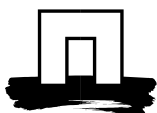MSc Thesis

Learning about advocacy

Monitoring as a tool for learning in Ibis South America

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MAKS 16

Bettina Ringsing

WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY
SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Bettina Ringsing

With supervision by prof. dr. Cees Leeuwis

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MSc programme Management of Agricultural Knowledge Systems (MAKS)
Communication and Innovation Studies
Wageningen University

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Summary

'To learn' as an organisation is a growing objective amongst Non-Governmental Development Organisations (NGOs). Similarly, advocacy is becoming a popular focal area in NGO development work. In this research it is investigated how learning about advocacy is facilitated and how it can be strengthened in the Danish NGO, Ibis South America. A specific interest in the research is related to the question about how monitoring is to be implemented in order to be able to facilitate organisational learning.

Theories about experiential learning, social learning and organisational learning are discussed and it is argued that dominant approaches of social and organisational learning tend to be normative and assume that learning is a neutral process. It is furthermore argued that an approach that understands learning as a social process influenced and shaped by social practices, agency, different interests, social pressure, and power relations will provide a more appropriate analysis of learning in organisations acting in a political environment. Finally, concepts about monitoring related to the conventional paradigm of planning and instrumental monitoring as well as the learning monitoring paradigm focusing on process, are included in the conceptual framework of this research.

The research consists of both exploratory and action research elements. In the exploratory research the existing situation in Ibis is analysed as to advocacy, monitoring and learning. In the action research the participatory, process-oriented monitoring method *Most Significant Change* (MSC) is experimented with.

The results of the exploratory research show that a highly complex field like advocacy gives specific challenges to monitoring and that social learning in this case may be facilitated by monitoring focusing on process, context and actors' different interpretations of change. Further findings reveal a gap between different monitoring practices in Ibis: a formal policy which relates to the outside world – the donors – and an informal process oriented method used for analysis of the political social context as well as decision making internally in the organisation. The different monitoring practices represent two divergent sense-making paradigms: one defined by the donors and another emerging from concrete experiences between actors at the field level.

Findings show that learning of operational as well as strategic and methodological issues occurs. However, organisational learning mainly takes place at the field level and this learning does not travel to higher levels in the organisation (regional field office, head office and board). Additionally, it is found that learning is influenced by aspects

like lack of time, lack of alternatives, internal competition, different interests, and power relations.

The current situation presents various challenges to Ibis concerning advocacy and learning. One is monitoring of complex, changing and often conflictive advocacy processes. It is argued that when monitoring advocacy there is a need to capture expected as well as the unexpected changes. This is true both for changes where actors agree about meaning and for those changes where actors do not agree about meaning. Furthermore, it is a challenge to learn more systematically from the field, to recognise tacit learning that is already in place, to stimulate wider information sharing, and to provide feedback in programmes as well as in overall strategies.

The experimentation with the MSC monitoring method shows that the method is able to monitor the complex and unexpected advocacy processes. Additionally, the method recognises the informal learning in the organisation. The MSC approach, however, appears to lack a systematic formulation of lessons for future action, and feedback provided by the method is not linked to decision-making about action.

In order to strengthen learning in the MSC approach, it is recommended to include critical feedback (negative stories), reflections on why changes occur, individual and organisational roles in that, and the 'so what' after a selection of changes has been made.

List of Acronyms

CA	Central America
CAOP	Council of Original Ayllus of Potosí
CARE	International NGO
CIDOB	Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia
COICA	Co-ordinating Body of the Indigenous Peoples' Organisations in the Amazon Basin
CONAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador
Danida	Danish Agency for Development Assistance
IDR	Institute for Development Research
IDS	Institute for Development Studies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISALP	Social Research and Legal Advice Potosí
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
MAS	Movement for Socialism
MS	Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke (Danish Association for International Co-operation)
MSC	Most Significant Change
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PIS	Project Information Sheet
POA	Annual Plan for Operation
SA	South America
SIDA	Swedish International Development Co-operation
UN	United Nations
US-AID	US (United States) Agency for International Development

1. Introduction and background

1.1 Introduction

This research links two popular fields in development aid: learning and advocacy. 'To learn' as an organisation is a growing objective amongst Non-Governmental Development Organisations[1]. Why is this so? Both the ever-changing environments the organisations work in and external pressure from donors play a role. In the past, NGOs in the North have predominantly been praised for their effectiveness in reaching the poor, and they have consequently been recipients of government funding (Edwards & Hulme, 1992). With secure funding, NGOs did not feel pressured to prioritise learning (Fowler, 1997). However, in a future dominated by increasing competition about scarce funds and growing demands from donors for results and greater accountability, the present situation requires that NGOs learn much more and learn much more effectively (Edwards, 1997). Senge, one of the most known authors writing about the learning organisation, argues that "[t]he organisations that will truly excel in the future will be the organisations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at *all* levels in an organisation" (Senge, 1990: 4).

Advocacy is a popular focal area among NGOs. One reason is that NGOs have come to realise that service delivery projects alone do not change the fundamental problems and structural inequalities that generate poverty (Edwards, 1993). Consequently, advocacy focussed on macro-level problems has been emphasised. Initially, this work was done mainly by NGOs in the North, however NGOs increasingly recognise that in order to achieve sustainable change it is necessary to relate their work to the reality in the South (Edwards & Hulme, 1992). As a response, advocacy is now being refocused in order to strengthen marginalised groups in civil society to challenge power structures in their own countries and to take on regional and international alliances in order to influence unequal global trade relations, debt and macro-economic policy.[2] Another reason for the popularity of this kind of advocacy has been the fact that Southern NGOs and social movements have increased in terms of both size and capacity to implement their own projects. With a diminishing role as aid implementers, many Northern NGOs have sought out this new role in advocacy (Coates & David, 2002).

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[1] In the rest of the thesis 'Non-Governmental Development Organisations' are named 'NGOs'.
[2] This work has by some NGOs been named 'people-centred advocacy' (Chapman & Wameyo, 2001).

Experience shows that it is difficult to learn from advocacy (Roche, 1999). Similarly, most NGOs are struggling with how to demonstrate and illustrate the changes triggered by advocacy (Chapman & Wamyeo, 2001). Confronted with the need to demonstrate that advocacy is not only effective but also cost-effective for making a positive difference to people's lives, and with the strong desire to learn, NGOs are facing a very challenging situation.

1.2 Brief overview over Ibis

This research is about Ibis, a Danish NGO, and its efforts to introduce practices that support learning from their practical advocacy work in South America.

Ibis in Denmark

Ibis is one of the largest NGOs in Denmark. The organisation began in the 1960s as part of the international World University Service (WUS). From the beginning the Danish WUS supported student movements and later liberation movements in South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia. Over the time the Danish WUS increasingly gave priority to development activities and in this way its work deviated from that of the international organisation. In 1991 the Danish WUS decided to withdraw from WUS international and changed its name to Ibis.

Today Ibis works in Africa and Latin America and they support around 200 projects in 12 different countries. The organisation has a decentralised structure with its head office being in Denmark and field offices in the South. Ibis' Vision 2012 states the organisation's clear goal is to work for empowerment and recognition of underprivileged and marginalised people's rights and participation in the development of democracy. (See box 4.1 for Ibis' global goals). The Vision 2012 is supplemented by an overall strategy, by country strategies and thematic strategies.

> Box 4.1: Ibis' global goals in Vision 2012
>
> In the year 2012, the impoverished are representing themselves, regardless of social status, race, gender and ethnicity. They demand that their individual and collective rights be respected, they want their fair share of political power and an equitable part of the planet's wealth.
>
> In the year 2012, global development is bringing marked improvements in underprivileged people's social and economic opportunities, such as their access to education and health, their rights and participation in democratic processes. The gap of inequality between men and women is being narrowed, so that both genders may have a say in decision-making, gaining equal rights and access to resources. Moreover, significant steps have been taken towards sustainable global development. (Ibis 1999: 1)

Advocacy on the agenda in South America

Ibis initiated activities in South America in the 1980s – the first projects being in Chile (1980) and Bolivia (1985). The present programme covers Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru with partners being predominantly indigenous organisations in the Andean highlands as well as in the Amazon rainforest. The three countries have a common cultural indigenous heritage with indigenous peoples representing a significant part of the population – in Bolivia, the majority. In order to promote interaction and alliances amongst indigenous organisations in the three countries, the South American programme has adopted a regional approach (Ibis, 2002e).

Map1.1: Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru the countries in Ibis' South America programme

Source: Made on the basis of Microsoft Encarta

Advocacy plays a leading role at the regional level. The programme supports the struggle of the indigenous peoples to reach recognition and to exercise their rights as peoples within the nation-state. The goal is a democratisation of the society and an implementation of individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples to territories and natural resources, to education in their own language and to participate in decision-making processes (Ibis, s.f.). Assistance is also given to the participation in global campaigns (in co-operation with Ibis head office or global networks) towards international organisations and multinational corporations in order to influence international trade rules, loan policy etc., which are sustaining poverty.

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The political processes and various actors involved make advocacy a highly complex and particular type of intervention. It is a challenge to monitor advocacy projects because objectives are modified throughout the process, the impact has long-term perspectives, the work is carried out by many actors in networks and coalitions, and sometimes very conflictive processes are involved (Roche, 1999).

1.3 Research problem and objectives

Impact assessment and monitoring as instruments of accountability and learning have been a point of attention within Ibis over the last years. After significant growth in the Danish NGO sector throughout the 1990s, the NGOs have recently been scrutinised by Danida – the Danish government body for development activities and main donor for the sector. These examinations have led to significant conclusions for Ibis.

An impact study of Danish NGOs as development agencies made as a joined initiative by Danida and Danish NGOs in 1998-99 found it very difficult to assess the long-term impact of NGO project interventions. The study criticised the NGOs for putting too much emphasis on documentation of project activities and outputs as opposed to impact assessment.[3] The study called for development of a monitoring system to track impacts of interventions. "If some of the energy put into producing the volume of detail on Inputs and Outputs could be diverted into consistent, more focused and well targeted monitoring of the impact of all of the output, then this would add a much needed dimension to project reporting" (Danida, 1999: 10).

Monitoring is also a core issue in a capacity assessment undertaken in 2000 of Ibis and another four larger Danish NGOs. The assessment identified certain limitations in the present monitoring system of Ibis and the report concludes that:

- Monitoring practice is output rather than process-oriented and there is limited systematic monitoring of contextual change and of outcomes and impacts of interventions

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[3] The concepts outputs and impacts are parts of the project hierarchy used in the logical framework approach – a widespread project planning tool - that sees a project running through certain stages (see section 5.2). There is no shortage in the literature of definitions of these stages, however the more common terms used to be:
Inputs: Financial, human and material resources in a development intervention
Outputs: The products, capital goods and services that result from a development intervention
Outcomes: A group of short and medium term results both possible and achieved ones as products of an intervention
Impacts: Long term results, positive or negative, produced directly or indirectly by a development intervention. (Based on the terminology used by Ibis in a monitoring and evaluation workshop).

- The monitoring system is characterised by upward accountability rather than by learning from practice; it is set up to produce data for Danida reporting (Danida, 2000a). Ibis is invited to explore more learning-process oriented methods (Danida, 2000b)

The two studies present a big challenge for Ibis; on the one hand to improve the accounts of outcomes and impacts and on the other hand to increase learning from practice. Ibis is trying to meet its challenge in the overall strategy – Strategy 2005 – that declares an explicit wish to be a learning and knowledge-creating organisation. It further states that the organisation will develop monitoring systems aimed at generating knowledge of outputs, outcome and impact of development activities (Ibis, 2001).

As a second step, it was decided to replace traditional project intervention with thematic programmes that will lighten the administrative burden and allow room for learning amongst other justifications. A working group at the head office has been established with the aim of looking into how programme monitoring could provide feedback, ensure a continuous adjustment of development activities and facilitate learning that goes beyond the individual level (Ibis, 2002d). This is combined with an exploration of alternative approaches to monitoring and evaluation, and compiled with the experiences within Ibis and other NGOs with the intention of stimulating a process of internal capacity development concerning approaches and tools for monitoring and evaluation (Ibis, 2002a).

These initiatives are still in progress and have yet to result in concrete proposals. Ideas are being explored, but it is still far from clear how monitoring will facilitate collective learning processes in the organisation. In the field offices they have begun to design thematic programmes and in South America a regional advocacy programme is being elaborated (see Annex 2 for an overview of Ibis regional programme in South America). The challenge in relation to the programme is two-fold: to implement a monitoring system that on the one hand can deal with the special requirements of advocacy, and on the other hand can facilitate learning in the organisation.

Before developing a future monitoring system it is worthwhile to examine the actual practices in the organisation, an effort seldom given priority in development policy (Mosse, 2003, forthcoming). As monitoring is an essential part of daily activities in the organisation, a greater understanding of what is already in place, what is functioning and what is not, can guide the search for alternative monitoring methods.

This research is related to the search in Ibis for monitoring methods that can facilitate learning and can be used in the regional advocacy programme that the organisation is presently designing.[4] The **research objectives** are:

- To better understand the current practices in the Ibis programme in South America relating to the monitoring of advocacy and learning in order to assess what is functioning and what could be improved
- To explore alternative tools for monitoring advocacy through which more systematic learning can be facilitated.

The research is composed of both exploratory and action research elements. Through exploratory research, the current situation in Ibis South America is investigated whereas action research allows experimentation with the alternative monitoring method "*Most Significant Change*" in the region.

1.4 Reader's guide – disposition of the thesis

The thesis is divided into four parts. **Part one** (chapters two and three) comprises the conceptual exploration and methodology for the empirical investigation. In chapter two, I explore and discuss distinct theories about social learning and different dimensions of learning in organisations as well as review different approaches to monitoring. I finalise chapter two by laying out the concepts that will guide analysis of the empirical findings. Chapter three accounts for the methodology applied in the research involving an exploratory and action research design.

Part two presents empirical findings from the exploratory research about the current situation in Ibis vis á vis monitoring of advocacy and the learning from this. It contains four chapters (four – seven). Chapter four is a description of Ibis' experience with advocacy work and an exploration of the challenges to the monitoring. Chapter five describes and analyses the present formal and informal monitoring practises and chapter

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[4] This research is about monitoring and does not include evaluation. The relation between monitoring and evaluation has been subject for some discussion. Some treat the two terms as they were synonymous, while others think they should be clearly separated as they have different function (Cracknell, 2000). Monitoring is carried out by the staff responsible for the implementation of the project to keep on track. Whereas evaluation is carried out by staff from outside the project 'for the purpose of learning lessons primarily for application to any future projects of a similar kind' (ibid: 161). However, I will argue that the two activities are closely linked together in social development, because the information needed for the evaluation has to be collected on a continuous basis as the project evolves, which is what happens in monitoring. When I use monitoring in this research it is meant to be the reflection and analysis of day-to-day activities related to a project/programme. This is, as a minimum, done by project or programme staff and partners or beneficiaries. I assume that the reflection and analysis is useful in an eventual (mid-term) evaluation, which can be internal as well as external.

six is an analysis of the learning that takes place in the organisation and the present obstacles to learning. Chapter seven is an analysis and discussion of the tensions and challenges that Ibis faces in relation to the present situation.

The action research is accounted for in **part three** – chapter eight. Chapter eight describes and reflects on the first experiences of Ibis in South America with the monitoring method known as Most Significant Change (MSC). This is followed by a discussion of the extent to which MSC can facilitate learning in the organisation and comply with the challenges that advocacy gives monitoring. Recommendations and options for Ibis regarding implementation of MSC method conclude the chapter.

Part four consists of chapter nine, which presents the concluding reflections about the research and future challenges.

PART I

2. Conceptual exploration

2.1 Introduction

Learning is one of the main themes in my research. This chapter is an exploration and discussion of different theories about learning. A question that guides the chapter is 'how does learning happen in organisations'? There are many ways to answer this question. I choose first to look at experiential learning theory that considers learning to be an iterative process between experience, reflection and action. This leads the way to a presentation of social learning, which requires a shared vision amongst different actors resulting in collective action.

In addition, I explore the very popular theories of the 'learning organisation' that originated in the private sector and are now taken up by the NGOs as well. As will be revealed, theories on social learning and the learning organisation are normative and assume that learning is a somewhat neutral process. Nevertheless, I argue for an emphasis on the social dimension of learning, which implies concepts such as 'agency', interests, social pressure and power relations.

To understand the context in which Ibis is learning, the chapter also includes different views on project monitoring. As it appears in the literature, conventional and prevailing methods are mainly oriented towards outputs and focus on accountability to donors, whereas process-oriented monitoring methods seem more suitable for facilitating learning from experience in development projects and programmes.

The chapter concludes by explaining the notions used in the research and by presenting the research questions.

Before I begin an exploration of learning, I will explain the overall perspective of this research – a constructivist perspective.

2.2 A constructivist perspective

We are living in a world that moves between different paradigms. Two main paradigms have influenced the philosophy of knowledge: objectivism and constructivism.

The overall perspective of this research is a constructivist view. Constructivism takes an ontological position "asserting that there exist multiple, socially constructed realities ungoverned by natural laws, causal or otherwise" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 86). As opposite to this view is the objectivistic paradigm holding the belief in an objective reality existing "out there", independent from any observer's interest and operating according to natural laws, many of which take a cause-effect form (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

The objectivistic view sees *knowledge* as being independent and separate from the individual and from any specific context. In this view it is possible through objective and value-free scientific procedures to create objective knowledge about the world. I distance myself from this epistemology, because I think that *knowledge* about the world is constructed through interaction amongst social actors. In this sense it is impossible to separate the knowledge from the 'knower' – the essence of a constructivistic epistemology.

The constructivist perspective is applied in my research where the results presented are my interpretations and sense-making of reality. It is also the perspective taken during the analysis of the process of actors' interaction in the field. As assumed in the actor-oriented perspective (Long, 2001), these processes are "complex, often ambivalent, and highly contingent upon the evolving conditions of different social arenas" (Long, 2001: 2). Moreover they are "processes by which specific actors and networks of actors engage with and thus co-produce their own (inter)personal and collective social worlds" (Long, 2001: 3). Following this perspective, the analysis pays attention to multiple views on the topics being studied and it is open to the various understandings and interpretations of problems and solutions that different actors may have.

2.3 Social learning in development

The prevailing need to better learn from experience has stimulated within NGOs, the aspiration to become 'learning organisations', a concept used mainly in companies and businesses (Garvin, 1993, Senge, 1990). Learning in organisations is intertwined with learning from others, which has been named 'social learning' by various researchers that have found the concept useful when dealing with learning in and about rural development and innovation processes (Röling, 2002, Leeuwis, 2002, Guijt & Proost, 2002).

Among the authors writing about social learning no single definition exists. Nevertheless, they seem to agree that social learning is cognitive change that involves a collective or group process. In the following, I first present a model of experiential learning that has inspired many scholars working with social learning. Following this, I explain social learning as it is viewed by one of the field's most prominent promoters.

2.3.1 Experiential learning

The theory of experiential learning presented by Kolb (1984) is quoted and used widely in research of learning and can be considered a very important contribution to understanding how people learn.[5] The theory emphasises the important role that experience plays in a process through which people, individuals or groups, learn. Experiential learning involves a four-stage cycle, which figure 2.1 illustrates.
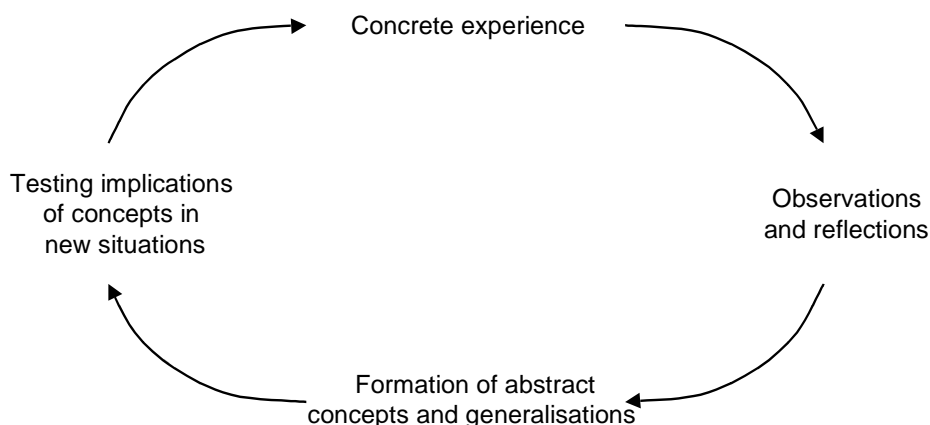
Figure 2.1 The experiential learning model presented by Kolb (1984: 21)

As the figure shows, the basis of concrete experience, observation and reflection lead the way to abstract or conceptual thinking, which guide new action with new experience. According to the theory of experiential learning, learning and change are best facilitated by an "integrated process that begins with here-and-now experience followed by collection of data and observations about that experience" (Kolb, 1984: 21). The collected data are analysed and conclusions are "fed back to the actors in the

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[5] The experiential learning model is often referred to as Kolb's learning circle (Groot & Maarleveld, 2000, Guijt & Proost, 2002, Leeuwis with Van den Ban, 2003, forthcoming). Kolb presents the model in his book *Experiential Learning* (1984), however it is originally elaborated by Kurt Lewin (Kolb, 1984).

experience for their use in the modification of their behaviour and choice of new experiences" (ibid: 21). A thesis is that what people learn from their own experience has a "greater impact" than that of others, particularly if the others are distant and difficult to identify with. The learning should not be seen as a circle that ends after new action has been taken, on the contrary the process continues with new experience, reflection, theorising etc. The cyclic learning is a continuous interaction and iteration between reflection and action and can if it is stimulated in organisations, lead to new learning opportunities.

2.3.2 Social learning: the move from multiple to distributive cognition

Röling has worked with social learning in the field of resource management as a mean to facilitate people coming together to find collective solutions to problems. To understand how organisms and actors learn and how people get to collective action through cognitive change, Röling (2002) goes beyond the idea of the learning cycle. He approaches social learning by seeing cognition not only as 'thinking' but as a process of knowledge that involves both an organism (or agent) and its context:
- "An organism or *agent* that can perceive the environment or context, has beliefs or theories about it, has emotions that provide criteria for judgement about it, and can take action in it" and
- "the *context*: the environment or domain of existence with which the agent is structurally coupled" (Röling, 2002: 33).

To show the elements of cognition, Röling (2002) presents the following figure:
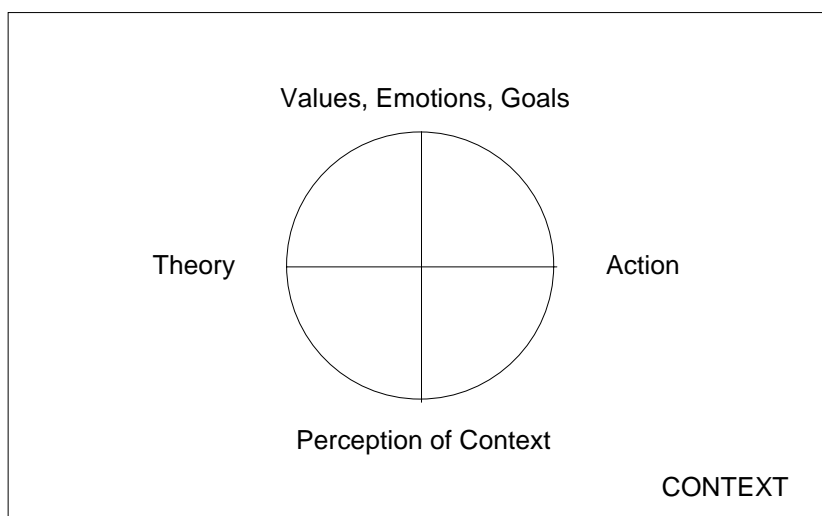
Figure 2.2: The elements of cognition. (Based on Kolb, Maturana and Varela, and Bawden), Röling (2002: 33).

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The figure shows different areas in which learning (or cognitive change) can take place. Learning takes place around values, perceptions, theories and actions. The interaction between the organism and its environment indicates that you learn from the changes in the environment or context (domain of existence), which means that learning is also about the values and perception of others.

The organism has an 'inside' (the values, perception, theory and action) which continuously adapts the internal environment of the organism, so it can survive when the 'outside' environment or context changes, also when the external changes are unexpected (Röling, 2002).

Two *drivers* have to be added to understand the process of learning completely. According to Röling, cognition assumes a continuous move towards coherence (or cognitive consistency) between the elements of values, perception, theory and action and a tendency towards correspondence (or structural coupling between agent and domain of existence) between these four elements, and the context. The tendencies toward coherence and correspondence as well as the dilemmas between them provide dynamism to cognitive theory, according to the author.

To define social learning Röling operates with three different forms of cognition: multiple, collective, and distributed cognition:
Collective cognition is the "shared attributes". This could be shared theories about reality, shared values and collective action. As an example of collective cognition, Röling mentions a group of households all engaged in waste paper recycling.
Distributive cognition emphasises different but complementary contributions that allow concerted action. Distributed cognition recognises that actors can work together in coherent practices while "significant cognitive differences remain" (Leeuwis, 2002: 392).
Multiple cognition emphasises the existence of totally different cognitive agents with multiple perspectives (Röling, 2002: 35).

With reference to the three different types of cognition, Röling describes social learning as "a move from multiple to collective or distributed cognition" (2002: 37). The multiple cognitive agents incline to maintain their mutual isolation, but when they come together and become interdependent they tend to engage in conflict and disjoint action. "However", he alleges,

> "multiple perspectives are equally likely to grow into a joint rich picture, they can meet on platforms for land use negotiation, and decide on collective action. In this way, *multiple cognition can grow into collective or distributed cognition*" (Röling, 2002: 35)

The view of Röling suggests that the multiple cognitive agents, by perceiving themselves as interdependent, can act as a *single cognitive agent* and thereby move to distributed cognition and concerted action.

Röling wants to contribute to an interactive way of "having things done" and this can be facilitated through a learning process in which actors are moved from multiple to collective cognition. However, the view on cognition presented by Röling raises a question when we have to do with social processes and learning in organisations. These questions I discuss in section 2.4.

2.4 The learning organisation

Because of the pressure from donors, Ibis feels a need to learn from their experience in order to improve action. This is a more general need in the NGO sector and for almost a decade, larger international NGOs such as Oxfam, Save the Children and CARE have oriented their efforts towards more effective learning (Edwards, 1997). In this process, literature on 'learning organisations' has found its way to NGOs, and unlike the ideas of many "gurus" of private sector management, the view of Senge (1990) and Argyris & Schön (1996) seem to be popular amongst international NGOs (Edward, 1997, Bloch & Borges, 2002). In this section I present two of the most used approaches to learning organisation: principles of learning organisations and levels of learning in organisations.

2.4.1 Principles of learning organisations

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Senge (1990) is one of the most cited authors in literature on learning organisation. He defines learning organisations as "organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge, 1990: 1). Central in his approach are five disciplines or principles that form the components of a learning organisation. They are 'systems thinking', 'personal mastery', 'mental models', 'shared vision', and 'team learning'. In the following I describe the five disciplines.

Systems thinking
The idea behind the disciplines in Senge's approach is systems thinking and systems thinking being 'the fifth discipline' as well. Systems theory is a discipline for seeing wholes. Moreover, "it is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static "snapshots" (Senge, 1990:68). According to the author systems thinking is needed today more than ever because "we are becoming

overwhelmed by complexity" (more information, greater interdependency, faster changes), which can undermine 'confidence and responsibility' and leave people inactive because "- It is all too complex to me" (1990: 69). Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing the 'structures' that underlie complex situations – "by seeing wholes we learn how to foster health" (ibid: 69). To be able to manage this ever-changing complex reality, organisations need to engage in the following disciplines.

