WORKING WITH PARTNERS FOR A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

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CONNECTS WITH:

Social Networks – Complexity – Gender – Participation and Research

Introduction to the Module

Description

Integrated approaches traversing sectors and incorporating diverse actors have been suggested as a solution to many complex problems, including those which overlay health, ecosystems and society (Webb et al. 2010). Ecosystem approaches to health (EAH) promote integration and collaboration and call for building partnerships for collaborative work.

Critical research into how to support diverse partnerships and forms of collaboration in EAH identified outreach to other sectors, such as government and civil society, as a common goal of practitioners (Saint-Charles et al. 2014). Another study of partnerships across health and environment emphasized the importance of partnerships in public health "which thrive in the gaps and cracks created by the 'fragmented and incomplete' government response to environmental and health issues" (Leung et al. 2015) p. 15). Thinking in the field of EAH has converged onto the idea that the diversity of the actors involved in a partnership should be commensurate with the complexity of the problem (Charron 2012; Zinsstag et al. 2011). By combining elements of both complexity (systems thinking) and diversity (participation, transdisciplinarity, and social and gender equity) into one framework, the ecosystem approaches to health can help to draw up an appropriately calibrated partnership which integrates the necessary actors.

While partnerships have been shown to be successful in alleviating health problems linked to ecosystems and collaboration is cited as a common goal among practitioners of ecosystem approaches to health, challenges to working in partnerships still exist. Identifying the role that each partner plays in a network and the relationship between them can help mobilize actors. In thinking long and hard about all the people and organizations touched by an issue, unwitting allies can be discovered. For example, in an attempt to increase coverage of bike paths in a small community it was discovered that bike paths increase the value of houses and thus the local real estate sector became an ally in the fight to create more bike paths.

This module presents the overall design for a 2hr to a half-day workshop focused on working with partners in EAH. The module is composed of two sections: 1) a lecture giving participants the vocabulary to identify different types of actors and relationships between actors involved in complex ecosystem-society-health issues using a well-chosen case study; and 2) guiding the participants through an individual activity in which they map the actors who are implicated in the issue that they have chosen to explore. This workshop builds on principals laid out in the social networks module, but can be given without prior knowledge of social networks and is not redundant with the social networks module. The workshop described here reinforces the "Partnerships, collaboration, and advocacy" public health competencies.

Purpose

The overall aims of the two learning activities described in this section are to:

1. Introduce the participants to the following concepts: stakeholders, partners, actors, social networks, collaboration, common relationships in networks, and intersectoral work.
2. Illustrate the different categories of partners, the roles they play and the relationships they have through a case study.
3. Explore the different partners' characteristics and positions as well as their relationships and the network they create in a situation related to the participant's own work.

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Guiding Questions

1. Who is involved in a given ecosystem/society/health issue? Who should/could be?
2. What role do they play in the social network of actors?
3. What relationships exist between these actors?
4. How does knowing the roles and relationships between stakeholders help us mobilize the network to work collaboratively?

Working Terms

Actors[1]; partners; partnership; collaboration; social network

Overall Instructions and Principles

This module is organized into two sections. One facilitator can manage both sections, but having two facilitators makes certain sections easier. If several facilitators are presenting the material, make sure that the one not responsible for the case study is minimally appraised of the issue being presented. All presenters should be comfortable with the concepts in activity two in order to field questions when participants will be working on their own network map. If this workshop is not part of a larger group learning experience (such as a field school) you might want to begin the workshop with a short exercise for getting to know each other.

Activity 1 – Complex partnerships and relationships in an ecohealth issue

Description

This activity is designed to introduce participants to the different types of stakeholders, the roles that they play in a given issue and the relationships between them.

Aims/Goals

The aims of this learning activity are to:

1. Learn about the different types of partners involved in complex health issues touching on the environment and society.
2. Explore existing relationships between these actors.
3. Deepen understanding of these actors and relationships through the illustration of a case study.

Guiding Questions

- What types of actors are there in relation to a given issue?
- What are the main features one can consider in a social network?
- What types of relationships are there between the different actors?
- How can this influence the outcome of efforts to mobilize the network?

Directions

TOTAL TIME: 45+ minutes

OBJECTIVE: To introduce the participants to basic concepts and deepen their familiarity with them through describing a case study.

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[1] The expression "stakeholders" is often used, but is contested so we opted for a more neutral term.

Logistical note for the facilitator: This activity is best led by two facilitators. One facilitator presents the different categories of partners visually (powerpoint, blackboard, flipchart) through a case study which includes most, if not all, of the categories of partners proposed here[2]. The second facilitator can be noting down the partners as they come up in the case study on a flipchart or blackboard.

