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Perspectives and processes to address power inequities

MSPs have the potential to either challenge or reinforce existing power inequalities and experiences of exclusion. To enable inclusive dialogue and create more equitable patterns of stakeholder interaction, they need to be structured carefully, reflectively, and with an openness to adapt as goals/contexts/priorities change across time. For meaningful and effective participation, there are elements to consider that are internal to the MSP (getting people to the table) and elements that are external (engaging with the broader context of power relations you have just mapped).

Below are some key elements to consider:

Identify barriers to participation. It's not enough to simply invite more under-represented actors to the table (Larson et al., 2022; Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2021). It's also critical to look at whether it's feasible and worthwhile for them to show up – and when they do, at the quality of participation and representation that's available to them (Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2020).

Women and groups such as Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and local communities (LCs) are frequently under-represented, excluded, or lack influence on the important processes and outcomes of MSPs (Evans et al., 2021). This is not only due to overt prejudice and discrimination, but also to practical and procedural issues. For instance, can women (who often have restrictions on their mobility) and IPs (who often live in more isolated places) access the venue? Do they need financial support to get there? Do they have the time to participate amongst their other commitments and responsibilities? Is it safe for them to do so? (CIFOR and ONAMIAP, 2020).

Box 1. What do we mean by 'meaningful and effective' participation?

In an MSP, participation is meaningful and effective when its participants are given the tools to be heard, with an equal voice and ability to have a real influence over the platform's outcomes. For this, participants must feel safe, listened to, in a process where their inputs are valued and that are worth their time (remember that not all participants hold jobs that pay them to participate in platforms). Spaces of meaningful and effective participation are organized and facilitated with reflexive and adaptive methods that address power asymmetries, gender-based inequalities and different forms of exclusion. Meaningful and effective participation is an incentive itself for continued participation in an MSP.

Differences in socioeconomic and educational status can also present challenges: in particular, different levels of technical knowledge held by different participants – and the ability of more powerful participants to decide what kind of knowledge is most important and valuable – is a key cause of power imbalances within MSPs (Ratner et al., 2022).

To get clear on the barriers to inclusion in your MSP, the tool 'Mobilize the structures' (Evans et al., 2021) may be helpful. It assesses the enabling environment and context conditions that motivate or hinder inclusion, identifies strategies for change and presents a starting point to monitor progress. It provides a framework for collective goal-setting and identifying strategies, as well as guidance on monitoring. It can also serve to help prepare a roadmap for change.

Designing meaningful, inclusive spaces for transformative change
How to: design for inclusion

Case study in Acre, Brazil: designing for inclusion

Acre is a small state in north-western Brazil that is largely covered in Amazonian forest, which supports a high number of nontimber forest product (NTFP) dependent communities. Resource governance challenges include deforestation, Indigenous displacement, and elite capture of agricultural land due to expansion. In 1999, Acre's state government established an MSP as part of efforts to reduce deforestation and secure Indigenous land rights; its task was to collectively create a map of the state with zones set out for different types of land use.

The MSP implementers made clear efforts to mitigate power differentials between stakeholders. The state environment agency (SEMA) and private sector had a high level of technical knowledge compared to that of representatives from Indigenous organizations, traditional populations, and smallholder farmers. But SEMA worked hard to make the technical knowledge neutral and accessible, and ensure traditional knowledge was also valued. They held many meetings in areas closer to Indigenous communities, rather than solely in the capital. Thematic groups also ran smaller meetings to enable focused discussions and negotiations. Also, in response to demands for self-determination, the MSP organizers set up a parallel "ethno-zoning process", run by and for Indigenous peoples to discuss their own priorities within the MSP – and then advocate coherently for these in the wider forums.

This MSP was designed by the state government, which was also responsible for approving the final zoning plan: a situation that could easily imply excessive governmental control. But most participants said the process and its outcome was equitable and effective: a testament both to the government's commitment to the inclusive, deliberative process, and to the state's political environment, which was amenable to civil society participation, multisector collaboration, and sustainable development in territorial planning (Gonzales Tovar et al., 2021a and 2021b).