Personal mastery

The discipline of personal mastery involves "continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively" (1990: 7). The aim is to develop the full human potential of the members in an organisation. An organisation's commitment to and capacity for learning can only be strengthened if that of its members is being strengthened. The core of this discipline is the connection and reciprocal commitment between individual and organisation – a special spirit of an enterprise made up of learners.

Mental models

The mental models of members (especially managers) are in focus when dealing with learning. Mental models determine not only how people make sense of the world, but also how we take action. Mental models can be generalisation such as "people are untrustworthy" or they can be complex theories like assumptions about why people act as they do (1990: 175). The approach of Senge suggests that these models should be brought to the surface. Only then internal and external contradictions inherent in the current model can be dealt with and change can come about (1990: 202).

Shared vision

Lack of a shared vision can constrain learning in organisations: "[w]hen there is a genuine vision (...) people excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to"(1990: 9). Hence, the discipline is to translate individual (mainly leaders') vision into a shared vision in the organisation. "The practice of shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared "pictures of the future" that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance" (1990: 9).

Team learning

In the learning organisation team learning is vital because "teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning unit in modern organisations (...) unless the teams can learn, the organization cannot" (1990: 10). Team learning builds on the disciplines of developing shared vision – but also on personal mastery, because "talented teams are made up of talented individuals" (1990: 236). Dialogue (as different from discussion) is central in the team learning. In the dialogues team members express their capacity "to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine "thinking together"." (1990: 10).

According to the author, the disciplines should not be understood as an "enforced order", they are "a body of theory and technique that must be studied and mastered to be put into practise" (1990: 10). They are central to Senge's popular management courses developed for organisations in the private sector that want to learn better. According to Senge, a learning organisation is "an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future" (Senge, 1990: 14). It is not enough just to survive. ""Surviving learning" or what is more often termed "adaptive learning" is important and necessary. But for a learning organization, "adaptive learning" must be joined by "generative learning", learning that enhances our capacity to create". According to the author, the implementation of the five disciplines described above will assist an organisation in engage in such a process. The two forms of learning, adaptive and generative, have been inspired directly from the work of Argyris and Schön about different levels of learning, which I present in the following section.

2.4.2 Levels of learning

In the context of organisational development Argyris and Schön's (1996) work on different levels of learning has been widely used since they started their work in the late 1970s. The authors make distinctions between single-loop learning, double-loop learning and deutero-learning.

Most reflections in organisations are what the authors call *single-loop learning*. This is an instrumental learning, where strategies of actions are changed in ways that "leave the values of a theory of action unchanged" (Argyris & Schön, 1996: 20). Instrumental or single-loop learning involves the detection and correction of error that permits the organisation to carry on its present policies or achieve its present objectives. It is like learning how to do what is already being done, but better. The authors illustrate the single loop learning using an example of a thermostat that learns when it is too hot or too cold and turns the heat on or off. The thermostat can perform this task because it can receive information (the temperature of the room) and take corrective action (Argyris, 1994).

Double-loop learning occurs when error is detected and corrected in ways that involve a change in an organisation's values as well as in underlying strategies or assumptions (Argyris & Schön, 1996: 21). This means that in double-loop learning the norms, policies, and objectives in an organisation are questioned. In the case of the thermostat, double-loop learning would wonder whether the current setting was actually the most adequate temperature and ask why the current setting was chosen in the first place. "[D]ouble-loop learning asks questions not only about objective facts but also about the reasons and motives behind those facts" (Argyris, 1994: 79).

Double-loop learning comes in when it is considered that single-loop learning is not enough, i.e. if there are gaps between the vision and the current practice of an organisation. *Deutero-learning* (a kind of triple-loop learning) is "learning how to learn" (Argyris & Schön, 1996: 29). Deutero-learning happens when underlying assumptions and policies are questioned and procedures and methodologies for (new) learning are designed in an organisation.

The concepts of the learning loops are analytical. However, it is inherent in the aim of the work of Argyris and Schön to facilitate organisations to increase their capacities for facilitating learning and higher levels. Double-loop learning seems to be necessary if organisations are going to make decisions and adapt in rapidly changing and often uncertain contexts. However, this should not be a reason for underestimate single-loop learning, sometimes single loop learning will be enough to bring about change.

Argyris and Schön have been criticised for not giving any attention to the diversity of views at the double-loop level concerning new goals and criteria for performance for example, which might poses a risk for an organisation and prevents effective joint action (Davies, 1998). Instead of perceiving different views as a potential threat to collective action, it can be argued that actors in an organisation will always have different views on new objectives and methods and these different views will influence learning and action in an organisation. An interesting issue would be how an organisation could learn from different views in order to encourage creativity and create change and action. This might be the big challenge for organisational learning. The outcome will depend on the process of reflection on different views, their negotiation and how collective action is facilitated.

2.5 Critical discussion of learning paradigm

In this section I reflect critically on the approaches introduced in sections 2.3 and 2.4, and discuss their usefulness for my analysis of Ibis.

2.5.1 Social learning in organisations

Social learning in organisations is a process of involving many actors who interact with one another and wherein there is a struggle over different views assigning meaning to the changes that have happened. One observation in relation to Röling's theory is that it is not clear how learning and knowledge are shaped by these relations. Being inspired by a biological theory of cognition, the theory seems to refer foremost to individual organisms or agents (Leeuwis, 2002) and not to interests, conflicts and power relations and their influence on cognitive processes.

This relates to another observation. When Röling argues that cognition is a continuous move towards coherence/consistency in agents' cognition and correspondence between agents and context it inclines a perspective on learning as being a process that will move towards consensus or a stage of equilibrium. In this way, the theory becomes normative. The question is: Can we talk about people having consistent cognition? Are people (and the way we act) often not complex, contradictory and inconsistent rather than consistent? Furthermore, cognition seems to have analogies to the function of the human body or any other living organism that tend to seek a stage of equilibrium.

Hence, if we suppose that the "environment" is made up of not only biological organisms but also of other social actors in the society, the interaction or "structural coupling" between the environment and the agent might be more complex than Röling suggests. Social agents are very likely to influence cognition in a different way than the bio-physical environment. The same issue has been brought up by Leeuwis (2002) who pertinently asks if "it is useful to speak of individuals and treat other social agents as 'environment' or 'context' in much the same way as the bio-physical environment" (Leeuwis, 2002: 393).

The biologically inspired model of cognition used in social learning theory above seems insufficient when dealing with learning in NGOs that act in a political environment and where people advocate for change in their conditions and environment. The biological inspired approach to cognition tends to hide the social and political influence that affects knowledge construction.

2.5.2 Normative approach to learning organisation

The literature on learning organisation presented in section 2.4 illustrates considerable interest in how organisations should improve learning, be it through the mastery of different disciplines or by reaching a condition of double-loop learning. In this sense the theory on learning organisations tends to have a built-in normative or prescriptive view.

Another observation is that the emphasis of the learning organisation literature seems to be on consensus among actors. In this way theory tends to be functionalist in approach, seeing the organisation as an organism searching for harmony. Furthermore, the prescriptions often conjure a medical prognosis referring to the state of the organisation's health and providing recipes for cure and survival. Concerning the normative, harmonious and functionalist view, the learning organisation seems to have various points of resemblance with the biology-inspired approach to cognition and social learning discussed in section 2.3.

A third observation is that the literature on learning organisations tends to present a very rosy picture of how organisational practice should be, and the prescriptions therefore run the risk of being unreflective of power relations, conflicts and tensions that this practice might involve. The reason for this could possibly be, as suggested by Berthoin Antal and Dierkes (2001) that situations with power and conflict are perceived as antithetical to learning. However, the 'neutral' perspective seems rather naïve, because information and knowledge processes are never neutral. As Davies (1994) points at, "neither information, the use to which it is put, nor the exploitation of that knowledge is ever neutral". She says further, "the impotence of being unable to use knowledge is distinct from the active choice not to act on information received, which is the misuse of knowledge". Hence, the dealing with information and knowledge in a change process is conscious and often manipulative.

2.5.3 Learning perspective in research

One of the aims of this thesis is to propose how Ibis can strengthen the learning in the organisation. In this way this research itself involves a normative element. However, the recommendations as to how to learn better are based on an analysis on how and what Ibis is presently learning. In the analysis of the actual monitoring and learning practices in Ibis, the normative theories from the field of learning organisations do not seem sufficient, though I do find concepts of single- and double-loop learning useful as analytical concepts in the analysis about how learning is currently taking place.

However, I have to look further for concepts that can help me to analytically describe the monitoring and learning practices in Ibis. One reason for this is that I understand organisations as systems where social actors interact with each other. In this interaction actors have 'agency' and opposing interests, and exercise power as much as or maybe more than shared views. As mentioned earlier, these aspects of organisational life seem to be downplayed or ignored in theories on learning organisations. In the next section I will explore how the aspects can be dealt with in the analysis of Ibis.

2.6 Learning as a social process

In the analysis of how learning takes place in Ibis, where different social agents constantly interact with each other, it is relevant to see learning and knowledge creation as social processes, where agency and social practice play an important role.

2.6.1 Learning as everyday practice

Choosing a theoretical approach that considers learning to be a socio-political process implies a focus on social actors instead of individuals and agency instead of individual capacity (Leeuwis, 2002).

In his Theory of Structuration, Giddens (1984) focuses on human beings as social agents. He sees human beings as knowledgeable agents, which means that "all social actors know a great deal about the conditions and consequences of what they do in their day-to-day lives" (Giddens, 1984: 281). Human action is a continuous flow of conduct ordered into social practices. According to Giddens, the continuity of practices presumes reflexivity, and he says:

> "reflexivity in turn is possible only because of the continuity of practices that makes them distinctively 'the same' across space and time. 'Reflexivity' hence should be understood not merely as 'self-consciousness' but as the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life. To be a human being is to be a purposive agent, who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon those reasons (including lying about them)" (Giddens, 1984: 3).

The reflexivity is grounded in a continuous monitoring where purposive agents reflect on their practices. Giddens calls this a *reflexive monitoring of action*.

> "The reflexive monitoring of activity is a chronic feature of everyday action and involves the conduct not just of the individual but also of others. That is to say, actors not only monitor continuously the flow of their activities and expect others to do the same for their own; they also routinely monitor aspects, social and physical of the contexts in which they move" (Giddens, 1984: 5).

As Giddens' concept of reflexive monitoring of action assumes, human beings continuously monitor their day-to-day conduct and expect others to do the same. He distinguishes the reflexive monitoring and rationalization of action from its motivation. Reflexive monitoring is bound up with the continuity of action, whereas motives refers to the wants that push action and according to Giddens much of our day-to-day conduct is not directly motivated.

The reflexive monitoring of action can be understood as creation of knowledge about experience, which is subsequently acted on. It is an everyday learning process as learning happens as a continuous flow of reflection about our daily action. This learning is not neutral but a socio-political process. As Leeuwis (2002) argues, knowledge is shaped by "perceived political cultural, economic, relational or normative interests and/or by pressures imposed by various others who can effectively mobilise resources to support adherence to their views" (Leeuwis, 2002: 394).

To reveal the social dimension of social learning, Leeuwis emphasises social learning as 'practices' in the sense that we have to do with 'patterns of human action' or 'regular activities'. The practices are shaped by social relations and perceived social pressure, which involves perceived desires and expectations from other actors, resources that others are perceived to mobilise in order to persuade and a valuation of expectations, recourses and relationships.

2.6.2 Why does social learning occur and why not?

Until now, I have looked at how learning comes about. However many obstacles to learning are part of the reality in organisations. In the analysis of learning in Ibis it is therefore relevant to look at why social learning happens and why it does not happen.

To reflect on the question, Leeuwis (2002) presents a range of factors, preconditions and obstacles that can influence the process of learning.[6] First of all learning is a 'scarce resource' as it takes effort, time and energy. Moreover, a basic requirement is that people do feel motivated to learn. Below other aspects that influence whether or not learning occurs are elaborated:

a) *The relative importance/seriousness of an experienced problem*
Before learning takes place, actors often need to experience a problem, which means that "in their frame of reference a tension exist between their aspirations and perception of reality" (Leeuwis, 2002: 401). How important and serious actors perceive a problem depends on the priority of the aspirations involved and the magnitude of the experienced tension. It can be expected that people select only those problems that they consider to be 'serious'.

b) *Direct involvement with a problem*
It makes a difference whether or not people are directly affected by the consequences of a problem. Actors can consider a problem (e.g. poverty) as important and serious, "but still not experience the consequences in a very personal manner" (2002: 402). People are more disposed to learn if they feel directly involved with a problem.

c) *Perceived urgency to solve the problem*
Actors are often more inclined to learn when they feel that urgency exists to solve a problem.

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[6] The factors, preconditions and obstacles are inspired by a model to understand the reasons underlying human (farmer) practices (Leeuwis, 2002). However, the purpose is not to include and discuss the model in this thesis.

d) *Self-efficacy and environmental efficacy*

Actors must have confidence that they can solve the problem, which means they must believe in their capacity and/or the support of others. If this is not the case people are more reluctant to engage in learning.

e) *Complexity, observability and triability*

If social actors feel that the complexity of a problem is high, their "perceived self-efficacy" and the "environmental efficacy" may be reduced accordingly, which affects their motivation to learn. Furthermore, some problems can be more easily learned about than others. Here observability and triability play a role. In some areas, the process involved in learning is easy to "observe" with the help of the human senses (like in agricultural techniques), in others it is not (like empowerment or organisational development). Similarly, "triability" - "referring to the extent to which learning can be supported through small-scale experiments" - can either facilitate or hinder learning. Both aspects have to do with if relevant feedback for learning can be easily organised or not.

f) *Clarity about the nature of a problem*

Often it is uncertain to actors if a problem really exists or it is unclear how urgent or serious it is. "An important component of clarity is whether or not different stakeholders are in *agreement* about the nature and seriousness of the problem. If social actors are confronted with a lot of *contradictory information and arguments* in relation to a problem, they may well become discouraged from dealing with it" (2002: 403), and are thereby discourage from learning about it.

g) *Perceived social consequences and risk associated with accepting alternative cognitions*

In a learning process actors encounter new cognitions and these may be seen as a threat or as a reward. They might think that the alternative view jeopardises their interests or creates dissonance between new and existent cognitions. When this is the case, learning may be constrained because the actors have a wish to "prevent the possibly negative consequences of accepting new ideas, or a wish to avoid uncertainties arising from these new ideas" (2002: 403). The opposite can also happen, e.g. when people feel that "novel cognitions can be rewarding, learning processes may be sped up considerably" (2002: 403).

h) *Social and organisational space*

The social and organisational environment in which learning takes place is important in the sense that new ideas may or may not be appreciated in that environment. "When actors are part of a collective in which the leaders and/or the majority of people experience certain new ideas and views as threatening to the interests of the collective, 'individual' actors who are open to these new ideas and see positive dimensions as well,

may be discouraged to express and further develop these views" (2002: 403). In cases wherein new ideas are supported in the environment, learning might be accelerated.

i) *Resources and safe space for experimentation*
Closely related to the issues of organisational space and triability (see points (e) and (h) above) is the need for access to resources and a safe space for experimentation. Even though, Leeuwis is writing in the context of agricultural field, the concept of 'safe space' for experimentation can be transferred to other areas as well – like experimentation with new methods for monitoring. Experiential learning usually requires energy, time, equipment and infrastructure. Lack of these requisites in addition to other resources like support from facilitators, may constrain learning.

j) *Stress and trauma in situations with many problems and tensions*
It is likely that some external pressure triggers learning. However, if such pressure is felt to be overwhelming or has a character of example, abuse or violence, it may result in a situation of stress and trauma, which can cause 'break down' or apathy in the actors.

The aspects described above are relevant in the analysis of learning in Ibis. They will help to identify the conditions as well as what might complicate the learning process within the organisation. However, power and the conflictive and political elements of learning are not explicitly emphasised in the learning aspects mentioned. They are the focus of next section.

2.6.3 Power, politics and conflicts in learning organisations

As mentioned in the discussion about the literature on learning organisations (see section 2.5), power, tension and conflicts are paid little attention. However, I will argue that relations of power, struggle over meaning and 'human agency' have a significant influence on the learning process at Ibis. I argue that it is central to see knowledge and power as closely intertwined. Naturally, I am not the first person to talk about power and knowledge in this way. To the contrary, it is a central theme in sociological literature.

Let me start with 'power'. Giddens embraces power as a "transformative capacity of human agency". This is "the capability of the actor to intervene in a series of events so as to alter their course" (Giddens, 1976: 111). This capability to intervene is part of social interaction. Giddens explains:

> "'Power' (...) is a property of interaction, and may be defined as the capability to secure outcomes where the realization of these outcomes depends upon the agency of others. It is in this sense that men have power 'over' others: this is power as *domination*" (Giddens, 1976: 111).

With Giddens' definition it is possible to understand power as expressed in interactions where the capacity of the actors to intervene is connected to their attempts to get others to comply with their wants. But how do people manage to enrol others in their pursuit of certain goals? It depends on access to particular knowledge, on support from institutions to certain knowledge and the mobilisation of resources (e.g. money, land, violence, and protection) (Leeuwis with Van den Ban, 2003, forthcoming). Hence, I can understand that resources or structures both constrain and enable the actors' ability to act.[7]

When power and knowledge are exercised, tension and social conflicts tend to occur. As Long (2001) points out:

> "Knowledge processes are embedded in social processes that imply aspects of power, authority and legitimation; and they are just as likely to reflect and contribute to the conflict between social groups as they are to lead to the establishment of common perceptions and interests" (Long, 2001: 183).

As Long puts forward, learning processes are likely to reflect and contribute to conflicts as well as to shared views in the organisation. Furthermore according to Long, it is crucial to "take account of the ways in which social actors engage in or are locked into struggles over the attribution of social meanings to particular events, actions and ideas" (Long, 2001: 17). If I understand, that knowledge, power and social and political conflicts are closely intertwined and being part of the social interaction of every day life, then it should also be considered in the study of (learning) organisations, where social actors interact.

Sometimes, the learning process also includes the exertion of control. Members of organisations might use their power in order to maintain or enhance their control of the work situation and to attempt to build up agency, alone and in collaboration with others (Coopey, 1996). This could be to withhold information from others or use information in a strategic way. Power plays and control happen at all levels in the organisation,

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[7] A central discussion in social science relates actor and structure. It is not the aim of the thesis to explore this relation further, however I want to stress that I understand that the actors and structures are mutually shaping each other. As it is expressed by Giddens: "In following the routines of my day-to-day life I help reproduce social institutions that I played no part in bringing into being. They are more than merely the environment of my actions since (...) they enter constitutively into what it is I do as an agent. Similarly, my actions constitute and reconstitute the institutional conditions of actions of others, just as their actions do mine. (...) My activities are thus embedded within, and are constitutive elements of, structured properties of institutions stretching well beyond myself in time and in space" (Giddens 1987:11).

because "all actors exercise some kind of 'power', leverage or room for manoeuvre[8], even those in highly subordinate positions" (Long, 2001: 17). The learning organisation literature seems not to acknowledge the tension between control and learning. Even though, Argyris & Schön argue that "to focus on learning without taking into account legitimate need for control is to embark on a romantic and usually fruitless exercise" (1983 in Coopey, 1996: 352), they are referring to the necessary control by managers to ensure that the learning goes in the right direction to achieve the objectives, and not that control and power are part of the political process in organisations that have an impact on learning (Coopey, 1996).

In this section I have argued for the need to relate learning to concepts like agency, social practices, power, interests and conflicts because they are an integral part of the continuous learning in Ibis. Also the context in which Ibis operate – the 'project world' – influences the learning capabilities of the organisation. In the next section I present the most commonly used approaches to project planning and monitoring in development work.

2.7 From project planning towards learning

To understand the context in which Ibis is learning, it is relevant to look at how development projects are planned and carried through and how learning is happening in the context of project and programmes.

2.7.1 In search for process-oriented approaches

From the 1960s to the end of the 1980s the instrumental approach to development was dominating. The instrumental approach assumes that it is best to plan intervention in advance with predefined goals and outcomes for the future. It also assumes it is possible to rationally plan and implement development interventions step by step (Long & Van der Ploeg, 1989). Projects and programmes in development work are still today influenced by this way of thinking (Leeuwis with Van den Ban, 2003, forthcoming).

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[8] Room for manoeuvre "implies a degree of consent, a degree of negotiation and a degree of power – not necessarily power stored in some economic or political position, but the possibility of control, of prerogative, or some degree of authority and capacity for action, be it front- or backstage, for flickering moments or for long periods" (Long, 2001:185).

Leeuwis with Van den Ban list a number of steps that models for project planning typically include:

1. Problem definition and problem analysis
2. Setting project goals
3. Further diagnosis of the causes of problems / problem analysis
4. Identifying alternative solutions
5. Comparing and evaluating alternative solutions vis-à-vis goals / criteria for goal achievement
6. Choosing between alternative options and solutions
7. Developing an action plan to realise solutions
8. Implementing the plan
9. Monitoring and evaluation of goal achievement
10. Adapting the action plan

This linear and rather 'mechanical' idea of development and change, also called 'blueprint' planning, has a strong orientation toward structure and control. It was challenged in the mid-1980s, when the process dimension of projects and programmes came into focus and made the limitations in existing planning and monitoring systems more visible (Mosse, 1998). According to Mosse (1998), there are several reasons for this development, which has to do with a change in the nature of development programmes themselves. He mentions some of them:

a) a shift away from narrow technology-led projects towards sectoral concern (sector-wide reform or strengthening) and cross-sectoral issues (e.g. poverty, gender)
b) a no longer exclusive focus on development assistance but on networks, inter-agency links and partnerships to reach development objectives
c) a general shift from project-centred to organisations-centred concerns in development interventions
d) a move away from externally planned, technically and managerially prescriptive ('blueprint') approaches towards more flexible and iterative approaches
e) a shift from centralised 'top-down' approaches towards more decentralised and participatory ones.

Leeuwis with Van den Ban (2003, forthcoming) point at certain experiences that have contributed to the shift from planning to the process oriented approaches referred to above:

- Many of the planned innovations and project goals were never realised. Human behaviour and society proved to be much less predictable and controllable than expected. In relation to this, "top-down planning often appeared to be an obstacle to change and innovation; while new developments and insights called for the

adaptation of goals and plans, project planning procedures did often not allow this" (Leeuwis with Van den Ban, 2003, forthcoming: 37).

- It became clear that everyday practice in projects was much more chaotic than the straightforward and rationally organised projects in the written project documents. Formal project documents "appeared to be highly artificial reflections of project practice" and their purpose was "merely to satisfy the bureaucratic needs of donors and government institutions" (ibid: 37).

- Finally, it was acknowledged that 'multiple realities' exist among stakeholders and it became clear that it was impossible to create 'objective' knowledge on which rational planning could be based. It was realised that "human beings are active agents (rather than externally determined 'zombies'), that respond to external circumstances in an active, creative, flexible and contextual manner" (ibid: 37).

Following the same line and abandoning the idea that development and change can be planned in a straightforward manner towards pre-determined goals, Long & Van der Ploeg (1989) have argued that it is important to recognise the intervention for what it is, namely "an ongoing, socially-constructed and negotiated process, not simply the execution of an already-specified plan of action with expected outcomes" (Long & Van der Ploeg, 1989: 228). Leeuwis with Van den Ban (2003, forthcoming) advocate to talk about *learning* and *negotiation* (instead of planning) "as the key processes that are to be supported in deliberate efforts to induce change and innovation" (ibid: 38).

In fact, the learning aspect in development processes has been emphasised in recent literature as an alternative to conventional models of the development project (Mosse, 1998, Estrella, 2000, Cracknell, 2000). In relation to planning, viewing a project as a 'process' means having a design, which is flexible and changeable as a result of learning from implementation experience. This 'learning process' approach implies treating development projects as flexible systems with changeable procedures and approaches (Mosse, 1998).

However, this is the theory. In practice the planning ethos in the management of development projects and programme is still the predominant approach. Donors require the use of specific tools that emphasise planning over learning. While, this might have been recognised by the financiers to some extent, this has not been followed by any concrete or significant changes in tools or procedures in the practical 'project world'. On the other hand, scholars and practitioners have various methodological considerations about how monitoring could be done in order to use it for learning. Some of these are presented in the next section.

2.7.2 Monitoring for learning

As is the case for many NGOs, Ibis has been criticised for not learning enough from their experience. This section will look at the role that monitoring can play in facilitating learning in an organisation.

It is a demand from donors that projects be monitored. This ought to be done in order to ensure that a project stays on right track. In this sense it serves as a means for *accountability* – to show donors (e.g. governments/politicians) and contributors (e.g. taxpayers) that development work is functioning and to show that the funds donated e.g. to improve the participation of marginalised indigenous peasants in the building up democracy, actually reach the target and that aid is in fact useful.

Therefore, in most cases, monitoring is done for the purpose of accountability and is seldom used for *learning*. It has been argued that conventional approaches to monitoring do not meet the demands for learning and adaptability in organisations working with social development (Estrella & Gaventa, 1998). Many have also argued that conventional approaches attempt to produce information that is 'objective', 'value-free' and 'quantifiable' and that they are mainly oriented to the needs of donors and policy makers (Estrella, 2000). The principles on which the conventional approaches seem to be based are:

- An assumed causal relationship between inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts, difficult to prove in real life
- That influential external and internal factors can be controlled
- That projects are 'closed systems' with time limits when in reality development is a process
- Cost-benefit analysis, when 'what would have happened without the project' type of questions cannot be answered
- Quantitative measures tell only partial truth (Mikkelsen, 1995: 167).

However, during the last decades there has been a growing awareness of the need for alternative approaches to capture and understand the process of social development (Oakley et al., 1998). The result has been a search for a more process-oriented, qualitative and learning style monitoring. As part of this effort, Mosse (1998) has differentiated the process-oriented monitoring from other more conventional approaches of monitoring in the following ways:

- In contrast to planning/design activities and ex post evaluation, process-oriented monitoring involves *continuous* information gathering over a period of project and programme work. Information on 'process' provides neither a 'snap-shot' view of a development intervention, nor a measure of progress against a fixed set of

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indicators. "Rather it is concerned with the dynamics of development processes, that means with different perceptions of relations-ships, transactions, decision making, or conflicts and their resolutions" (ibid: 10).

- Process-oriented monitoring is oriented to *the present*; that is "the intimate relationship with what is happening right now" (ibid: 10).

- Process monitoring is *action-oriented*. The monitoring is meant to be a tool directed towards participants that are able to act immediately on the output from it.

- The process monitoring is *inductive* and *open-ended*, which means that the monitoring takes the starting point in what is actually happening. The focus of process monitoring is not narrowed down to expected outputs or impacts, but includes an account of events and relationships and diverse impacts "including those which fall beyond the project as officially understood" (ibid: 11). "In this way process information helps break away from the image of development projects or programmes as closed, static, predictable and controllable techno-rational systems. It draws attention to the areas falling beyond management control which nonetheless have important influence on project success and allows critical reflection on the project's own definition of problems and solutions" (ibid: 11). In its focus on context and interpretation, process-monitoring methods borrow from ethnography.

- Another characteristic of process monitoring is that it is situated outside of normal project structures and the routine flow of programme activities and information.

- Information from monitoring is highly charged with *interests* and some process monitoring recognises this giving special attention to different perspectives and judgements of 'monitors'.

