

Assessment of an iterative process: The double spiral of re-designing participation

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Abstract

The procedures for reforming forest policies and programmes as promoted through the international dialogue on forests are addressing hard challenges to forest administrations, which are basically still working along a very different scheme for decision making (top-down and command-and-control systems, with no evaluation of the results). One of the most relevant conceptual frameworks to address the issue of forest governance reform under such conditions is the mixed model which tries to link the deductive instrumental and the communicative approaches in a progressive process for change. In the mixed model, the basic structure of the decision making process is a chronological deductive series of steps whose content is defined through a negotiation procedure. The monitoring of the implementation of the forest policy reform aiming at a permanent adaptation to the changes in the context, including those brought from the reform process itself, is provided by the means of participatory assessments along the chain. The mixed model is especially adapted to the follow-up of the National Forestry Programmes, which are supposed to be carried out through an iterative and participatory scheme.

As most of the time the deductive and communicative approaches are not completely fitting to each other, the process of re-designing the forest programme works as a combination of outward and inward spirals (the double spiral), revealed by evaluation procedures.

The experience of the evaluation of a complete cycle of forest policy development in Kyrgyzstan (Central Asia, ex-USSR country), an 8-year case history of implementation of the “mixed model”, is presented. The paper explains why the mixed model was used as a basis for the process of forest policy reform in Kyrgyzstan, and how in this framework the various forces expressing participants’ interests were alternatively balancing from collaborative learning (outward spiral) to target oriented strategies (inward spirals). The paper also shows how the evaluation exercise carried out after 5 years led to a re-definition of the participatory procedures linked with a re-construction of the forest administration authority.

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1. Linking rationalist evaluation to communicative perspective as a base

1.1. The special role of forest services in forest policy processes

Over the past 15 years, the international dialogue on forests has been bringing some basic changes in the way the forest policies and programmes are designed and evaluated. Different new concepts, supposed to be conducive to sustainable development, have been introduced, and some of them are bringing big changes in the way the decisions are taken in the forest sector. Participation is now presented as a key-word (if not THE key-word), which is supposed to give a new framework for any kind of decision making procedures, and this is, obviously, a considerable change for forestry specialists, who were used to decide through controlled top-down rationalist procedures. Thus a question may be raised: are all the stakeholders on the same level of decision making? Usually, after a period of enthusiasm while designing new programmes and policies, the step of implementation brings back more trivial aspects, and, at the moment for assessment or evaluation, some evidences are reintroduced. Most of the time, it leads to the revision of the concept of forest policy itself.

Among those evidences, the one to be particularly stressed, and carefully considered in the subsequent steps of the policy process, is that in no case the forestry department has the same responsibilities, rights and duties as the other participants in the decision elaboration and implementation.

1.2. Forest services as responsible for implementation

First, the specialised administrative structure is in charge of carrying out the reform, and conducting the related actions derived from the participatory process. Many participants may express their views and contribute to the designing of the process; some of the planned activities may be carried out through a partnership with specific actors more directly engaged in the implementation of such measures; but at the end, only the forestry department is responsible for the implementation procedures and, as such, is supposed to report to the public authority on the results from the common action. This makes the main difference for its position.

Such an asymmetry in the relative positions of the different partners in the forestry programme implementation necessarily creates the need for an adaptation of the evaluation methods to the rationale of the executive agency. Thus the assessment of what is being carried out also needs to be goal oriented, as the conventional technical action of administration is supposed to be based on the instrumental rationality and on a deductive scheme of decision making (measures directly aimed at achieving the predefined objectives), without any consideration of the needs and interests expressed by the users.

1.3. Forest services as experts in designing actions

In addition, the knowledge that may exist among the various participants in a forest policy process is very different from one stakeholder to another. The type of interest they express, as well as the more or less inclusive views they have on forest development, introduce basic differences which usually lead to misunderstanding and discrepancies in the dialogue installed through the participatory procedures. The forestry department staff is usually supposed to have a high level of education and general background on the topics to be addressed in relation to the forest development, which puts them in position of experts in the field of discussion.

Furthermore, there are many issues in the forestry field which cannot be addressed only through the views reflecting interests, as it is the case with the participation of stakeholders. Forests bring many utilities to society, which may not be completely taken into consideration by any stakeholder. Some of the more complex issues (like biodiversity, ecological sustainability) may require a specific knowledge which should not be linked with any kind of social interest. This is the role of the forestry department staff, together with other experts (scientists, experts from environmentalist non-governmental organisations) to bring in this knowledge in order to shape and direct the discussions on what is to be done at the global level (scientifically based deductive decisions).

1.4. The mixed model

Derived from this consideration is a need for taking into account the special position of the forestry depart-

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