# Best Practices for Site Visits and Exchanges

*An Analysis Prepared for the Climate and Land Use Alliance*
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*Cover photo credit: Rainforest Alliance*

# Executive Summary

Exchanges, site visits, study tours, and exposure visits have been widely used by development organizations, NGOs, and advocacy groups to promote knowledge sharing and capacity development.  This analysis is not a turnkey framework; rather it suggests best practice and recommended steps to maximize impact of onsite visits, adding to the growing literature on the multiplicity of tools available for knowledge exchange. The methodology used by this analysis includes a literature review and interviews with expert practitioners. A working definition of 'onsite visit' is used throughout the assessment to generally reference all the related terms (study tour, site visit, exchange, congress, learning caravan, etc.) when referring to activities whereby knowledge is gained by participants from another place visiting a locale to observe something specific and to interact with people who are knowledgeable about it.

The genesis for the onsite visit is always the learning objectives. There are many motivations for organizing and implementing onsite visits, including but not limited to the following:

- Exposing participants to a variety of new approaches and/or technologies to demonstrate concrete and practical results;
- Developing technical skills or offering training on a particular skill or strategy;
- Providing motivation or a spark of inspiration to encourage participants to try new approaches or develop new attitudes;
- Encouraging critical thinking and reflection;
- Developing trust and confidence that encourages future exchanges;
- Connecting groups, creating networks for ongoing engagement or learning around an issue;
- Developing advocacy messages, evidence, and solidarity and forming new leaders to help push forward an agenda; and
- Influencing decision makers.

A key question is the extent to which there is evidence that onsite visits can contribute to policy changes and if so, under what circumstances. The obvious challenge in answering this question is attribution. Not all interview respondents used onsite visits with the objective of driving a policy agenda or creating or strengthening networks of stakeholders to advocating for a shared agenda, but those who did stressed that onsite visits were a part of a much broader program of work and that it was difficult to identify the magnitude of the contribution of onsite visits to achieve the policy change objective.

Best practice indicates a well-articulated theory of change, with a variety of linked activities over time, should guide a policy change agenda. Onsite visits could be an input, activity, or part of a results chain relating to a policy change outcome. A recommendation from interviews is that it is critical to think about timing when trying to influence policy change. Activities should be well planned so that they coincide with legislative agendas or other global initiatives to take advantage of momentum.

This analysis places onsite visits in a theoretical framework of capacity development, knowledge transfer, and adult learning, and in doing so it highlights the following key principles for their development and practice:

> Principle 1: Onsite visits should be participant-centred. They should be carefully crafted, with the involvement of participants and with the purpose of enhancing capacity to deal with real life problems of the participants.

> Principle 2: The success of onsite visits depends on striking a good balance between internal motivation and external conditions: participants are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance.

> Principle 3: The learning effect of onsite visits is enhanced by extensive personal contact, regular interaction, and building trust.

> Principle 4: Onsite visits require the active engagement of participants: they need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their learning.

Organizations use their own definitions for different types of onsite visits (study tours, exchanges, farmer field schools, learning caravans, etc.) and sometimes use these terms interchangeably. More important than the type of onsite visit selected is that all activities are linked to a learning objective (preferably one that is tied to a results framework with an underlying theory of change). Of equal importance is that adequate time and resources are allocated for the planning, implementation, and follow up for onsite visits.

Recommendations in the areas of preparation, implementation, and follow up/getting to impact are:

**Preparation**

- It is necessary to anchor onsite visit to a desired change or outcome that is relevant for participants given their starting point and context.
- A needs assessment should be conducted to take into consideration the relevant factors that will influence learning objectives and determine where there are gaps. The following factors are suggested as a starting point, though there may be additional factors depending on the context: cultural context,

ecosystems, power dynamics, legal frameworks, political economy, institutional capacy,  community context, market analysis, and organizational assessment.

- The number of onsite events is less important than the duration of the overall engagement, including follow up. A programmatic approach that uses onsite visits as one of multiple interventions is recommended.
- Identifying the right participants is key. The selected participants should be those who have a stake in the issue, and priority should go to those who can and will initiate the actions needed to achieve the change objective, and who can influence others on their return.
- Timing of onsite events is very important. Decisions about duration of onsite visits should be driven by the learning objectives, target audience, resource constraints, and logistics.
- There are extensive logistics challenges with organizing onsite visits. These should be carefully considered beforehand and adequate time and resources should be allocated. Optimally, preparation should start six months before the onsite visit. A fuller accounting of logistics challenges and recommended tips is presented in the main text of the analysis.
- Adequate attention should be paid to both preparing participants and host communities. At a minimum, background information should be provided, and steps should be taken to help participants prepare for the learning activities. Best practice includes a short preparatory workshop prior to the event.

