7   Shell-Living Earth Learning History

In this chapter I present the learning history document that I developed for Living Earth UK, which was subsequently used as a springboard for discussion during an internal workshop. My description of the relationship between Shell and Living Earth in the previous chapter runs roughly up until the time that this learning history was written (Spring 2000) whilst chapter 9 , in which I interweave my own story with that of this relationship, adds details of the relationship that emerged subsequent to the relationship.

The learning history is arranged in six sections. The sections are based upon six core themes that I constructed from a grounded analysis of my conversations with these various parties (as described in chapter 5 section 4)[1]. Overall, the chapter might therefore be conceived of as a combination of the "findings" and the "analysis" sections of a conventional research report. Together the sections inform us further about the following areas of interaction:

i) The relationship between Living Earth and Shell, the communities of the Niger Delta and other NGOs;
ii) internal organisational dynamics within Living Earth and Shell;
iii) the individual response to these phenomena and
iv) the implications of such relationships for sustainable development.

You will notice that it is presented in a "two column" format. At the beginning of each section there is a brief full-column introduction that sets out the relevance of the section. Subsequently, the two-column format separates the narrative from my commentary; the *right-hand column* uses direct quotes from the interviews and my observations to tell the story of the relationship in the words of the participants; the *left hand-column* contains comments, questions and some of my own reflections.

The format is hopefully more than a presentational device; it aims to encourage a reading of the document that is likely to open up, rather than close down possibilities for further conversation

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[1] See Appendix B for a list of participants with interview numbers.

and reflection. The primary aim of conducting and writing the learning histories was to create individual and organisational reflection within Living Earth and Shell in order to allow for improved and critically informed action. I produced separate documents for each organisation and I have chosen to present the learning history written for Living Earth; this was the only history that was subsequently followed by an internal workshop. One point to note is that the learning history was originally written with a view to presentation within Living Earth and therefore you may come across references that are not immediately obvious. The decision to present it here comes from a sense that the work may be useful for parties outside of the relationship; it offers the opportunity for others involved in similar change efforts to gain from the vicarious experience and reflect upon their own practice. At the end of this learning history I go onto add to the discussion with some details from the workshop that was conducted with Living Earth UK. And then in chapter 8 I delve deeper into my own relational praxis, which includes my interaction with Shell and Living Earth. I return after this to make some conclusions with regard to the relationships. At the moment, I would like to invite you to engage with this learning history.

The six sections are as follows:

Selection of communities

Emergence   Change

Helping others   Abundance

Participation
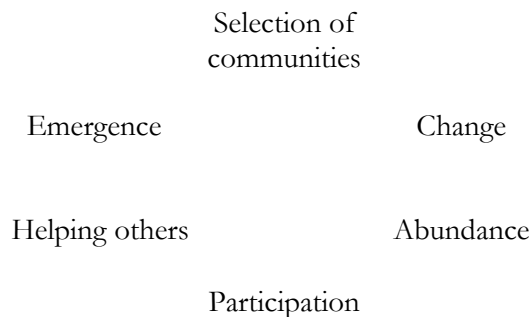
There is no specific order in which to read the six sections so you may chose whichever first grabs your interest or just follow the order I have presented them in. Similarly, within each section you may move between reading the text in left and right columns as you feel comfortable, as engages your inquiry the most. I would like to ask you to notice your own reactions as you go through the sections. What is of interest to you and draws you in? What excites, upsets or challenges you? You might find it useful to make notes. If you would like to send me any thoughts that come from reading the document I would be grateful to receive them at: rupesh99@fsmail.net

7.1   Selection of Living Earth communities

Burning down Unity Bridge in Nembe

14 communities in Bayelsa State now form the core of Living Earth Nigeria's programmes. For the communities that were selected to benefit from these programmes the final decision was obviously a significant one. There also seems to have been much significance in the selection process for the four organisations involved in this encounter. The issue of the choosing the communities where Living Earth would conduct its work seems in many ways to be a microcosm of the interactions between the organisations.

Seems to reveal a difference between what Shell International and SPDC perceived as the objectives of the Living Earth programme.

One of the things with Shell and ourselves was that we didn't just see the Delta on its own….And this was really interesting because this was coming from a number of people from Shell. Others, particularly when we got out there, when we got the programme going were saying "why are you dashing off to Calabar every so often, why are you doing this and that, you're supposed to be looking at the Delta." And we were saying "no, no, context and experience and building up a whole programme is important. So the message clearly wasn't getting through inside the Shell end of it (LEUK 2)

The importance of business benefits and Shell's needs with respect to the relationship.

And Shell were so terrified of losing a quarter of their production they would do anything that Nembe asked them. And they were literally pouring more and more money into Nembe and yet it was on the brink of becoming another Ogoniland.…(LEUK 4)

At first, we thought since it has such great potential we would put it in Nembe – which as you know is one of

our hottest spots, where at that time we had the poorest relations there, with very troublesome youths and all. (SPDC 28)

Using Living Earth as an independent third party.

When Living Earth initially arrived they wanted to work in Nembe area, where we were having problems. It was thought that they would act as a bridge between Shell and the community. (SPDC 26)

They (Shell) said, "no, no we want you to do this in Nembe" and we said "what?" Nembe was particularly challenging because its got a complex history as a community. Its been divided as long as its been Nembe – there a bridge called Unity Bridge that joins the two sides but that's been burnt down regularly. (LEUK 2)

My first reaction to when they said we should work there was "no way". And every single meeting we went to Roger was just like "yes, okay then. Sure, we'll go and work in Nembe". And as soon as I'd start raising objectives to Nembe he'd be like "ssssh, Tunde, you know lets discuss this in private not in front of Shell." (LEUK 4)

So I got really upset, because basically we were having this money dangled in front of us and we were prepared to do anything.…We hadn't been to Nembe; we'd done no assessment of their needs; we'd known nothing about Nembe and yet here we were like a dog jumping up and down saying "yes, we're going to work in Nembe". (LEUK 4)

So for a while we argued against it, saying this is crazy.

The difficulty of matching the needs of the communities and Shell as competing beneficiaries.

Then we thought "well actually there are some advantages in going there; its got a microcosm of all the Delta problems and all the challenges", so we said yeah we can do something there. So we looked the positive side. (LEUK 2)

No matter whether we spoke to NGOs, Government people, people who came from Nembe itself – people said think very carefully about going to Nembe, it is the most difficult place you can start working….Roger was "well, if we can work in Nembe then we can work anywhere". (LEUK 4)

But then we both decided that if it goes there (to Nembe) it will just die and you won't really have seen the benefit. (SPDC 28)

Did the issue over Nembe sow the seeds for the emerging relationship between SPDC and LE?