Process monitoring seems to have the ability to ease learning from practice and from different views of actors. However, learning in development programmes is not an easy task. As Mosse (1998) himself declares, process monitoring involves tensions – between engagement and detachment, insider and outsider, action and reflection, practitioner and researcher, support and criticism, management and field etc.

2.8 Conceptual notions applied in the research

The chapter has developed as an exploration of different theoretical approaches to and concepts about learning with the aim to in a step-by-step fashion, define terms, which will be applied in the analysis of the reality in Ibis South America.

Perspective on learning and notions used in the research

As the discussion in the chapter discloses, the perspective in this research is that social learning is an iterative process between experience, reflection and action. This means that learning needs to be related to action. Furthermore, knowledge is perceived as

socially constructed and dependent on the actors that create it. Social learning implies that various actors have a need to reach collective action and it requires that actors develop a greater understanding of the multiple perspectives on complex situations and to arrive - at least partially - at a shared view on reality or 'collective cognition'. However, this is not viewed as a political neutral process that always has a positive outcome for organisations and their members. Learning is seen as a social process influenced and shaped by social practices, agency, different interests, social pressure and power relations.

In the analysis of learning in Ibis, I look at what enables learning as well as what prevents it from happening. I use the notions *cognition, learning loops*, *room for manoeuvre*, *power* and *different interests.*

In analysis of monitoring in Ibis I view monitoring as an everyday practice. In the identification of the monitoring practices I use concepts from the conventional paradigm about *planning* and *instrumental monitoring* as well as concepts from the learning monitoring paradigm about *process / learning monitoring* which is *socially constructed* and *negotiated*.

In analysis of the action research part of this thesis, I use these same perspective of learning and the same notions.

2.9 Research questions

The above described and chosen conceptual notions form a basis to ask the following research questions to enable investigation of my research problem and objectives (see section 1.3):

Main question

What is the experience of Ibis staff and partners of advocacy, monitoring of advocacy and the learning from advocacy, and to what extent can alternative monitoring strengthen the learning about advocacy in the organisation?

Sub-questions

The first part of the main question will be answered in the explorative research asking the following three sub-questions:

1. How do actors in Ibis experience advocacy and what are the challenges they meet in the monitoring and learning about it?

2. How are advocacy projects presently being monitored? What are the formal and informal practices?

3. In relation to the actual monitoring practice, what and how do actors in Ibis learn and what keeps learning from happening?

The second part of the main question related to the possibilities of an alternative monitoring framework is being answered in the action research part this thesis (Part III) and the sub-questions are, as such, presented in section 8.3.1.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Choices were made before as well as during the fieldwork in relation to organisation, topic, research design, and techniques for collection of information. In this chapter I account for my choices, illustrate how I did the research, and I discuss related implications. An explanation of the selection of research subject and the considerations involved opens the chapter. I next explain the research design, which consists of both exploratory and action research elements, and account for my methodology – the methods and tools used in both parts of the research.

3.2 Selection of research subject

3.2.1 Selection of organisation

As a first step, initial communications were with the Ibis co-ordinator and advisors in South America about my research ideas and the possibility of conducting fieldwork in the context of Ibis South American programme. With an enthusiastic answer from the co-ordinator who gave the impression that I could easily fit into the present exploration of new approaches to projects and programmes, I decided proceed with fieldwork with this organisation.

I already knew Ibis as from 1997-2000 I had worked with the organisation in South America. My first work as expatriate with Ibis was a period at the regional office in Bolivia, followed by almost two years in Ecuador where I worked with a regional indigenous organisation based in Quito. I worked in the areas of advocacy giving advisory support in political analysis, strategic planning, campaigns, lobbying and networking.

3.2.2 Negotiation of topic and scope of research

The next step was to decide on the topic. I was most interested in relating my research to advocacy in some way and I proposed a range of different topics in relation to this: organisational development, monitoring, evaluation, tools and techniques in advocacy amongst others. After reading recent documents, I understood that there was interest in

strengthening the monitoring and learning in the organisation. I realised that if I were able to successfully combine *advocacy*, *monitoring* and *learning* I would converge my interests with those of Ibis, and address a central topic at the Wageningen University (learning).

I suggested to divide the research into two parts: 1) to study what is already in place in Ibis regarding monitoring and learning, and 2) to facilitate initial steps in Ibis towards a clearer idea about the kind of monitoring system Ibis would like. The co-ordinator and two advisors read my proposal and agreed on the initial idea.

3.2.3 Geographical delimitation

The fieldwork was carried out from 4 July to 16 November 2002 and mainly in Bolivia. Ibis' regional office is situated in La Paz, the administrative capital, where I was provided with desk, telephone and computer. As mentioned in the introduction Ibis works in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. The programme in Bolivia is the largest regarding funding and number of projects, partners and employed personnel (programme officers and advisors). The projects with the clearest emphasis in advocacy are in Bolivia and Ecuador. I made one trip to Ecuador where I made interviews with Ibis' partner organisations and programme officer. I did not go to Peru, given that it is a small programme where the advocacy component is still not strong. However, on other occasions regional seminars and workshops, for example I met with Ibis personnel from Ecuador as well as from Peru and had the chance to both interview and have informal talks.

3.3 Research design

The research has been carried out as *applied research*. According to Mikkelsen (1995) the purpose of applied research is to understand "the nature of sources of human and social problems". The desired result is to contribute to "theories that can be used to formulate problem solving programmes and interventions" (Mikkelsen, 1995: 219).

To answer the research questions it has been necessary to involve two research designs: *exploratory research* and *action research*. The exploratory part builds on what actors in Ibis said and did during interviews and participant observations. The exploratory research is appropriate when the purpose is to understand the existing situation in Ibis regarding advocacy, monitoring and learning.

Action research can be defined, as the name suggests, as a methodology, which has dual aims of action and research. Action to "bring about change in some community or organisation or program" and research to "increase understanding on the part of the researcher or the client, or both" (Dick, 2000: 4).

The action research becomes relevant for the second part of the research objective to explore an alternative framework for monitoring and learning. The purpose of using action research is that the creation of action leads to data that can be interpreted and reflected on vis á vis a particular topic, in this case monitoring and learning. Through the action it is possible to produce knowledge about the needs of the organisation on the basis of which analysis can be made.

However, due to time limits of the research, action research was limited to four initial events in the field. In the following section I explain how the research was carried out in more concrete terms. I have chosen to account for the exploratory research and action research in two different sections (section 3.4 and section 3.5).

3.4 Methodology in exploratory research

3.4.1 Choice of qualitative methods

I chose to use qualitative methods, because I think they are more suitable than quantitative method (e.g. survey and questionnaire) in terms of the purpose and character of research problem. Qualitative methods seek to uncover people's meaning, values and views (Peacock, 1986) and allow for the possibility to study Ibis as a whole and include relations appearing in the process that might be necessary to understand the organisation from within.

In qualitative research it is recognised that the researcher does not collect the data in a vacuum rather in a social context where elements of various kinds influence the process and outcome. As one of the fundamental issues, qualitative research demands good 'rapport' between research subjects and researcher and an openness on the part of the research subjects. The relationships that the researcher establishes in the field define to the extent to which s/he is able to get 'deep' data. Data will always be constructed in encounters between the researcher and the 'researched' – in this case, the encounters between the programme officers, co-ordinator, advisors in Ibis, Ibis' partners and myself. At the same time, my interest in organisational learning and process monitoring and the theoretical position (as presented in chapter two), also influence the knowledge constructed in the research.

The strengths of qualitative methods are at the same time their weakness. In this respect they have been criticised for not being objective, replicable and generalisable (Johnson, 1990). As Peacock (1986) states, complete objectivity or 'truth' is difficult to reach in qualitative research. The qualitative researcher is *interpreting* 'the reality', that has in fact already been interpreted (by the 'subject') – so-called 'double hermeneutics'. As such, it is difficult to be completely 'detached' from the reality that is researched.

In a qualitative research, it is difficult to make generalisations of the results to a larger population on statistical grounds. To be clear, such generalisations are not the intention of this research. Furthermore it is difficult to replicate qualitative research, because it is almost impossible to create exactly the same research conditions (e.g. the context, the research person).

Therefore, validity and reliability are important in order to ensure that the findings are interpreted in the right way and that they are not dependent on accidental circumstances (Mikkelsen, 1995). To deal with these aspects, I have on the one hand openly searched for information that could make me reject the ideas I had on beforehand or developed in the process about advocacy, monitoring and learning in Ibis. On the other hand I constantly checked these ideas with the actors (e.g. staff members, co-ordinator, partners). I cross-checked information by using different methods. For example the information gathered during participant observation was cross-checked in interviews, and information from interviews was cross-checked through informal discussion over dinners or during the 10-12 hours car trips to the field.

3.4.2 Participant observation

I conducted participant observation in approximately 15 formal and 20 informal meetings in Ibis. I participated in events related to advocacy and monitoring. Some of these were internal meeting e.g. where staff members met to discuss the progress of the advocacy programme in detail. Others were monitoring visits to the partner organisations. Similarly, I made participant observations in regional meetings/seminars (three) and workshops (four). However, not all of these were in concrete terms related to my thesis e.g. in meetings about programme development and in an information exchange seminar among the advisors in the region. The purpose of taking part in these events was to get information about the broader agenda within the organisation.

I took notes during the meetings and I consistently took time afterwards to write notes on the computer, while the information was still fresh in my mind.

While I tried to maintain the participant observation role of the researcher, this proved to be a challenge at times as I was frequently expected to participate, especially when

advocacy was on agenda. I was expected to contribute to these discussions due to my own field experience.

3.4.3 Interviews

I made 21 in-depth and semi-structured interviews with Ibis partners, Ibis staff in South America and Ibis staff at the head office in Denmark. The general strategy was to interview people with some kind of experience in advocacy and monitoring.

Of Ibis partners I chose to interview those who have experience with advocacy work and who have also had the possibility to reflect on this experience. Therefore I chose to interview indigenous leaders with experience in negotiation at international meetings and with national governments. However, in Bolivia it happened that two younger organisations with relatively inexperienced leaders had recently gained valuable experience through a march to La Paz to claim a constituent assembly. I thought it was important to draw from their experiences with advocacy. I also interviewed NGO partners who support indigenous organisations in campaigning, lobby work and capacity building, because their experience and reflections are important in the effort to explore the nature of advocacy and the challenges of advocacy monitoring.

Of Ibis personnel in South America, I chose to interview all of the programme officers, because they are responsible for the monitoring of projects. I also chose to interview the Danish advisors who worked most directly with advocacy. From the head office in Ibis I chose to interview the desk officer for the programme in South America who is also member of a minor 'study group' at the head office exploring alternative to monitoring methods and the person in charge of methodological development in relation to monitoring and learning.

I interviewed:
- 12 Ibis's partners:
- six representatives for indigenous organisations (four in Bolivia, two in Ecuador)
- six representative for local NGOs (five in Bolivia and one in Ecuador)

- Six Ibis staff members in South America
- three programme officers (from Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru)
- two advisors working with advocacy (one of these left Ibis six months before the interview)
- the regional co-ordinator

- Two Ibis staff members from the head office in Copenhagen, one of the members i interviewed twice – at the beginning and at the end of fieldwork

The interviews were taped and every interview took 1 – 1 ½ hours. As mentioned they were semi-structured, which means that I did not necessarily go through the questions in order. The interviews were sometime a fine balance between ensuring that questions were asked and letting the interview be conversational wherein I was open to the topics, stories and thinking of the interviewee.

The formulation of questions in the interview guide was an operationalisation of the research questions and they were related to advocacy, monitoring and learning. I made different interview guides for Ibis personnel and partners. Even though I asked about the same topics I assumed that I could ask more direct questions to Ibis staff members who were frequently dealing with concepts such as advocacy, monitoring and learning at internal meetings and seminars. The questions with the counterparts were less direct in order to assess if indigenous people were valuing aspects other than those Ibis (and myself) associate with advocacy, monitoring and learning. For example, instead of asking directly about advocacy, I asked: "What activities do you undertake to strengthen the position of your member organisations?". Instead of asking directly to monitoring, I asked: "How do you know you are doing a good job? Or a bad job?"

In general, I found it difficult to interview indigenous representatives about these quite abstract topics. The questions needed a good deal of explanation, and frequently I had to ask the same question in different ways. In retrospect, reflecting critically about the research techniques, I think that the questions about monitoring and learning with the indigenous representatives would have been easier to study through a longer stay in one or two indigenous organisations. However, that was not possible within the timeframe of the research. Instead I asked programme officers and consultants working with Ibis who have experience working with indigenous peoples, for their perspectives on monitoring and learning in the indigenous peoples' organisations.

3.4.4 Documents and other information

I explored documentation within Ibis on advocacy, learning and monitoring especially at the beginning of the fieldwork in order to have an impression about the organisation's perspective regarding the topics at hand. I also studied project documents and evaluation reports to gain a clearer understanding of the current planning and monitoring practice in the organisation.

During fieldwork I started the search for literature on alternative monitoring methods. Especially, when the Most Significant Change method became central in the action research (see section 3.5) I searched on the Internet for documents and other information regarding the method. I also participated in a discussion group for the

method on the Internet where I gained insight from other organisations' practical experience with the method.

3.4.5 Analysis of data

The analysis of the data began in the field. While I was still in Bolivia, I wrote a minor paper on preliminary findings that was sent to my supervisor in order to incorporate his comments on research progress at an early stage, while I was still able to go more in-depth or cover related areas if necessary.

All interviews were transcribed. While I was still in the field I paid a person to transcribe the interviews made in Spanish. The interviews I made in Danish I have transcribed myself. It was an advantage to have the interviews written-up. In this way it was possible to read the interviews over and over again and underline crucial places in the text for easier reference. A disadvantage of not transcribing the Spanish interviews myself is that I did not listen to the interviews again where the tone of voice and pauses can have a special meaning effecting interpretation.

All interviews were coded. When I read the interviews specific themes for later coding became clearer. The themes were partly formed by the research questions and partly by the information that came up during the interviews.

3.5 Methodology in action research

The methodology used in the action research is different than in the exploratory research. Action research still makes use of a qualitative methodology, which makes the methodological considerations presented in section 3.4 apply for this part of the research as well.

In action research the researcher plays a more active role than s/he normally would when using qualitative methods, because the intention is to create action, which brings about change in the organisation. Likewise, the subjects the researcher is investigating are having a greater impact on the research process than is normal for a qualitative research using e.g. merely interviews and participant observation.

As put forward by Dick (1997) action research is build up of critically reflective cycles or spirals. It is characteristic for each cycle that the "researcher plans before acting, and reflects on the findings and the method after acting. The reflection at the end of each cycle feeds into the planning for the next cycle" (Dick, 1997: 4).

The action research in the fieldwork in Ibis was centred around the alternative monitoring method called Most Significant Change (MSC). It is not the purpose to explain the method here, this I do in chapter 8, but to explain how the action research was methodologically designed.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the action research. It is built up as a spiral that consists of four circles or small spirals, which each represents an event of experimentation. The research can be seen as a spiral, which has been carried out according to a certain intention – the '*intend*' element, namely to make actors in Ibis reflect on different methods and to try alternative monitoring tools. This is followed by the '*act*' element, the events of experimentation which is then followed by '*reflect*' element, which is the review or analysis of the research cycle. The smaller spirals have all been built up according to the same principles of intention, acting and reflecting.
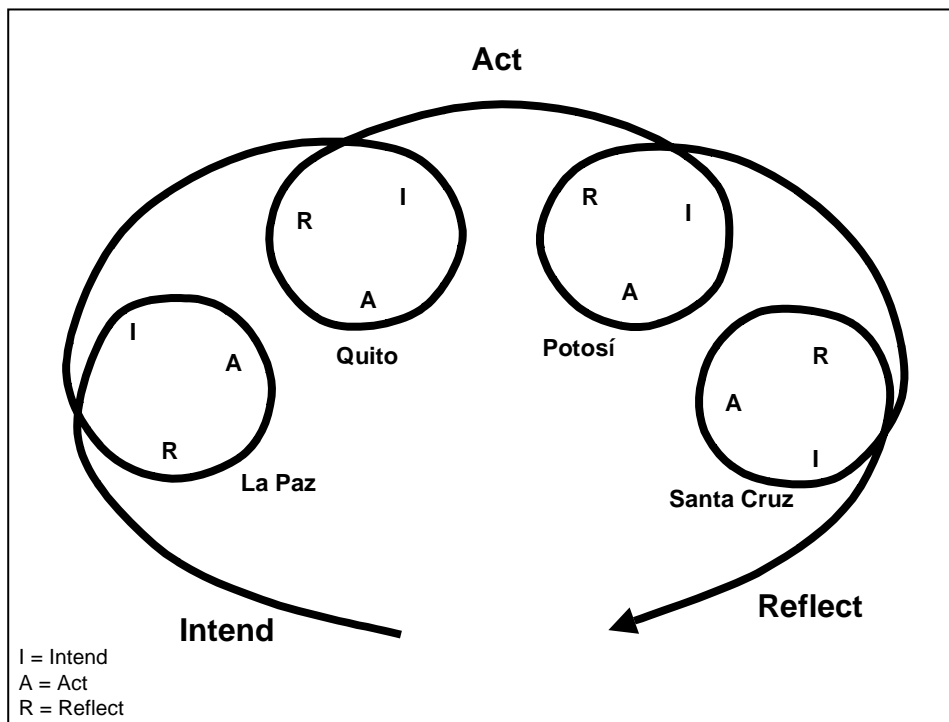
Figure 3.1 The action research illustrated as a spiral made up by smaller spirals

The events of experimentation in the figure are briefly described. These events are explained further in chapter eight, where the process of action research, the methodology used and the reflections are presented.

- *La Paz*. A staff member, based in La Paz and working with advocacy, made three individual exercises with the MSC method. Even though the experimentation was spread over the field period it is illustrated with one circle in the spiral

- *Quito.* In a workshop held in Quito, Ecuador with programme staff the MSC was introduced and reflected on in relation to expectations to the monitoring of advocacy
- *Potosí*. MSC was used in a workshop Ibis held with an indigenous organisation with the purpose to make an internal midterm evaluation of the progress of a project
- *Santa Cruz*. In a workshop with representatives from Central and South American programmes, the MSC was tried among the programme staff, advisors and regional co-ordinators. As a final step of the workshop a concrete proposal was presented to what the MSC would look if implemented in the regional advocacy programme.

In fact, the circles have the same character as the experiential learning cycle presented by Kolb that consists of observing and reflecting on the basis of concrete experience, which again guide new action with new experience (see section 2.4.1). In this way the action research had the quality of being a joint learning process among the different actors including myself.

3.6 Reflections on my role

The fieldwork brought me back to an organisation I had worked with for 3 ½ years. Consequently, I was not an outsider. This was an advantage and an explanation to why I was able to make considerable progress in relation to the two research processes. I created quickly rapport with the different actors, and on some occasions I was able to meet very busy people probably only because I knew them on beforehand. However, as mentioned earlier, the fact that I was sometimes expected to participate in the discussions meant that several times I chose to fully participate instead of observe.

The fact that I was close to Ibis in the research deserves some reflection. Even though I made it clear to the partners that I was conducting a study for a university MSc thesis I was not perceived as being totally 'detached' from Ibis. Conscious about this, I always tried to arrange interviews when there were no other Ibis activities going on. I travelled to the organisations myself or I at least chose a day or moment where there were no Ibis representatives present.

However, in relation to Ibis, I was not a complete insider either by the fact that I came back in this new role as a researcher. Advocacy, the field I had worked in as an advisor, is the point of departure for the study. However the focus is monitoring, a topic that advisors are normally not involved in, as it has always been seen as the responsibility of programme officers. Therefore, this research led me into a new domain, which has been both a challenge and a learning experience.

PART II

4. Advocacy and challenges to monitoring in Ibis

4.1 Introduction

This is the first of four chapters that present the findings of the exploratory part of this research. It is about advocacy in Ibis South America. I first describe Ibis' approach to advocacy and the activities they support. This is followed by an analysis of the role and relations Ibis have in advocacy. Various actors work together and the roles of these different actors and their relationships to one another are central for understanding the development and success of advocacy. In the second half of the chapter I explore the characteristics of advocacy based on experience in Ibis and from there the challenges for monitoring will emerge. I conclude the chapter by presenting some overall features of monitoring that would facilitate organisational learning about advocacy.

4.2 Advocacy as overall perspective in Ibis

Advocacy plays a lead role in the Ibis regional programme in South America. Through organisational development Ibis support indigenous organisations in building up their capacity to present their positions so as to influence political decisions and practices at the local, national and international levels. In addition, Ibis assist indigenous organisations with Danish personal who work in the partner organisations in order to give advice in areas such as political analysis, strategic planning and preparation and the implementation of campaigns.

Ibis has prioritised advocacy in South America since the mid 1990s. This happened at the same time as the Ibis head office began to exert advocacy in a more strategic and co-ordinated way with the South American programme. Advocacy is now an integral part of the programme. As stated by one of the programme officers: "It is such a natural part of our work, in fact advocacy is what we do all the time". So far, advocacy work has had positive reactions and the capacity assessment of Ibis made by Danida in 2000 considers Ibis in South America as a 'showcase' for NGO activities aiming explicitly at increasing the 'political capabilities of the poor'.

Ibis is working from a broad definition of advocacy, which includes campaigns, lobbying and capacity building (See the box 4.1 for concrete examples of advocacy projects). Advocacy can be understood as pleading a cause, or helping others to plead a cause. Advocacy is a way to influence decision-making about problems that concern people, especially those who have been marginalised and left out of the political process. One of Ibis' partners, an indigenous leader explains how he and his organisation work with advocacy:

> We manage [advocacy] as organisational strengthening and we present the proposals that we think are convenient at the different organisms, national or international. For example in the draft declaration of the United Nations about indigenous peoples' rights, and the draft declaration of the Organisation of American States about indigenous peoples' rights (…) But it is not only about the proposals that we are making, it is also about where we want to reach to. And I think that it is an advancement we have had in the indigenous movement until the present moment, (…) a process of maturity a process of affirmation, not of power but affirmation of values and affirmation of principals.

As the quotation indicates, advocacy is a comprehensive field. The influence can be political but can also be directed toward ethical questions or attitudes. Advocacy should not be understood as isolated events but as processes of change interwoven into societal contexts.

In the Overall Strategy Ibis emphasised advocacy as an important instrument of change (Ibis, 2002b). In order to strengthen the regional perspective on advocacy in South America, Ibis has decided to elaborate the new regional programme: *Advocacy and globalisation with a focus on indigenous rights* (Ibis. 2002c). At the time of the fieldwork it is still not decided how the monitoring system of the programme is going to be designed, which makes this a timely opportunity for exploring how leaning about advocacy can be improved.

Donors are also giving priority to advocacy. In this way advocacy is a strong element in Danida's strategy for financial assistance to Danish NGOs from 2000, which emphasises the strengthening of civil society in developing countries including the building up of partners' capacity for advocacy (Danida, 2000c).

Box: 4.1: Different dimensions of advocacy in Ibis

Advocacy as influencing

Formulation on secondary laws in Ecuador concerning indigenous peoples' rights

In 1998 a new constitution was made in Ecuador which recognised the collective rights of indigenous peoples. To ensure that changes were made to comply with the constitution CONAIE, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador participated in the formulation of a range of secondary laws concerning indigenous peoples' collective rights. Ibis supported this process with a project with CONAIE for one and a half years.
One of the objectives was to communicate the content of the constitutional improvements regarding collective rights to the members of CONAIE. Another goal was to reach agreement with government sectors, political parties and social organisations about the scope of the secondary laws.

The secondary laws are about organisational structure of indigenous peoples and nationalities organisations, indigenous justice, collective rights to territories, bilingual education, local communes (organisational unit with the indigenous movement as the base), among others. Some of the laws have been elaborated and are being treated by the Congress and the President, but most are still in the process of elaboration.

Advocacy as capacity building

Advisory support to strengthen advocacy in partner organisations

By means of advisors placed in the local organisations, Ibis gives advisory support in political analysis, strategic planning and how to implement advocacy campaigns. As an example, Ibis has an advisor placed in COICA, the co-ordinating body of the indigenous peoples' organisations in the Amazon Basin, in Quito, Ecuador.

The objectives of the advisor's placement are:
- To support COICA in the implementation of strategies on issues related to sustainable development, indigenous peoples' rights, natural resources, biodiversity and institutional strengthening of the Amazonian indigenous movement.
- To widen the scope of lobbying and dissemination of COICA's proposals and strengthening their levels of coordination with other actors involved in the defense of the indigenous peoples' rights.
- To support the capacity building processes for lobbying and advocacy both at COICA and Ibis South America[9].

Advocacy as international networking

Strengthening of Southern civil society before Earth Summit in Johannesburg

Three Danish NGOs working with environmental development issues, including Ibis took in 2001 the initiative to a global advocacy project. The aim was to strengthen the civil society networks in the South and the co-ordination between NGOs in the North and the South as a preparation for the Earth Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. The Summit was a follow-up 10 years after the summit in Rio de Janeiro where the Convention on Biological Diversity was signed. The project involved NGOs from Africa, Asia and Latin America among these Ibis' partners in Ecuador and Bolivia.

The focus of the global project was to establish national and regional NGO networks that should prepare the participation in the Summit. The idea was to elaborate national studies on progress of the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in each country (Agenda 21, national laws and regulations etc.). Other goals were to get into dialog with the national governments to influence their agenda for the Earth Summit and to create public debates in the countries about sustainable development.

4.3 Roles and relations in advocacy

As advocacy depends on networks, coalitions and alliances, roles and relations between actors become central in this field of intervention. The regional advocacy programme in Ibis (still in elaboration) has as one objective to strengthen the global alliances between indigenous peoples and NGOs, which makes the issue highly relevant. In this section I look at the role of Ibis and the relations between Ibis and its partners.

The interviews made with actors in the South American programme seem to show a prevalent attitude both in Ibis staff and in partners that Ibis first and foremost plays a facilitating role. The facilitating role is also stressed in Ibis' strategic documents (Ibis, s.f.) and is understood as building up capacity and accompanying the partner organisations (in Spanish: *acompañamiento*). The accompaniment role includes joint analysis about political development, advice and solidarity with partners and reflects a perspective on indigenous partners as agents able to speak on their own behalf. This accompaniment role is regarded by Danida (according to a capacity assessment of Ibis) as an *innovative* approach, because Ibis does more than just advocacy unlike many organisations doing advocacy work. In general, advocacy is done by Northern NGOs pleading the cause of their partners in the South (Danida, 2000b).

When it comes to South–North relations in Ibis, a different picture emerges. By virtue of being a legitimate actor in the North and a member of European NGO networks Ibis have close contact to policy processes and their decision-makers in the North e.g. the European Union, World Bank, IMF etc. These contacts provide important insight into crucial documents, dates for meetings and who the most important players for influencing political processes – a task that is difficult for indigenous peoples situated in Bolivia and Ecuador. This places Ibis in an advantageous position to plead the case of partners in the South.

However, the advantageous position sometimes makes Ibis head office understand that advocacy in the North is a task reserved mainly for them. There is a tendency for advocacy strategies and priorities for the global organisation to be defined at the head office. This situation can cause tensions in the relationship between the Ibis head office and Ibis partners or Ibis in the South America. The capacity assessment report touched upon tensions in South-North relationships in Ibis and found that South-North advocacy on occasion has suffered from clashes between different interests. In some cases local expertise has not been used for film production for a Danish audience and in one case it

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[9] Ibis. 2002. Terms of reference for the placement of an Ibis advisor in COICA

seemed as though it was more important for Ibis to present a clear 'good story' in the North than to advocate on behalf of the interests of the Ibis partners (Danida, 2000b).

