dialogue with various stakeholders is believed to generate knowledge, empowerment and a common understanding for implementing policies (Siebenhüner, 2004). However, evaluations of stakeholder dialogues and other social learning interventions suggest that there are several factors, including institutions, leadership, facilitation, and historical experiences, that together with learning contribute to desired outcomes (Nykvist, 2014). This paper aims to shed light on these factors, in the context of international environmental dialogues.

4. The Quito Dialogue Seminars and negotiations under the Convention on Biological Diversity

In 2010, the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP10) to the CBD resulted in a Strategic Plan with the associated Aichi Biodiversity Targets. The mission of the Strategic Plan is to "take effective and urgent action to halt the loss of biodiversity in order to ensure that by 2020 ecosystems are resilient and continue to provide essential services, thereby securing the planet's variety of life, and contributing to human well-being, and poverty eradication".

The implementation requires resource mobilisation and in 2008 at the CBD-COP9, Parties adopted a strategy to enhance international and domestic funding for biodiversity. As part of this strategy, Parties were invited to come forward with new and innovative financing mechanisms, which according to the CBD decision could include environmental fiscal reforms (e.g. tax reforms and elimination of harmful subsidies); payments for ecosystem services (PES); biodiversity offsets; markets for green products; biodiversity in climate change funding; and biodiversity in international development finance.

However, in 2010, in the last hours of COP10, for the first time in the history of CBD, a whole decision was deleted. It was the decision on innovative financial mechanisms. Parties could not reach agreement because, some Parties felt that the institutional frameworks and regulations of markets and safeguards were not elaborated enough; while at the same time a lack of trust and an absence of dialogue between actors with different political views prevailed. It was a sharp conflict on issues such as monetary valuation of nature and whether instruments such as PES and biodiversity offsets can, or should, be used to protect biodiversity. The conflict also included the role of the private sector, and not least the role of the financial sector in resource mobilisation for biodiversity.

Triggered by these dramatic events, an agreement was made in these last hours of COP10 by SwedBio and Norad (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) to initiate a dialogue seminar as a possible way to move out of the deadlock well in time for the next COP (two years later).

In this section we identify key methodological factors that were decisive for the Quito MADS to have an impact on transformative social learning and international conflict resolution. We then assess the outcomes and impacts of these two MADS on the formal CBD negotiations.

4.1. Decisive methodological factors of Quito I and II MADS

The vision for the Quito I dialogue was to provide an informal setting for an open exchange of views among diverse actors, including negotiators (i.e. governmental officials representing their respective countries in CBD negotiations), to understand the different worldviews underlying this conflict and prepare for mutually beneficial decisions at the subsequent official CBD negotiations in India (COP11), October 2012. The Seminar was not intended to draft formal recommendations, but rather seek to clarify areas of convergence and divergence among participants, and by that enhance the understanding of various perspectives on financing for biodiversity, including the role and nature of innovative financial mechanisms. In selecting participants, instead of seeking likeminded people with similar views on strategies for financing biodiversity, the organisers had an explicit aim of bringing into dialogue both converging and diverging views and exploring the social collaborative learning that could emerge from these interactions in a well-planned, facilitated and respectful environment.

