

Learning for Sustainability

<http://learningforsustainability.net/>

This site aims to provide a practical resource for those who work with communities (in the wider sense of the term) to help them identify and adopt more sustainable practices. This site was initiated in 1998 as part of my PhD studies, and has developed over the past years as the *NRM-changelinks* site. During 2007 the *NRM-changelinks* was discontinued, and has been superseded by this *Learning for Sustainability* site.

This site aims to provide a practical resource for proponents of multi-stakeholder learning processes. It recognises that social learning is an ongoing process, rather than an outcome to be achieved. Moreover, the process occurs as a result of many well-managed relationships and the provision of a range of interactive opportunities between different stakeholder groups. Social learning and empowerment are based on each other. In this sense empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.

The new *Learning for Sustainability* website is designed to provide you with improved layout and easier navigation. The change is not just cosmetic - you will find significantly new content, and a new structure guides the site content and navigation. The page design is new too, and no longer relies on the old web idiom of using tables for layout and using font tags to control the typeface and point size of the text. I have moved the site to use Cascading Style Sheets and drop-down menus to improve the presentation. I have also introduced advertisements on some pages. This was not an easy decision to make, but I also hope that the targeted nature of the ads will provide benefits to some of you. The reality is that it takes many hours to maintain these sites, and as the site delivery improves so the costs of hosting and software to manage the various functions that are required increase.

The following thoughts set the context for the development of this site, outlines how its structure has evolved through the application of community-based approaches in practice, and provides a brief guide to its use for those unfamiliar with the Internet. Your ideas and comments are welcomed in order to improve this on-line resource.

Site context

Everything has been said about development, but almost everything remains to be said and therefore to be explored or rediscovered, because incontestably, almost everything remains to be done. (Cosmao. 1984 p. 81)

It is easy to say that successful development can only be achieved by a truly collaborative effort between local community groups, agencies, scientists and policy makers. However, despite ongoing improvements in this area over recent years, we also know that we still have a long way to go in achieving such collaboration - and effectively sharing the required perspectives, information and ideas. While social scientists and change management practitioners have long sought to inform and improve the practices of those seeking to bring about such constructive societal

change, too little of that research seems to have found its way into practice. Yet the volume of participatory-oriented research continues to expand. The resulting information overload causes researchers and practitioners alike to simply miss much useful material which they have neither the means to identify nor the time to read. Often too, while initiatives in this area have been improved by the efforts of individuals (be they local environmental managers, community leaders, NGOs, agency staff or other end-users) as part of their efforts to address a particular problem, the lessons learnt have not always been documented for others to use.

Another major problem facing the would-be "*change agent*" is the breadth of disciplines and areas of expertise that are needed. The practice of involving people and building constructive partnerships requires not only a specialist knowledge of the particular area (agriculture, biodiversity, etc.), but also skills in a diverse range of areas from information management through to conflict resolution. Although the emphasis of the original *NRM-changelinks* site was on improving community participation and engagement within natural resource management (biodiversity enhancement, conservation, riparian management, agriculture, etc), this emphasis is broadening in the new *Learning for Sustainability* version. The approaches outlined here are useful for those working in a diverse range of development areas such as rural development, health, housing, etc.

The material here is all freely available for use, please acknowledge the source where appropriate. Thanks to all those of you whose comments and suggestions have helped improve this site as an Internet resource. The views expressed in this site are my own, and are not necessarily those of any supporting organisations, groups, or individuals.

We need to change peoples' attitudes and values ... surely?

Do we? Paul Stern provides good reason as to why we need to concentrate on other things before changing peoples' values ... "*The idea that to preserve the environment, people's attitudes must change, especially in the wealthy countries, is widespread among natural scientists. There are several problems with this belief. First, pro-environmental attitudes are already strong in most of the wealthy countries. Also, the connections of values and attitudes to behavior are rarely strong because behavior also depends on a variety of other factors, such as the infrastructure, incentives, and institutions affecting the behavior, the difficulty of the behavior, and individuals' abilities and knowledge regarding performing attitude-consistent behaviors. In most cases, the key to behavior is its immediate context, not deeper values. Changing values may have a large influence on behavior in the long term, but mainly an indirect one, by affecting policies, institutions, or incentives that shape behavior.*" **Paul Stern (2004) Understanding global change: What psychology can contribute. IHDP Update; Issue 4**

http://www.ihdp.uni-bonn.de/html/publications/update/pdf-files/IHDPUpdatePsych4_04.pdf

This site is compiled and maintained by Will Allen (PhD)
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