The global campaign project, Rio+10 is an example, illustrating tension in the South-North relation within Ibis. The project was co-ordinated by three Danish NGOs, among these Ibis, and partners in more than 20 countries as a preparation for the Earth Summit in Johannesburg in 2002 (see box 4.1). An indigenous leader representing indigenous peoples from the Amazon criticised the project for having the goal of defining one common proposal on sustainable development for civil society in the South and North to be presented in Johannesburg. He says:

> They are different worlds. I would not consider the Danish [representatives] making a report on sustainable development similar to the one for the Amazon. They are different things, different conceptions, different regions and different visions. Each one should give priority to demands according to [own] interests, proposals and ways of implementing actions.

According to the leader a common proposal was not only difficult to agree on, but it also hampered the possibility for the indigenous representative to express their vision of development.

The clash between Southern and Northern interests in international advocacy networks is not only a problem in Ibis, it has recently been subject to closer studies. In an analysis of international advocacy, Jordan and van Tuijl (2000) show that it frequently happens that organisations in global campaigns have different goals within the same campaign. The authors include concrete examples of campaigns where Northern NGOs have given priority to conservation of the environment while the local organisations in the South wished to improve the economic possibilities or working conditions in the local area just as much as or more than prioritising the environment. Nevertheless, it often happens that the goals of the Northern NGOs lead the campaigns at the expense of the desires of the local organisations, because the NGOs in the North have easier access to resources and contacts in the international political environment. (Jordan & van Tuijl, 2000).

The South-North relation is a difficult balance in global advocacy. On the on hand, the links between global and grassroots activity are seen as fundamental for the effectiveness of advocacy work, since "only when these activities are mutually supportive can lasting change occur" (Edwards, 1993: 173). On the other hand, Northern NGOs easily take over the global action and speak on behalf of the poor or marginalised in order to pursue their own agenda (Jordan & van Tuijl, 2000, Nyamugasira, 1998). In learning about advocacy it seems important to involve different

actors (Northern and Southern NGOs as well as the grassroots' organisations) and their diverse views on the significance of advocacy changes.

4.4 Challenges to monitoring advocacy

Monitoring of advocacy has gained interest amongst NGOs as well as governmental aid organisations. However, existing literature contributes little to the issue. Since advocacy became significant in development work about ten years ago, several NGO handbooks have been written to guide practitioners (Miller & Covey, 1997, Cohen et al., 2001, Rasmussen & Ringsing, 2002). However, the guidelines focus first and foremost on understanding of the power and politics as well as how the planning and execution of advocacy is effectively done. None focus on monitoring.

Two main reviews have been made concerning how (mainly English) NGOs monitor and evaluate advocacy (Chapman & Wameyo, 2001, Davies, 2001). They explore different methods (type of indicators, models and diagrams) used by the organisations to monitor and evaluate their activities. While the studies inspire, they do not however, provide concrete proposals. At the same time Chapman & Wameyo (2001) conclude that organisations normally are struggling with monitoring and they make an urgent call for an examination of adequate frameworks and methods to assess advocacy work.

4.4.1 Examples of advocacy

In this section I present four examples of advocacy processes experienced in Ibis and describe the kinds of challenges they present for a monitoring system.[10] I argue that conventional 'project focused' monitoring appears inadequate when dealing with changes processes in advocacy. By 'project focused' monitoring I am referring to monitoring that is strictly practised within the framework of a project with elements including: a limited time span (e.g. two years), fixed objectives, planned activities and predefined indicators (often time-bound and sometimes quantitative).

Example 1: Objectives change during the process and advocacy work has long-term impact
Some years ago, COICA, the co-ordinating body of indigenous peoples' organisations in the Amazon Basin worked for the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous peoples in the Economic and Social Council in the United Nations. Advocacy took place in the UN Commission on Human Rights and continued over several years. Every year a workshop with participation of indigenous representatives and country members

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[10] The examples are all related to the advocacy supported by Ibis. The description is based on information from interviews in the fieldwork.

of the Commission was celebrated to undertake negotiations about a possible future forum. Ibis supported a project with COICA, where one objective was to establish this above-mentioned body for indigenous peoples.

The advocacy process lasted six years (a project period is normally two years). In the negotiation process it was necessary to make compromises with governments about the mandate of the body, numbers of members, amongst others. Therefore objectives changed and the focus of lobby activities shifted during the process. COICA made alliances with other indigenous representatives to form a negotiation platform. This meant that COICA had to negotiate its demand with the indigenous network as well. It became a common case and the outcome of the efforts depended on the strength of the international indigenous networks to conduct lobbying and have influence as well as on the willingness of representatives for the member countries. At the end a forum for indigenous peoples' issues was approved and established in the Economic and Social Council, but it will still take time before the impact is felt.

General characteristics of advocacy appeared in the example:
- Objectives change during the process
- Changes depend not only on one organisation (or project) but on other actors in network as well as on the people who are the target of advocacy
- Advocacy has long-term impact

Challenges in relation to project-focused monitoring:
- It is difficult to monitor the advocacy process with the use of pre-defined time-bound indicators
- Long term impact that happens after the project ends are normally not assessed

Example 2: Advocacy can lead to unexpected changes
Ibis has a project with an organisation that represents the indigenous peoples in one of the provinces of Bolivia. A local NGO that gives legal assistance is also a partner in the project. The overall objective is to strengthen the indigenous movement so that "it becomes able to have influence in the state politics by presenting political and ideological proposals with the aim to construct a pluri-cultural and multiethnic society"[11].

The activities in the project include: training in law and other legal issues (collective and individual rights related to territories, environment, bilingual education, etc.), meetings in order to analyse and prepare proposals with other organisations and public information amongst others.

In May and June 2002 the indigenous organisation participated in an extensive 30-day march to the administrative capital of La Paz together with its member organisations and with organisations of the indigenous movement from the lowlands of Bolivia. Marches are a known form of protest, but it was the first time the indigenous peoples in the highlands had organised a march. The goal was to press the government to sign an agreement about the development of a constituent assembly. The intention of the indigenous movement was that an assembly, with participation of the civil society, would make a new constitution in order to strengthen the pluri-cultural and multiethnic dimension of Bolivian society and to include indigenous peoples' collective rights amongst other issues. The outcome of the march was an agreement with the Government about an extraordinary session of parliament after the upcoming elections, which would examine the measures necessary for such a constituent assembly.

The march was not part of the planned activities. However it drove towards the same overall objective as the project, namely to construct a pluri-cultural and multiethnic society. In fact the march provided the organisation with more recognition, experience and capacity than the originally planned activities for the same period would probably have given them.[12]

General characteristics of advocacy appeared in the example:
- Advocacy processes can lead to unexpected changes
- Planned activities in advocacy processes change all the time
- Advocacy can be planned only in a very flexible way

Challenges in relation to project focused monitoring:
- Pre-defined indicators monitor only expected changes
- Only a flexible project monitoring will catch not planned activities and processes

Example 3: Advocacy can be conflictive and disagreements about results can arise
In the scope of a global advocacy project with the aim of preparing the participation of civil society of different countries at the Earth Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (see also box 4.1 in this chapter), Ibis in Bolivia started a project with a local NGO. This NGO was appointed by Ibis to be the focal point in an NGO network with the task to elaborate a proposal about sustainable development in Bolivia. The objectives were to get the proposal approved by a network of social organisations in Bolivia and have the government adapt the proposal of civil society into one elaborated by the government to be presented at the Earth Summit.

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[11] Ibis. *Proyecto fortalecimiento y consolidación de la estructura organizativa del consejo de Ayllus Originarios del Departamento de Potosí.*01.05.2001 – 30.04.2003
[12] Unfortunately, the politicians of the new government did not feel responsible for the agreement made by the former, which means that no extraordinary session was held in the parliament to treat a possible constituent assembly. Some indigenous organisations still have the demand on their agenda, whereas others see it as an impossible goal to achieve.

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The proposal that was elaborated by the NGO network created disagreement within the same network, which ended up being divided into two groups. One group represented by the focal point NGO was supporting the proposal whereas another group was very critical towards the document.

A representative from the focal point NGO tells about the document:

> What we have done is a systematic evaluation of which laws have been complied with and which not. We wanted to evaluate the process and not take a position against the structural adjustment policy or the neo-liberal model, but rather look at what had actually happened, what was the concrete progress until now and what was still to be done.

An actor from the network representing the group disagreeing with the proposal, declares:

> That document [the proposal] was very much criticised, because it was done together with the government with the idea to agree on it and to have as strong a position as Bolivia. But, that document had so many weaknesses, many, and from the social organisations present the critique was very, very hard. (...) A representative from the government also participated in that meeting. Why is a representative from the government present at the meeting? He said, that the position of the government was exactly the same as the one from the civil society. But they were two totally different positions in the issues of land, of water etc.

The first group was satisfied with the document because it had the possibility to be taken up by the government. The second group considered the document as being uncritical of governmental politics and therefore almost useless.

General characteristics of advocacy appeared in the example:
- Participants may not agree about the meaning or value of the change processes
- Advocacy involves relations between groups and can be conflictive processes

Challenges in relation to project focused monitoring:
- It is difficult to capture results that are disagreement about since pre-defined indicators capture the results, which are generally agreed upon at the outset of the project

Example 4: It is difficult to track, which activity makes the difference in advocacy and to isolate the impact of a particular organisation
In June 2002 the presidential and parliamentarian elections were held in Bolivia. The elections were historic. The Movement for Socialism (MAS) representing marginal

sectors as peasants, indigenous peoples, mineworkers and producers of the coca leaf won 21% of the votes. The indigenous peoples got represented with six parliamentarians and one substitute in the new parliament, a result that only a few had expected before the elections.

Many NGOs, local as well as foreign, work with the MAS movement or with local organisations that support the movement. After the elections many NGOs took credit for the result. The regional co-ordinator of Ibis South America says:

> [The problem of documenting results] has been tremendously explicit in Bolivia after the elections. I have not heard of one single NGO who did not take some of the credit for the election victory of MAS or for the fact that a number of indigenous representatives came into the parliament. It is very peculiar because to a certain extent it is true what they are saying. But you could also say to each of them "okay, it may have happened anyway without you".

General characteristics of advocacy appeared in the example:
- Many actors are involved and work in alliances and networks

Challenge in relation to project focused monitoring:
- It is difficult to track, which activity or project makes the difference in advocacy
- It is difficult to isolate the impact of a particular organisation

Sum up of the challenges to monitoring advocacy
In this section the following challenges to monitoring advocacy have been identified:

- Much advocacy work has long-term impacts, political reform can be slow and it takes long time before implementation and real change in peoples' life
- Compromises are often necessary in advocacy, which means that objectives are modified or abandoned in the process
- Advocacy work is diverse and depends on different activities (lobbying, campaigns, demonstrations, capacity building) and on different actors (carried out through networks and coalitions), so it is difficult to assess which activity makes the difference and to isolate the impact of a particular organisation
- Advocacy can be a conflictive process and participants disagree about the meaning and value of results.
- Advocacy is a complex field that operates in uncertain and changing contexts

4.4.2 Learning from advocacy

On the basis of the examples described and analysed in section 4.4.1 it may be possible to define some overall features of monitoring that can facilitate social learning from advocacy. These features could be defined as follows:

Process versus results
It seems more adequate to monitor process rather than tangible results. Monitoring that can cope with uncertainty, is open to changes in the project, and does not measure progress against a fixed set of indicators seems to make it possible to learn from the dynamics in advocacy: shift in focus, different perceptions, conflicts, negative changes.

Context versus project
If learning is one of the organisation's goals, it is useful to have a monitoring system that questions the social and political context rather than a method, which is bound by the framework of the project. Changes from advocacy often happen outside the scope of the project and it is an illusion to think that one project or actor alone can bring about the change by themselves. If monitoring focuses on what is actually happening (beyond the parameters of the project) it then draws attention to the changing context – this has an important influence on a project's success (Mosse, 1998).

Interpretation versus quantification
Social learning seems to be able to emerge if monitoring focuses on actors' different interpretations of change instead of on quantified information collected by indicators suggesting general trends. Advocacy – like social development processes – will always be subject to multiple conflictive interpretations and understanding (Long, 2001). People interpret advocacy in order to make sense out of it. It is precisely through the different processes of sense-making that social learning emerges. Disagreements about the meaning and value of change express the different interpretations of actors involved in the advocacy process. These different interpretations can have as many consequences as points of agreement in the design of future advocacy work (Davies, 2001).

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have briefly described Ibis' broad approach to advocacy, which incorporates campaigns, lobbying and capacity building. In South America Ibis mainly play a facilitating role where they accompany the partner organisations, which seems a rather innovative role in advocacy. However, there seems to be a tendency in the relationships within Ibis that head office dominates the global agenda in the organisation.

As the findings show, advocacy is a highly complex field that gives specific challenges to monitoring; objectives change, the work has long-term impacts, impacts can not be isolated to one actor and advocacy can be a conflictive process. Social learning about advocacy may be facilitated by monitoring that focuses on process instead of results, context instead of project, and interpretations of change instead of quantification made by collecting quantitative indicators.

The tendency in monitoring still leans towards quantitative accounts of activities and results over internal organisational learning processes, due primarily to the donors' reporting requirement. In the next chapter I analyse how monitoring of advocacy is practised in Ibis.

5. In search for flexibility: Gaps between principle and practice in monitoring

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is an analysis of the monitoring policy in Ibis South America. I analyse formal as well as informal practices used by Ibis employees and the partner organisations when monitoring the progress of projects.

The formal project management tool is the logical framework approach (LFA), and indicators are the starting point for the monitoring. Apart from this formal procedure, Ibis staff implement an alternative and more flexible method. The analytical description of the two approaches includes an analysis of discrepancies between ownership and control, participation and effective management, and between linear cause-effect thinking and reflexive monitoring of action. Additionally, I look at the potential of current monitoring practice to cope with monitoring advocacy and organisational learning.

5.2 Logical framework as principle tool

Within Ibis, definitions of quality control, monitoring and evaluation are closely related to the system of project cycle management and planning tool known as the logical framework approach (LFA).

The LFA is a well-known tool, which was introduced circa 1970 by USAID. Later it was adopted by the Canadian aid agency, CIDA and the German technical assistance agency, GTZ. During the last three decades the framework has spread so widely that today it is the predominant tool for aid management in bilateral and multilateral agencies (Cracknell, 2000).

LFA as a planning tool
LFA is originally used in the designing and planning stage of a project. It breaks down a project into its component parts, which constitute a logical hierarchy of inputs leading to activities, outputs, and immediate and wider objectives, and relating these to assumptions made about the external environment. The framework represents a cause-effect logic, which means if you put X resources into a project and implement Y activities then it will, all things being equal, give effect Z.

The project components are usually presented in a one-page matrix that gives an overview of the project. Ibis do not use an actual matrix, but makes use of a simpler form called *Project Information Sheet*, which is basically a list based on the LFA-thinking and representing a logical hierarchy (see table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Ibis Project Information Sheet

1. Development objectives	
2. Immediate (project) objectives	
3. Indicators	
4. Outputs	
5. Target group (Gender profile)	
6. Sustainability	
7. Important risks	
8. Time horizon for future financing	

The Ibis information sheet is designed by Danida and is used for the projects they support. At present, this is the case for all the projects in South America. The Ibis sheet includes three points that do not enter into the logic but are areas that are given priority by the organisation: "target group" – including considerations about gender, "sustainability" and "time horizon and future financing".

Each Ibis project formulation follows the LFA logic. Normally, the procedure for project formulation starts with the partner organisation preparing a first draft of the project.[13] Depending on the experience and needs of the organisation, the programme officer facilitates the process of elaboration. Frequently a project document goes back and forth between Ibis and the partner several times, and in this progress the Ibis programme officer gradually accommodates the project content in relation to the Ibis format. The programme officers have final responsibility for the project document being in accordance with the LFA structure.

The completed project document is sent to the Ibis Board for approval, then the LFA information sheet is sent to the donor.

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[13] The South American programme consists of many small projects and the partner is often weak in project management.

LFA used in monitoring

LFA is not only a planning tool it is also central in monitoring. In Ibis' manual of methodology it is said that monitoring should be carried out in relation to the different components or levels within the logical framework: inputs, activities, outcomes, project objectives, and development objectives. Furthermore, it is stated that indicators are the starting point for monitoring, and that it will therefore be useful to define understandable as well as measurable indicators and consider how these indicators will be monitored (Ibis, 1996).

As in many other development NGOs, the LFA has become the standardised format for defining projects in Ibis. An advantage is that the clear order of the project document as well as that of the matrix gives a fast overview of a complex project. Furthermore it is an important tool in Ibis because it is used for funding as well as for upward accountability to donors. This makes it a very helpful management tool in the decision-making process. However, LFA also has significant limits. Ibis itself is aware of this. In the application for Danida funding, Ibis states the following about the project cycle and the LFA:

> These two instruments are essentially neither process-oriented nor useful to facilitate learning among Ibis's staff, partners and expatriate advisers. (Ibis, 2002b: 23)

In its Strategy 2005, Ibis writes:

> Some of the critics of the planning concept behind the LFA point to the limited understanding of the reality in which most of Ibis' activities are realised: we are acting in an environment of conflictive situations, uncertainty and unpredictability, but we act as if this is not the case. (Ibis, 2001: 39)

Ibis sees the limitations in its main tool. LFA and the project cycle management do not seem to be very appropriate for learning and process-oriented monitoring. They do not take different views or the changing reality into account and they call for a linear way of thinking. As Fowler (1997) affirms, project management assumes "that the future can be accurately foreseen" and constructs "rigidity on processes which should be adaptive and flexible".

Even though it is a strategic goal of Ibis to develop other forms of project methodologies that are more flexible and process oriented and that enhance organisational learning (Ibis, 2001), LFA still remains the principle tool in the organisation.

After this more overall discussion of the LFA, I now explore how Ibis is conducting monitoring with the use of indicators and monitoring visits to partner organisations.

5.3 Indicators – participation or control

After the formulation of the project, the partner organisation is responsible for the implementation and the financial management. Ibis in South America considers itself to have a facilitating role (see also section 4.3), while the partner has ownership of the project and is responsible for its implementation. However, it is the responsibility of Ibis to make sure that the monitoring of the project is being done according to prevailing administrative procedures.

As mentioned in the previous section, the monitoring is based on indicators. The indicators relate to project objectives and are defined in collaboration between an Ibis programme officer and leaders and members of partner organisations. Often, it is a challenge for the partner to define indicators. Firstly, it is necessary to understand and accept the logic of the framework and the role of indicators, which requires application of cause-effect thinking underlying the LFA tool. Secondly, it requires a certain level of analytical capacity to formulate precise and measurable indicators for the objectives.

The majority of the indicators in Ibis projects related to advocacy are qualitative and oriented towards processes, for example: "COICA has increased its capacity for co-ordination in international forums and instances regarding respect and recognition of Indigenous Peoples Rights". However, quantitative indicators with numbers and indications of percentages are also present like "10 original authorities of the target population participate actively in Vigilance Committees and insist on the fulfilment of their Annual Plan of Operations". (See box 5.1 for examples of indicators). Further than the characteristic of indicators no information is included about *how* the monitoring will be implemented during the project period or the kind of information or data needed to measure the indicators. The lack of specific information on these points limits monitoring potential and it is subsequently very difficult to implement.

Box 5.1: Examples of indicators in Ibis advocacy projects

Project title: CIDOB Strategic Plan 1999-2001
Partner: CIDOB (Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia), Bolivia
Period: 1999-2001
(Three of the 12 indicators of the project)

- The national leaders represent the policies and strategies defined by the regional organisations on a monthly basis with governmental instances, other social organisations and the private sector

- The indigenous movement's priorities are recognised in at least two processes of revision of laws and regulations yearly

- The CIDOB has an active and well-prepared representation in COICA (regional body), and participates fully and representatively in at least three specific themes of priority per year at international level

Project title: Capacity building in municipal, territorial, juridical and environmental management, for the Ayllus[14] of Caiza "D" Chaqui, Tomave and Puna, strengthening their original organisational structures.
Partner: ISALP (Social Research and Legal Advice Potosí) (NGO), Bolivia
Period: 1999-2000

- 4 ayllus of the target population make the first steps before public authorities for the recognition of their territorial rights

- 4 ayllus of the target population make the first steps before their municipalities in order to be considered with their requirements in the Annual Plans of Operations (POAs)

- 30% of the target population of the project participate actively with their legitimately recognised authorities in the preparation of municipal strategies, politics and management together with the Council of Original Ayllus of Potosí (CAOP)

- 10 original authorities of the target population participate actively in Vigilance Committees and insist on the fulfilment of their POAs.

Project title: Institutional strengthening of the Promotion of Indigenous Rights
Partner: COICA (Co-ordinating Body of the Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon Basin), Ecuador
Period: 2001-2004

- The opinion of COICA is taken into consideration at international and regional forums in which decisions are taken regarding Indigenous Peoples Rights

- COICA has increased its capacity for co-ordination in international forums and instances regarding respect and recognition of Indigenous Peoples Rights

- The quality of COICA's analysis and proposal documents has been improved in

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[14] An *ayllu* is an ancestral social organisation situated in a particular territory and administrated by its original authorities.

Project Title: Increase the participation of the NGOs from the South in the Earth Summit RIO+10
Partner: Fundación Tierra (NGO), Bolivia
Period: 2001-2002 (10 months)

- Within four months an elaboration of a national report on the fulfilment of the conventions signed by the government in the RIO Summit in 1992 has been realised

- The institutional working platform is a reference to preparatory discussion of the Summit RIO+10.

- At the end of the project political proposals for sustainable development are to be found as an outcome of agreement among several social actors.

- From the third month onwards, messages to create awareness about the problems regarding the Summit RIO+10 are to be found in the press and radio.

As mentioned, the indicators are negotiated and defined amongst different actors – Ibis staff, indigenous representatives, advisors for the organisations, supporting local NGOs. In the literature about participatory monitoring, the construction of indicators is seen as a negotiation process (IDS, 1998, Estrella & Gaventa, 1998, Guijt, 1999). Ibis staff are facilitating the composition of concrete indicators in meetings or workshops. However Ibis has a significant input into the concrete formulation of indicators. At the end the Ibis representative knows what kind of indicators are needed for inclusion in the document in order to have the project approved by the Ibis Board. This means that no indicators that might possibly complicate the procedure are accepted in the document by the programme officer. The negotiation process that takes place is therefore not completely equal because one of the participants – Ibis – has the final word and decision. All participants are of course interested in the approval of the project, but it is the Ibis staff who manage the project logic and thereby seem to control the formulation process. As one programme officer puts it:

> You formulate [the indicators] together with [the partner organisation], yet Ibis is the owner of the document as such. The proposal and what they want to do is totally the property of [the partner], but the methodological structure, the coherence or logic in which it is articulated depends a lot on Ibis. Because the document is of Ibis, it is for Danida.

The above quotation tells that the product document is basically made for the donor, Danida. It also informs that the partner organisation participates in the definition of the project content. However the whole construction does not seem to be in accordance with partners' views and this has implications for monitoring. Another Ibis programme officer recounts his experience of monitoring visits to one of the partner organisations:

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> Several times, I have intended to make an analysis with [the partner] and I have taken the point of departure in the project in a very technical way. This ended in a discussion between the technical staff of [the partner] and me. And this was not important, I was not interested in discussing with the technical staff, it does not make sense. The technical staff had their arguments, but it was a discussion of the technicians and me and the leaders became the audience.[15]

It seems that the LFA and indicators do not make sense for many of the indigenous leaders. As the quotation shows, the leaders do not participate in the technical analysis of the projects. In general during fieldwork and interviews, when I asked indigenous leaders about their tools for monitoring they put emphasis on daily contact with the community bases and their response and the judgement of member organisations at larger assemblies. In indigenous communities oral monitoring predominates. The leaders are in continuous contact and dialogue with e.g. the elders and women in a community to have their comments and advice.[16] It seems that for the indigenous leaders the success of a project is linked to other indications – those linked more to internal and collective assessments and less to predefined indicators for the achievement of project objectives.

Nevertheless, it is with the goal of being participatory and creating ownership of the project that Ibis encourages partners to 'apply' the LFA and indicators in their project management. However, this has been a mistake according to one programme officer, who explains:

> [It] has been a mistaken use of the participatory methodology. Considering the ends for which we have employed it, the participatory methodology has worsened rather than improved the situation. It has led to an exhausting process of seeking to turn indigenous leaders into para-methodologists, and it has encouraged the "NGO-isation" of indigenous organisations, overlooking the fact that the indigenous movement's natural role, in current conditions, is essentially to challenge the institutional set-ups and to propose new ones.[17]

As stated by the programme officer, the participatory approach in Ibis is very easily turned into a form of disciplining partners in a certain methodological logic. A logic that may even divert them away from their original role, namely to bring about changes in a society that is build upon institutional discrimination of indigenous culture and its own ways of societal organisation.

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[15] The technical staff (*los técnicos*) of the indigenous organisations are often non-indigenous persons with some educational background whereas the indigenous leaders (*los dirigentes*) often only have few years of primary school education.

[16] Natalia Wray, anthropologist and consultant in Ecuador, (personal comment).

[17] From a contribution to *Innovator*, an Ibis Internet Discussion Forum, www.ibis.dk.

This is contrary to what Ibis say they want to work for: ownership, empowerment and the fulfilment of the collective rights and autonomy of indigenous peoples. This contradiction can be seen as a gap between participation and effective management. Craig & Porter (1997) describe this contradiction and they state that the two aims, participation and effective management, in fact are deeply contradictory. Participation means the promotion of local control and efficient management is evidently seeking centralised control. In this case the management of a project using a certain logic reinforces this control of Ibis rather than facilitating ownership a practice that may even have a disempowering effect on the partner.

5.4 From principle to practice

Above I analysed how the indicators, as a core instrument in monitoring are constructed. In the following section I explore the implementation of monitoring in Ibis – the practices.

Project monitoring in Ibis is based on two practices. One way Ibis implement monitoring is through narrative and financial reports that partner organisations are obliged to submit every three months in accordance to organisational guidelines. This is part of a formal procedure common for all regions in which the organisation works. The second method Ibis uses to monitor projects includes visits by programme officers to partner organisations at three months intervals. This practice has a particular shape in the South America programme and can be seen as a kind of informal practice, because it is not contained in Ibis' manual of methodology guidelines.

5.4.1 Formal principles

According to Ibis' manual of methodology (Ibis, 1996) the monitoring system at the project level operates with several elements:
- Partner progress reports
- Ibis field office annual status reports for each project
- Project reviews, approximately every two years, or mid-term in a project cycle
- Project completion reports
- Possibly end-of-project evaluation

Partners provide a narrative progress and financial reports every three months. The narrative reports account for the progress of the project, the financial reports for the expenses in relation to activities and budget. In South America, Ibis practise a so-called 'integrated monitoring'. It is based on simple but efficient co-operation between project staff and financial staff at the field office, where the programme officer pays attention to

financial affairs and the administrator to the programme work. The reports not only serve the daily monitoring needs, they also serve as information source for the status and completion reports that programme staff submit to Danida.