Luckily Shell had some new management, including this woman Deirdre Lapin. And the new management said "that we really want this partnership with LE to work. We would rather that LE went somewhere really, really quiet where we haven't had that much intervention; somewhere where we have neglected. We want LE to basically start work where they have a good chance of success. And when they have proved their colours then they can work in Nembe". And Roger just went "yep, okay." And I was really relieved because at least it meant that we were going to work somewhere sensible. And we were assured that we could choose where we wanted to work. (LEUK 4)

At first SI and SPDC specified a location (Nembe), but later changed its mind, and so the proposal was recast.

The result was not a technically rigorous document. (SPDC 36)

The selection of "oil producing communities" over "non-oil producing communities".

We submitted a list of communities we wanted to work in… Straightaway we were faced with stiff opposition from Shell, because they wanted us to work in their oil producing communities, i.e. communities that are sitting next to wellheads. And we said "no, communities right across the Delta are oil producing communities in that they are all affected by oil exploration. And therefore we feel we can work anywhere we like". (LEUK 4)

One thing we've been arguing constantly with Shell is that if you look at community development you cant just say this community because they've got oil under their toes now and not that one "no, because its Agip" and that one "no, because they're on the road to that community, but they haven't got any direct concessionary land". (LEUK 3)

But you must understand, if I am to mention ones selfish point…is that we are very focused on the Niger Delta, that is if LE has very great programmes but are not in the Delta, our first interest is there (in the Delta). Three reasons: its our constituency; the needs on the ground and the great and they have been deprived for so long. So we have no apologies for being biased towards the Delta. So long as they have a programme that is geared towards the issues we have been managing in the Delta, they will find from us a very willing partner. (SPDC 28)

Matching business needs with needs of the wider community within the Delta

When they were starting the project one of the things that I insisted was that they should work in one or two communities that were also Shell communities, at least so that we can see the impact of their projects as different from communities that Shell is directly impacting, directly doing community development work.(SPDC 29)

What were the criteria for choosing the communities? Whose criteria?

Further more, the direct impact of the LE programme is not strongly felt on our operations, as only one of their three pilot communities is in our oil producing area. This is not to say that programme benefits in all communities may not influence other communities, but this is somewhat indirect. (SPDC 36)

Was it that the communities would form part of a wider model of development?

They didn't really understand the fact that we were working on a model of development, which could be anywhere from which they could learn. They wanted to see results right now. (LEUK 4)

Or based on the likelihood of success?

And it needed them to find a more placid environment that's why the areas the ones they are working were especially chosen because they were calm, we thought people would be more co-operative and there was no contention and so on. (SPDC 28)

SPDC's needs for its licence to operate?

And I said it many times to Dara even in our meetings that "the way I see it is that the resistance you are finding in the organisation is because this does not directly meet the need of the organisation". So if that could be a way of turning things round so that you meet at least one percent of the needs of the organisation - at that time the need was to show that

you were working in at least one or two of their communities. (SPDC 29)

What about other business benefits?
Living Earth's skills, motivations and objectives?

The relationship is unlike others SPDC has which are mutually beneficial in the sense that the NGOs are committed to developing locations in which SPDC works….The assertively independent style of LENF led SPDC to conclude that philanthropy and reputation (publicity) were probably the main business benefits. Less clear were the value of the project to the Company's day to day business or the strengthening of the CD programme. (SPDC 36)

We had an enormous argument about the selection of communities – they went absolutely crazy when we said we were going to chose where we were going to work - that's SPDC and particularly the community development people. International were quite happy for us to do that. But they (SPDC) thought that this was us getting out of hand, how dare we think we can decide where we're going to work, do they not know who's funding us?"….finally we basically put our heals in and said we only going to work if we can decide. And then later they said, when we met with the managing director of East, who said "I'm really glad you stuck your feet down because that community, now, we've decided that there is oil there and we're going to go back there. So whether that's actually learning I don't know. (LEUK 3)

What can be considered to be "learning" in the context of trying to change the operations and thinking of an oil company?

We finally managed to win the war over the communities. I think more through a process of attrition than because people really understood. (LEUK 4)

The kind of relationship we were going to have wasn't very clear to many of the staff within Shell, because they had been used to controlling things "we have this problem in this location, we have this project we want you to do", so they would tell you and they would give you funds to do it. But this one was different. It was an NGO with its own independent programme and with funding from Shell. (LENF 13)

Can a partnership exist with one party having complete independence?

But basically we had got the money from Shell, we were going ahead with our work in the communities. Shell couldn't stop us even if they wanted to. (LEUK 4)

The way this project was conceived it was "we are interested in doing environmental education, developing communities and we will go ahead and develop it irrespective of whether it has to do with your communities or not. That was a very important turning point in the whole initial conception. LE said well, that the understanding that they had with London was that they were not going to be dictated to where they do their projects and therefore it doesn't matter whether the communities selected are Shell communities or not." Fine go ahead, but they are using Shell funds to do that. (SPDC 29)

The effects of not feeling consulted or having ownership…

This view was reinforced when Living Earth selected its three initial target communities -- two of which were not SPDC's oil producing communities. The Company was not consulted on this choice, and this decision contradicted earlier basic assumptions about the rationale for the relationship. At this point the

interest of CD staff in the potential partnership began to wane. (SPDC 36)

Shell International and SPDC have a differing perspective of the relationship.

When they selected the communities, we looked at their maps and we saw the areas in which they were working and there were at least two communities that were very close to these areas and they said they would look at that. They went back and decided that "no, no, we already decided with Shell (International) they were not going to influence the choice of locations. (SPDC 29)

How are the needs of the primary beneficiary affected when the donor has its own (differing?) needs?

I was a bit surprised by the communities chosen and that we had no opportunity to discuss or review the choice before it became final. Perhaps it was agreed by the London office without our input. (SPDC 36)

What can the above inform us about the relationship? The choice of communities was obviously not a clear-cut issue, solely dependent upon the needs of the people of the Delta. Looking at the process of selection and the outcomes may inform us of the level of control held by various parties in the relationship. It also seems to indicate that differing motivations existed within Shell for the relationship with Living Earth. Whose needs – Shell International, SPDC or Living Earth - were decisive in the end? What are the implications of having a donor that has quite specific needs for development work?

7.2   Emergence

'Begin at the beginning,' the King said gravely, 'and go on till you come to the end: then stop.'[2]

It is unlikely that any of the individuals involved at the beginning of the relationship in 1991 could have imagined the flow of internal and external events that have lead to the emergence of the relationship as we now see it. The sense of developing, emergent possibilities and outcomes in the absence of "conclusive knowing" is something that seems to exist in much community development work. At a still wider level, in making a transition towards sustainability one often feels the need for having faith that a path will emerge.

Different levels of the relationship have emerged over time allowing different qualities able to appear.