The first challenge in the dialogue process was to create legitimacy for this vision in the CBD community. Soon, the Secretariat of the CBD as well as the governments of Sweden, Norway, Ecuador, India and Japan showed interest and became the formal conveners of the Seminar. IUCN-Sur in Ecuador agreed to be the local host and the convener countries constituted a steering committee. A four-day long Dialogue Seminar was then organised in Quito, Ecuador, in March 2012 under the title 'Scaling up of Biodiversity Finance'). The issues and agenda for the Dialogues were structured into a "road map" (see Figure 1 – Demonstrating the similar map for Quito II). Quito I was financed by SwedBio (with funding from Sida), Norad and Japan. It included around 80 participants, ranging from governmental negotiators to members of civil society organisations, academia, indigenous peoples, business and intergovernmental institutions. The agenda included keynote presentations, case studies and round table discussions. Representatives from India and Sweden co-chaired the event. Quito I entailed one and a half years of detailed planning and preparation, which we conclude was a key factor for its success. Box 1 provides details on the methodology of this process, from planning to evaluation. While describing the Quito Seminars, most issues are generic for the MADS methodology, which has evolved based on SwedBio's learning from experiences during the last decade.
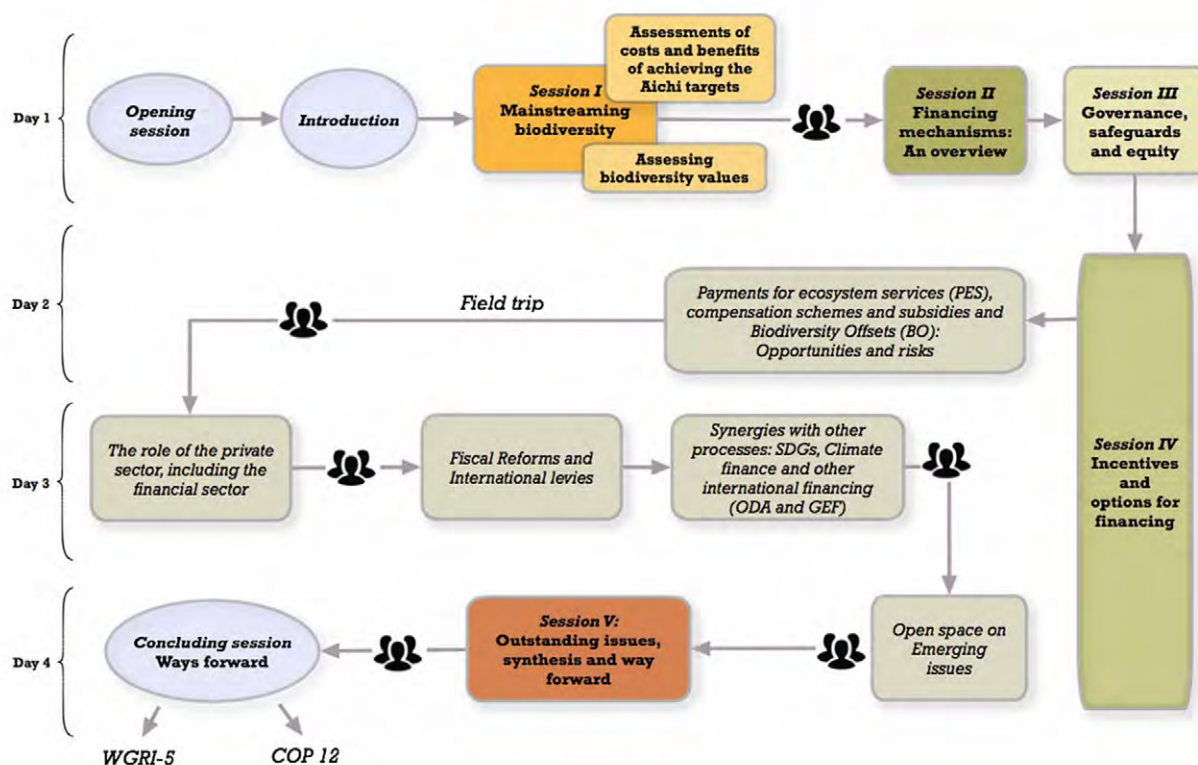
Fig 1. The final Quito II "road map" of content, and back casting clarifies and visualizes issues that need to be put on the table and questions needed to be addressed to achieve deeper social learning and understanding. Source: Ogwal & Schultz (2014)

At COP11 in India, October 2012, seven months after Quito I, the EU, supported by Bolivia, suggested a continuation of the Quito Dialogue, as part of the preparations for COP12 in the Republic of Korea in October 2014. SwedBio was asked to also organise this event. The convener governments were expanded and included Ecuador, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Norway, Sweden, Uganda, the European Commission and the Secretariat of the CBD. Local host was again IUCN-Sur. Quito II was organised similarly to Quito I, but focused more on country-specific experiences relating to e.g. National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) as well as on the newly proposed Sustainable Development Goals.

When preparing the Quito II dialogue the organisers were faced with pressures to include more participants and plenary speakers. The politics of excluding particular persons from bringing their messages and experiences to the table was hard and in the end there were too many presentations, which hampered the time for dialogue.

Both dialogues gave ample room to analyse the diversity of financing mechanisms with many tangible outcomes. Many participants felt the expression 'markets for biodiversity' should be avoided or clarified for each context since it is ambiguous what 'markets' imply, from local to global context, and to what extent economic instruments like taxes and payments involve markets. It was proposed to change the CBD term "innovative financial mechanisms" (IFM) to "biodiversity financing mechanisms" (BFM) since many of these mechanisms are not new and most countries already apply one or several. It was found that payments for ecosystem services (PES) and biodiversity offsets (ecological compensation) are very diverse in their actual designs and implementation. A concrete outcome of the seminar was a shared understanding that these particular mechanisms may look different depending on country-specific conditions and cultural-political orientations.