**Implementation**

- Facilitators play a key role in onsite visits as the person (or people) who systematize learning. There was a noted lack of consensus among interview respondents regarding the merits of a formal, outside facilitator versus a peer facilitator; each seemed to have an "appropriate use case scenario." A key function of the facilitator is to motivate participants to focus fully on learning – a list of tips for achieving this is presented in the analysis.
- Documentation practices and the sharing of documentation varied between organizations, with learning best concretized when participants themselves engage in the documentation. Adoption of the Chatham House Rule[1] is recommended to create an environment that encourages unrestrained exchange of information. Best practice is a well-planned strategy for documenting events with a clear delineation of responsibilities, an understanding of the mechanism for capturing events, including outputs, and a clear use for any information used to capture events (i.e., not documenting for the sake of documenting).

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[1] The Chatham House Rule reads: "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), not that of any other participant, may be revealed."

**Follow Up/Getting to Impact**

- Follow up is sometimes challenging due to lack of financing, especially when onsite visits are considered 'projects' – often the bulk of funding is allocated to the actual onsite event with little to no funding available for follow up. Organizations have found some success overcoming resources constraints by using some synergistic approaches, such as partnering with NGOs that will conduct follow up activities, or using low cost follow up methods such as phone calls.
- A monitoring and evaluation framework is recommended. Successful monitoring of the effectiveness of onsite visits requires the following:
  - Assessing pre-existing knowledge and learning expectations.
  - Clear tools and measures for participants to apply when returning to their area / project / institution / organization.
  - Clear objectives at the output and outcome level: to the extent possible, measuring observable behavior changes and practices.
  - A commitment to continuing monitoring and evaluation, even months after the event itself. This includes having the resources to do so, and clear delineation of responsibility for monitoring activities without over burdening local partners.
  - A selection of sites and exchanges that is conducive to the intended objectives.

The analysis that follows suggests a more detailed list of potential indicators, synthesized from the literature and from interviews.

# Introduction

## Background

Exchanges, site visits, study tours, and exposure visits have been widely used by development organizations, NGOs, and advocacy groups. They are not a new addition to the development tool box. Recent analysis on knowledge exchange activities (World Bank 2015) highlights the use of site visits as one of a multiplicity of tools for knowledge exchange. This analysis adds to the growing literature on general best practices in organizing, implementing and following up on exchanges, and adds an additional emphasis on findings relevant for organizations working with indigenous and local community stakeholders. What follows is not meant to be a one size fits all description of exchanges, nor a turnkey framework, rather it suggests best practice and recommended steps to maximize impact of onsite visits.

*Box 1: Guiding questions for the onsite visit development process*

Site visit development, implementation, and review typically requires looking at several aspects in an integrated and interconnected way. Figure 1 below provides a graphical representation of these related elements. Obviously, it is important to know who the participants are, what the focus and topics of the site visits should be, where activities should take place and for how long. Broader questions usually precede these, including the choice for a site visit over an alternative approach, as well as consideration as to the expected outcomes and outputs from the site visit. The broader context plays a key role as well, including the development background of the site and the participants. As site visits are not the magical solution for every capacity and networking challenge, decisions made around site visits should be well informed. It should be noted here that even if these questions apply to all capacity development inputs, they are particularly pertinent for onsite visits, as these usually require a lot of inputs
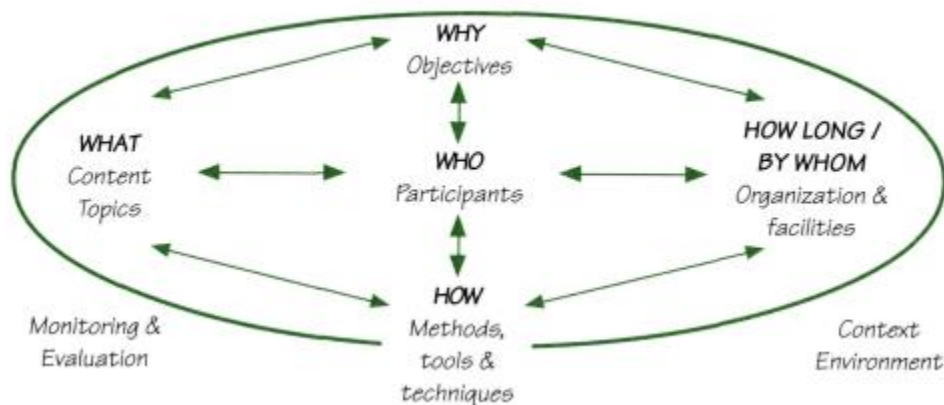