Some individuals feel that the relationship is still very much emergent.

A parallel to relationships with communities, where allowing

The relationship has changed since it started and the number of individuals that have interactions with the other partner has increased quite dramatically as you would expect. And with that has bought additional perceptions and misunderstandings. And some positive stuff as well. (LEUK 1)

And like I said, the partnership is just beginning, in the sense that what they are doing at the moment, is taking an area to themselves and pursuing particular programmes in those areas. So you could call it partnership based on trust and they delivering services within the funds that they got from us and letting us know whether they are being judicially applied and demonstrating that we are getting the desired result. That's the first stage. (SPDC28)

We have also realised that it is going to take time, from 6 to 10 years in terms of how Shell operates and the communities see them. There is a massive trust deficit

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[2](Carroll, 1995)

time for things to emerge is also important

to transform and this will take time. So for LE, it will take 3 years to show how to work with the communities and then another three years to translate that to the organisation. (LEUK 35)

It will take time for the community people to change their attitude - to realise that Shell is not handing out money – but this is not something that happens overnight (SPDC 26)

I think one of the things that has come across has been that things like this tend to take time – a lot more time than we had previously perhaps thought. (SI 6)

Is it possible to hide a lack of progress behind the excuse that things take time?

But this is going to take a long time, particularly in a place where there is incredible poverty and a lot of complex social structures that keep an imbalance. It is iterative and going back and forth. (LEUK 1)

With this iterative motion it seems that some things are lost while others maintained and even added.

These things tend to go through several iterations. Because if you are trying to communicate with an organisation as diverse and big as Shell, language is so important and there is a language gap and we've got to work out and develop a common language and build those bridges (LEUK 1)

We did a lot of work with him and we submitted draft after draft of proposal. We never shifted the fundamentals of the proposal, "this is what we want to do, this is how we are going to do it". We were very much in charge of it. (LEUK 2)

link to: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/r_shah.html

Which party and what criteria define what is deemed fundamental?

And in negotiation parts of it were thrown out partly because Shell clearly didn't want it included but also because Roger didn't want to confront them. These were the entire log frame about how we should measure change within Shell, which was thrown out. (LEUK 3)

How much does reality unfold and how much can one do to create that unfolding?

Anything that concerns change is not anything that happens over night. It has to be gradual…These things do not just come just once. As time rolls by the reality of the thing will unfold. And gradually people will begin to see the changes or the impacts of what we are doing in the people themselves. (LENF 16)

Although I would say that they are essentially in transition, which is a phase of uncertainty and lack of plans. (SPDC 14)

But the one thing I would like to emphasise – and you will see it in the Shell report – a lot of the things we are doing are clearly aspirational. We will do our bit where we can, we will continue to change from inside, I hope and encourage that change – but realistic change…others will have to involved if these processes are going to work – so they are aspirational and what I'm not saying is we've got everything right and we've now got no problems. On the contrary, we've now started on a journey that even our competitors think we're looney tunes and they have said so (SI 8)

What is the outcome of such journeying where one does not know the destination? How do

Anyway, as time went by the NGOs here in the UK were still very anti-'us'. But a few had begun to say "LE

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you deal with this sense of "not knowing"?

has taken the money from Shell, basically we are not going to attack them anymore, but we are going to wait and see what they do. If as a result of them taking money from Shell they can actually make a difference to the actual communities where it matters then we well revise our position about LE.(LEUK 4)

So judging it comes down to – well there are something's you can count – the physical outputs, they said they were going to develop such and such a programme for schools, "where are the books?, where are the teachers materials?". (SI 6)

I am still looking for tangible outcomes. That is the point to make….it ain't over yet…we've had dialogue, we've had struggle, we're waiting for SPDC to let go and again it is a project that isn't as tangible as ones we have worked on before. So we still have to get some measure of outcome, and its not going to be at some terminal exposition. It is going to be a measure of outcome over a period of time (SI 6)

7.3   Change

How are we to match the need for changing the state of people's lives today with the need to transform our ways of thinking for the future?

The current environment is one in which new ways of working between private sector and NGOs, which aim to create change by offering solutions, are being developed. Living Earth UK's work with Shell is suggested to be at two levels: changing how Shell relates to its host communities with the aim of delivering development today and also transforming the way Shell thinks for the longer term. Shell International is hoping to alter the way its operating companies relate with communities and the NGO sector. SPDC is also looking to change the way it is able to relate to its communities, with an operational concern for the effects of community disturbance upon.

Creating change requires some initial catalyst.
What happens to the catalyst?

We need pressure groups; we need whistle blowers, we need people who will zoom the boat out and take over oil platforms. Because there isn't one solution for companies and private sector and government. (LEUK 2)

I think that is 100% part of it. Shell has changed, not because they are nicer people than Texaco or Mobil, but because they were facing protests in Europe and that was it. I don't care why they are changing – that is fine. (UK-NGO)

Helping to provide action-oriented solutions and real sustainable developments is an important carrot for helping to change the "other".

Part of it is I feel, a lot of people can work on a campaign for a while - its a bit like a record, it goes up, up and up and it hits the top of the charts and then people quickly lose interest. Because even down on the ground people want to see something changed, they want some differences, they want to feel more in control of what they are doing. And what we were offering was a programme that did that, "here's a way to actually change your state from this to that" and

began to be more exciting. (LEUK 2)

Are the change agendas of the activist whistle-blowers and solutions-oriented collaborators so distinct that the two find it difficult to come together?

I said to them (other NGOs) it would be wrong for us to feel that we – as an organisation that works with Shell cannot work with other organisations. The best thing any organisation can do to impact change is working together with the people. I said today, I work with LE and I know my impact in LE, and I am happy. And so for anybody to effect changes, is not only by talking. If you can get involved with the people you can exact more changes than staying outside and talking. (LENF 16)

Living Earth and creating change within Shell…

…there's a dynamic going on between what we want to happen in terms of changes within Shell and what we want to happen in terms of changing in the NGO sector. (LEUK 1)

It's still repeated that that's why we're working with Shell. "We're working with Shell to try and change them". And I say that to any of my friends that I meet as well. But it's…it goes no further than a mere comment. (LEUK 1)

Are there different signals coming from the two sides of Shell?

So we wanted to influence Shell to show that we could do a decent job, that we could work with them and we can make a difference. (LEUK 2)

And one of the activities lower down was working with Shell and I think it was something along the lines of "we will influence key individuals in Shell". And Deirdre Lapin insisted that that was removed

completely. Which, obviously from her perspective, she wasn't interested in the debate that had gone on, presumably at international level, which had talked about us influencing Shell and they way they did things in the Delta. And also for me it was very important in this organisation, because I think if LE isn't clear about what its doing in Shell its pretty difficult to look for the changes. And so that particular log frame went and it never…I don't even know where it is now. Its vanished. (LEUK 1)

Creating change within Shell is an important aspect of the relationship for some individuals.