BOX 1 *The Dialogue Seminar methodology exemplified by the Quito Seminars: Top 20 methodological ingredients.*

1. Trust through an established bridging organisation, which is respected by a diversity of governments and civil society organisations.

2. Right timing. The first Quito Dialogue was deliberately scheduled 6 months before the next official CBD negotiation with a clear and realistic goal: to explore and contribute to the understanding of convergence and divergence around the critical issues that almost crashed the last negotiations. By carefully selecting the timing the Dialogue was to have maximum impact on the formal negotiations.

3. An inclusive planning process. The long and thorough planning process involved most key actors and generated overall legitimacy for conducting the dialogue seminar. The dialogue essentially started from day one of the planning process, and the extensive interaction with participants long before the actual meeting took place expanded the sense of ownership. This required considerable but necessary investments in terms of both financial resources and time.

4. A thorough selection of participants. It is key to actively seek the right mix of people from the appropriate institutions, while maintaining an open and democratic process. The CBD secretariat issued a notification to both parties and non-parties (such as civil society organisations) inviting them to provide nominations.

5. A "road map" (see Fig 1). This is a technique inspired by What Next Forum. A road map of content (sessions) and back casting visualises issues that need to be put on the table and questions needed to be addressed to achieve deeper social learning and understanding from the different worldviews and perceptions. It is an excellent tool for the planning phase of a seminar together with the co-conveners and key participants. It also allows the participants at the seminar to have a clear picture of the overall goals and intended trajectory/logic of the seminar, understand the context for particular issues or sessions, and provided a convenient overview agenda that the facilitator could repeatedly refer to.

6. An agenda that brings up both convergences and divergences, constructed around short presentations with different experiences and perspectives, including both "positive" and "negative" case studies, and mixed with discussions in plenary and in working groups. The dialogue mode was emphasised throughout the seminars, to give space for all participants to talk, discuss, listen and exchange views. For each session of the agenda a clear expected outcome statement was elaborated and presented in the program. In addition, a detailed annotated agenda was developed for the organisers with the anticipated flow of the seminar, working group questions, and further elaboration of expected outcomes.

7. Literature and background report. A research group was commissioned the task of producing a thorough 'background report' on the main topic of the seminar (Vatn et al., 2011). While not a necessity, a main background report can constitute an important basis for a successful seminar. In the case of Quito I, the report set the basis for both trust-building and clarity of terms and concepts. The fact that the report was generally seen as a fair and insightful account of the issues and provided a helpful framing of concepts and terms, provided participants trust in the overall seminar process, and gave tools for enhanced, more nuanced communication in the dialogue. Complementing this, participants were encouraged to share literature before, during and after the seminar, which was all presented on the dialogue webpage.

8. Teamwork and flexibility. The international steering group met regularly in teleconferences during the planning phase and daily during the seminar to handle upcoming situations, including suggestions for changes to the program. Our ambition was a goal oriented flexibility, combining continuous adaptation of the program within the frame offered by the road map. The bridging organisation in charge of the process must set aside enough time to bounce ideas internally as well as with other actors regularly during the planning phase. As the meeting draws near there is need for daily interaction. During the meeting there must be time set aside for deliberations every evening/night to evaluate the process and consider adjustments for the coming days.

9. Facilitator/s and role of co-chairs. The co-chairs were selected from countries, one woman and one man, one from the north and one from the south. At the seminar, they served as 'ombudsmen' to whom participants could raise concerns and suggestions for improvements. They had an important role talking with participants and pre-emptively buffering against potential conflicts. They also took responsibility for the content of the co-chairs report. The facilitator/s should have a strategic vision, be able to listen and ensure the meeting holds an appropriate pace – both so that all parts of the agenda are fairly treated, while also having good judgement and flexibility to divert or take the necessary time when critical issues arise. The facilitator/s could be the same person(s) as co-chairs in case they have these skills.

10. A local host, with good insights regarding the subject, but who also can handle practical details. A visit to the local hosts long before the seminar was important to create relations and friendship for a good work environment. To have good understanding of the place where the seminar is to be held is important. It can also be important to allocate budget resources for follow up workshops at national and regional levels even if the seminar has a global context – this provides opportunities for harnessing the momentum and positive outcomes of the seminar locally, and enhances credibility and ownership.

11. A beautiful, calm, peaceful, functional venue. The beauty and calmness of the venue contributed to open up the mind, kept participants relaxed and focused on the meeting, and allowed people to get to know each other and build trust. While held in Quito, the venue – Hotel Quito – was on the outskirts of the city, overlooking gorges and volcanoes and didn't suffer from other distractions pulling people away from the meeting. Sometimes it makes much sense to have these kinds of dia-

logue seminars in remote locations where there are no other conceivable distractions.