Monitoring reports are generally made by the indigenous leaders or technical personal in the organisations. Usually reports account for the activities realised during the period and they normally do not include reflection on progress in relation to indicators or on lessons learned. It seems that the indigenous partners generally have a hard time writing the reports. One of the programme officers narrates from his experience:

> Our partners experience serious difficulties in drawing up the monitoring reports to be submitted to Ibis. Unless there is a "técnico" – generally a white or mixed-race professional – to take care of it, their level of compliance with Ibis's methodological requirements is deplorable.[18]

Reports vary in quality and often the partner organisations do not meet formal standards. Programme staff make observations and comment on the reports and send a written response to the organisations. The reports must formally be approved, though, the approval is undertaken in a flexible manner. This means that if the report does not meet standards it is generally not refused. The programme officer continues:

> I feel incapable of rejecting the three or four pages with which the indigenous organisations "comply" with the requirement of handing in technical reports to Ibis. Because in these reports the organisations expose what really seemed important to them throughout the period of project implementation. And the achievements are sometimes apparently trivial things such as "having managed to meet", or "getting to know the organisation's leader", or "training the grassroots for the first time".

In order to improve the reporting standards one role of the programme officers is to support the organisation in the reporting process, providing advice where necessary.

The task to read and comment on the monitoring reports is very time-consuming for programme staff and it often happens that approval of reports is delayed.

5.4.2 Informal practice – the political dialogue

The other and very central element of monitoring practise in Ibis South America Programme is what is called *diálogo político* – political dialogue.[19] As mentioned

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[18] From a contribution to *Innovator*, an Ibis Internet Discussion Forum, www.ibis.dk.
[19] Political dialogue is not exclusively related to monitoring. It is part of the role of accompaniment (see section 4.3) and indicates the relation between Ibis and partners, where Ibis aim for relationships influenced by political dialogue rather than a project management attitude.

above, the dialogue is only carried out in this region and is not included in the general Ibis manual of methodology. Political dialogue is part of the monitoring visits that the programme officers make to the organisations every three months (sometimes every four or five months, depending upon time constraints). The programme officers explain that they do not follow specific guidelines or procedures for this dialogue. However, common qualities can be found.

Basically, the dialogues are meetings where programme officers visit the partner organisation preferably together with representatives from the target group. Sometimes supportive local NGOs also participate. Ibis staff in South America see these meetings as an "interesting" and necessary part of monitoring. It is a good opportunity to maintain close contact with partners and at the same time provide accompaniment to the organisations.

Functions of political dialogue

First of all political dialogue is a way of creating confidence between Ibis and its partners, a necessity vital in a society that is characterised by racial discrimination towards indigenous peoples. Such discrimination has created relations of mistrust between different groups. A programme officer discusses the importance of building trust between Ibis and its partners:

> The first step is to establish political confidence. If you do not have confidence it does not function. You have to talk, narrate, listen [to their stories] and be in the process with them. The first thing is to create affinity and sympathy.

Besides being an opportunity to create confidence between Ibis and its partner, the meetings creates a space for joint reflection on and analysis of the changes in political surroundings. Examples of topics are the elections, negotiations with politicians, popular protests and alliances made with other civil society groups. During my fieldwork two activities overshadowed meetings with partners in Bolivia. One was the recently held national elections wherein the indigenous peoples achieved the appointment of various representatives in national parliament. The other key event was the indigenous march just prior to the elections. During the dialogue these event are discussed. What does/did the event or process mean for the organisation? What did the organisation reach and what could have been done in a different way or even better? These questions are not always easy to answer because they require self-criticism. Therefore they must be addressed with care. Furthermore, information is exchanged on different political and development issues. Because programme officers have contacts with other NGOs and access to national and international sources of information, they are sometimes able to provide new and useful material in relation to ongoing processes of policy development and initiatives in other organisations.

The discussion and analysis that takes place during these meetings has the potential to strengthen the political analytical capacity of the partner. Knowledge constructed between programme officers, indigenous leaders and NGOs can lead to new reflections. There is no doubt that such political dialogue requires a programme officer's in-depth understanding of the context, local power relations, social tensions and areas of support and opportunities.

A final function of the meetings is the monitoring of capacity building within the organisations. A programme officer explains how he assesses progress in this aspect:

> When you start to discuss you also notice if there is any progress or not. If you go there again after six months and the leaders and community members still talk about what happened to the cow or the bull, then you know that something is not functioning. This is also a part of the monitoring, but you also discuss politics, you create sympathy, and you see if there is progress or not.

Frequently, meetings unfold as a relaxed conversation covering a wide range of topics. Nevertheless, as the above quotation indicates unstructured conversation serves as a way of monitoring aspects such as political formation and the capacity building amongst leaders in the organisations.

Some partners, especially young and less experienced organisations, express satisfaction with the accompaniment and guidance Ibis provide during these meetings. However, the monitoring visits are also an opportunity for control. An Ibis advisor tells how the indigenous partner organisation with whom he works perceives the Ibis visits as a means to control. Ibis staff review accounts to ensure the correct use of funds and to oversee that funds are used in accordance to the plans (neither too much nor too little). If irregularities do exist, Ibis staff flag as an issue at the meeting and then explain what is wrong and how it can be corrected.

For programme officers, it takes considerably more time to travel to the partners in order to build the collective analysis and discussion amongst partners and programme staff than to administrate the formal monitoring reports. However, the programme officers prioritise the informal political dialogue. While formal reports might be written by technical staff in the organisations, the meetings in the field are opportunities for programme staff to meet indigenous leaders and the target group. It seems to be the widespread perception among Ibis staff that it is through these monitoring visits that "you get insight in the consolidation process of the organisation", as expressed by one programme officer.

5.4.3 Indicators and project documents are not used

As already mentioned, there are no formal guidelines for political dialogue meetings. The procedure depends on each programme officer. One programme officer told me that he seldom lets the project document be the point of departure for political dialogue meetings. Sometimes the activities discussed are not part of the project at all. Another programme officer sticks more to planned activities, and he sometimes lets the narrative reports made by the organisation lead the discussion.

A common characteristic for the political dialogue monitoring is that programme officers seldom measure project progress by using the indicators outlined in the project document. Over the course of my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to participate in various monitoring visits during which the indicators were never referred to. A programme officer confirms this:

> I think that at the end Ibis, in this case me, and [the partner] we are conscious about that the document will not play any role in the relation between [the partner] and Ibis. Therefore we do not give it the necessary importance. It is a tacit agreement that it is a formality. We make the project so it is correct (...) the indicators are less relevant. It is to comply with Danida.

The regional co-ordinator of the South American programme is also aware of this and comments:

> It is my impression that monitoring is done very little in relation to how the project document is elaborated and which indicators are drawn up. After it has been made and used for fundraising, it is used very little.

As can be understood from the above statements, the project document is used very little in monitoring of the progress of the project. First and foremost it is used for funding and reporting to donors and not for guiding the monitoring of the process. It is a shared view among the programme officers that it would be difficult for partner relations if an Ibis representative put too much focus on the LFA logic and indicators.

5.4.4 Flexibility in management of advocacy

A somehow ambiguous situation seems to exist in Ibis. As findings have shown, much energy is spent on elaborating precise indicators. Indicators are furthermore a core instrument in the manual of methodology. However, they are rarely used in the practice of projects. In formal monitoring reports very little account of progress is made in

relation to indicators, and in the informal practise indicators are seldom referred to (see section 5.4.1 and 5.4.3).

On the one hand, in the words of the Ibis co-ordinator, "it reflects that we are actually listening to what is going on instead of standing on if you have followed up on this indicator or realised that activity". The monitoring practice is flexible and can adapt to changing situations and needs. On the other hand the flexibility could create problems in midterm or end evaluations made by external consultants measuring the success of a project in relation to compliance with indicators in the project document. This occurred when a consultant was making an evaluation of a project with one Ibis partner. A programme officer tells about the situation:

> It was impossible to evaluate outputs and things like that, if we took the project document as a starting point to see what had happened. Well, then we felt very bad, but we knew that the partner organisation was managing very well. Instead it became an evaluation about how the partner had elaborated its institutional capacity, about the extent to which the Ibis support was appropriate in the relation with the partner, and how lines of action for the next project could be drawn. It was not an evaluation in a strict sense, but we formulated a new work plan on the basis of the detected progress. It was not carried out in relation to the project document but in relation to the process. We are interested in the processes, not in projects.

The evaluation referred to above was done in a flexible manner. Attention focussed on what had actually happened in the partner organisation during the period and the project document was not strictly followed. Furthermore the evaluation included a question about the adequacy of the support provided by Ibis. Moreover one of the aims was to suggest directions for a new project. In this sense there was a focus on the usefulness of the evaluation for the future support to the organisation.

Seen in relation to the features of advocacy and the demands for monitoring, the political dialogue seems to have some advantages compared to traditional tools. Firstly, it is flexible and has the ability to adapt to new situations and changing context. Secondly, it has the potential to capture both expected and unexpected changes. Rigidity and predefinition of desired concrete results seem problematic when dealing with advocacy processes. Similarly, a strict use of indicators would lead to a monitoring of expected outcomes and of what was agreed upon at the outset of the project. However, as the descriptive analysis in chapter four discloses, advocacy is complex and ever-changing processes that depends on manifold factors not under the control by one organisation. Additionally, advocacy is sometimes a conflictive process wherein groups neither agree about the result nor the process.

5.4.5 Reflexive monitoring of action

With Giddens' (1984) concept of the *reflexive monitoring of action* we can understand the monitoring practised through political dialogue between Ibis and partners as a constant characteristic of everyday action.[20] Through this dialogue the indigenous organisations and Ibis are monitoring their activities and the political context as a routine, day-to-day activity rather than monitoring that is motivated by specific "wants" linked to objectives in the Ibis project. Analysis as to the significance of activities, negotiations with local politicians, new alliances with other social groups and the recent indigenous march to La Paz are all part of a routine whereby indigenous leaders continuously monitor the "flow" of their activities. As "purposive agents" the leaders will always have reasons for their activities even though they might not be a part of the project or planned activities. At the same time activities might be relevant for the achievement of project objectives.

In this way, the political dialogue goes beyond monitoring motivated by project documents and defined indicators. It allows room for a broader view of the daily struggle for recognition of the indigenous organisations. If we understand the Ibis project as only a fragment of the indigenous peoples' struggle for recognition and that this struggle has to be seen – and monitored – in a much broader perspective than the project allows for, then the political dialogue seems to have advantages over a strict monitoring of indicators.

5.5 Lack of systematisation and distribution

Up until this point in the chapter, I have analysed the formal and informal monitoring practice in Ibis though formal has not to been explored to the same extent as informal. As the findings reveal, there seems to be a gap between on the one hand a formal procedure let by linear cause-effect thinking in LFA and indicators, and on the other hand an informal practice that is flexible and oriented towards processes. To get back to the starting point of the chapter I could ask, what does this informal reflexive monitoring of action tell us about the use of project cycle management?

It is sometimes claimed in the literature that the LFA tool can be used in a flexible and process-oriented manner (Cracknell, 2000, Danida, 2000a). Also Ibis' manual of methodology emphasises that the LFA tool should be used in a process-oriented manner, where the project documents are continually adjusted (Ibis, 1996). However, this is not happening in the Ibis South America programme. Here the project documents or the LFA information sheet are almost never adjusted as a result of monitoring, they

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[20] See section 2.6.1 for a more elaborated account of the concept of reflexive monitoring of action.

stay the same throughout the project cycle. Even when project components like activities and outputs change during the process, the document or project matrix are not modified.

In general the personnel in Ibis South America are not satisfied with the LFA method. The regional co-ordinator says:

> We have always complained about the LFA. We have also always said that it is just because we have to be better at using it in the "soft" fields. But I do not think we have ever reached that stage where we use it in a reasonable way. If you look at our project documents they seem to be a somehow desperate attempt to integrate a model we are not familiar with and which is fundamentally not suited for these topics.

It seems as though the staff in the South America programme find it difficult to use the LFA in a more flexible manner. The regional co-ordinator considers that it might be because the LFA logic does not fit issues like organisational development and advocacy, the main fields of the organisation.

A programme officer confirms this view stating the following about a project that supports an indigenous organisation in seeking the building of a state with "a plurality of nations":

> This is an essentially political strategy and a bid for a new power structure, because it is about creating a new institutional set-up for the state, based upon new values or perceptions of democracy, participation, representation and equity. The way to pursue this strategy in practice is to exercise collective rights. This drive goes beyond the process embodied by the administrative cycle of Ibis-supported projects. It is a historical process seeking to build a nation and a state from new political, economic, ethnic and cultural constituents. This basic fact leads to various discrepancies and misunderstandings, complicating project monitoring based on qualitative indicators.[21]

Danida also pointed out the limitation of the present use of LFA in the capacity assessment report from 2000. The programme in Bolivia was included in the assessment, and the authors conclude in the Country Report for Bolivia:

> While it may be possible to use LFA in [a flexible] manner, it seems at least difficult to avoid that the project documents – with "hard" outputs – becomes either too rigid a framework for implementing staff, or alternatively dismissed as presently irrelevant. The complex, conflicting and uncertain circumstances in which the support operates seem to increase the risk that LFA is becoming a straitjacket. (Danida, 2000a: 36)

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[21] From a contribution to *Innovator*, an Ibis Internet Discussion Forum, www.ibis.dk.

As stated in the Danida report, the LFA easily becomes a constraint to the management of the projects. However, as illustrated in the analysis, while the staff try to maintain the LFA structure for formal accountability – however rigid or irrelevant they think it is – in practice they manage the project monitoring in a more flexible and process-oriented way.

It seems that a strict use of LFA is inappropriate when monitoring advocacy and that political dialogue is more competent in coping with process, context and conflict, all features that ought to be part of a monitoring method able to facilitate learning about advocacy as formulated in chapter four (see section 4.4.2).

The political dialogue practised in Ibis also has some limits, though. One of the programme officers does not make reports or take notes from the monitoring visits, nor are collective writing or drawing material produced from the meetings that could potentially serve as tools for discussion or documentation of the changes and agreements. Another programme officer takes many notes. He has shelves in this office full of notebooks containing information from the many meetings with counterparts. He writes everything down because he is unsure as to what information is important and what is not. At the same time he does not know how to process this information.

There does not seem to be a systematised way of processing the information collected in monitoring meetings and there is no organised distribution or sharing amongst actors in the form of reports, seminars etc. This means that nobody other than each programme officer is informed about what decisions and changes have been taken, their justification, and the process leading to these outcomes. This prevents other actors in the organisation (programme officer colleagues, co-ordinator, advisors, Ibis in Denmark or new employees) to have access to the potentially valuable information. The knowledge remains with a few actors, hampering organisational learning. Similarly, it becomes difficult to compare progress in different projects and subsequently to get a common picture of the regional programme.

5.6 Conclusion

My findings have brought to the light a gap between two different monitoring practices in Ibis South America: formal policy, building on the LFA method and indicators, and the informal practice of political dialogue prioritised by the programme officers. Ibis staff conceives of the LFA method as being a rigid tool linked to the project set-up and its cause-effect logic seems limited in the monitoring of advocacy processes. Political dialogue, on the other hand, generates more information, is oriented towards processes and opens up the potential for monitoring what is happening beyond the limited framework of the project's concrete goals and activities.

As a consequence, the LFA is mainly used to deal with the outside world. It is a necessary instrument to access project and programme funding and to prove accountability to donors. The political dialogue is used for internal analysis between programme officers and partners about the progress of the project in its social and political context. It takes place on a continuous basis, as a "reflexive" monitoring of the day-to-day activities.

The two monitoring practices illustrate a clash between two different views on planning and development. The LFA and indicators are influenced by an instrumental approach to development, which embraces the idea that it is possible to plan development intervention beforehand in a straightforward manner emphasising rationality, cause-effect relations and control. The political dialogue is allied to another idea of development and change that views project and programmes as processes in which planning plays a more limited role. Instead it recognises that development intervention is a continuous socially-constructed and negotiated process, which needs to be dealt with as such.

Political dialogue monitoring has certain qualities when dealing with advocacy. It is a process-oriented monitoring that is not limited by objectives and indicators defined at the outset of a project. It is open-ended and takes into account what has actually happened in the social and political environment of the partner organisations. The political dialogue is, as the name indicates, a dialogue between different persons, views and interpretations of reality, which has the quality of bringing different meanings of and eventual disagreements about the advocacy process into the open. A greater understanding of the multiple perspectives on advocacy is a crucial step in a process of social learning in Ibis.

However, as my findings point out, political dialogue has certain limits in relation to learning. Even though programme officers prefer political dialogue in daily monitoring with partners, the priority has not been to systematise and distribute the huge amount of information collected through this form of monitoring, which has resulted in limited learning within the organisation. External reporting and accountability to donors have dominated the monitoring and attention to learning has been left on the sideline.

Learning is the focus of the next chapter. Here I explore in more depth how organisational learning takes place in Ibis and what barriers there may be.

6. Loops, levels and obstacles in learning in Ibis

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is an analysis of the learning practices in Ibis South America. The analysis emphasises first of all, how and what is already being learned and secondly, what might hamper learning. Ibis feels external pressure to improve the learning processes in the organisation and it is the interest of this thesis to study monitoring as a tool for learning. Being aware of the fact that there are many sources of learning in Ibis – reviews, studies made by other organisations and literature in general – the analysis in this chapter focuses on the learning that takes place through the daily monitoring in the regional programme. In this way the discussion on monitoring in chapter five continues. This chapter goes into more depth in terms of identifying different levels and specific obstacles to learning within Ibis.

6.2 Monitoring practices and learning loops

From the description of the monitoring practices in chapter five, it is clear that the narrative reports from partner organisations mainly account for activities whereas reflection on progress or challenges is often lacking. On the other hand the political dialogue between programme officers and partners seems to provide some room for learning. At these meetings significant feedback is received from a complex and changing environment and the reflection on the political and social context, which is taking place can construct new awareness and knowledge amongst the participants. [22]

As discussed in the chapter two, social learning is related to collective action and new practices. Reflection and analysis in political dialogue lead to changes in project activities as well as in project strategies, which can be considered as change in action and practises. An example of a change in the environment that has consequences for the objectives and strategies in a project are the elections in Bolivia in June 2002 (see also section 4.4.1). The elections changed the political picture in the parliament and the indigenous movement from the highland got represented with six members. One of the Ibis projects with a highland organisation has the aim to negotiate proposals with the State in relation to the implementation of indigenous rights. This situation was brought

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[22] Of course, the monitoring visits can also be used by Ibis as a mechanism of control as mentioned in chapter 5 (see section 5.4.2).

up and analysed in a meeting between a partner organisation and a programme officer. A challenge they identified was to hold their elected representatives accountable in order to take advantage of the situation. This meant that laws and regulations should not only be negotiated with the State but they could also be addressed in parliament through the representatives.

This specification of the objectives and strategy in order to take advantage of the apparent new political space in the parliament was informal between the partner and programme officer, it was not noted in the project document.

A second example that led to a changed action in a project is a situation during a midterm internal evaluation with a partner. One of the project objectives aimed at taking advantage of several existing laws defending the rights of indigenous peoples (natural resources, environment, popular participation etc.). However, work in relation to one specific law about land and territories had become paramount in the organisation and an expansion was anticipated in this area. Everybody recognised that expansion would be at the expense of efforts in other areas and accepted this as a change in the project trajectory. In this case neither the objectives, results nor indicators were modified in the project document despite the change in the actual situation.

Using the theory of Argyris & Schön (1996), we can distinguish different kinds of learning in Ibis: single-loop learning being instrumental learning, and double-loop learning being where underlying assumptions, norms, policies and objectives are questioned (see section 2.4.2). The adjustment of activities seems to be single-loop learning, because these are in practices that are within the range of existing norms and rules, learning that leads to changes in strategies of action as opposed to changes to underlying values and assumptions. Single loop learning aims to 'correct the defect' that obstructs the achievement of a goal, it addresses 'how to do the same, but better'. Because of the high degree of flexibility regarding changes in planned activities, it can be concluded that the level of single-loop learning is high in Ibis.

Double-loop learning also takes place in Ibis in South America. This happens in situations where existing practises and relations (objectives and strategies of projects) are questioned and the values, assumptions and strategies of an organisation are changed. In the examples above the objectives and strategies are questioned and changed due to changes in the context that rendered the current strategy inadequate.

With Davies' (1998) concept about 'past learning', it is possible to observe another aspect of double-loop learning in Ibis. Davies argues that organisational structures can be seen as evidence of past learning. Following this thesis, we can understand the introduction of an informal methodology – political dialogue – as a sign of double-loop learning. Programme officers recognised that formal monitoring closely following

logical frameworks and indicators does not work for advocacy projects with indigenous partners. As a consequence they have introduced a more flexible, process-oriented and political practice to meet some of the monitoring needs. In this way, old lessons have been embedded in the organisation in its work at an informal level, evidence that the organisation has been informed by its past experiences. On basis on these experiences action has been taken to change the methodology. This can be seen as double loop learning, because the existing practices were questioned and consequently changed.

The changes in strategies, objectives and methodology analysed above have in common that they are made informally and exist as tacit knowledge between programme officers and partners. The knowledge and subsequent change do not consequently lead to formal modifications in projects or monitoring procedures. An 'unspoken' or implicit social (double-loop) learning appears to occur. This learning possesses an informal quality within the organisation.

6.3 Learning takes place at lower levels

As the above analysis reveals, both single- and double-loop learning happens in Ibis. The programme officers are the actors in Ibis that are potentially the most involved in learning from field experience. One programme officer comments the following:

> I think that every meeting is learning, every project provides new learning. When I develop a project I learn, when I create new space for discussion in a project to do the monitoring, it is my learning. The learning is [only] mine, that is the problem.

Another programme officer tells:

> A great part of monitoring work stays in one's head. [As a result of the monitoring] you can confirm the relevance of being engaged with this partner, or you say, no, we should not go in this direction in a project. But it is rather this intuition or our own reasoning we can have as programme officers.

The daily work with the projects and the contact between programme officers and partners provide new learning. The knowledge is accumulated and is expressed as 'intuition' on the basis of which decisions are taken. The quotations above illustrate that the information collected during monitoring stays with the programme officers. One programme officer recounts that he registers a lot of information from the meetings. But he adds: "I do not know what to use it for". Nobody asks for the information. Only when he makes the final project report for Danida, does he review some factual information points from his notebooks. At one moment he began to systematise the information gathered, but this quickly became overwhelming and it was not easy to justify such a task as it was neither requested nor required.

Another programme officer takes far fewer notes after meetings. Instead he memorises information from the events and the decisions taken at meetings. He does not find the time to make minutes or other written notes afterwards.

Both the overload of information and the information that exists in inaccessible forms (e.g. in the hand-written notebooks) make it difficult to share. "If a programme officer leaves the organisation today, we are in trouble", the co-ordinator states and expresses her concern about the situation.

The information and knowledge created through monitoring is not shared at other levels in the organisation e.g. the co-ordinator or staff at the head office. The social learning from the monitoring takes place at the interface between programme officers and partners and it does not involve other actors in Ibis. As such, the organisational learning remains at lower levels and does not travel to higher levels within the organisation.

6.4 Obstacles to learning

6.4.1 Lack of time, mechanisms and motivation

In general, learning was seen as a scarce resource by Ibis staff and lack of time was a frequent answer given when asked about obstacles to learning in Ibis. One programme officer answered:

> "Institutionally there does not exist any mechanism for learning. We say that we are a learning organisation but we do not have any mechanisms".

Lack of mechanisms is related to a lack of institutional support in the organisation. Mechanisms like prioritising room for learning or building incentives are still not developing, according to the programme officer.

Not until recently did the head office of Ibis begin to show large interest in learning (see section 1.3). Earlier, the external pressure was not so pronounced and it was therefore not deemed to be an important or urgent problem needing resolution. This meant that no specific motivation inspired the staff to improve learning.

6.4.2 Competition between programmes is an obstacle to openness

Competition existed between the three country programmes in the region (Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia) and staff have e.g. tried to protect their own programme funding cuts

without much thought as to the other programmes. However, this situation has improved through the introduction of regional meetings amongst programme officers, intended to strengthen the mutual understanding between the programmes.[23]

The competition between the programmes in the different regions is also reflected at the head office in Denmark. The co-ordinator in South America describes her experience at her former post as desk officer at the head office:

> We know too little about what each other is doing and we do not share our experiences. I think it is absurd that we were four desk officers at the head office having the same function in relation to different countries and regions and it was incredibly seldom that we had the time, possibility and structure to talk about concrete experience. And sometimes we had a situation where one officer said: "oh, you want to use this set up, but we already tried that and it went to rack and ruin". (...) I think there is far too little exchange of experience between the five kingdoms. (...) An internal competition has always existed about who has the highest status and who receives most funds, which has the effect that you do not tell others about the problems and weaknesses in a programme.

As the regional co-ordinator states, it seems that this type of competition prevents openness towards the sharing of experiences especially about failure in the different programmes. This case shows that internal competition among staff can be an obstacle to learning.

6.4.3 Transaction costs limit flexibility and information sharing

As analysed above (section 6.2), the project elements (objectives, indicators and activities) are seldom changed in the project documents even though the environment or other circumstances change. This aspect is significant understanding organisational learning because at present the project documents serve to communicate information between the organisational levels within Ibis (programme officer, regional co-ordinator, head office, Board). The reason for not changing the documents seems to be that it is perceived as being laborious by the staff members. The co-ordinator says:

> I think, that sometimes the Latin American bureaucratic tradition is a clog for [changing the project document during the process]. Because a lot of work has been done to make the project document and the agreement [with the partner], to have it all translated and to have the co-ordinator to sign every single page. Hence, the idea of having one or only half a page telling that the situation has changed like this and that and therefore we think this and that [should be changed] seems overwhelming. Because after that it has to be

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[23] By early 2001, the Ibis programme officers compose one single regional team with quarterly planning meetings, where the strategies, planning and methodological tools are discussed and worked upon.

signed and then an addendum has to be made to the agreement. Then it is easier to make verbal agreements about [the changes].

The administrative and somewhat bureaucratic procedures seem to create high 'transaction costs' for changing project documents and subsequently prevent programme staff from making such changes. This seems to create an obstacle to learning given that the project document is a means of communication. If the document were changed during the process, other actors in the organisation, e.g. co-ordinator and staff in Denmark, would be informed as to these changes and their rationale.

6.4.4 Programme officers create room for manoeuvre

As discussed in chapter five, programme officers regard the formal policy of monitoring in Ibis as being inappropriate for the monitoring with indigenous partner organisations. The indicators do not seem to fit with the way indigenous partners' monitor political work (see section 5.3). The programme officers recognise this and emphasise dialogue in preference to a closer monitoring of indicators.

In the interviews, programme officers indicate that it would be reasonable to change monitoring policy. Once, one programme officer expressed the inadequacy of the indicators on the Ibis web page for methodological discussions. The problem seemed clear and pronounced, but why did the programme officers never try to change the formal way of monitoring, if they consider it to be so inappropriate?

Firstly, it has been the general perception that no real alternatives to the widespread and predominant LFA method existed. This diminished the perceived efficacy among programme officers and their confidence in their own ability to change the formal monitoring system. Secondly, if Ibis do not use the LFA, they would simply not get funding. In this way, upward accountability has directed the work. Thirdly, the choice of the programme officers not to change the formal system in Ibis can be understood as somehow strategic and the 'invention' of the informal practice as a creation of room for manoeuvre. They make a room for manoeuvre to be able to pursue their own 'project', namely to *ease* the relationship between Ibis' project world and their partners. As long as programme officers manage to follow the formal logical framework upwards in the Ibis system while handling in their 'own' way the relationships with the partner organisations and project monitoring, the problem will not bee perceived as serious or important enough to address.