A lot of people in the organisation felt very strongly that it (change within Shell) should be in there because that was the whole point of us being in Nigeria and yet we removed it. And some people said that "well, if we remove it then later on down the line as trust is established it can sneak in the back door". But what happened is that it sneaked out through the back door and kind of dropped off . (LEUK 4)

Is there an element of protecting oneself from criticism in the constant refrain of "creating change in Shell"?

And what we're trying to do is somehow get the business sector locked into that kind of community development. So what we need is programme staff to be able to look over their shoulder to be aware of how can we link in SPDC appropriately, how can we do this, how can we do that. (LEUK 2)

It seems that for Living Earth Nigeria changing Shell is not an important objective.

One way or another, Roger still believes that we are doing that (trying to change Shell). And I told him that if that is what we think we are doing in Nigeria, then we are failing because its not an objective that we really need to set for ourselves, because we wont get far with it. Its is something that we could be doing indirectly

(LENF 13)

Influencing the relations between SPDC and the communities has been perceived as an important although neglected area of the work.

One of the understated aims for our programme in Nigeria was basically to set up a model for participatory development in the Delta that demonstrated the benefits to communities for sustainable natural resource management and we hoped that this would be a model that influenced the way that Shell worked with its communities. (LEUK 3)

At the moment the relationship is not much beyond a simple funding relationship…on the ground we have had some influence. In one of the communities where we are operating – Biseni – its also a Shell community development area and so the field staff on the ground have been liasing quite closely with Shell staff – they provided them with training and support with how to work with communities. So I think at that level we have had an impact. We've also provided some training and support for some other Shell community people. So we're trying to, I think influence their field practitioners in community development. (LEUK 3)

…a specific training element, inviting Shell staff to their training, or inviting LE to come and handle some aspects of training.…if there had been a longer term plan then he (Dara) would be able to react more positively. (SPDC 29)

But the creation of change within Shell seems to have become sidelined.

One of the things in the proposal was that LE would help Shell to develop the capacity of the community development staff, internally, to be able to deliver because LE already has an advantage in doing

Participatory Rural Appraisals and things. But that never happened. (SPDC 29)

And as with all the best capacity development, it works best when people really don't think it has happened to them, but that they have learnt it themselves. (LEUK 35)

Getting ownership of a change effort is difficult.

There should have been a 4th element in the agreement about competence development within SPDC and it should have been overt and clear. Now at the time because of all the forces on us, it was very hard to see how to do that. We talked to people about it here. Its like the hidden curriculum in the school "we can't talk about it, we can't make it obvious, because then that will tend to blow it." We could have done more here though in being a bit clearer for ourselves. (LEUK 2)

And SI are desperately trying to change the way that SPDC operates – they see us very much as a Trojan horse as a way of doing that. So funding us to try to have influence on them is good. I think that International would have been very keen to have a log frame that said "lets look at how we can create changes within SPDC and try and measure that change". And we couldn't turn around to SPDC and say actually this is what we want to do and you don't have a choice in the matter. (LEUK 3)

Pressure from outside…if the people within Shell who would like to turn things around get strengthened by pressure from outside, then that's fine. (UK-NGO 5)

Now these are things that I liked when I was listening to Living Earth, but if I'd had said it would not have had the same clout as someone coming from the outside and saying it. And I needed the outside voice and that's why I invited him to many, many workshops, both here in the UK and overseas as well. (SI 8)

Knowing about change is difficult in any circumstance, because of the indeterminacy of knowing what would have happened without the inputs. This is perhaps increased, in this situation, by the fact that the issue of influencing SPDC has been a "hidden curriculum" in the programme and that "we do not necessarily know where we are going". How can we know about our own efforts at creating change?

I wouldn't say we have been involved in that re-organisation. I think people like Roger would like to think – and I am sure that if you ask Roger I'm sure he would say that yes we have influenced Shell. I think he would like to think that we have had a big impact on their re-organisation , but I don't think we have. (LEUK 4)

They are beginning to use terms like PRA, and I would like to think that it is partly to do with LE's influence within Shell. But its difficult to quantify that. Shell might have done it themselves regardless; I think we might have helped that. But I wouldn't say we've had a big impact on Shell yet. (LEUK 4)

What does the use of language tell us about changes?

What, then, do actions tell us about change?

I think there have been some changes at the bottom end, but I don't think it is measured. Its easy enough to measure the number of workshops that senior managers have been to, but that doesn't tell you anything except that they've been on a lot of workshops. (LEUK 3)

I do think that we have made a little bit of difference with Shell – not as much as I'd like to think we could have done and not as much as we could have done if we had been much, much clearer and perhaps more honest about what our programme was going to be about. (LEUK 4)

How is it possible to be clearer about change? By asking questions about the type and level of change you are looking for and the relative importance of creating those changes?

…Shell has not really worked with NGOs before and the relationship with LE is one of a kind in that we tried to build our inputs into the activities of Shell, try to exchange ideas on the operations of a multinational

oil company and the systems operated by NGOs, especially the applications of the bottom-top approach using the participatory approaches. (LENF 16)

The initial influence with SPDC was to try and move them away from thinking "community assistance" and to get them thinking "community development". Even Deirdre, I think, acknowledges that we were crucial in that process. And that was the first workshop in response to our scoping study. (LEUK 35)

Knowing about change is also seemingly hindered by the fact that there are multiple levels of change….

LE did not have a direct hand in the establishment of the community development approach in SPDC. Apart from early advice, the August 1998 workshop, the Scoping Study, and a second workshop offered to SPDC CD staff in 1998, LE did not contribute substantially to the conceptualisation, training, or integration of community development within the Company. (SPDC 36)

(Change as) a big overall objective?…no, no. I don't want to deceive myself that that is what is happening. (LENF 13)

How can you measure sincerity to change?

Sure, and its a constant concern in building up relationships in "how serious are you?". Is there serious intent to change? Sometime there isn't and where there isn't you've got to work out the cost benefit of doing this. And maybe its a step to establishing a relationship. (LEUK 2)

This lack of certainty has some implications within the

Getting more and more people in the inside involved in

organisations.

that debate is the way forward and obviously you don't get everybody involved, but bit-by-bit this is getting into the system and that is why, I said, the process are important. (SI 8)

In the absence of opportunity for creating big transformations of mindset do you accept "small changes", i.e. action oriented developments?