12. Working groups and round table buzzes. All participants were considered experts and extensive time was set aside for working groups. Working group questions were elaborated beforehand. Rapporteurs of working groups were also decided before the seminar, with an assignment to also contribute to the production of the seminar report, while the groups democratically selected a chair. "Buzz" discussions in small groups in roundtable seating was organised after sessions that did not entail working groups. The seating and organisation of participants in working groups was planned in detail with the aim to have good personal dynamics, a mix of national and geographical backgrounds as well as various political and organisational affiliations as much as possible (only limited by language barriers). Participants were seated at round tables (about 6-10 persons around each table) throughout the seminar.

13. Language and interpretation. For both the Quito Dialogues the plenary sessions were simultaneously translated into English or Spanish. The seminar reports were likewise published in both these languages.

14. Chatham House Rule and other house rules. The Chatham House Rule was applied to create an open atmosphere. When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received from other participants, but not reveal their identity or their affiliation. For the speakers it was agreed that their presentations would be public with summaries included in the report, but no attribution to what they expressed in discussions. The Chatham House rule allowed everyone to express their own opinions, without concern for their personal reputation or their official duties and affiliation, and therefore encouraged free discussions. Additional house rules for the dialogue included the following principles of respect: to listen actively, to follow flow and focus; to contribute to trust-building; to show respect for others, e.g. to attack issues, not persons; to ask for the turn to speak; to respect time, both as panellist and as participant; not to use telephone, sms or e-mail in the meeting room; and to give the facilitator permission to run the seminar according to her plan throughout each session.

15. Field trip. A field trip offered a possibility to experience practical examples of the policies and practices being discussed. Participants were asked to mix between groups as much as possible. The field trip had also the direct purpose of encouraging informal dialogue and new meetings of individuals as people spent several hours in buses and on hiking trails.

16. A cultural evening and participants wellbeing. Since the topic biological diversity is often related to cultural diversity a cultural evening with song and dance performed by the participants was organised. This contributed to a joyful and relaxed atmosphere. To make participants feel welcome, secure and comfortable, all the supporting staff were encouraged to actively ask how

people felt, if they enjoyed the food, slept well, and to see if anyone looked left out, or needed help with practical issues such as flight confirmation. Wellbeing also relates to an inclusive, participatory structure and a facilitator who clearly shows where the seminar is on the road map, informs about changes in the agenda, and clarify the expectations of the next session, etc.

17. An Open space session. This included topics that the organisers had not included in the formal program and pertinent issues that emerged during the seminar. Participants were encouraged to suggest topics on bulletin boards and the issues were later grouped. Working groups were formed around them in the Open space session.

18. Report. Rapporteurs, chosen beforehand, have to be familiar with the subject and report in unbiased ways so they do not express their own thoughts at the expense of others. Responsibility for each session and working group was allocated beforehand and this included collecting and editing summaries from each presenter. Chatham House Rules was adhered to in the summary of discussions and working groups. The reports were conducted as 'Co-chairs' reports', which meant there was no agreed recommendations from the meeting in order to avoid getting into a difficult negotiation mode. Still, the buy-in and participation in the reporting process from as many participants as possible is recommended. Summaries of presentations were generally cleared with those presenting, and at least the co-conveners should agree on the executive summary. The Co-chairs' report was available in both Spanish and English in both online and printed formats. Considerable attention was put on ensuring accessible and attractive layout and uniform graphic style with other seminar documentation.

19. Outreach planned from the beginning. The results from the Quito Dialogues were presented at relevant policy meetings in the form of the Co-chairs' report and as presentations in meetings and at side events. A dialogue website was set up before the meeting for dissemination and sharing of information including purpose, agenda, background literature, and during the seminar, power-points, presentation of individual participants etc. See more at www.dialogueseminars.net ; https://www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=DS-FB-02 . The website was much appreciated by participants, especially some of the developing country participants thought this was an excellent way to disseminate the dialogue to colleagues.

20. Evaluation and follow up. At the end of the seminars participants answered a short questionnaire. A more thorough questionnaire was sent to participants after the main policy events (e.g. after CBD COP11 to evaluate the outcomes of the first Quito Dialogue). This evaluation of Quito I was used for planning of Quito II, and for the reporting the results of the Dialogue Seminar to Sida as story line indicators. This type of reporting is well suited to communicate qualitative outcomes from these kinds of social learning processes, as results to the funder.