OVERVIEW OF LEARNING ACTIVITY

STEP 1: **Introduce the activity** (5 minutes)

- Explain to participants that the workshop is composed of two parts: a didactic presentation and individual work.
- If a session on social networks has been held in the same learning experience, point out that this session is linked to that one.
- If this is a stand-alone workshop, more time should be allocated to this section in order to carry out an activity which gets participants to know each other.

STEP 2: Terminology (20 minutes)

A compelling way to learn the terms associated with the different actors is to let them emerge from a well-told story of a case study (see the example provided in Box 2). It is useful to have a single slide with an image for each new actor presented as the story unfolds. As the story is being told, the second facilitator can be noting down the different actors on a flipchart for use in Step 3 (see below). The different actors can be placed anywhere on the flipchart covering the entire space (i.e. not a list). You may want to end with a slide summarizing the different actors seen in the case study (see Box 1).

> **Box 1: Types of actors**
> - Experts
> - Affected populations (ensure diversity)
> - Pressure groups (for and against)
> - Private companies
> - Governments
> - The voiceless
> - Third parties/intermediaries
> - Independent actors/neutral

**Alternatively, you may begin with brainstorming a list of different types of stakeholders involved in a health issue. This can be useful if you have a specific case study already developed, as for a field school. You can also begin with a list of the actors (see Box 1) and tell the story afterward.

Choice of case study:=
If the group is working on a case study in the context of a larger learning experience this can be an obvious choice.
- A good case study for this activity is:
  - Complex
  - Draws in different sectors of society (government, academic, non-governmental, civil (e.g. workers, etc.))
  - Mediatized/familiar
  - Contentious
  - Contemporary
  - One that is known well by the presenter

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[2] The typology proposed here is by no means the only one possible, nor is it exhaustive. It is meant more as stimuli.

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Box 2: Example of a case study - Forest practices in a region of Québec

CONTEXT: Healthy forests are a necessity for the organisms that live in them, hunters, first nation's people who rely on them for food and identity, tourists who take refuge in them to relax and recharge, people who earn their living from forest products, a regulated climate, etc. Only 10% of Québec's original forests remain; 90% has already been cut at least once. For logged forests to regenerate properly, pockets of intact forest are necessary as seedbanks and as a refuge for species dependent on old growth forests.

PRESENT SITUATION [actor categories are named in square brackets]: To safeguard the remaining intact forests and ensure a sustainable management of forests, the international community has developed a certification process for forestry companies. The most respected is the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) [THIRD PARTY] which evaluates 13 criteria to ensure sustainability. Resolute Forest Products [PRIVATE COMPANY] lost two of its certificates in the Lac Saint-Jean region of Québec; other companies [PRIVATE COMPANY] have not lost their certificates and are committed to sustainable practices. Non-Governmental Organizations [PRESSURE GROUP] have taken up the cause. Some have been pressuring Resolute Forest Products to earn back its certificates through direct actions, while other organizations have emphasized tactics aimed at encouraging sustainable practices at the exclusion of pointing out destructive behaviors, creating occasional tensions in the environmental movement. Meanwhile, the company continues to cut down the forest [VOICELESS] and has shut down mills and workers [AFFECTED POPULATIONS] have lost jobs. The chief forester [EXPERT] issued a report showing that at current rates of forestry activity, no suitable habitats will remain for the woodland caribou [VOICELESS] in the Lac Saint-Jean area in the next decades. The Minister of Forests, Fauna and parks [GOVERNEMENT] distanced himself from the chief forester, saying la « première espèce à protéger c'est le monde de la communauté ». One worker's union [AFFECTED POPULATIONS] and the Atikamekw Nation [AFFECTED POPULATION/GOVERNEMENT] have agreed with the propositions of NGOs, while most municipalities [GOVERNMENT] have come out against the pressure tactics. A video produced by one local mayor [GOVERNMENT] created a media [INDEPENDENT ACTOR/NEUTRAL] scandal bringing this issue to light in the larger population [AFFECTED POPULATION].

*events took place from January 2014 to March 2015.

STEP 3: types of relationships (15+ minutes)

- Begin by introducing or reviewing several basic concepts in social network structure: triangle closure, homophily, reciprocity, degree centrality, betweeness centrality, pockets of density (see module on social networks).
- Present the different relationships that actors potentially have: collaboration, opposition, convenience, allegiance, strategic, competition, perceived competition (e.g. two NGOs competing for media coverage) etc. This is the crux of the module as it presents material that is not presented in the social networks module and it provides the added tools to mobilize the network. In the following steps time should be taken to name and discuss the different relationships.