Identify strategies to address these barriers (Larson et al., 2022; Evans et al., 2021), together with the groups you are targeting for inclusion. These strategies will make it possible to link the internal development of the MSP to the external context.

For instance:
- Identify and invite leaders of marginalized groups who represent a constituency and are considered legitimate by other group members in the landscape, with the caveat that – in many landscapes – most of those leaders may be men and so you must pay special attention to mapping organizations that represent women and youth
- Invite a critical mass of representatives of such a group to form a constituency in the MSP
- Meet with these representatives to strategize about how the MSP can better serve their interests and needs, using the context mapping exercise as a basis for discussion

- Provide separate spaces for that constituency to meet, discuss and identify collective needs, including capacity building needs to participate more effectively in the forum
- Facilitate networking between the constituencies and other participants in the forum who can serve as strategic allies
- Provide resources for representatives of these groups to report back to their constituencies
- Consider holding meetings closer to the residences of these actors, such as rotating the location to facilitate participation
- Take care of practical/logistical challenges to participation like childcare, travel funding, and translators for those participants that may need them
- Ensure that gaps in technology resources, capacity, and access are not limiting participation for underrepresented groups (e.g., social messaging platforms like WhatsApp and radio broadcasts may be more accessible than email and Zoom).

Case study in Mexico: missing the mark on inclusion

Every autumn, millions of monarch butterflies alight on a 56,259 hectare reserve about 100 kilometres northwest of Mexico City, following migration from locations across North America. In 2004, Mexico's Federal Government created an MSP called the Monarch Butterfly Regional Forum, through which governmental, non-governmental, private sector and local community stakeholders were involved in managing the landscape, which is called the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve. The MSP aimed to integrate conservation and development by building the capacities of communities and providing them with opportunities for wage labour – as ecotour guides, and in reforestation activities. In return, community members were expected to cease certain forms of resource use such as logging.

The initiative had three main challenges. First, there were uneven power relationships among actors who did not agree on the nature, causes and severity of the environmental problems affecting the Reserve. Second, only members of *ejidos* [land owned communally by the original inhabitants of Mexican villages] participated in the MSP, excluding many of the reserve's inhabitants. This exclusion created legitimacy challenges from excluded community members. Third, there was deforestation by non-local actors who did not live in the area and thus were less affected by threats to local ecosystems. Those who were willing to support the changes towards more sustainable land use and expanding eco-tourism could not effectively influence other actors that continued to use land unsustainably (Brenner and Job, 2012).