Anything that concerns change is not anything that happens over night. It has to be gradual. Because you are building the psyche of the people, the people have a different orientation. You are not talking about behavioural changes; you are talking about the sociology or anthropology of the people and those are the things that we are concerned about. These things do not just come just once. As time rolls by the reality of the thing will unfold. And gradually people will begin to see the changes or the impacts of what we are doing in the people themselves. (LENF 16)

I think Shell is a huge organisation and think there will be some people in Shell, who would like it to be a nice organisation and some people who say, look we are oil, we don't care about this stuff.…But I don't really mind if they are doing it for good reasons or bad reasons, as long as the behaviour changes. (UK NGO 5)

If we accept that others will only make small changes, then do their motivations for making these incremental shifts matter?

I, again on a personal level, feel that the skills that I've got are more efficiently employed in assisting that kind of change, and others are far better at trying to do revolutionary change from the outside. We need both. It's a tough job, it's a big job and in my lifetime, they won't change these oil companies and we won't change the economic system of the world, but I think we can start moving the thing in the right direction. (LEUK 2)

It seems to be scary for the individual involved at the edge of change; by experimenting with new methods, the outcomes of which you are not sure, is there a feeling that you might breaking the picket line of the activist?

As an environmental NGO, does Living Earth consider how the incremental changes within Shell enhance its ability to argue a case for continued unsustainable resource extraction? Or do small changes make all the difference?

Whether we campaign from now until the next millennium, we're not going to stop oil companies from producing oil, for God sake. But we can get them to do it more sensibly and in a more responsible manner. (LENF 13)

Its very frustrating. Its difficult, because you are constantly thinking, is all that we are doing providing potential greenwash for them or is there any real change going on; are they prepared to listen and are they really trying to change. I don't know – on my good days I think maybe they are, and then on my bad days I think well this is just nonsense. (LEUK 3)

I think that whether we are influencing corporate behaviour or not is another big issue. And I think corporates like to be involved because they can change the debate: they are now involved in sustainable development. It's a way of getting NGOs disarmed (LEUK 3)

7.4 Abundance

Paper clips, bootstraps and rivers of plenty

One of the things that stands out when visiting the Delta is the wealth of natural resource in the area. To be sure, the richness of the land is the reason why the oil companies are operating in the area. The arrival of monetary wealth from the oil industry has been suggested to be partly responsible for the social problems facing people in the Delta. The implication is that abundance perhaps does not always provide unequivocal benefits.

We've lived hand to mouth. And I think one of the things that sets me out from the others here is that I was here at the beginning as one of the founders, so there is quite a lot of soul gone into the thing. And the first 6 or 7 years it was incredibly hand to mouth – we spent inordinate amounts of time working out whether we could afford to buy a chair, which isn't really what we were set up to do as an organisation. And we bootstrapped right from the start. (LEUK 2)

Developing core reserves affords Living Earth increased flexibility.

It's something…when I came here first of I thought great, this is wonderful. Inevitably when you're working for an NGO you think that's a limitation. You think if only I could had enough money we'd do this job well. Here suddenly you've got a limitless supply of money, but of course it doesn't solve all of your problems, but it certainly solves some. It takes the pressure of you a lot. (LEUK 1)

Yeah, you don't have to make compromises. Less and less I worry about the cost of the things. If something's needed you just buy it. (LEUK 1)

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Its obvious that you have to rent an office you have to pay for it. Having a flash office helps to deal with the corporates. So its swings and roundabouts. (LEUK 3)

You come here from Shell and you don't realise. If you see a particular high salary paid to somebody and you work for Shell obviously it doesn't seem that high and you probably think the whole NGO sector is like that. That makes it a lot easier. And maybe it makes it a lot easier to trust us. (LEUK 1)

So what are the impacts from perceived or real abundance?

Corporate money is more…more...there's more spare cash and it gives you more freedom. Which in itself is not a bad thing, but it does affect how you see that cash. It doesn't come free. (LEUK 3)

And now there's a culture, particularly with the Bayelsa project, of not worrying about whether things cost too much. (LEUK 1)

Individuals and Living Earth are seem to be affected by this.

And I think the amount of money involved tends to blur the issue. Because it's such a lot of money relative to the size of the organisation – an organisation that is coming from a relatively poor an underfunded background – that dollar signs can sometime flash in front of people's eyes. And that can sometimes affect people's objectivity.(LEUK 3)

But I think maybe what's gone wrong here is that the organisation here wasn't clear or strong enough about what it believed in and was going to do to protect it from the cultural shock of suddenly getting 2.25

link to: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/r_shah.html

million. (LEUK 1)

And clearly if you get an opportunity to start in a new country with a large programme with significant funding, which far outweighs any other funding area it has potential for confusion if your beliefs are not clear from the beginning. (LEUK 3)

What is the impact such abundance upon outsiders? Is it likely to affect the perception of Living Earth as an organisation?

I'm rather suspicious of the expensiveness of their offices. (UK-NGO)

But again another thing I thought was happening then, was that they thought that LE got too much money – more than we actually required. So there was that kind of jealousy there, "why is so much being given to LE, which is mostly a British based NGO from SI." Many of them didn't like that as well. (LENF 13)

And the fact that they are spending most of it in London – I went to their old offices and apparently the new ones are really great. I know the costs, and if you have to run an office like that then obviously some of it is going to come from that project. (Nigerian NGO)

A colleague of mine said to me "My God, this whole environmental NGO business is becoming an industry in itself; where does all the money come from to pay for this". (LEUK 4)

Some of these other local NGOs may not actually be talking to us because of jealousies encouraged by the fact that LE has money and while there is competition for a limited amount of funds, they may well try to put

LE down. (LENF 13)

There also seems to be an impact upon the development work being conducted with communities.

Actually, its too much money to do what we are doing. We're over funded to carry our community development for 14 projects and will have sufficient funds to extend the programme by another year, easily. (LEUK 3)

I also felt that the amount of money was too much for too short a period. I didn't feel that we could start working with 100 communities. That you need to start off and build a programme. To do that you need to start off, I think 14 communities is absolutely plenty and that we should look at not having large amounts of money going into "projects" because otherwise we are going to go back into the same circle that you are trying to break. Rather than empowering communities you are just going to go in there to quickly find projects and spend money on them, which isn't going to be that much different from what Shell are doing at the moment. (LEUK 3)

Is the amount of money really likely to breed a donor-victim relationship?

There seems to be a real concern over how much money goes to the communities in the Delta.

But still if someone in SI is going to tell the board of directors that "we are spending $2 million in the Niger Delta on community development projects", if 1 million is staying in London, then that's misrepresentation. Lets get some of that money into the Delta, I don't mean in Port Harcourt…I mean in the Delta for projects. (Nigerian NGO)

And its something you wouldn't dream of doing in an NGO - you wouldn't buy alcohol. Because the line that

would go in the organisation and would go in your head automatically that "you're taking money from the communities." But the trouble with the Shell project that such a large amount money of the 2.25mn is coming here (LEUK 1)

A lot of money doesn't go to the communities. But that answers a lot of questions about the way NGOs are run. A lot of money is not going to the communities. (LEUK 4)

What is spent in the UK as a proportion of the Bayelsa budget is similar to the overheads we allocate for EU or other projects. (LEUK 35)

This concern is extended to the implications for the quality of the resulting development work.