However, the situation is changing. Now, when Ibis has been encouraged to intensify learning and has decided to search for learning-oriented monitoring, the programme

officers feel motivated to express some of their criticism towards the formal monitoring system and a safer space for experimenting may emerge.

6.4.5 Power and different interests influence learning

The advisors in Ibis are mainly Danish expatriate personnel who are contracted for a two-year period to work in the indigenous partner organisations or local NGOs. Consequently, they participate in the partners' activities, are close to the daily functioning of the partners and have knowledge about the Ibis projects. The advisors make semi-annual reports about their activities and compliance with objectives of the post. At an internal Ibis seminar of advisors held in August 2002, an advisor tells the following about the use of the reports in the organisation:

> There has not been any monitoring of my advisory work in the project. I do not get any comments on my reports from the partner organisation or from Ibis. You do not know if what you are doing is good or if you need to adjust, change or improve something in relation to the work.

All seven advisors who participated in the seminar had similar experiences to those quoted above, namely that posts are seldom monitored and that the advisors' reports are rarely read or used by anybody.

The reason why the quoted advisor does not get a response from her partner on her reports might be the tension between the use of oral and printed information. The culture of the indigenous leaders in the partner organisation is primarily oral. In oral cultures, printed documents are not perceived as having an influence equal to that of the spoken word, and might therefore not receive much attention (Davies, 1994). As Davies (1994) argues, the printed word is still perceived by the North to be the most influential form of information in the development process, regardless of culture backgrounds.

The fact that the programme officers seldom make use of advisors' reports might be a question of different interests and power. The expatriates' reports are often very critical of the project progress and the functioning of the partner organisations. The Danish advisors frequently judge partner organisations as not functioning efficiently and as not working rationally to comply with planned activities. It happens that Ibis programme officers take the information (including the criticism) of the advisors' report as expression of a lack of understanding of the local cultural and political context. The organisations are weak and work does not progress in the same way as in a Danish organisation. If the information is presented like this in the contact with the partner organisation, it may harm the relationship of confidence and solidarity with the partners

that programme officers try to create and reinforce. As a consequence, it is not in the interests of the Ibis programme officers to use the critical information for direct action.

When Danish advisors give critical judgements after such short periods in the region, they easily give the impression of "knowing better" than both partners and programme officers, whether the judgements are appropriate or not. This attitude easily creates friction and tensions between advisors and programme officers. This might be one of the reasons that advisors think it is sometimes hard to get information from programme officers or that information is concealed rather than shared.

That the programme officers seldom draw upon the knowledge of advisors and that information is concealed rather than shared, influence the learning process and may lead to the loss of key opportunities for learning such as learning from critical reflection, learning from different interpretations and learning from errors. In the case mentioned, different cultures, interests, power relations and tension between actors lead to obstacles in learning processes in Ibis. This illustrates that knowledge and learning are not neutral. On the contrary they constitute a political process influenced by power, conflict and tension.

6.5 Monitoring for upward accountability versus learning

There is general agreement in Ibis that the monitoring done today is done for the purpose of upward accountability in order to collect data for reporting to Danida. This has influence on learning. One programme officer explains that all material produced containing knowledge is produced for Danida. He portrays it in the following way:

> We have to create our own space for reflection and socialise it in Ibis. Because the only reports we make and have as ours are those we are obliged to give in to Danida. So we are not obliged to produce the material [for self-reflection]. In the present process where we elaborate the new national and regional programmes there is an occasion to begin to institutionalise this knowledge that the programme officers have. Now, there is nothing further than that. That is why I say that the learning in Ibis is very weak, it is very little.

In this quotation, the programme officer touches upon a tension between accountability and learning. External reporting overshadows the internal learning process. This seems to be a widespread and general situation in project management as they are difficult to combine. Cracknell (2000) states, that the main purpose of monitoring for accountability is to answer questions such as "does aid work?" and "how effective is development aid?" In monitoring for lesson-learning the key objective is to study "selected successes and failures with a view to learning why some actions were successful and others not, and to ensure that the relevant lessons are learned and acted upon" (Cracknell, 2000: 55).

> "The tension between these two basic objectives always has a major influence on how evaluation [or monitoring] is organised in most aid agencies. The underlying difficulty is that it is not really possible to kill the two birds with one stone, and difficult choices have to be made. (Cracknell, 2000: 55).

Upward accountability seldom invites reflection on why things went wrong. The fact that the purpose of monitoring in Ibis today is upward accountability to Danida has a limiting effect on the learning capacity of the organisation.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed social learning in Ibis. Learning has multiple dimensions and to deal with this I have looked at how learning is taking place as well as what hampers learning.

Monitoring practice in Ibis seems to facilitate both single-loop and double-loop learning. Single-loop learning takes place when the changes are made in the strategy of action (the activities) in order to reach the defined objectives. Double-loop learning happens when the assumptions (existing objectives and strategies) are changed. However, the learning loops have a kind of informal quality since the changes seldom are incorporated into formal project documents, by which reflections and action taken at the field level would be communicated to regional and head offices. This means that learning from practice takes place mainly at the lower levels in the organisation. The learning and knowledge are created at the interface between programme officers and partners and it remains *tacit* knowledge that is unavailable for other actors in the organisation.

In the analysis, some obstacles to learning have been identified in Ibis. Those distinguished during fieldwork are:
- Lack of time, mechanisms and pressure
- Competition between programmes
- Transaction costs in project management
- Creation of room for manoeuvre by actors
- Differences in culture, interests and power relations between actors
- Upward accountability reporting overshadows internal learning

Some are easier to deal with than others. But it is certain that the obstacles demand special attention and are not easily overcome. Chapter seven will look at the tensions between advocacy, monitoring and learning in Ibis disclosed in the empirical analysis and identify the challenges they bring to Ibis.

7. Tensions and challenges: Analysis and discussion of part II

7.1 Introduction

In chapters four, five and six I presented the empirical findings emerging from the exploratory part of this research. The presentation of these empirical findings involved a certain degree of reflection and analysis that brought to the surface some tensions vis à vis advocacy, monitoring and learning. In this chapter I present these tensions and offer some recommendations for Ibis to consider in order to meet the emergent challenges. This chapter concludes part II of the thesis.

7.2 Clash between different views on development and planning

In chapter five I described the monitoring practices in Ibis. The main finding was that two practices – a formal practice based on LFA and indicators, and an informal practice based on political dialogue between programme officers and partners – exist side by side. The LFA is an instrument to deal with the outside world and the key purpose is upward accountability. The political dialogue approach is for internal analysis about the external political development and organisational issues, and for adjustment of project activities and strategies.

The *sense-making paradigms* discussed by Wagemans (1995) allow us to understand two different monitoring methods – formal and informal – as two divergent definitions of reality. According to Wagemans, differences in sense-making paradigms arise when different actors (government, organisations and citizens) interpret reality in multiple ways and act with the purpose of making sense of it. This leads to policy-making processes often becoming influenced by conflictive views on problems.

In the situation of Ibis, this means that on the one hand there is the general and dominant indicator policy defined by aid donors and Ibis, and on the other hand, the political dialogue practised by programme officers and partners. The official policy is influenced by linear cause-effect thinking. Similarly, it stands for an instrumental approach to development that embraces the idea that it is possible to plan an intervention before it occurs in a straightforward, clear cut manner. The informal

practise represents an understanding of development work as a flexible and non-linear process influenced by conflictive interpretations.

What influence does this have on the relationship between policy and practice? At one level, in the day-to-day monitoring, there is almost no relationship between monitoring policy and practice in the South America programme. Instead two divergent sense-making paradigms exist simultaneously. At another level – when progress has to be reported to the Ibis head office and to the donors, and when the projects are being applied for – the partner organisations have to express themselves in the language of the dominant sense-making paradigm of Ibis. This accounts for the presentation style chosen for the development issue the partner wants to address, the formulation of the project logic and the way of reporting on progress.

Even though Ibis sees the limits of this rigid tool in the monitoring of advocacy processes, LFA is institutionalised to such an extent in the 'aid world' that if Ibis do not use it, they simply will not get funds from the donors. In day-to-day monitoring LFA and indicators seem to be minimised as much as possible. This creates a tension in practical monitoring. The programme officers try to meet the challenge of balancing between and managing both systems simultaneously. In this way they seem to keep the two worlds together preventing a big clash. At the same time, in doing this, the programme officers maintain and reproduce the illusory world of projects and the belief that planned intervention works perfectly in a constantly changing and uncertain political context.

7.3 Tensions in advocacy

As the analysis in chapter four reveals, advocacy is a highly complex field operating in an uncertain and uncontrollable environment. Advocacy engages in various political processes at the same time and many different actors are involved. Similarly, advocacy is influenced by opposite and conflictive views and interpretations that usually surface in the process.

These features pose various challenges to monitoring because:
- advocacy has long-term impacts
- objectives are changed in the process
- it is difficult to isolate the impact to a single actor and
- various perceptions exist of the advocacy process and disagreement can arise about the meaning of the results.

A tension exists in the different views on priorities in global advocacy. Advocacy is to a large extent a donor driven field. This also seems to be the case in Ibis. There is a

tendency towards the global advocacy strategies and campaigns influenced by the thinking of Ibis in Denmark. The global advocacy project RIO+10 is an example. Tensions arise when Ibis in Denmark dominates the political agenda at the expense of views and desires from Southern partners.

One of the conclusions from chapter five is that the idea of planned intervention does not fit the monitoring of advocacy projects in Ibis. LFA and indicators are a constraint and are sometimes blatantly meaningless when dealing with advocacy. Advocacy outcomes and impacts can not be captured through the employment of a method that assumes everything can be planned in a mechanical way – a prescription that things unfold in a foreseeable, linear cause-effect manner.

On the other hand, political dialogue seems to better illustrate the dynamics of advocacy processes. As a kind of *process monitoring*, political dialogue is flexible and process-oriented, and focuses on context of the multiple realities of actors that lead to different interpretations of change. Programme officers and partners unfold different views on events leading to new decisions about what the next activities in the process should be.

However the process monitoring is not systematised and knowledge is not made explicit and accessible for others, which puts certain limits to this kind of monitoring in terms of the organisational learning perspective. The political dialogue approach is not officially recognised in Ibis perhaps the reason why it is not further elaborated.

7.4 Tensions in learning

7.4.1 Levels of learning

As the findings presented in the empirical analysis about learning in chapter six show, various loops and levels of learning exist in Ibis.

Both single- and double-loop learning take place in the organisation. Single-loop learning happens when programme officers and partners correct the planned activities in order to make adjustments when changes in the environment have occurred. Double-loop learning takes place in situations where the project strategy is changed because it is no longer considered suitable due to changed conditions for a project.

Political dialogue seems to foster social learning. Reflection on the political and social context triggers cognitive change and constructs new awareness and knowledge amongst participants. This happens during collective analysis about the political scenario and strategies of indigenous organisations that lead to new understandings and changed practice. An example is when organisations from the highland joined the

lowland organisations in a united march for change. The collective action was based on a new understanding of the relationships between regions that have been divided in the past.

Social learning takes place when it is possible to create a relatively safe space for learning (Cees Leeuwis, personal communication). If the atmosphere is characterised by control, for example, when programme officers and partners do not agree on how a project should be accounted for, then actors might not feel the trust that is needed to reach collective cognition.

Learning takes place at the interface between programme officers and partners. Learning does indeed lead to improvement in quality at the project and programme level. However, learning at the lower levels seems to be implicit or tacit and cannot move into the explicit world, i.e. it is not channelled to other levels. This creates a tension between tacit and explicit knowledge in the organisation – a matter I will discuss further later in this chapter.

7.4.2 Obstacles to learning

In the empirical analysis certain obstacles to learning were identified in Ibis that create tension in the organisation. These obstacles are:

- Lack of time for people to reflect on successes and failures from the experiences in the field
- Lack of mechanisms that can channel learning to different levels in the organisation
- Competition between people in different programmes about funds and status that prevent actors from being open, especially about experiences from failures from which others in the organisation could learn
- Experience with perceived high 'transaction costs' in changing a project document, seems to limit the learning in the sense that project documents are the means of communication within the organisation at present
- Lack of alternative monitoring methods that could foster organisational learning
- Different interests, power relations and manipulation of information amongst actors
- Monitoring oriented towards upward accountability to the donor of Ibis

7.4.3 Learning from tacit knowledge

Since the tension between tacit and explicit knowledge is evident in Ibis (see section 7.4.1) and I did not address tacit knowledge in the conceptual framework, I will take some space for reflection on the topic in this section.

The tacit knowledge in professional practice is something that has been addressed in the literature. Sternberg & Horvath (1999) have edited a book about tacit knowledge with views and contributions from various researchers and practitioners. There seems to be a common view of tacit knowledge as important in organisations. It guides behaviour, relates to action and is relevant to the attainment of goals that people value. Some even says that tacit knowledge is important to success in specific fields (Sternberg & Horvath, 1999).

Tacit knowledge can be understood as a kind of 'intuition' and 'gut feeling' as put forward by Hatsopoulos and Hatsopoulos (Sternberg & Horvath, 1999). They see that decision making in a company can be based on two different processes of knowledge: a 'logical' process and an 'intuitive' process. The logical process consists of a set of assumptions, knowledge and rules that the company agrees on are true. It is explicit and can therefore be communicated to others and its explicit character makes it, at the same time, open to be questioned and even corrected and changed.

In contrast, the intuitive process consists of implicit or tacit knowledge from which instinct and feelings are generated. The intuitive process rarely comes up with a detailed set of procedures by which to solve a problem. Rather, it generates a feeling in the persons that have it that can be used in decision-making and for example in quick evaluations of more complex issues that are products of the logical process (Hatsopoulos & Hatsopoulos, in: Sternberg & Horvath, 1999: 142).

However, tacit knowledge is not only intuition or gut feelings. It is the knowledge human agents use in the day-to-day practices. Giddens calls it 'practical consciousness' which consists of "all the things which actors know tacitly about how to 'go on' in the contexts of social life without being able to give them direct discursive expression" (Giddens, 1984: xxiii). Everyday actions are 'routinized' and automatic and this repetitiveness of activities is part of the nature of social life.

Tacit knowledge is not accessible in the same way as explicit knowledge (or 'discursive consciousness' as Giddens calls it). Hatsopoulos and Hatsopoulos suggest that the tacit knowledge can be articulated and made known to others. Once tacit knowledge is made explicit, it can be evaluated according to logical rules and assumptions. However, it is probably not possible to make all tacit knowledge explicit. Tacit knowledge might not even be known to people who have it or it might be so 'situated' or embedded that it

resists any kind of useful classification that is recognisable. This does not mean that an organisation should not try to access existing tacit knowledge, if it could be beneficial.

7.4.4 To recognise tacit knowledge

One of the core challenges for Ibis is to recognise what is already in place within the organisation and make that knowledge explicit. The programme officers learn every day 'on the job'. They acquire knowledge from experience in their working environment. As the exploratory analysis showed, the programme officers use their 'intuition', when taking decisions in the field (see section 6.3). This intuition is based on accumulated tacit knowledge (Sternberg & Horvath, 1999).

As already mentioned above, learning in Ibis takes place at the interface between and amongst actors at lower levels in the organisation (programme officers and partners). As long as the knowledge is tacit and is maintained at lower levels, other levels of Ibis do not learn from the field experiences. A challenge is to make knowledge, obtained and processed at the lower level, available at higher levels in the organisation.

But this does not necessarily occur via a smooth process, as theories on the learning organisation often assume. It involves programme officers sharing 'their' knowledge (the tacit knowledge in the organisation) with other actors in the organisation, however convenient it may be for the programme officers to possess it tacitly. When the tacit knowledge of programme officers becomes explicit, their usual way of doing things may be questioned and corrected and this may involve changes to ingrained practices and procedures. Knowledge and power are closely related, and the learning process involved in the explication of tacit knowledge may create new tensions in the organisation. It will require a 'safe space' where actors can bring their knowledge and views without fear of being 'punished'. This is said, with full knowledge that the idea about a 'safe space' is at the same time an illusion (Cees Leeuwis, personal communication). It is impossible to create a completely safe space.

7.4.5 Last reflection on learning in organisation

In the conceptual exploration (see section 2.4) I included concepts from the literature on the learning organisation (Senge, 1990 and Argyris & Schön, 1996). As discussed, these theories tend to be normative and have a ready-made solutions for organisations so they can overcome crises, compete in the market, attract professional staff and so on. Within the framework of these approaches the outside consultant is given magic capabilities, comparable to those of a doctor giving a diagnosis and providing a patient with the right cure. However, when learning is understood as a social process, the view embraced

within this thesis, learning becomes part of the daily life of an organisation. From this perspective learning will always happen. There will always be some kind of flow of information and knowledge. This is the reason why the first step in the research was to reveal how learning already occurs in Ibis.

I used analytical concepts from Argyris and Schön about learning loops in the empirical chapter six. However, I did not make use of Senge, mostly because the explorative part of the research dealt with the disclosure of what was already in place in Ibis. Using the five disciplines of Senge (1990) would have suggested an analysis of the extent to which Ibis master the five disciplines. I would have limited the analysis to a certain picture of a learning organisation namely the mastering of five disciplines. However, as I have discussed in chapter two, I was interested in aspects like human agency, interests and power relations, which I see as an integral part of organisational life and therefore also of learning.

A good deal of the literature on learning comes from theory of business management or psychology. Learning emerges when views, values and assumptions of a person or those of an organisation meet other and different views, values and assumptions and when the exiting and often "well-rooted" views, values and assumptions of a person or of an organisation are questioned. I have endeavoured to demonstrate that learning is not only situated in the head of an individual but that it also depends on how people interact with each other. Learning processes involve the exercise of power, the creation of room for manoeuvre, the manipulation of information, and competition among actors. It is important to understand these social processes when strengthening learning in Ibis.

7.5 Challenges in Ibis regarding learning about advocacy

In this chapter I have elaborated the tensions that findings in the explorative part of the research brought into the open. These tensions present various challenges to Ibis concerning advocacy and learning. In this section I identify those that are most important.

Challenges to advocacy
If Ibis is to follow their on prescription, stated in Vision 2012 that by 2012, "the impoverished are representing themselves, regardless of social status, race, gender and ethnicity" (Ibis, s.f.: 1) then the tensions identified above represent certain challenges to Ibis in the field of advocacy.

One challenge is to create space so that different views on and expectations as to advocacy can be expressed in the organisation in order to ensure that Ibis' work reflects the interests and concerns of actors at different levels within the organisation. Linked to

this issue is the challenge to co-ordinate the global advocacy networks in a way that benefits partners from the South as well as Ibis in the North and makes explicit the expectations and desires from partner organisations as well as from Ibis.

A second challenge is to monitor the different features of advocacy. The analysis has shown that this requires a method that is process-oriented, that is able to adapt to the complex and ever-changing context and that is not bound by the parameters of the project. It seems specifically important to catch the expected as well as the unexpected and unintended changes and those changes where actors agree about the meaning as well as when they do not.

Challenges to learning

If Ibis wants to strengthen and improve its quality as a learning organisation, the presented tensions challenge the organisation.

One challenge is to learn more systematically from the field in order to build a more comprehensive understanding of the processes of advocacy and related changes so as to improve action and decision-making. A second challenge is to let the learning created at lower levels in the organisation be accessed by upper levels so that it can be used for reflection on experience, action and decision-making.

A big challenge for Ibis is to make the tacit analysis and knowledge within the organisation explicit: to recognise and give value to programme officers and partners' knowledge and skills, to encourage information sharing and wider organisational learning, and to provide critical feedback on programme, as well as overall, strategies.

The obstacles identified make up wide a range of challenges. A step towards a solution could be the creation of incentives for learning and the creation of time and space for collective reflection about the experience in an atmosphere of trust. However, there will probably always exist some obstacles to learning and it seems unrealistic to eliminate all obstacles at once.

A central question seems to be: Is there an alternative way to capture the unexpected and conflictive changes arising from advocacy work? Is it possible to develop a system of monitoring that will provide the information to analyse these changes, a system which is both simple and accessible to different groups of actors, and is capable of fostering learning at different organisational levels?

During the action research I experimented with the alternative monitoring method, *Most Significant Change* in Ibis. The trials carried out, the analysis of the results and

discussion as to the extent to which this method can deal with the challenges to learning and advocacy in Ibis are the topic of chapter eight. This is part III of the thesis.

PART III

8. *Most Significant Change* monitoring: First experiences in the field

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the results of the action research, which makes up part III of this MSc thesis. The chapter starts with an explanation of how the monitoring method Most Significant Change (MSC) became central in the research during the fieldwork period. This is followed by a description of the method and an explanation of how it differs from conventional monitoring methods. I describe initial experimentation with MSC that was carried out with Ibis and reflect on preliminary results. This leads to an analysis as to the extent to which Ibis is able to meet the challenges identified in chapters four and seven using the MSC approach. I conclude the chapter presenting some options and recommendations for an MSC design within Ibis South America.

8.2 How *Most Significant Change* came into the action research

I did not arrive in Bolivia with a detailed plan for action research. The purpose was first to analyse what was already in place in the organisation and what was considered to be lacking in the existing practice (as the analysis in the explorative research – part II of the thesis – has revealed). On this basis the aim was to facilitate a process whereby programme officers and the co-ordinator would define expectations of the monitoring. At the same time the objective was to explore alternative tools or methods in order to evaluate how these tools could help to monitor advocacy and facilitate learning.

Even though I did not have a predefined plan, I was biased in the sense that I went to South America with concepts like "participatory monitoring" and "process monitoring" in mind. I thought that methods based on these concepts could be appropriate in a situation like that of Ibis where the organisation wants to strengthen its capacity to learn. I first came across the MSC method in a paper by Guijt et al. (1998). The authors make reference to the method as a non-indicator based participatory approach, one that

facilitates "reflection and learning by the group members", aspects that I found relevant in relation to the needs of learning that Ibis staff had themselves formulated. At the same time I thought that the 'open' character of the method could be relevant for advocacy, which operates in uncertain and changing contexts.

However, the MSC method is not originally elaborated to deal with advocacy, so the aim became to try it in practice in order to see how the method fit the advocacy context. A Danish advocacy advisor in the South America programme based in Bolivia agreed to participate in a small experiment: he made monthly MSC reports in relation to his working area. This was the first step in the action research.

Two months after the start of fieldwork, Ibis had their quarterly meeting between programme officers in the region. They had decided to focus on monitoring and evaluation at this meeting. Advocacy was also on the agenda because a draft for the regional advocacy programme was up for discussion. In relation to these topics, I was asked by the co-ordinator to make a workshop on monitoring of advocacy at the meeting. She asked if it was possible to present "something really different". With this she was referring to an alternative monitoring system, which was not based on logical framework and indicators. This was said in the light of the fact that Ibis staff in South America do not find an indicator-based method appropriate for the processes they are engaged in nor for communication and contact with indigenous partners as the exploratory part of the research revealed.

Even though I was already trying the MSC approach at an individual scale, the seminar was the 'crucial event' that brought the method into the organisational arena and thereafter it became a substantial part of the action research.

8.3 *Most Significant Change* approach to monitoring

The MSC method is based in Davies' (1996) 'evolutionary approach to facilitating organisational learning'. It is an 'innovative approach to impact monitoring' and was elaborated and tried for the first time in 1994-95 in a credit and saving programme in the NGO Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh. Since then, experience with the method has been gained by CARE in Ghana, Togo and Benin, by SIDA in Ethiopia and US-AID in the Philippines amongst others. More recently, the Danish NGO, Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke, is experimenting with the method in Zambia and Mozambique.

An MSC approach is rather different from conventional monitoring methods. The most important divergences are presented in table 8.1 and explained in the following.

Table 8.1: Differences between conventional monitoring and Most Significant Change[24]

Issue	Conventional monitoring (based on planning paradigm)	Most Significant Change (based on interpretation of stories)
Objective – subjective	Conventional monitoring uses indicators. It has 'objectivism' as its central principle and a need to control or ignore differences and subjective perspectives. Assumptions are made about future events/changes	MSC has abandoned pre-defined indicators. Instead subjective opinions, values and perspectives are valued and differences and interpretations are being explored. Meaning is extracted out of events/changes that have taken place
Quantitative – qualitative	Conventional monitoring is merely quantitative in content and efforts are done to homogenise experience rather than differentiate	MSC is qualitative in content and uses "thick description" which provides in depth information. Experience are selected (most significant) and the core is to define meaning of experience rather than to identify a central tendency
Collection and interpretation	Information is collected in relation to the prescription of change (indicators). Data is often interpreted out of context at senior levels in the organisation	MSC is open-ended and it asks broadly about happened changes. Data collection and interpretation are done by the people with direct experience with the changes.
Static – dynamic	Conventional monitoring systems are frequently static structures where focus remains the same: indicators do not change and same questions are asked	An MSC approach is potentially dynamic and adaptive, where the domains of change can be modified in relation to new and unexpected contexts

In the MSC method people are asked to identify changes they have observed during a certain time period in a specific domain of interest. In the original method the domains are identified by senior staff according to what they think the organisation needs to monitor and learn about and the number of domains is limited to three plus an optional domain of free choice (Davies, 1996). In fact this number of domains has been used in general in experiments with the method in order to keep procedures simple (Sigsgaard, 2002, Most Significant Change electronic discussion forum).

The changes, also called *stories of change*, are collected and interpreted at the field level. In this way, people with first hand experience constitute the starting point of the monitoring system. The changes are communicated to upper levels in the organisation that review the changes and select the most significant ones according to their own views and values. In the original method, the structure consisted of three levels: 1) field staff at project offices, 2) senior staff at head office 3) round table with donors, senior

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[24] Based on Davies (1996)

staff, field staff and target group. The interest is to get a better understanding of the changes in the field and the meaning that people attach to them and share this knowledge among different levels in the organisation. However, changes that happen at upper levels are not in focus, for example changes experienced by Ibis Board of head offices about donor policies.

The MSC approach includes a system of feedback. Each time stories have been selected at the upper levels, the selected stories are fed back to the lower levels. The idea of the method is that the lower levels can consider the views of the upper levels in organisation, when identifying the next changes. The intent is to create an extensive dialogue up and down in the hierarchy of the organisation (Davies, 1996).

Based on different perceptions of change, the MSC approach has an inductive focus where indicative events are the basis for conclusions about the impacts. In this way the method is open instead of prescriptive and allows for discovering changes that were not foreseen in the formulation phase.

The MSC approach does not seem to be a time consuming method. Experience shows that meetings and discussion take about three hours of staff time per month (Davies, 1996) and the method saves time in relation to the use of sophisticated indicator systems (Sigsgaard, 2002). On the other hand it seems important that sufficient time is allocated for the actors to enter into a meaningful dialogue about what is happening in the field (Darts, 1999).

The MSC approach is said to facilitate organisational learning (Davies, 1996, Darts, 1999). Learning is meant to take place through interaction with peoples' realities and from the social meaning that people attach to the impacts of their activities. It seems to reach "a richer and more shared understanding of what has been achieved as a project and what is valued as a positive outcome by the project stakeholders" (Darts, 1999:6). This chapter explores how the MSC approach fosters learning.

8.3.1 Research questions for the action research

The main question of this thesis is (as presented in chapter 2):

What is the experience of Ibis staff and partners of advocacy, monitoring of advocacy and the learning from advocacy, and to what extent can alternative monitoring strengthen the learning about advocacy in the organisation?

The second part of the main question related to the strengthening of learning about advocacy is answered in this chapter and is based on the following sub-questions:

1. To what extent does the MSC method meet the challenges in Ibis about monitoring advocacy?

2. To what extent does the MSC method meet the challenges of learning in Ibis and thereby strengthen the learning capacity of the organisation?