In Open Space session participants had the opportunity to propose themes they thought were missing in the seminar or wanted deepened discussions on.
Photo: Niclas Hällström

Valuation, good governance, rights-based frameworks and safeguards to ensure good social and ecological outcomes were discussed and clarified at Quito I; most of these issues were re-addressed and elaborated during Quito II. At Quito II it was recognised that there is a need for clearer terminology as controversies and disagreements around these issues relate both to language as well as real divergences rooted in different worldviews. As an example, the word compensation is in some contexts used for PES and in some contexts used for offsets; the differences depend both on language and institutional design (country context). Some pointed out that PES as well as compensation ('offset') schemes are publically determined and don't use the 'price mechanism', and are therefore not really market mechanisms. There were also different sets of concerns around voluntary compared to liability compensation. At Quito II it was acknowledged that valuation of biodiversity can be done using a number of methods, from dialogues with relevant actors who communicate and demonstrate qualitative values – to valuation in quantitative and monetary terms.

For a theoretical analysis of these issues see Hahn et al. (2015). For outcomes related to content of Quito I and Quito II, see Box 2 and the co-chairs' reports (Farooqui & Schultz, 2012; Ogwal & Schultz, 2014).

4.2 Assessing the Quito I and II outcomes and impacts

The outcomes of a social learning process can be evaluated on different scales, e.g. tangible outcomes (in this case at formal CBD negotiations), outcomes in related policy areas, and a general increased capacity for conflict resolution and adaptive governance (Plummer & Armitage, 2007; Plummer et al., 2012).

The Co-chairs reports of the Quito-seminars (Farooqui & Schultz, 2012; Ogwal & Schultz, 2014) were made formal information documents to the pre-COP meetings Working Group on Review of Implementation (WGRI) of the CBD (WGRI4 and WGRI5) and the dialogue was presented at the first hours of the WGRI4, using the positive experience to set a good atmosphere for the meeting, and in a plenary panel of WGRI5. The outcomes of the Quito Dialogues were also presented at side events at WGRI4 and WGRI5 and later at CBD COP11 in India and COP12 in South Korea.

The decisions from WGRI4 and WGRI5 and also COP11 and COP12 explicitly referred to the Quito Dialogues. Decision XI/4 from COP11 made reference to the Quito Dialogue for the further development of Innovative Financial Mechanisms. COP11 also made reference to a formal Information Document on safeguards (Ituarte-Lima et al., 2012), responding to needs identified at Quito I, where the importance of safeguards for any mechanism was discussed. Safeguards refer to measures for minimising negative impacts while maximising

BOX 2 *Examples of reflections and topics discussed at the Quito I and Quito II dialogues (Farooqui & Schultz, 2012; Ogwal & Schultz, 2014):*

• The need for appropriate safeguards, institutional frameworks and compliance mechanisms are critical for all financing mechanisms for biodiversity.

• Payment for Ecosystem Services can be designed as market-based instruments or subsidy-like government payments depending on cultural-political orientation. Similarly, biodiversity offsets or ecological compensation can be regarded as either markets or compliance schemes, depending on their specific design. This facilitates the legitimacy of using economic incentives. It is important to use clear terminology around markets and compensation to avoid unnecessary conflicts and understand where there are real divergences. For example, the word compensation is in some contexts used for PES and in some contexts used for offsets; depending on language and country context.

• The importance of ODA was recognised.

• Public-private partnerships (PPPs) play a role; public funds can provide seed money for private investments.

• Green markets were considered promising – for example, between 2000 and 2010 the global market for certified organic farming grew from US$ 18 billion to US$ 59 billion.

• The importance of private sector was recognised – both as change agents and a source of tax revenue, but also that it needs clear long term incentives and regulations. The importance of both incentivising more biodiversity-friendly business conduct, as well as effectively tackle corporate behaviour that has negative impact on biodiversity, for example through regulation. The importance of making clear distinctions between different kinds of private sector actors.

• Fiscal reforms, particularly green incentives and taxes – income taxes and new forms such as financial transaction taxes and air ticket levies, as well as curbing tax evasion – and removal of perverse subsidies, were considered promising.

• There are different views, concerns, risks, opposition and hopes related to financialisation of biodiversity through trading derivatives and green/forest bonds.

• Mainstreaming of biodiversity is needed in productive sectors and national budgets and strategies.

• Better coherency between different policy areas is needed, where the inclusion of finance ministries was considered particularly important.