If you try and spend that money, if you are fixed to that 2 year budget then you are going to be forced as a manger to put pressure on people to spend that money, so you are going to be in a miniature position to how the World Bank used to operate. You've got to push the money out of the door. And thus you are going to have to start building things and buying things and putting things into the communities, which may not be ready or needed. (LEUK 3)

The end product of (Living Earth's work) did not in SPDC's view fully measure up to best international development practice; it was…expensive…the indirect costs paid to the London office very high, etc. …The administrative and staffing structure seemed excessive in relation to the outputs expected. (SPDC 36)

Setting a generous price tag on the project before the

proposal was written also may have dampened the incentive for rigour. (SPDC 36)

Is there a possibility that needs other than those of the communities begin to drive the projects?

They have the same problems in Abuja, Ajengunle or wherever; why would a man from there come down and try to get a development project in the Niger Delta? No reason at all, except that they are trying to get money that is here. And that isn't what should be driving NGOs…It shouldn't be driven by the fact that there are funds. (Nigerian NGO)

Are "needs" redefined in the context of a relatively more wealthy organisation?

But I get the feeling that sometime LE can be a bit power drunk with the money that we have got. I think that more than ever now, we tend to run after oil company money. And I think there are certain people in the organisation who feel that as long as we are offered the money we will do anything, whether its Mobil, Shell, Chevron or any of the oil companies. (LEUK 4)

So what are they going to do, go and find out everywhere where there is a multinational oil company who are in a bit of trouble and say "maybe we can help you out. Stop the natives getting restless." (UK NGO)

what LE is doing would be good, if LE were able to publish a comprehensive case study saying what the lessons were and if they were able to be completely, completely honest about their impact both on Shell, government, communities and a lot about their relationship with Shell, but I don't know how honest we would ever be able to be if we want more money from Shell. That's the thing. (LEUK 4)

NGOs have to be careful that they do not become too dependent. This is a difficult terrain and getting money from Shell can make an NGO ask for too much money and then you tend to lose that thing that makes you an NGO and then taint your credibility with the community. (SPDC 14)

Does "counting paper clips" make the NGO?

And so it has allowed certain people a great deal of leeway to move off on a completely different route….its made LE quite unique in terms of my perception. And for me its not an NGO. (LEUK)

What are the problems for the NGO community from the arrival of corporate money and the increasing professionalisation of the organisations? Traditionally, the NGO sector has attracted fairly idealistic individuals who attach equal importance to their financial and employment security and the cause for which they are working. Offering more risk-free opportunities in employment is likely to attract highly professional individuals and so improve the quality of work. Does the creation of more financially safe careers affect the ideological determination of NGOs? Does the position of community as core beneficiary shift to allow space for other beneficiaries within and outside of the organisation?

7.5   Helping others

How can we balance idea of helping others with the need for our own internal work?

The prospect of being able to provide assistance to others – those without voice or power - whom I feel may benefit from my efforts has given me considerable motivation in my work. "Other-centred values" have traditionally been identified within those working in development. As organisations such as Living Earth attempt to create solutions in partnership with the private sector, the range and scope of the help may also begin to shift.

So we felt people were running when they should be staying in. People need help when they're bobbing up and down in the water, rather than when they've got to the shore. So we thought we might be able to do something. That's probably it mainly. (LEUK 2)

We're not there representing or protecting communities, we look out for interests and sometimes we're a buffer, but we're not a democratic organisation in a way that we pretend that we can represent people who's lives we don't live. (LEUK 2)

The logic for helping communities seems clear for those within Living Earth…

Community development is supposed to provide at least some level of support and assistance to these people. I believe that is the goal of it. So if the money is not being well spent, it means that those people will remain the way they are. But if it is well spent they can have the furniture for the schools, they can have skills within the communities, they can have potable water and light. So there is a need for organisations like LE to come in and support this effort and make sure that it works and that they actually deliver on what they plan

…and, it would seem, for Shell.

to do. (LENF13)

By the fact that we are operating there, we are actually then, we hope, improving the employment, the economic conditions which then hopefully move things on, for infrastructural development and the development of civil society. (SI 8)

…so we want to find a way of taking the best things of all of us and in the end we are applying this whole strategy to raise the standard of living of the people and their quality of life. (SPDC 28)

We, in our modest way, are trying with our community development effort to give something back. We cannot do it alone. There is no way that even if we wanted we could develop the Delta through the whole Shell world-wide budget. And why should we if we are paying our taxes and royalties to the government. (SPDC 11)

That's what its all about in the end – are we actually helping the people and their quality of life, because if we aren't then all we are doing is rhetoric and bullshit. So in the end the only thing we are trying to do is have we improved the situation, have people's lives improved, do they see a net benefit, a sustainable benefit. (SI 8)

Does altruism exist entirely separate from self-interest?

…there was a shared sentiment in the organisation that the communities had to be given something as long as you wished to maintain operations in the area (SPDC 14)

The reasons for Shell having a community development department is that circumstances have gotten that

way…Its fine that Living Earth are doing something, but people want to see what Shell is contributing to the community. (SPDC 14)

I had realised that Shell were not doing this for altruistic reasons and this realisation has been important. Shell in Nigeria is there to drill oil and if it is to do this, then they are going to have to give the community something; if this is the case then you need to make sure it is done properly. (SPDC 14)

But you must understand, if I am to mention ones selfish point… is that we are very focused on the Niger Delta…our first interest is there (in the Delta). Three reasons: its our constituency; the needs on the ground are the great and they have been deprived for so long. So we have no apologies for being biased towards the Delta. (SPDC 28)

Does the motivation for helping others make a difference to the quality of help?

And I think this is the way to go, to use NGOs to take some of the aggro from the villagers and they can come in and genuinely say "hey we want to help you". (SPDC 11)

Their problem in the Niger Delta, is quite specifically relationships with communities. They don't know what to do, its causing a lot of problems. Now working with Living Earth is a way to solve some of their problems, and it's a business objective. (LEUK 2)

They did that because it seemed obvious to them that if you are drilling in point A you work with the community in point A, not the ones in B and C on the

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road to Port Harcourt. They weren't thinking of clans and lineage and ethnic structures where people are not just relating to one village. (LEUK 3)

When collaborating to create change within Shell, in what sense does it count as a beneficiary?