8.4 Initial MSC experience in the field

During fieldwork, I organised and participated in four events where the MSC method was tried in Ibis South America. The four activities were very different in relation to the type of actor that participated and the level of organisation (one person, partner organisation, among Ibis staff from South and Central America) involved. The activities were carried out in different ways and none of them reflected a complete MSC procedure or structure. With the limited time it would not have been possible to construct a complete MSC structure, choose the stories and have them selected at different levels in the organisation as the method requires. The method was adapted to the different occasions in order to gain first experience. The purpose was to explore together with the actors, the different dimensions of the method in order to evaluate its potentials and limitations. The four events are described in the following paragraphs.

La Paz: Monthly reporting from advocacy project in Bolivia

The first step was an exercise made by a Danish advocacy advisor. He is working in an advocacy project with an NGO in Bolivia based in La Paz advising indigenous organisations as well as the NGO on advocacy. He is also responsible for elaborating the new regional advocacy programme. Every month the advisor was asked to choose the most significant change within his work area: to strengthen the capacity of the indigenous organisations in Bolivia to critically participate in the implementation of the national 'poverty reduction strategy'. The advisor was told that the most significant change did not necessarily have to be restricted to the project he was working in. The reason was that his project was in a 'silent period', which meant that he took part in activities that were not central to his project. The main idea was to explore the method's capacity to cope with advocacy, so we decided not to make this MSC trial restricted to the project.

Three domains were identified in relation to the different impact areas of advocacy as they are presented in the regional advocacy programme:
- Policy change
- Strengthening of civil society
- Enlargement of democratic space
- Any other change of free choice (optional)

The question was: "During the last month, in your opinion, what do you think was the most significant change that took place in policy change?" The same question was asked to the other domains.

When the change was chosen, the advisor was furthermore asked to describe what happened, who was involved, where it happened and when it happened. This was to be followed by an explanation of why this change was the most significant. These questions are also asked in the original method. The purpose of the explanation is to bring subjective values and concerns into the public realm, where they can be examined, compared and selected (Davies, 1996).

The Ibis advisor made reports for June, July, and October.

The idea was to try the MSC method at a very small scale in order to see if it made sense in relation to advocacy and if it would be interesting for the Ibis context.

Quito: Introduction of and first reflection on MSC at regional level

In an internal regional meeting with programme officers and the regional co-ordinator in Quito, Ecuador, I facilitated a five hour workshop. The main purposes were to reflect on expectations amongst the actors as to a monitoring system for advocacy and to explore the potential of the MSC approach in relation to these expectations. The Danish advisor who already had knowledge about the method also participated in the seminar. Two consultants contracted by Ibis participated in the last part of the workshop. First the participants defined their expectations for a monitoring system in Ibis. The question raised was: "What are your expectations for the monitoring of the regional advocacy programme?" Meta-plan cards were used and eventually grouped in plenary. This was followed by a presentation of the method. Finally the participants were asked to make a comparative evaluation of the MSC method and the indicator-based method Ibis formally use today in relation to the expectations defined earlier. When the participants, who worked in pairs, had decided which of the two methods was more suitable they had to rank with one, two or three crosses an indication of how much more suitable the selected method was relative to the other.

At the workshop, the MSC method was introduced to the programme staff for the first time. Interest was triggered and the positive response to the method was the motivating factor behind the next trial in Potosí.

Potosí: MSC method use in an evaluation workshop with indigenous leaders and technical staff

In September a programme officer held a workshop in Postosí, Bolivia, with an indigenous organisation to evaluate a project one year after its start. The programme

officer wanted to use MSC for the evaluation and we tried to integrate some aspects of the method in the workshop. We formulated MSC questions in relation to the project objectives and asked for both positive and negative changes. An example is: "What has been the most significant change in the relation to land and territory during the last year? Please state one positive and one negative change".

The participants were asked to work in three groups: female leaders, male leaders (the leaders are husbands and wives) and technicians ('non indigenous'). Each group had two questions/domains and the purpose was to agree on the most significant positive and negative change in both domains. They were asked to argue for the chosen changes as well. The results were presented in plenary and an analysis was made in relation to the objectives and activities in the project.

Santa Cruz: Changes communicated in system hierarchy in seminar with staff from Central and South America

In November there was a seminar on monitoring and evaluation organised by Ibis representatives from the head office in Denmark. The seminar was held in Santa Cruz, Bolivia where Ibis advisors, programme staff and co-ordinators from the programmes in Central and South America participated. Together with the representatives from the head office, I facilitated an exercise with the MSC method. In the exercise the participants were asked to identify the MSC in a domain formulated in relation to the Vision of Ibis: 'During the last year, in your opinion, what do you think was the most significant change in your working area that took place in the participation of the impoverished in the democratic processes of decision making?'

Advisors were divided into two groups (the two Americas mixed) and the programme officers in a third group. Each person in the groups had to tell a most significant change story related to their work and argue why it was the most significant. We involved the idea of levels. Each group had to agree on which of the group's stories they would present in plenary. After the plenary the two co-ordinators selected between the three MSC stories presented (one from each group) and chose the one that they considered the most significant. Finally, they made clear their argument for choosing that one as the most significant.

8.5 Reflections on first experience

The experience gained from the trials in the field can only lead to preliminary conclusions, which I present in this section. The presentation begins with the changes collected during the trials. This is followed by an account of the first reaction of the method by Ibis staff and of the conclusions made with participants about the MSC approach, and my own observations in relation to the activities. The section concludes

with observations on and analysis of the nature and quality of the MSC results, while I present some suggestions for improving the MSC method. In section 8.6 I analyse the MSC approach in relation to the monitoring of advocacy and learning challenges in Ibis.

8.5.1 What changes were collected?

Box 8.1 presents some of the changes collected during the trials in the field. The difference in formulation is due to the fact that they are collected under different conditions. MSC A and B were typed on a computer by a single person with a considerable amount of time. MSC C and D are results of group work during a three hour session.

Box 8.1: Examples of most significant changes collected during the trials

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MSC A
In an advocacy project in Bolivia
June 2002

Domain: Strengthening of civil society
Question: *During the last month, in your opinion, what do you think was the most significant change that took place in terms of the 'strengthening civil society'?*

Description of story of change:
The March. From mid May the indigenous organisations from the highland as well from the lowland marched demanding a constituent assembly. After that the march started in the lowland, the highland joined later. The march started in 6 different places in the country.

At the end of the march, a fraction of the organisation from the lowland, signed an agreement with the government about the call for an extraordinary assembly in the parliament the 3rd of July after the elections. Here they would discuss the possibility of holding a constituent assembly. The other fraction of the march continued because they were against this agreement. However, they ended up making an almost identical agreement with the government at a later point.

The march has been especially significant in the sense that it is the first time that the [indigenous] organisations from the highland demonstrated in large numbers in the political arena and that the march promoted good collaboration between lowland and highland peoples (who traditionally have been divided, BR). However, this collaboration was harmed by division within the lowland organisation. This means that good collaboration at the beginning was weakened. However, after all, it seems that closer contact and alliances for the future have been made, which can be important.

Alliances: Other groups from civil society [that also want a constituent assembly] participated in the march and at the last road blocks, other organisations supported the indigenous movement. In this way, the indigenous movement has become not only a protagonist for its own cause but also for that of other groups who join them.

For the highland movement it is one of the first times they have participated in political negotiations with the government. At the same time, this has shown their tactical weakness compared to the lowland organisations who are accustomed to negotiating. However, they have had their first experiences and they have more knowledge about the political play in negotiations now. In general, though, this experience shows that especially in the highland there is a lack of analytical and strategic capacity to lead the big battle.

Comment from advisor: It can be discussed how much the march and its demands are related to my work. On the one hand the demands have had nothing to do with the themes I work with. On

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the other hand, the march is a part of the requests from the indigenous movement about rights to be heard and to participate. Furthermore, the march can be viewed as an advocacy trajectory where the methods used in this is within my area. I have also chosen this event, because nothing significant has happened strictly related to my working area.

MSC B
In an advocacy project in Bolivia
October 2002

Domain: The enlargement of democratic space
Question: During the last month, in your opinion, what do you think was the most significant change that took place in the 'enlargement of democratic space'?

In relation to the project a negative development is most characteristic for the last period. Since the new government came into power there have been negotiations with IMF and the World Bank about the new economic politics of the government. There has been no participation or input from Bolivian civil society in these negotiations. The negotiations are happening behind closed doors. Once in a while some information gets to the press, however, it is not about the content of the negotiations. Everything points towards the fact that a new poverty strategy PRGF (Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility) is being made with the IMF and a PRSC (Poverty Reduction Support Credit) with the World Bank and a Letter of Intent with IMF, which will determine the economic politics for Bolivia over the coming 3-5 years, without any participation from either the civil society or the parliament.
This situation appears even more absurd in relation to the fact that the government is planning a revision of the poverty strategy through National Dialogue 2003. In this consultation, the economic objectives for the strategy will be revised in order to take into account the poor economic growth over the last 4 years. But the economic politics underlying the whole strategy will not be discussed with the civil society, even though this policy is the basis for the poverty strategy.

MSC C

In an indigenous organisation

Domain: Organisation
Question: Which has been the most significant change in the organisation during the last year?

Positive: Participation in the march for the constituent assembly to achieve more space for direct participation as a movement of indigenous peoples.

Negative: Lack of experience in negotiating with the government. There is insufficient political knowledge and lack of political advice with indigenous vision from the ayllu.

MSC D
In an indigenous organisation

Domain: Organisation
Question: Which has been the most significant change in the organisation during the last year?

Positive: The balanced co-ordination of the local and regional councils with the organisation and the political presence at the departmental level and the influence in the national organisation.

Negative: It has been noticed that in the process of co-ordination, the regional organisation in Southeast became weaker in its balanced relation [with the other member organisations].

8.5.2 Results of MSC trials and first reactions within Ibis

Table 8.2 below presents the conclusions made by participants as well as my own observations, which are indicated in relation to each trial. After the conclusions and observations about the trials an account follows of the first reaction of the method among programme staff. In section 8.5.3 I analyse the results of the MSC trials.

Table 8.2: MSC trials in action research, conclusions by participants and researcher's observations

Trial	Conclusions by participants about MSC	Researcher's observation
La Paz Danish advisor in advocacy made monthly MSC reports within his working area according to the following domains: - Policy change - Strengthening of civil society - Enlargement of democratic space - Any other change of free choice	- MSC helps to think about change and not only activities and outputs - MSC encourages looking beyond the project and considers changes in the environment that have consequences for the project or that the project had an impact on	- MSC seems to have the ability to take into account the unintended and unexpected effects and impacts - It seems that the domains related to impacts reveal relevant dynamics of advocacy - Sometimes stories are told that do not describe actual changes
Quito Workshop (five hours) with co-ordinator and programme staff. Evaluation of MSC and indicator-based method in relation to the monitoring of advocacy	Analysis made by participants: MSC has an advantage over indicator-based method regarding: - The dialogue with the partners Mutual learning between partners and Ibis - Wish for a practical and communicable method - Improvement of orientation of support to partners - Evaluate progress and make adjustment in project Indicator-based method has advantage over MSC regarding: - Upward accountability - Control with use of resources and planned activities	- MSC was positively received by programme staff - MSC seems to have similarities with informal monitoring practice (political dialogue) already in place within Ibis
Potosí Workshop (seven hours) with indigenous organisation. MSC tools used in the evaluation of a project with advocacy components one year after start	- Important to have consistency in the phrasing of questions - MSC needs careful introduction and facilitation - MSC questions inspire discussion among participants - In one group it was difficult to think of negative changes, because it required self critical analysis	- Asking for change makes the participant take the point of departure as changing events instead of what has been planned in the project - Formulation of change is diverse (abstract – concrete) - The LFA terminology has an influence on how changes are formulated - Identification and selection of MSC in workshop facilitates participation of women and a horizontal learning at the first level in a monitoring system

| *Santa Cruz*
Workshop (four hours) with co-ordinators, programme staff and advisors from Ibis programme in Central America (CA) and South America (SA).
MSC trial made, stories selected in groups and 'sent' to level of co-ordinators, who chose the MSC over all. | - MSC is simpler to use than LFA/indicators

- MSC creates a situation of less control than LFA/indicators

- Important to guide the indigenous peoples in the use of method but at the same time maintain balance between openness <-> simplification

- Important issues are
Who defines the domains
Who makes the decisions about what action to take (Ibis or partners?)

- It is difficult to select among changes that happened at different levels (local, national, international). The explication of the context is important.

- Many important changes are lost in the process of selection

- Focus on changes (without selection) can facilitate a chain of reflection in the organisations | - South American staff were more enthusiastic than Central America staff, probably because:
- CA does apparently not have the same critiques of LFA/indicators as SA and had just elaborated a new indicator system for monitoring
- One of the main advantages SA see in MSC is a more appropriate tool of communication with indigenous partners, CA programme does not focus on work with indigenous peoples to the same extent
- CA programme focus on local development (service delivery) not on advocacy to the same extent as SA

- When changes are presented by participants they appear as events, but they are seen as manifestation of a process |

The MSC method got a quick and relatively positive reaction over the course of the fieldwork. A programme officer said after one of the workshops, "now, I do not feel like working with indicators anymore". Even though the reception was enthusiastic in general, there was also a critical voice. This came from a consultant working with Ibis who pointed out that it seemed very difficult to "minimise" the subjectivity in the MSC method. He is right in the sense that the purpose of the method is exactly to explore these subjective opinions and interpretations. The consultant's conclusion is made from a view that sees subjectivity as a 'disturbing' factor in the objective measurement of indicators.

Part of the reason for the good reception by Ibis staff seems to be that there are similarities between the principles of the MSC method and the day-to-day informal monitoring that programme officers are practising with the partners (see sections 5.4.2, 5.4.3 and 5.4.4). The concern of actors' views and values, people's recent experience and contextual interpretations seem to be characteristic for both MSC approach and the political dialogue. One programme officer felt that the MSC approach could even facilitate the political dialogue, because it limits the 'story collecting' to certain areas. "If I knew that I was going to ask for changes in only three different domains, for example, it would make the meetings with counterparts much easier".

The positive evaluation of the method was not only influenced by the method in itself. The fact that the largest NGO in Denmark, Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke (MS), is experimenting with the method as well and that staff members in the Ibis head office were studying the method and found it worthwhile to explore, probably helped to stimulate openness towards MSC initially.

8.5.3 Observations on the nature and quality of MSC results: suggestions towards improving the MSC method

In the following subsection I present observations on the changes collected and reflect on some of the results presented in table 8.2. In addition, the reflection includes suggestions for improving the MSC method.

Nature of changes collected

A first observation is that the description of changes varies considerably. The changes in C and D are far less telling than those of A and B. C and D are formulated like statements rather than actual stories. Although the changes are formulated as statements they are in fact the end product of a group discussion that included descriptions and argumentation for the choice of events. A conclusion could be that in order to gain the full advantage of a 'story telling' method, the changes need to be formulated as completely as possible.

The experience from the trials shows that group discussion has a value of its own (this issue is further analysed below). It appears therefore necessary to find a way to document the stories without losing the valuable group discussion at field level. Some description and explanation were given orally during the presentation in plenary, but to be able to complete the idea of sending the stories to other levels within the organisation, changes need to be documented in writing. This could be done in different ways e.g. recording the discussions or note taking during group discussions.

A second observation is that because the MSC method asks broadly about changes in the actors' environment, this leads to changes that were not results of planned activities surfacing and therefore the unexpected could be identified. An example of this is the changes cited in A and C about the indigenous march, which was not a directly planned activity. The change still relates to the overall objective of the project – to strengthen the indigenous movement to influence national laws and policies – which is why it becomes relevant to include in the monitoring of impact. Even though the project did not include the march as a defined output, the capacity building activities in the project might have been significant for the process that lead to the march.

Nevertheless, the risk exists that since the questions are asked in a broad manner, then the answers might not relate to the work of Ibis. The 'story-teller' of MSC A comments that the chosen change, the march, has nothing to do with the themes he works with, which are mainly related national poverty strategy reduction plans. However, in my view the two are related. The 'story-teller' did not personally participate in the planning of the march, but from an overall perspective the march is related to his work, namely the strengthening of the capacity for advocacy. Furthermore, a demand for a constituent assembly could lead to significant changes in the participation of civil society in the poverty strategy plan, which is the advisor's working area.

However, methodologically there seems to be a risk, when asking very broad questions, to identify changes that might not be directly related to supported activities of the organisation or at least not in the conventional understanding of the project sphere. Similarly, the method does not question the role of the organisation in relation to these changes. The Danish organisation MS has had similar considerations. They ask open questions at the field level in relation to domains that are chosen because they are central to MS' overall policy, though not directly to project activities.

> "Asking very open questions provided us with rich information on political and societal *context*. Some had feared that the questions were too broad to elicit specific information about partnership activities and their outcome. Luckily for MS, a big part of the changes observed related to some of the supported activities, but very often seen in a wider perspective than that of the input-activity-outcome project picture" (Sigsgaard, 2002:3).

However, it is possible to deal with the problem. For example questions could be asked more strictly related to the framework of the project. "During the last six months, in your opinion, what do you think was the most significant change, *caused by the Ibis project*, that took place in the participation of your organisation in the democratic processes of decision making?" However, that would establish a narrower view of change with the implicit assumption that an Ibis project alone will cause political changes. In light of that, I would argue for an experimental phase where questions are asked broadly. If experience shows that the identified changes do not relate to Ibis' work, then they could be reformulated.

Simple to identify change but difficult to choose the most significant

Some programme officers and advisors stated that the MSC approach seems to be a simple, understandable and not so mechanistic method. During the trials it also seemed easy for all participants to identify changes they had observed in their environment.

However, in the workshop with the indigenous organisation it was difficult to choose the most significant amongst a host of changes. For example, one group had listed four negative and three positive changes and was unable to choose among them. This might

be due to lack of facilitation. However, the topic also appeared in the Santa Cruz workshop where a participant experienced that it was difficult to compare changes at different levels in order to select the most significant. She expressed the desire for clearer criteria from which to select. Another participant at the same workshop saw choosing the most significant change as a direct limitation of the method. He asked: "Why is it so important to choose one single most significant change? There are many significant changes and what is the point of excluding some of them?"

I agree that it is valuable documentation to register the diversity of changes that has happened. However, the exercise where the 'most significant' change (and not only 'significant' changes) is chosen provides an important input to the learning process. According to Davies (2000), it is exactly the diversity of changes and the exercise to choose between them, that creates the discussions in MSC. For example, in a situation where there is less diversity in the stories told, there will be fewer to choose from and probably a less lively discussion. This will result in less learning as to changes in understanding of what constitute positive and negative developments. Also Dart (2000) attaches importance to the session of selection of the most significant change, because it seems to "allow interpretation of the stories based on the collective group values, and explication of these values" (Dart, 2000:6).

I think it is important to include a selection process, because it is through this process that people are confronted with other interpretations and learn either if to select by consensus (Dart, 2000) or to make a kind of voting system (Davies, 1996). However, if all identified changes are stored it would give a broader picture of the changes in the programme. A way of doing this could be to gather identified changes in a document and attach them to those selected as most significant or to develop a special storing mechanism like e.g. a database, where the changes could be saved in an accessible form.[25]

MSC approach can facilitate group discussion and participation of women

In the original conception of the method, changes are collected and written down by a programme officer or field worker (Davies, 1996). Others have chosen to interview key persons to define important changes (Sigsgaard, 2002). To collect the changes in workshops as was done in two of the trials seems to give a new dimension to the method, namely the dialogue between actors at the field level in the system. In the group work in the Potosí workshop, female and male leaders were divided into separate groups. An observation made by a collaborator of the organisation (and by myself as well) was that she had never seen the women so active in a workshop. They had

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[25] The idea about a database stems from MS that have an intention to store all stories in a database (Sigsgaard, 2003, personal communication).

discussed non-stop whereas normally they seldom speak during the meetings. It seems as if the MSC questions are able to inspire discussion among participants and that the exchange of views in workshops can add a horizontal learning aspect to the method.

After this reflection on some of the results from the first experience, the focus in the next section is on the extent to which the MSC approach may meet the challenges that Ibis is facing in their wish to learn better about advocacy.

Self-critical reflection is limited

In the experience of trials with Ibis, it was found that for most part, positive changes were identified. Prior experience with the method has shown that there is a tendency for people to focus on positive events when they define the significant changes (Davies, 1996). The main reason is that people want to give a good impression of the work they are doing, particularly when the stories are sent up through the hierarchy of the organisation. It was noted in Ibis that only positive changes came up when no specific indications were given for the identification process. However, in the workshop where negative changes were explicitly asked for, both positive and negative were identified.

The identification of negative changes fosters critical stories, which are essential in a learning perspective. Nevertheless in spite of the negative stories, the experience was that little self-critical reflection took place and little effort was made to understand the circumstances of the changes. This seems to limit the generation of lessons for the future, an issue I discuss further in section 8.6.2.

After these reflections on the first experience and results the next section presents an analysis of the MSC in relation to the challenges in Ibis.

8.6 MSC and the challenges of Ibis

The challenges that Ibis is confronted with concerning learning from advocacy were identified in chapter seven (see section 7.5). In this section I analyse the extent to which the MSC approach is able to meet these challenges. First of all, I discuss the approach in relation to the challenges of monitoring advocacy and subsequently I look at the possibility of the MSC approach to increase the capacity of organisational learning.

8.6.1 MSC approach to monitor advocacy

As identified in chapter seven, the challenges in Ibis in relation to advocacy are to deal with complex and ever-changing processes and contexts. Similarly, it is a challenge to catch expected as well as unexpected changes and to take into account different and

conflicting views on advocacy and disagreement of the results. Furthermore, it seems a challenge in Ibis to ensure that the monitoring reflects concerns from actors at different levels in the organisation.

Changing processes, unexpected changes and conflictive views

In the monitoring of advocacy there is a need to monitor expected as well as the unexpected changes. This is true both for changes where actors agree about meaning and for those changes where actors do not agree about meaning. Table 8.3 illustrates the type of changes pre-defined indicators are able to capture.

Table 8.3: Kind of changes captured by indicators

Changes are:	Expected	Unexpected
Meaning is agreed	Indicators useful here	?
Meaning is not agreed	?	?

Adapted from Roche (1999:43).

As table 8.3 shows, indicators usually capture changes that are expected and agreed upon among actors from the starting point of a programme. However, these changes are just one part of the landscape of changes that happen in advocacy. To what degree does the MSC approach fill out the boxes with question marks in table 8.3?

Being open-ended and asking broadly for changes that have occurred in peoples' political and social environment, the MSC approach is not limited to reveal changes that are expected and prescribed in the outset of a programme. It explores changes in a broader perspective within domains of interests. In that sense it seems that the MSC approach is able to capture the unexpected changes of advocacy activities. As the example with the march in Bolivia clearly shows (see box 8.1) the MSC approach allows the possibility of grasping changes that go beyond the project parameters and the results of its planned activities. For unpredictable processes of advocacy a method like MSC that looks further than the original scope of a project seems to have an advantage over a method guided by pre-defined indicators. However, it seems that the MSC method does not provide a systematic reflection about the character of the changes, which I will come back to in section 8.6.2.

To what extent is the MSC approach able to monitor conflictive views between actors on the changes? The Potosí and Santa Cruz trials made in my fieldwork involved processes of selection of most significant changes in groups. During the group discussion and the selection process different and opposed meanings attached to change

were explored. The MSC approach seems to have potential for dealing with multiple realities and different views, interpretations and meanings in advocacy.

In addition, the starting point for the MSC method is the target group or partners of Ibis and their own experience and interpretations of the social context in which they act. The MSC approach collects and documents dimensions of advocacy processes that are important to the partners and not only those valued by actors in Denmark or at the regional office in South America. This addresses another challenge identified in Ibis, namely to deal with the fact that advocacy is dominated by the North, thereby ensuring the perspectives of Ibis partners are expressed in global campaigns. Collecting views from partners may make it possible to enrich and democratise the Ibis approach to advocacy.

The level of trust among participants influences how freely discussions flow and how conflicting views are addressed. Cultural aspects can also influence this process. For example, is it acceptable to express negative opinions? Can women express their own views? In the groups established in the MSC trials a 'free' discussion seemed possible, especially when groups were strategically defined (e.g. men and women in separate groups).

According to the theory of the MSC method, one of the advantages is that agreement on the meaning of events is a *result* of the process (however, never in a final form) rather than a *premise* for the monitoring (Davies, 1996). However, it is not always possible to reach consensus about meaning (Dart, 1999) and there are examples of disagreement where two changes were about to be selected as most significant[26] and of a voting procedure used to make the final selection (Davies, 1996). In section 8.6.2 I reflect on the elements of power and tension related to learning.

Process monitoring

Mosse (1998) defines process monitoring as being continuous, oriented to the present, open-ended and giving attention to different perspectives. According to this interpretation, the MSC approach has features of process-oriented monitoring. Furthermore, again according to Mosse (1998), process monitoring includes an account of events, relationships and impact of various kinds (see section 2.7.2.). When the most significant change is asked for, what kinds of change are revealed? Are they processes?

The findings from fieldwork disclose different kinds of change. Some are presented as processes like "It has been noticed that in the process of co-ordination, the regional organisation in Southeast became weaker in its balanced relation [with the other member organisations]" (see also box 8.1). Other examples show that changes can be

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[26] Sigsgaard, 2003, personal communication.

interpreted as events e.g. participation in the march, entering alliances with other indigenous organisations, or (a process of) negotiation where civil society has not participated. It seems that the changes revealed in MSC are perceived as manifestations of processes and are described in that way.

MSC can not cover all aspects of advocacy

The MSC approach's strengths seems to be in revealing different views on the success of advocacy activities and what is important for the target group. Likewise, the method seems effective when providing information about how the situation of indigenous organisations has been affected by the project and programmes. However, MSC does not seem to be able to cover all aspects of advocacy and supplementary tools may be necessary. For example, measurement of column inches in newspapers, statistical surveys about public opinions, or interviews with coalition partners and politicians that have been 'victims' of advocacy may be needed to get a broader picture of the impact of advocacy campaigns.

8.6.2 MSC approach as a tool for learning

The underlying idea of the MSC approach is to strengthen organisational learning (Davies, 1996, Dart, 2000). As identified in chapter seven, one challenge in Ibis in relation to learning is to make the tacit, explicit: to recognise and give value to the analysis made by programme officers and partners at the lower levels in the organisation. Additionally, there is a challenge to be more systematic in collecting the information and sharing knowledge from the field experience so that different levels in the organisation can learn about advocacy and the change it stimulates in order to improve action.

As discussed in chapter two, knowledge is socially constructed and dependent on the actors creating it. Likewise, learning is socially shaped by e.g. social relations, desires, interests and power relations (see sections 2.6.1 and 2.6.3). Furthermore, social learning means that different actors are involved in developing a greater understanding of the multiple perspectives on complex situations (see section 2.8). How is learning happening in the MSC approach and to what extent are the challenges in Ibis being met?

Power or consensus in selection process

The MSC approach reveals different views and interpretations of actors and it is therefore obvious that the selection process determining the most significant change is not neutral. Tensions and power relations may manifest themselves at the interface of different interpretations of significant changes in development. Likely, interests include having changes rooted in one's own project selected by the others. There may be

manifestations of power between political and technical staff arguing for most significant changes in their respective areas.