• Country specific mechanisms/solutions/innovations have to be developed according to different countries' needs and cultural, social and political contexts.

the positive impacts of an intervention. Safeguards became a core issue at Quito II and at the following WGRI5. Furthermore, Decision XI/4 requested the CBD Secretariat to further develop the Information Document on Safeguards with comments and inputs from Parties and relevant actors and requested WGRI5 to prepare a recommendation for the consideration by COP12. The subsequent COP12 later adopted voluntary guidelines based on an elaborated Information Document including proposed guidelines for safeguards in BFMs and suggested operational next steps (Ituarte-Lima et al., 2014). These proposed guidelines adopt a rights/responsibilities based approach to substantive safeguards (e.g. land, tenure and knowledge-related rights) and procedural safeguards (e.g. participation, transparency and accountability) while recognising that both are necessary and interdependent.

A survey was sent to participants in February 2013 to evaluate the impacts of Quito I on COP11 in India, October 2012. This evaluation indicated, in general, that Quito I had influenced COP11 in a very positive way exemplified by the following quotes:

Furthermore, the Executive Secretary of CBD, Dr. Braulio Dias concluded in the end of the Quito II that the two Quito

"The conclusions, results and opinions of the seminar have been used at the COP 11 and other negotiation's spaces. The concepts and the different discussions have generated new global visions for innovative mechanisms"

– Participant from Latin America

seminars have both shown a richness of ideas, and that coming CBD meetings would be arranged to include dialogues between negotiators for effective outcomes.

Some of the initial areas of conflict that motivated the Quito Dialogues have been resolved. As an example, parties are now in agreement about the need for BFMs, but from country specific needs and with a strong emphasis on safeguards to ensure positive effects on both biodiversity and social equity.

Concluding panel from Quito II with Francisco Prieto, Walter Schuldt, Seukwoo Kang, Braulio Dias, Hem Pande, Maria Schultz and Sabino Francis Ogwal.
Photo: Niclas Hällström

5. Discussion

"A richness and diversity of perspectives, controversies were put on the table; complex issues of financing were elaborated and to a large extent clarified in presentations and group discussions. Thanks to this, I feel that trust was built among participants with divergent opinions/interests."

– Anonymous. Evaluation sheets by the participants at the Quito Dialogue Seminar

The purpose of the Quito Dialogues was to explore and contribute to the understanding of convergence and divergence of views. One important characteristic of the dialogues described here is the listening mode. Listening, learning and facilitation, together with continuous communication, underlie most of the 20 key issues in Box 1. Facilitation as well as a physical and relational environment where participants can feel safe to opening up their deeper concerns have also been emphasised by Saunders (2009). The listening and learning mode is probably difficult to combine with an objective to seek consensus or agreement on a negotiated text. As described by Yankelovich (2001), it is important to be aware if and when an informal dialogue seminar is transitioning to a more formal negotiation mode. Some aspects of a dialogue may enrich a formal negotiation but we believe a Dialogue Seminar must be kept distinctly separate from formal negotiations. Otherwise there is a risk that participants start drafting recommendations, stop listen and get stuck with their own countries' or organisations' instructions and motivations.

Dialogue Seminars can also be a constructive way to handle power asymmetries. By inviting a truly wide range of participants to the Dialogue seminar and including these wide-ranging and often conflicting experiences and perspectives in the program, both as formal presentations and in roundtable discussions, actors that are normally marginalised get a voice like anyone else. By treating all participants as 'experts' and equals, existing power relations are indeed challenged.

It can, however, be tricky to achieve this as groups may for various understandable reasons be suspicious or hesitant that the dialogue will be balanced or fair enough. For example, in Quito I one civil society organisation that was very critical and worried there would be an implicit bias towards markets was asked to write a letter to the organiser to be read in plenary.

As actor groups often rely on distinct norms and values, and power asymmetries among different groups frequently exist, conflicts at various scales that hinder sustainability repeatedly arise (see e.g. Berger, 2003; Rist et al., 2007; Etty et al., 2013). A perspective of governance of natural resources and social learning, in contrast to a politically neutral discourse on resource management, makes explicit the often tacit conceptions behind the values, norms and rules in various highly heterogenic actor groups and the power relationships derived from them (Rist et al., 2007). In the context of ecosystem governance, participation of distinct groups of actors, including people from various geographical regions, is not an end in itself but a means to facilitate processes of deliberation to re-define norms, rules and power relationships to overcome conflicts and foster sustainability.