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- If the second facilitator was NOT noting down the different actors as the story was told, do this on a flip chart now.
- Ask the participants if they see any of the structures or relationships outlined in the short introduction in the example given.
- Decide upon or give the group conventions for drawing these structures and relationships (e.g. green line to represent alliances, red for opposition, etc.).
- Draw these out as they are suggested by the group.
- The diagram will probably become quite messy. Don't be too worried about this as it is part of the lesson: these relationships are complex. The participants might take more care to make their lines clearer for their own drawing (Activity 2) as they have more time and are invested in seeing the results.
- Prompt the participants when lulls occur.
- Invite the group to look for actors that have not been linked to others.
- A discussion is not necessary at this point, as one can occur after Activity two, but if you are doing a half-day workshop one would occur here. You could ask the participants if they have any questions. The questions might well be asking for more detail on the case study (if it was well chosen☺), so be prepared for this, and use clarifying questions to further exemplify the relationships that are the goal of the session.
- If the case study chosen had some closure (e.g. new policy, protected area, etc.) and an evaluation of the partnerships had been undertaken this could be discussed as an ending to this activity.

References and Resources

Brugha, R. et Varvasovszky, Z. (2000). Stakeholder analysis: a review. *Health Policy and Planning, 15*(3), 239-246.

Brummans, B. H. J. M., Putnam, L. L., Gray, B., Hanke, R., Lewicki, R. J. et Wiethoff, C. (2008). Making Sense of Intractable Multiparty Conflict: A Study of Framing in Four Environmental Disputes. *Communication Monographs, 75*(1), 25 - 51.

Prell, C., Hubacek, K. et Reed, M. (2009). Stakeholder analysis and social network analysis in natural resource management. *Society and Natural Resources, 22*, 501–518.

Activity 2: The network of actors involved in a particular health issue…and elucidating the influence of its structure on efforts to mobilize

Description

The activity affords time to the participants to apply what they have just learned about types of actors, structures and relationships to their own context through an exercise of drawing out the people and organizations who are or could be involved in an issue of interest to them.

Aims/Goals

The aims of this activity are to:

1. Draw the network associated with a particular issue of their choice
2. Build a strategy for mobilizing the network

Guiding Questions

1. Which roles do each of the actors in an issue play in the social network?
2. How do the relationships facilitate or hinder collaboration?
3. Which actors do not appear here? Who else?

Logistical note for the facilitators: While this activity is based on individual work it is helpful to have two facilitators circulating through the room to answer questions and prompt participants to explore the outer reaches of their potential network.

OVERVIEW OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES

TOTAL TIME: 45+ minutes

Some specialized supplies are useful and fun for this exercise, but pencil and paper work as well. Here are some ideas:

- Large white paper
- Permanent fine point markers in different colours including red and green
- Stickers in the form of circles, preferably with boarders in different colours, and blank white in the middle

STEP 1: Exercise on the network of actors involved or potentially involved in an ecosystem/society/health issue (30 mins)

- Ask each participant to list the 15 most pertinent actors in the issue that they have chosen. Ask each participant to identify the most central of these actors. (5 min)
- Ask the participants to classify each of the actors into the categories provided in section one. (5mins)
- Ask participants to write the names of the actors on the circles provided using different colours for the different types of actors. (5 min)
- Ask the participants to place the circles of those actors deemed most central in the centre of the white sheet. Those that are less central should be placed on the periphery. (5 mins)

- Ask the participants to draw lines between the actors representing the relationships between them. These lines should have an indication of valence (e.g. +/-), direction (to/from) and strength (e.g. dotted vs. solid lines). (10 min)

Facilitators should be circulating in the room to answer questions and help participants explore their network.

STEP 2: Does the structure of the network influence strategies for mobilization? (15min)

- Ask the participants this question and leave them time to think about their answer. (5min)
- Take a few examples from the room and comment on them to the whole group, calling out structures and relationships that were outlined in the introduction.
- Comment on how the participants could use this knowledge to mobilize particular actors, (e.g. intermediaries can be useful in connecting with actors we are less familiar with; looking for biases in human networks and using them to mobilize; hypothesize potential relationships; look for redundancies; think of strategies to bring together participants that may seem to have no reason to work together).

STEP 3: How can my own network help?
- Ask participants to draw a network of the people who they know who could be involved in the chosen issue. Participants should think of the actors that they would not hesitate contacting for information or contacts on this issue, actors highlighted in the media, silent actors, etc.
- Ask the participant to compare the two networks.
- This step can be used to connect people, mobilize actors and to take action. In this way, the participants can see how their own network can be helpful in the resolution of the chosen issue.
- If time permits, you can ask the participants to form small groups and give each other advice on mobilizing each others' networks based on what they observe from each other's network portrait.