A member of the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve MSP (Madre de Dios, Peru) during an implementation of *How are we doing?* Photo by Pavel Martiarena/CIFOR
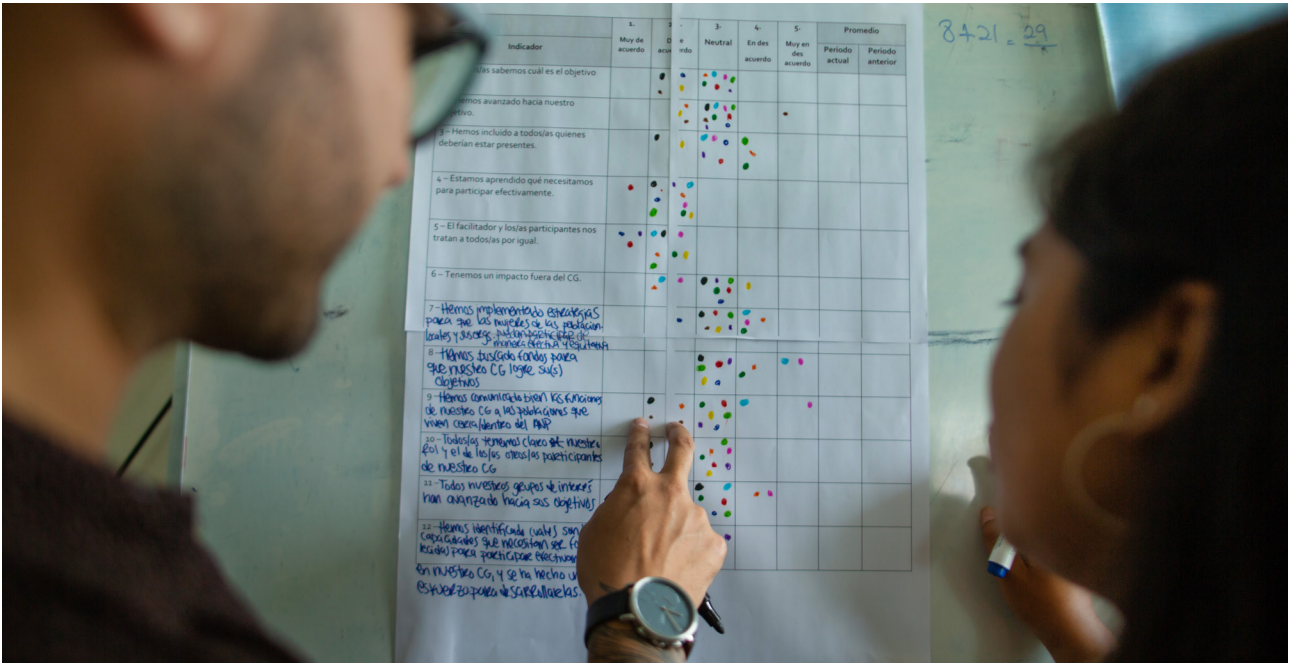
Members of the Alto Mayo Protected Forest MSP (San Martin, Peru) count votes during an implementation of *How are we doing?* Photo by Marlon del Aguila/CIFOR

Listen and (continue to) learn. It's critical for MSP partners, facilitators, and implementers to maintain an attitude of openness to learning from and listening to each other, and especially to those traditionally in weaker positions of power (e.g. women, indigenous peoples, peasant farmers) (Gonzales Tovar et al., 2021a and 2021b;). You can review your progress using the '**How are we doing?**' tool (Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2020a), and adjust goals and strategies as needed.

Build capacity, strengthen collective action. Training, preparation and capacity development are crucial to develop skills and knowledge, enhance empowerment and give confidence to women, Indigenous Peoples and other under-represented groups (Larson et al., 2022). But this should not be about designing trainings on the skills the project organizers identify as important: the emphasis should be on the skills these groups identify as key for overcoming inclusion barriers, and directly related to the context in which they live.

In the longer term, look to build capacity amongst both underrepresented groups and other actors on leadership, technical skills, and rights awareness, as well as in presentation, speaking, communication,

and organizing skills. Such skills development creates a positive feedback loop: as participants gain skills, they gain confidence, and they participate more, thus building more confidence in their own abilities (Tamara et al., 2021; Liswanti et al., 2023).

Likewise, supporting the development of social networks, organizations, coalitions, and public trust builds the capacity, experience and social capital that promote the inclusion of marginalized groups in decision making. Investing in the strengthening of these networks and groups promotes empowerment and inclusion in decision making and helps to build alliances, and networks that improve the ability to negotiate (Evans et al., 2021). The '**Unpack the Capacities**' tool (see Evans et al., 2021) can help with this process, by assisting users to analyze capacity opportunities and gaps, create an action plan based on these findings, and – critically – to monitor progress participatively with stakeholders and adapt the approach accordingly along the way.

Orient towards action. Underrepresented groups are often over-consulted with little tangible impact. Creating a clear impact pathway motivates participation and provides a reason for stakeholders to participate in the MSP (Evans et al., 2021).

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MORE INFORMATION

CIFOR-ICRAF's research on MSPs
https://www.cifor-icraf.org/research/topic/multi-stakeholder-platforms/

More tools for inclusive MSPs
https://www.cifor.org/toolboxes/tools-for-managing-landscapes-inclusively/

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CIFOR-ICRAF'S TOOLS FOR INCLUSIVE MSPs

How are we doing?
https://www.cifor.org/knowledge/publication/7796/

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