It is very important to acknowledge that manipulation can take place under the pretext of 'dialogue' and that a dialogue has only taken place if diverse actors and participants acknowledge that there has been a dialogue – afterwards. Dialogue seminars may become a hollow pretext for inclusion and participants might feel hijacked unless they feel there have been genuine attempts at challenging governance and power relations. The Quito Dialogues were part of a larger governance process and the goal and expectations were clear and transparent to all participants; power structures were addressed constructively by showing that the views of marginalised actors were part of a larger discussion on the value of nature (both in academic terms and beyond) (Hahn et al., 2015; Vatn, 2015).

Bringing into dialogue academic, practitioner and negotiator perspectives contributed to further understanding and addressing of these divergences. These dynamics also allowed overcoming the framing of the conflicts as only between some industrialised and some non-industrialised countries. Instead, it contributed to understanding distinct arguments for and against various BFMs as challenges, e.g. to what extent 'markets' can protect biodiversity (Vatn et al., 2011). Both developed and developing countries need to address this, while also taking into account the dynamics of an increasingly interconnected and complex world.

The following quotes from the evaluation by the participants at Quito I also illustrates the value of clarifying divergences:

> *"The workshop was an eye opener and brought out important issues as presented by the various experts that enhanced participants' knowledge" in presentations and group discussions. Thanks to this, I feel that trust was built among participants with divergent opinions/interests."*
>
> *– Participant from Africa*

Furthermore, the outcomes of the dialogues included novel and more comprehensive understandings among participants of power asymmetries in international multi-actor dialogues. It deepened and offered more nuanced understandings of different assumptions and views, particularly in relation to the role of the markets and private sector in biodiversity financing.

Multi-Actor Dialogue Seminars require support and legitimacy from a range of actors. The policy issues can be addressed in a multilevel governance framework where the aim at the

> *"There were interesting discussions on the pros and cons of different financial instruments and tools (e.g. PES, trust funds, species banking, Access and Benefit Sharing-related opportunities, etc.), and their contextual relevance for the various settings. The discussion also revealed some important philosophical and ideological divides on the acceptance of some of these tools."*
>
> *– Participant from an Inter-governmental organisation, Evaluation questionnaire*

global level is to create legitimacy, and foster laws and institutions that are adaptable and equitable (Young, 2003). This in turn sets the frame for and promotes policy development at national and regional levels (Malayang et al., 2006). But without a good understanding at the global level of the divergent national and local contexts, the global framework may become inflexible prescriptive blueprints difficult for many countries to adopt (Berkes, 2002). On the other hand, norms and laws including international environmental law can also be a means to positively influence the national governance systems and to achieving socio-ecological goals (Craig, 2013; Ebbesson & Hey, 2013).

One important factor behind the positive outcomes of these dialogue seminars is clearly SwedBio's standing as an established bridging organisation that enjoys a high level of trust, built over many years, among a diversity of actors, including both governments and civil society organisations. A bridging organisation could be a research institute, an environmental NGO or a governmental organisation and the collaboration could be formalised or very informal, bottom-up or top-down (Folke et al., 2005). With a focus on building trust among individual actors and providing an arena for learning,

bridging organisations facilitate collaboration, value forma-tion and innovative solutions. Social learning and bridging organisations are focused on practical issues related to par-ticular stakeholders and ecosystems (Hahn et al., 2006; Ols-son et al., 2007).

Another obvious reason for the outcome is the collaboration with the CBD secretariat, which has the mandate to bring together actors through an inclusive transparent nomination process.

Our results suggest that transformative social learning has taken place in our case study, according to the three criteria suggested by Reed et al. (2010): (1) demonstrate that a change in understanding has taken place in the individuals involved; (2) demonstrate that this change goes beyond the individual and becomes situated within wider social units or communi-ties of practice; and (3) occur through social interactions and processes between actors within a social network.

According to Rist et al., (2007), social learning can emerge from the articulation of different perspectives including North-South relationships where groups' descriptions of present unsustainable situations, and the goals and means to transform them can be particularly divergent. In this case the dialogue seminars provided a facilitated meeting space for di-verse actors, such as those who are generally marginalised in decision-making at the global and subnational levels (e.g. local and indigenous peoples) as well as governments from diverse cultural and political contexts. The dialogues and in-teractions made the linkages between knowledge and power more transparent and enabled the co-development of knowl-edge and understanding of convergence and divergence, without forcing convergence, which is important in conflict resolution.

Often, successful individual case studies can be seen as is-lands of sustainability in an ocean of unsustainability. An emerging challenge is then to develop approaches and meth-ods to scale up the desired outcomes from transformative learning (e.g. Lowry et al., 2009). Multi-Actor Dialogue Seminars has been developed as a methodology that can be applied at different scales and contexts. This has been proven in several other dialogue processes conducted by SwedBio.