The goal of the selection process is to bring the views together and arrive at a negotiated 'shared reality', which can serve as a basis for collective action. Experience of others shows diverse results. In MS it was very easy to reach consensus about the changes (Sigsgaard, 2003, personal communication). However, others experience that often consensus cannot be reached (Dart, 2000). As Dart states, "the process of *trying to achieve* consensus about which was the most significant story, brings to the surface the groups' values and experiences with regard to learning" (Dart, 2000:6). Also Sigsgaard argues that the selection process forces participants to make up their minds about different changes in relation to experience gained and strategies for development. "This process is an important aspect of organisational learning", says Sigsgaard, who has at times heard participants positively comment after a selection session that it was the first time they had talked about their programme in this way.

Of course, the selection process can involve power and tensions due to the different interests represented. This may be dealt with by trying to create a 'safe' space of trust where opinions can be freely expressed and are taken into account.

Self-critical reflection, feedback and decision-making about action are not optimal in MSC

As we have seen, the MSC approach fosters a system of dialogue and information flow between different levels in the organisation. In this way it strengthens the collective knowledge and learning about multiple views and interpretations. Thereby the tacit learning at the lower level becomes explicit to some extent. However, learning in Ibis is also connected with the challenge to change perceptions, attitudes and practices. To reach this learning requires critical self-reflection, feedback and decision-making about action. To what extent does the MSC approach facilitate this?

In the MSCs identified during the trials, little self-critical reflection was evident (see section 8.5.3). The demand to identify negative changes facilitated some critical stories, but still little effort was given to understanding the conditions of particular changes. In a learning perspective a detailed understanding of the circumstances for a given change is essential (Cees Leeuwis, personal communication). It seems that a systematic reflection and formulation of lessons for future action are weak in the MSC method. We can say that the level of reflection in the method does not lead to abstract or conceptual thinking as the experiential learning model suggests (see section 2.3.1) and from which new action can emerge.

Formulation of lessons for the future might be better facilitated in the MSC method by integrating reflections about why the change has happened and the role of the

organisation or individual therein. These reflections should expect neither a simple nor linear cause-effect relationship in the way changes happen. As both theory and empirical findings in the research have shown, advocacy is a complex process where the origin of changes are difficult to identify with a single activity or the action of a particular organisation (see section 4.4.1). The purpose of the questions is rather to stimulate a systematic reflection on the conditions and consequences of action. These could be questions about e.g. expected and unexpected changes, contextual changes or conflicting perceptions, actions or processes. This effort can be understood as the stimulation of a systematic *reflexive monitoring of action* (see section 2.6.1), which could optimise the formulation of lessons for future action.

Concerning feedback and decision-making, the MSC structure facilitates the communication of selected changes back to lower levels in the hierarchical monitoring system, which can take the views and concerns from upper levels into account. However, the structure does not explicitly let the knowledge created inform decision-making about action.

Summary of MSC and the challenges for Ibis

The MSC approach was not elaborated specifically to deal with advocacy. However, as discussed in this section the method seems to have some qualities which allow it to deal with complex and changing processes like advocacy and to capture unexpected and conflictive changes that conventional methods such as the logical framework can not. However, the monitoring of advocacy processes may need to be supplemented by other methods in order to capture more dimensions of this kind of work.

The strength of the method is that it provides extensive dialogue, which can facilitate the migration of tacit learning occurring at lower levels to upper levels in the organisation. This transports monitoring to the strategic and policy levels, which can potentially lead to change at upper levels as well. However, the method is weak in terms of self-critical reflection, feedback and decision-making, which limit the systematic generation of lessons learned for future action. In the next section I present options and recommendations for Ibis, which may start to compensate for this limitation.

8.7 Recommendations and options for an MSC design in Ibis South America

The regional advocacy programme in South America is being implemented as a new programme. Advocacy is a relatively novel area of intervention and it is not yet clear exactly what impacts to monitor in the programme. In this context the MSC approach might be very useful for discovering what changes advocacy in South America creates and what is necessary to monitor. In the following I present some options and

recommendations to Ibis that deviate from the original version of the method in order to adapt it to the Ibis context and compensate for some of the apparent weaknesses in the method discussed in section 8.6. The deviations are presented in table 8.4 and explained in the following sub-sections.

Table 8.4: Aspects of the original MSC approach compared with deviations suggested in options and recommendations to Ibis

Category	Original Method (by Rick Davies, 1996)	Options and recommendations to Ibis
Selection of domains	Selected by senior staff members in the organisation.	The selection of domain is identified in a participatory way.
Collection of change	Field Office staff responsible for the identification and collection of change, no specific requirement about what method to use or if target group should be involved.	Two methods could be used in the identification and collection of change: - Workshops with indigenous partner organisations - Auto-interviews or workshops by partner NGOs
Positive and negative changes	Changes are requested without specification as to parameters.	One positive and one negative change in each domain are requested.
Reporting interval	Changes are reported from the field each month.	Workshops are made every six months.
Selection	The most significant change is selected at each level in the system.	The most significant change is selected as in the original method, but all changes are recorded for documentation and analysis.
Lessons and action for the future	Each month the most significant changes selected by the head office are fed back to the project offices. The field office takes into account the view of senior staff, there are no decision-making mechanisms. There is no explicit reflection on lessons learned related to action.	After the selection of most significant changes, actors in the monitoring system reflect on why the changes happened and their roles in that change. To strengthen strategic action actors furthermore reflect on possible practical and strategic programmatic implications.

8.7.1 Selection of domains

The selection of the domains depends on what the organisation needs to learn about, so the possibilities are multiple. In the original method the domains are selected by senior staff in the organisation according to what they think is important to monitor for the organisation.

In Ibis the identification of changes can be done in order to know more about the fulfilment of higher goals reflected in the Vision of the organisation or closer to the objectives of the regional advocacy programme. A domain that is formulated in relation to overall concepts like the ones in the Vision will probably make it easier for the upper levels in the organisation to relate to responses. As an example, let me take a domain formulated in relation to a goal identified in the Vision 2012: the participation of the impoverished in the democratic processes of decision making. When the different levels select the most significant changes they will use different criteria. The partners will choose the most significant change in relation to their project objectives or strategy, Ibis staff in South America in relation to the regional programme strategy and Ibis Board in relation to overall goals, but all within the same domain.

On the other hand, it makes a difference who defines the domains. The original method does not give any guidance in this respect and in the first experience with the method the domains were defined by the senior managers of the organisation. If Ibis programme officers and co-ordinator choose the domains, they alone decide what should be learned. The partners might have another perspective on what is important to learn, which would not be revealed if they are not participating in the selection. It is proposed that Ibis identify the domains in a participatory way where partner organisations have a voice in what is being learned.

8.7.2 Collection of change

In the original MSC method no specific requirement is provided as to how the changes should be collected. The only determined procedure is that field office staff have the responsibility to collect the changes identified and send them to a higher level in the system once a month. In practice the field worker wrote down the stories without participation from the target group.

In the case of Ibis it would not seem adequate that programme officers write the changes down. Firstly partners are the responsible for the management of the projects, secondly partners are much closer to the experience of advocacy work than programme officers. Hence, in the context of Ibis it seems appropriate that partners are actively involved in identifying and collecting the changes. In this way their view will make up the basis for the changes that will be communicated upward in the system.

An option for Ibis is to collect the changes in various ways according to the relationship that Ibis programme officers already have with the partner organisations. In relation to the indigenous organisations the changes could be defined, analysed and selected in workshops facilitated by Ibis (similar to the Potosí workshop described in section 8.4). The workshops will then constitute a space for the exchange of opinions and

interpretations amongst participants, which in itself constitutes a space for learning. In relation to this, it is suggested that alternatives to the written word are experimented with for collection of the changes, especially in contexts where participants are accustomed to expressing themselves via other means of communication. This could be done by taking notes during the discussions or by tape-recording the sessions so that complete accounts of stories are documented.

An alternative could be to collect the changes using interviews with key persons selected by the partner organisations.[27] The advantage is that interviewing requires less time than workshops, but the discussions and exchange of opinions among the actors in the organisations would then be lost.

8.7.3 Positive and negative changes

In the original method no specific questions are made to positive or negative changes.

As found in the fieldwork, if specific question about negative changes are not asked, then there is a strong tendency amongst participants to identify only positive changes. Given that negative changes foster critical reflection, which is essential to learning, it is recommended that both positive and negative changes be asked for in each domain.

8.7.4 Reporting interval

In the original method the reporting interval is monthly.

The present reporting interval in Ibis for the narrative project reports where the partners account for the progress of the project is every three months and the monitoring visits to the partner organisations are made every three-five months. Hence, in order not to overload partners or programme staff with extra work, it is suggested that the gathering of changes be implemented every six month to coincide with current monitoring visits (political dialogue). Furthermore, advocacy impact is of longer perspective and reporting monthly may be too frequent to aptly capture significant stories.

8.7.5 Selection of changes

It is recommended that the most significant changes are selected as in the original method rather than simply registering all changes identified (see discussion in section

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[27] MS has positive experience collecting stories via interviews (Sigsgaard, 2002).

8.5.3). However, Ibis could register the full scope of the changes as a means to document the variety of changes occurring. On the basis of the registered changes further analysis can be done e.g. changes over time and comparison between geographic areas.[28]

A topic that I did not yet touch upon, is the fact that the MSC approach collects stories at field level and then sends them upwards in the system. This means that the organisation only learns from changes that happen in the field and not from changes happening at other levels of the organisation. It is recommended that Ibis begins with collecting changes from the field level. Later, when this first part is in place, it could enrich the monitoring system if a two-way change-flow is experimented with. This could for example be implemented by selecting changes at the Board or head office level in the organisation, which are send down in the system.

8.7.6 Lessons learned for the future

In order to meet the need for the generation of lessons learned so as to inform action, an option for Ibis is to integrate reflections on why the changes happened and what individual and organisational roles in this process were. Lessons might also be drawn by reflecting systematically on e.g. expected and unexpected changes or conflicting actions or processes in context. Another possibility is to formulate a specific domain of interest for lessons learned.

In order to link the MSC approach explicitly to decision-making about action an option for Ibis is to include considerations about the implication for practical improvements or for adjustment of programme strategies. This could be done if each level in the monitoring hierarchy makes two steps: first they select the most significant change, and then reflect on what significance the change has had for practical as well as strategic programmatic issues. This feedback system takes the learning one step further than the original method as the organisation takes action on the information.

8.8 Conclusion and perspectives

This chapter has accounted for the first experience for Ibis South America with the MSC approach. As the trials show, the MSC method is able to monitor the complex and changing processes in the field of advocacy. Additionally, the open-ended questions are able to capture unexpected consequences of what the organisation has started and it

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[28] MS has an intention to make further analysis of all the changes collected, however it has not yet been possible due to lack of time (Sigsgaard, 2003, personal communication).

seems possible to deal with negative impacts (with minor adjustments to the original method) as well as conflicts and tensions related to interpretations of impacts.

The overall impression is that the MSC approach could benefit the new advocacy programme where it is not yet clear exactly what should be monitored. However, that is not to say that the MSC method can deal with all aspects of advocacy impact. The monitoring of concrete advocacy trajectories may be complemented by other methods and tools. Using different methods can improve the quality of monitoring, the constraint of cause being the associated expenses.

Even though it was not possible to experiment with the complete MSC structure and cycle of selection during fieldwork, it seems as if it is able to provide a systematic collection of information and a structure for distribution. The MSC approach recognises the informal – the tacit analysis of programme officers and partners made at the lower levels. However, the MSC method appears to lack a systematic formulation of lessons for future action. To attain this goal, a better understanding of the circumstances of the changes, like why they happen and the role of the organisation is required. Similarly, the structure of feedback that the method provides is not linked to decision-making about action. In order to take action on the information collected a second step could be included in the MSC system where actors reflect on the practical and strategic implications of the changes for the programme.

What are the possibilities for making the MSC method work in Ibis?

As a primarily condition, there seems to be an initial openness and interest in the method expressed by staff in South America, which is also true of some actors at the head offices. The MSC method is positively received because it seems to be practical. It is relatively simple and seems to be neither bureaucratic nor very time-consuming. It is based on what already functions well in the field and seems to have aspects, which are recognisable from the political dialogue. Furthermore, the MSC process is situated within the existing hierarchy of the organisation rather than outside in a new setting.

The above suggests that some conditions already exist for making the method work in Ibis. However, an implementation of the method will probably most affect partners and programme officers, because they have to make changes in their usual way of doing things. The MSC method demands a more systematic approach and more reporting than political dialogue and there will be a need to compensate so as not to overburden the already pressed staff.

What is the situation in relation to the demands of the donor? The MSC approach is an alternative method for impact monitoring, which makes it a valuable contribution to the assessment of long-term impacts of project and programme interventions. Danida seeks

this out in their impact study of the Danish NGOs. Additionally, the method focuses on processes and facilitates organisational learning as the Danida capacity assessment of Ibis recommends.

However, Ibis find themselves in a contradictory position. On the one hand, impact assessment, process-orientation and learning are exactly what Danida asks for in their evaluations of Ibis. On the other hand the area of development aid is becoming a somehow unstable field in Denmark with the right wing government coming to power in November 2001. During the last year, NGOs have experienced serious budget cuts, which have had concrete consequences for Ibis, who have had to close projects and even dismiss employees. Therefore the organisation has problems with funding and is forced more than ever to show the results of their work. In any case, the reporting system in Danida is still guided by the conventional LFA system and if Ibis want to use the MSC method they must negotiate this with Danida.

However, the situation today is even more complex. The development sector is not only marked by considerable budget cuts, but also the ways of accounting for development work seem to be tightening up. In this way, the National Audit Office of Denmark recommended in January 2002 that future reporting of bilateral development aid should focus on quantitative accounts for activities and results (National Audit Office of Denmark, 2002). This emphasis on quantitative measurable information for accountability purposes to politicians is exactly the opposite of what Danida has recommended in the assessments of Ibis. So Ibis is caught in a dilemma between two different tendencies in Denmark: one asking for a focus on impact, process and learning and another stressing quantitative measurable results.

How will Ibis confront this situation? Will they follow their overall goals and strategies towards becoming a knowledge-based learning organisation? In this case the MSC method could make an interesting contribution. Or do they prefer to stick to the conventional methods that do not foster organisational learning but have the capacity to provide measurable results in an environment that demands and is accustomed to this kind of information?

These questions only Ibis can answer. However, in October 2002 the Board of Ibis decided to experiment with different approaches to monitoring and so far they have stood by that decision.

PART IV

9. Concluding reflections

This chapter presents my concluding reflections on the research and on remaining theoretical and methodological challenges. The chapter does not represent the main conclusions of this research as these are already outlined in chapter seven (of part II) and chapter eight (of part III).

Learning about advocacy

This research has studied two contemporary trends in development aid: learning and advocacy. The context of the research was Ibis, an organisation pressured by donors to adopt more process- and learning-oriented monitoring method, and for explicit accounts on the impacts of development work.

Advocacy is one of the main pillars in Ibis' South America programme. Although practised for almost a decade, the formal and organisational learning associated with advocacy it still a challenge. As the findings in the exploratory research have disclosed, conventional project monitoring methods using predefined indicators are not adequate to capture important features of advocacy such as: complex and changing processes, unexpected and long-term impacts and conflicts about the meaning of impacts. If Ibis want to intensify learning about advocacy and the changes it brings about, other methods must be employed.

Furthermore, analysis has revealed that existing informal learning mechanisms in Ibis South America – the political dialogue – seem flexible and oriented toward process and political context, which makes it able to monitor the complex and uncertain features that characterise advocacy. However, political dialogue is not a systematic method, probably because it is not formally recognised in upper levels of the organisation and therefore not recognised in formal systems. This limits the positive effects of learning from moving beyond the level of the programme officers and partners where it is generated. The existing learning mechanisms are therefore linked to the project level and do not reach strategic and policy levels in the organisation. (See chapter seven for more detailed conclusions on part II).

The 'action' element in this research has been experimentation with the 'most significant change' method in Ibis South America. The MSC method facilitates sharing of and reflection on knowledge created from field experience amongst actors and at different levels in the organisation. It provides a systematic collection of information and a dialogue about and feedback on the most significant stories of change, which have been selected and interpreted by actors at different levels within the organisation. However, sharing stories is not enough to foster organisational learning. Learning is an experience-reflection-action process and the MSC approach is not explicitly linked to decision-making about action. Similarly, the MSC method, in the original version, does not ask for critical stories and self-reflection, which is essential for learning, is limited. As I have argued, some key elements are needed in order for learning to occur: critical feedback (negative stories), reflections on why changes occur and individual or organisational roles in that, and a monitoring system linked to reflection on 'so what' after a selection of changes has been made. (See chapter eight for more detailed conclusions on part III).

The MSC method seems to have qualities similar to the political dialogue typically practised in Ibis when monitoring advocacy. It is process-oriented and flexible, asks for changes in social and political context, and lets actors' multiple views on and meanings of process and impact come into the open. This makes the MSC approach capable of capturing the unexpected impacts as well as the impacts that are not agreed by all actors. Both of these aspects are central to understanding advocacy processes.

The fact that the MSC method to a certain extent builds on existing practices in Ibis gives it a greater chance of functioning well within the organisation. However, it is difficult to predict eventual success. Firstly, the conclusions made in this thesis about the MSC method are preliminary. The method requires implementation over a longer period in order to get a clearer picture of the kind of information created, what is being learned, what actions have been taken based on the learning, who participates and in what way, the nature of the relationships between Ibis and partners etc. Secondly, a method alone is not enough to make change. The extent to which the MSC method will succeed in facilitating organisational learning depends on the people using it. Finally, how Ibis handles the tension created by external demands for accountability will influence how widely the MSC will be implemented internally. On one hand, Ibis feels encouraged by Danida to stress learning and process monitoring, on the other hand Ibis as well as Danida experience the demand for quantitative measurable results by the Danish Government.

As a final remark, it is possible to see the various aspects of advocacy as characteristic of other development fields. Development aid operates today more than ever before in a globalised context with uncertainties and quick changes wherein experts do not have all

of the answers and organisations do not have full control over processes and impacts of the work they begin.

Theoretical approach to study learning in organisations

In my approach to the study of organisational learning, I have integrated theories on social learning. I have argued for an approach that understands learning as a social practice and one that emphasises learning as an aspect of a wider political process. Additionally, I have argued that a study of NGOs engaged in advocacy needs to include analysis of different interests, conflicts and power relations as well as analysis as to both the stimulants and constraints to learning.

I think this approach has enriched the analysis of learning in my research, which has led to the identification of learning factors that are not cited in normative and consensus-oriented literature on learning organisations. These were for example competition between actors, manifestation of power between particular groups of employees, and the strategic use (e.g. no use) of information.

However, far more research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of social learning, organisational learning and knowledge creation as political processes where power and conflict are natural phenomena.

Opportunities in facilitation of learning

The action research made in the field became a learning process for the participants as well as for myself. Rather than being planned in advance, it evolved step-by-step as actors' interests (or lack of interest) and actions or reactions from the social environment (e.g. decision from Ibis Board about the need to experiment) gave direction to the process. This may be precisely what characterises social learning. Social learning processes can be facilitated, but the outcomes of learning can not be designed beforehand, instead they evolve in response to context and uncertainty.

The process of this action research triggered changes or 'surprises' in actors' understanding of the monitoring of advocacy. Amongst comments from the participants were: "Now, I do not want to use indicators anymore"; "it is difficult to choose negative changes"; "it is difficult to compare different levels without criteria"; "many significant changes happen, why choose among them?" were some of the comments from the participants. These reflections would probably not have arisen had it not been for the experimentation in the workshops. They can serve as important inputs in the current process of improving learning and monitoring in Ibis. Experimentation can lead to

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valuable knowledge and learning. Learning requires action and sometimes learning about matters occurs in the process of changing them. Therefore, I see potential in the facilitation of social learning processes, but facilitation as well as learning should be understood as critical aspects of a wider political process.

A couple of months after the action research, Ibis South America decided to implement the MSC approach as its monitoring method in the regional advocacy programme.

Self-reflection: to where did I get?

It is obvious that my analysis of learning and advocacy in Ibis is not exhaustive. For example the focus of the research has been limited to Ibis South America. This means that I have not included other levels in the organisation such as head office or Ibis Board, which learn from other sources such as visits to the regions where Ibis work, evaluations, studies etc. These additions would have given a more complete picture of learning in Ibis. Furthermore, the relatively small experience in the action research about the MSC method can only lead to preliminary conclusions, which is another limitation. Finally, I think the theoretical approach to study learning in organisations needs much further elaboration than I was able to do in the timeframe of this MSc thesis.

However, I think the research has made an impact. Firstly, I contributed to the ongoing process in Ibis of searching for alternative tools in monitoring and learning. Secondly, I learned a lot. It has been fascinating to conduct action research for the first time and to find concrete solutions to real problems. Methodologically it has been a challenge to move between descriptive analysis (exploratory research) and normative perspectives (action research) and I hope the balance between them is clear in the thesis. Thirdly, I think I have (to some extent) challenged some aspects of dominant approaches to social and organisational learning and integrated a perspective on learning as social and political processes. Finally, I hope to have contributed to a critical methodological discussion and the development of alternative ways to learn from advocacy in development programmes.

Remaining challenges

However, many challenges both theoretical and methodological remain in the field of learning, advocacy and monitoring.

As already mentioned there is a theoretical challenge of integrating power, interests and conflict as dimensions of cognition, knowledge creation and organisational learning.

The understanding of learning could be enriched by further research on how competition among groups, room for manoeuvre and gender roles influence (foster or impede) learning processes.

Methodologically, there is a need for further practical experimentation and research about alternative methods such as the MSC approach. More knowledge is needed on the MSC method – about what kind of information is created, how is learning happening, what knowledge and changes it can lead to, and how it can deal with demands for accountability from target groups, partners, alliances and donors.

NGOs are less bureaucratic and more flexible than governmental aid agencies and therefore they have until now often been cradles for innovation in development approaches. But this room for innovation may be threatened by increased competition over scarce funds and demands from donors for measurable results. However, if NGOs defy the discouraging situation and take up the challenge, they may well create opportunities for themselves to become the cutting edge of new methodologies for innovative monitoring in development.

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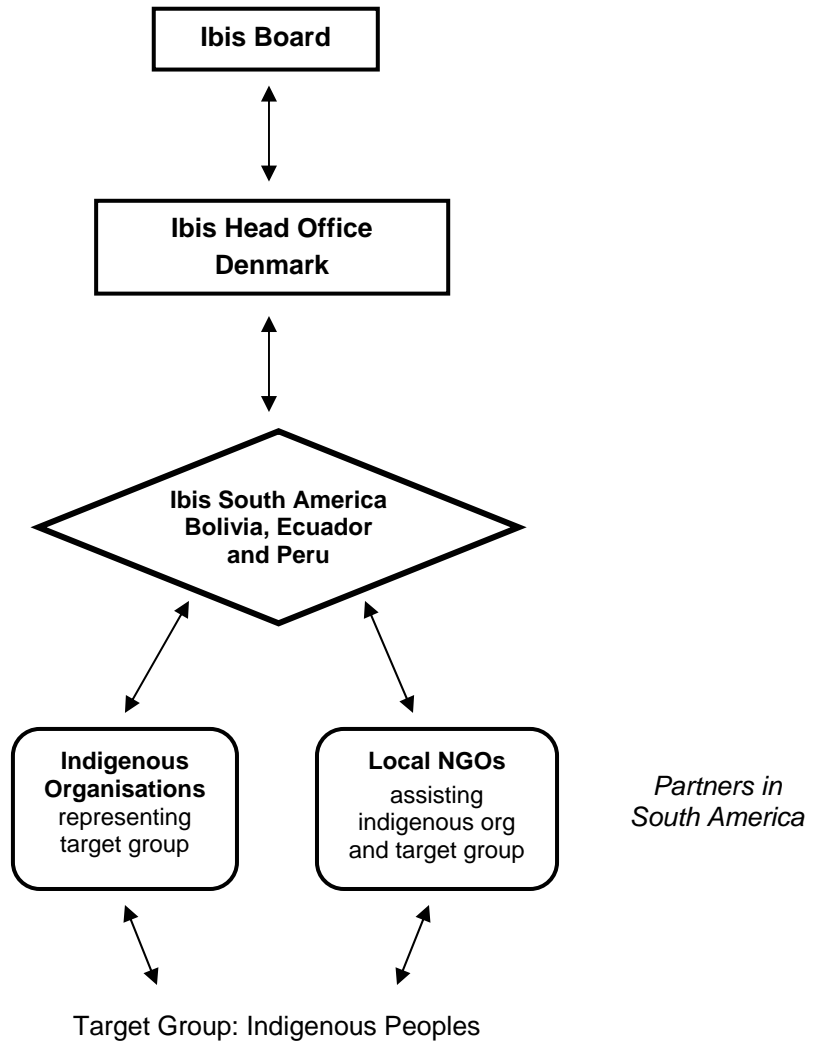
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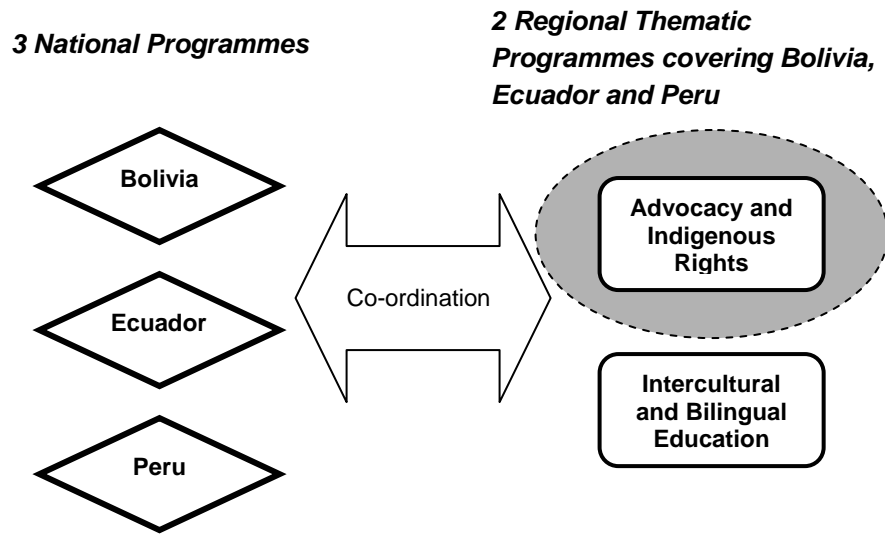
Annexes

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Annex 1

**Structure of Ibis in
Denmark and
South America**

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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │   Ibis Board    │
                    └─────────────────┘
                             ↕
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │ Ibis Head Office│
                    │    Denmark      │
                    └─────────────────┘
                             ↕
                      ◇─────────────◇
                     Ibis South America
                      Bolivia, Ecuador
                         and Peru
                      ◇─────────────◇
                     ↙               ↘
        ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
        │  Indigenous  │      │  Local NGOs  │
        │Organisations │      │  assisting   │        *Partners in*
        │ representing │      │indigenous org│       *South America*
        │ target group │      │and target grp│
        └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘
               ↕                     ↕
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Target Group: Indigenous Peoples

Annex 2

**Ibis Regional Programme
in South America**

**Ibis Regional Programme in South
America
consist of 5 major programmes**

3 National Programmes

*2 Regional Thematic
Programmes covering Bolivia,
Ecuador and Peru*

Bolivia

Ecuador

Peru

Co-ordination

Advocacy and
Indigenous
Rights

Intercultural
and Bilingual
Education

The National Programmes focus the support to indigenous
organisations and on topics like organisational development,
consolidation of indigenous territories, advocacy and
education.