And sure, it would be nice if the corporate sector changed, but the people who we really want to make a difference for are the people who are the needy ones, the communities. (LEUK 4)

Well, you know, when Roger goes out to talk to companies he talks a lot about developing the capacity of the corporate sector, changing the way the corporate sector works and its hard to know whether the money we are taking….Its difficult to know in his mind who the beneficiaries of the programmes are. For him, I think, very much the beneficiaries of the programme are corporate sector in terms of training for them, changing the way they think, changing the way they behave. Whereas for the programme managers the beneficiaries are the communities. (LEUK 4)

What about the voice of the communities being offered help?

LE is nursing the Akeplai community back to health (Chief at Akeplai)

LE are here because they have heard of the suffering of this community and have come here to take care of the community. You have witnessed the men mulching the palms with their legs; LE have noticed the problems and are giving a helping hand to help them. (Chief at Akeplai)

What is their experience of being helped?

LE have come here because they must have heard about the backwardness of our community and they

have come here to teach us how to go forward, to help us solve our problems. (Elder at Akeplai)

I think God sent people to help us. We have been denied a factory. They have come with a lot of beautiful ideas so that if we work as a team, we will get a good lot of benefits. (Elder at Opume)

Having seen first hand how difficult it is to understand the needs of those who you may wish to help I have reflected a great deal on a verse by Lila Watson, an Australian Aboriginal:

If you have come

To help me

Then

you are wasting your time.

But

If you have come

Because

Your liberation

Is bound up with mine

Then

Come

And let us

Work together.

7.6   Participation

What is the individual experience, as attempts at participation become scaled up and more widespread in society?

According to some observers we are entering a new phase of human consciousness with the development of a participatory worldview. Attempts are being made to forge inclusive relationships between various, powerful sectors of society, often in domains that have been traditionally characterised by a lack of participation. Much of the agenda for sustainable development has been predicated upon the need to involve all sectors of society. Both Shell and Living Earth suggest that working with others is necessary if they are to achieve their respective aims; and within Living Earth UK participation itself is part of the organisational mission. Furthermore, I set out to conduct this learning history in a participatory and collaborative manner with an organisation that I had perceived as sufficiently powerful in its own right.

I think right across the world there is a move towards greater participation. So there is a change…I don't know if there is a change towards the way we look at the planet and earth and the way we live off it, I don't know if that has permeated Shell but I think there is a world-wide trend towards participation and listening to communities and I think Shell has definitely changed in that respect or is definitely beginning to move down that line much more so than other oil companies working in Nigeria…. (LEUK 4)

Why are these issues of participation emerging at the current time?

The notion that we had begun to form in our own minds was what we had to do was involve the communities far more in development. (SI 6)

There was clearly a need to involve people more in a participative way. But the way to do that wasn't entirely

clear. (SI 6)

Is the adoption of participation an unambiguously good thing?

…although there is a slogan "Partners in development", but no community takes Shell as a partner, or if they do it is as an unequal partner, where they expect that Shell pays for it and they provide labour. We tried at some point also to include community participation in the design of projects and we saw that was very difficult. (SPDC 29)

And the difference between ("assistance" and "development") really is that you build total engagement of the recipient into the process of delivering the product or service.…you facilitate them to articulate their needs, their future, to do their prioritisation. (SPDC 28)

Whatever product you need to deliver…you also, as much as possible involve them in the delivery process and hopefully they would call it "our project; we did it, our sweat is in it." And more importantly if you can get them to invest in it, maybe just their time or their labour they will never say that it belongs to anybody else and hopefully they will be interested in keeping it sustainable. (SPDC 28)

As uppers increasingly adopt the language of participation what

And the only way that we thought they (the communities) could contribute was maybe trying to directly implement the projects, but funded by us – so they would submit a quote on how much it would cost them to do the project. But sometimes their costs are

experience do lowers have?

even higher than commercial rates. So then we decided to set up a bench mark for these projects and once it is set you award them that based on that benchmark. (SPDC 29)

We've got quite a strong participative process for what we are doing and how we do it. There is a lot of discussion and participation and we have the type of staff, who if they don't agree with what we are doing won't do it. (LEUK 35)

Within Living Earth the difficulties of creating genuinely participative structures are evident. Adopting the language of participation and creating a participatory reality are perhaps two different things.

So there are certain things that go on in LE that are very creative, but that don't involve anybody else and don't consult with the necessary structures and models and communication structures that are there. (LEUK 1)

So there are a lot of feelings and opinions and views amongst the staff which isn't communicated to the management and the management just go ahead and take decisions without much consultation. A lot of things happen in the organisation and we are just told about it – we don't really know why these things take place. So there is a culture of silence which is unhealthy. (LEUK 3)

In what areas is it possible to involve others?

We do manage by objectives; everybody has objectives that are negotiated. Once in the organisation there are a set of objectives that are there, not top down but dictated by the whole strategy – "this is what needs to be done in that job". So we have some givens – we negotiate on how we do it. I think that is quite participatory. The appraisal system is quite participatory. I think where things are not participatory,

I hope that we can look over the last year and next year that we are tackling those bits and taking them out. But it does not mean that everything will be. (LEUK 35)

And there is a whole process of taking this out and working on it with partner organisations, with programme managers to set the objectives. I find it hard to see that that is not participatory. If it isn't participatory then I have got a very wrong perception of what "participatory" is about. (LEUK 35)

Fostering a mindset of participation within oneself, when so much of what has gone on before and goes on in the world around is not inclusive seems to be difficult.

Some decisions will be made; and there will be somethings where people will feel that they weren't consulted. If you look at the work that we are doing, programme managers are the ones where it really sits in terms of power – they have the power within the organisation, within the programmes they have, because once the budgets and objectives for the year are agreed they get on and report on it. To say that it is not participatory – I am not sure about. (LEUK 35)

And things like strategic planning and working out where we are going, how we get there – there is a lot of staff involvement. I can understand a perception that at times there is stuff happening at the top and coming down. Probe into the reality of it and try and find examples of it and its quite difficult. The thought is still there, because we have a thing called "a senior management team", there is a board of trustees so there is a perceived hierarchy. But if you start looking at what

Is it possible that (non)

we actually do and how things are done, I find it hard

participatory processes in one part of a system (organisation, group, individual) can be mirrored elsewhere in the system?

to find evidence of top down dictating. It's a mindset that is there, and part of that is baggage that has come in; and part of that is baggage of LE's past. (LEUK 35)

And I think that the management strategy in the organisation is quite top-down not very participatory. I mean we go and talk about participation in our programmes, but we don't practice it internally. (LEUK 3)

What inhibits people from feeling that "uppers" are adopting participatory approaches?