These have been organised in similar ways, including consid-erable time invested in the design and preparations, and have shown similar results (see e.g. dialogue seminars on Connect-ing diverse knowledge systems in Panama 2012 (Tengö & Malmer, 2012); Integrating Social-Ecological Resilience into the New Development Agenda in Colombia 2013 (Rock-ström et al., 2013); and on Dialogue Workshop on Assess-ment of Collective Action in Biodiversity Conservation (Pérez & Schultz, 2015)). Our Quito I case study was focused on the global scale, i.e. the negotiations under the CBD, but would not have worked out successfully without examples and lessons learned from the national and local scales.

Our case study also addresses the challenges of adaptive gov-ernance (Folke et al., 2005) which concerns adapting govern-ance both to ecological feedbacks (the need to address the drivers of biodiversity loss by changing economic and other policies) and to actors perceptions about what is legitimate (by showing how the policy instruments like PES and biodi-versity offsets can be adapted to different political-cultural contexts). At the same time, the political-cultural contexts are not static. The social learning that occurs in a trust-build-ing setting is transformational and long-lasting only if social capital (trust, reciprocity, connectedness, networks, institu-tions, relationships that shape a society's social interactions) increases and values and preferences change (Pretty, 2003), since negotiations from given preferences and knowledge might not lead to transformation (Hahn et al., 2006).

For the outcomes of the dialogue the collaborative setting in terms of planning, performing and delivering results was of outmost importance. Collaborative and social learning are clearly interlinked, and as Plummer & Armitage(2007, p.71) describes it "while many of the characteristics outlined are common to various forms of co-operative natural resource management (e.g., pluralism, communication, transactive decision-making), collaboration and social learning are inim-itable". Plummer & Armitage (2007, p.62) also states that "adaptive co-management brings together collaborative and adaptive approaches in pursuit of sustainable resource use and social–ecological resilience." We believe the way the Quito Dialogue Seminars were planned and conducted con-stitute applications of such adaptive approaches.

6. Conclusion

The methodology of Multi-Actor Dialogue Seminars (MADS) proposed in this article has built on diverse social learning literature, in particular perspectives viewing social learning as a means for both personal and systemic transformation for enhanced environmental governance. It focused on the two Quito Dialogue Seminars but the general dialogue methodology has been applied to several other dialogues during the last decade. The policy context and participants in these dialogues have spanned from the local, national, regional to global levels.

We conclude that the main success factors for a 'Multi-Actor Dialogue Seminar' to contribute to transformative social learning related to international environment negotiations are: (1) an inclusive planning process, around an agenda elaborated to explore conflicting ideas from diverse perspectives with the goal of understanding reasons for divergence and convergence; (2) participants selected through a legitimate process that ensures a good balance and diversity of backgrounds; (3) a knowledge rich setting, i.e. knowledge from diverse actors reflecting on issues from different and sometimes opposite angles, using experiences from practice and policy, and from local to global levels; (4) deliberation, informed by science as well as by other knowledge systems, that makes visible the values, norms, rules as well as power relationships behind key concepts and viewpoints; (5) sincere efforts to ensure fairness and the creation of an embracing and emphatic atmosphere; (6) the fostering of a willingness to enter the 'dialogue mode' of active listening and learning from each other for experiential knowledge sharing among participants; and (7) facilitation and/or organisation by a legitimate bridging organisation.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that Multi-Actor Dialogue Seminars requires time and resources. But we see no better alternatives. Improved dialogue cultures may be the biggest single opportunity we have to reach genuine solutions in the quest for a sustainable future.

Participant in Quito II talking about reform of fishery subsidies – Sumaila Rashid, University of British Colombia. Photo: Niclas Hällström

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The methodology of the Multi-Actor Dialogue Seminars (MADS) described in this report, and exemplified with the two "Quito Dialogues Seminars", is based on experience gained over the past decade by SwedBio and a broad network of colleagues. It also builds on a diverse literature on social learning, and in particular perspectives that view it as a means for both personal and systemic transformation for enhanced environmental governance. Improving the culture of dialogue may be the biggest single opportunity we have to identify genuine solutions for a sustainable future.

About SwedBio

SwedBio is a knowledge interface at Stockholm Resilience Centre contributing to poverty alleviation, equity, sustainable livelihoods and social-ecological systems rich in biodiversity that persist, adapt and transform under global change such as climate change. SwedBio enables knowledge generation, dialogue and exchange between practitioners, policy makers and scientists for development and implementation of policies and methods at multiple scales.