But the difficulty…was how to change the attitude of dependency in the Niger Delta communities, because no matter what you are doing about participation there must be a willingness to participate. If people are not willing to participate, you cannot get them to do it – as we say in Nigeria you can take a horse to the stream but you can never force it to drink. So you brought a programme to the communities and you are really trying to facilitate the process of their participation, but they have a long history of baggage of how Shell comes in and just gives us, and why should this be any different. (SPDC 29)

How can such organisations that are full of powerful uppers such as Shell genuinely engage in participatory approaches?

So to that extent participation is being hindered by the mentality and attitude of the people towards a willingness to accept participation in the project. (SPDC 29)

So the NGOs are able to build more partnerships than Shell communities…(SPDC 29)

And also my whole problem with the corporate sector is power and control and democracy.…I think that we are missing it as a democratic point of working with the corporate sector. Its not just about listening to your stakeholders – its about the nature of democratic control. Its great to be supporting democracy in Nigeria, what about democracy in Shell. (LEUK 3)

Shell is certainly beginning to think about participation even if it isn't happening yet. And who knows, maybe in another 4 years participation will actually start to happen. (LEUK 4)

What is the difference between thinking about, talking about and actually being participatory?

And the bits that we thought weren't so good were the bits that we thought Shell were deluding itself. We were told how the company consulted, it had people's parliaments, it had all sorts of mechanisms but it was very clear talking to the people at lots of communities that all of this was perceived to just a complicated form to fill in order to get the money. It wasn't real participation. (LEUK)

It is hoped that the research will provide practical forms of knowledge …it is believed that individuals at Living Earth, Shell…should contribute to the flow of the research. Thus, although the research focus has been identified it is seen as important to allow the study to reflect the experiences of the participants. (from my research proposal to conduct the learning history with Shell and Living Earth)

Is it possible to convince yourself and others that you are acting in a participatory manner?

…we've had the communication, the correspondence

but informing us that this (learning history) is happening, not "what would you like as an organisation, like to get out of this" – but that is typical Living Earth style. Even we complain about that in Shell, but it happens in our own situation as well. Often times things happen like "this person is coming to Nigeria, to do so and so stuff," but we were not a part of that background discussion. But we felt that the way that we see it now is that Living Earth and Shell International are doing a study and that we are just part of that…we are just like interviewees, and that is all that we are contributing. That's the way it is. Because that is a fact of it. Its not as if we said "what would be useful lessons from this". (LENF 13)

Are all organisations and individuals equally worthy benefiting from participatory approaches of consultation? What if you feel that they do not need to be empowered any more?

I think from the initial set up, you (Rupesh) were talking to the London office, and I think the Shell people would have been a lot more happy if they had contributed to the design and terms of reference – at the stage if they had contributed they would have been a lot happier, and they would have been more willing to contribute. (LENF 13)

My own experience with attempting to adopt participatory measures in my research has been an intense learning experience. Being with the communities in the Delta indicated to me that both community and development workers find it difficult to break away from the upper-lower dynamic that has existed for so long; it seems easy for both sides to "playback" the words of participation but carry on with a different mindset. Using the language of participation has turned out to be far easier than actually developing participatory processes. Control has emerged as a significant issue, with a realisation that in order to create genuine participation one must be willing to empower others by letting go of personal agendas and simply doing less oneself. But such "giving up" is accompanied by personal uncertainty; glimmers of self-preservation and a self-perpetuating consciousness come into view. As a purely methodological device – i.e. in order to get better results than ordinary top-down methods might – genuine participation seems difficult to produce. How, then, are we to create a participatory consciousness for sustainable development?

7.7 Points emerging from internal learning history workshop at Living Earth

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, I was only able to help conduct one workshop, at Living Earth UK, subsequent to the dissemination of the learning history documents that I produced. The session was co-facilitated by myself and Peter Reason and involved seven members of staff from the UK offices - ranging from the Executive Director to the programme staff involved with Nigeria as well as staff not directly involved with work in Nigeria.

In the following section I shall briefly set out a range of themes that were discussed during the workshop. Whilst previous learning history work has suggested that the workshops have occasioned a cathartic reaction amongst participants (Bradbury, 1998) I do not think this was the case in this instance. Whilst there was considerable interesting discussion and acceptance of the core themes of the document, at the end of the workshop the participants seemed to agree that the usefulness of the learning history would only really be known when the ideas and aspirations generated meet with reality.

From the experience with Shell, it was recognised that the way in which things start off can be really quite important in affecting the quality of the emergent relationship. Whilst recognising that practical pressures sometimes mean that a perfect start could not be guaranteed, it was felt that an in-the-moment awareness of importance of beginnings in relationships can be very useful and should be cultivated in future activity. Part of this awareness was the recognition that the existence of internal and external risks should combine to determine an appropriate starting size for a new project or country operation.

In a slight parallel, Living Earth was noted for being a fairly young organisation that needed to develop the clarity of its purpose. A lack of solidity was recognised as having permitted Living Earth to act with considerable flexibility there was a sense that some of the values, objectives and activities needed to be more clearly defined for the future. The metaphor of Living Earth sitting on a number of critical fault-lines evoked the difficulties that the organisation faced in clarifying these issues. While an important factor within the conversation was the need to orient towards multiple external stakeholders, it was recognised during the workshop that Living Earth's role must be based on the organisation's key competences and comparative advantage. It was suggested that it would be vital to establish what Living Earth's core exportable values were; the central elements

of its mission statement and values that can and should be taken out into the world, with the implication that the organisation become clearer about its identity as an organisation.

An important part of gaining this clarity was considered to be the need to establish organisational objectives in participatory way. Roger Hammond suggested that while participation was an important element in this process it was not practical in all circumstances. Other members of staff added that having an internally and externally transparent decision making process should therefore be central to how Living Earth operates. This was also linked to the great need for downward accountability to a range of stakeholders - local NGOs, internal staff, communities and donors. Roger suggested that by placing the stake too firmly in the ground, the commitment to working with various stakeholders might be compromised.

One of the other members of staff suggested that Living Earth, as an educator, should maintain the belief that people are better than they really are and act as a friend to the friendless, in order to help them to change. Building on this, if working with the corporate sector was to be effective and Living Earth and the sustainability agenda were not to be compromised, there was also a recognition of need to have better knowledge of change efforts.

It was also suggested that during the workshop there were considerable tensions inherent in having various groups of external parties to whom you wish to be accountable; there is a danger of being blown about like a feather in the wind. But this was also recognised as being a core aspect of Living Earth's identity and so the need to live with, manage and work with the kinds of tensions that were brought up by the multi-faceted stakeholder orientation was emphasised.

Whilst a final answer as to how to manage these tensions was considered as unlikely, the development of good quality professional *and* personal relationships was reflected upon as a source for sustaining continuous internal inquiry that would allow questions to be asked and issues to be addressed.

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