*Figure 1: Aspects of onsite visits addressed in this report (Braakman, 2002)*

The following questions guided this analysis and are addressed in the pages that follow:

- Is there evidence that exchanges can influence policy or organizational behavior? Under what conditions?
- What are some particularly successful examples of exchanges or site visits? What made them successful? What lessons do they offer and what best practices do they illustrate?
- What is the optimal number of participants in an exchange and the ideal duration?
- What group compositions work well? How do different combinations of participants (e.g. horizontal exchanges between indigenous/community organizations v. vertical exchanges including policymakers) impact the preparation, execution, and outcomes of exchanges?
- What are best practices for (a) preparation before an exchange, (b) facilitation during an exchange, and (c) documentation of what took place during an exchange?
- What kind of follow up should happen after an exchange and how is this best organized? How can the impact of an exchange extend beyond the actual visit?
- How can the impact of exchanges be monitored and evaluated? How do we know if they are successful?
- What are some organizations with a strong track record of organizing exchanges, especially with indigenous peoples and local communities and/or in tropical forest areas?

Interviewees and the literature agree that exchange visits can be a useful tool, but deserve careful preparation to make them effective and avoid wasting the time of visitors and hosts. When done right, knowledge exchange can build the capacity, confidence, and conviction of individuals and groups to act (WB, 2015). Box 2 gives a succinct explanation of the multitude of benefits that site visits and exchanges can provide when undertaken effectively, but also warns that numerous issues, if not dealt with carefully, can confound even the best intentions. Many of these points were highlighted and expanded upon by interviewees and in other literature.

The next section focuses on defining relevant terms. Theoretical underpinnings for capacity development, knowledge transfer, and learning are explored, providing a foundation for the findings and recommended practice presented in the subsequent section. The methodology for the analysis, described in Annex A, consisted of a literature review and semi-structured interviews.

*Box 2: Bruns' (2007) overview of potential benefits and challenges of exchanges and site visits*

"Exchange visits offer a bundle of benefits, well beyond just acquiring information. An intellectual and physical journey creates common understanding, relationships forged in the fun and hardships of shared experience, commitments to new approaches, and friendships as foundation for future networking. Visits allow travelers and hosts to focus time and attention on a topic, learning deeply, sharing ideas, and assessing the relevance of new approaches. Information comes alive, in dialogue, in detailed responses to specific queries, in conversations enriched by the perspective of distance and difference. The chance to look behind the scenes, to get acquainted with real people, understanding their problems and achievements, can create inspiration to keep working and launch new initiatives.

However, visits do not always work out so well. Travel may deteriorate into a tedious blur of tiresome briefings, boring bus rides and rushed village tours. Model projects may appear too perfect to be true. Hosts or visitors may be poorly prepared or unable to communicate. Travelers may seem uninterested in anything more than a holiday. Logistical snarls fray tempers, exhaust patience and wreck schedules."

The findings and recommended practices section presents an overview of current approaches used by interviewed organizations for the preparation, implementation and follow up related to onsite visits. Recommended practices are highlighted when there is consensus on an approach or a strong recommendation from interviewees. The analysis concludes with two illustrative examples of onsite visits and highlights the best practices or lessons learned from the examples. Throughout the recommended practices section there are practical tips presented for the reader.

# Defining 'Onsite Visits'

This section reviews some of the different models of exchanges as presented in the literature, including peer-to-peer exchange models, knowledge exchange tools, study tours and site visits. It continues by describing a working definition for 'onsite visits' that will be used throughout the paper. The various models of 'onsite visits' used by interview respondents are presented along with some examples. The section finishes with a description of the objectives and motivations for onsite visits as described by the literature and interview respondents.

*For clarity, in this analysis we will use the term 'onsite visit' to generally reference activities whereby knowledge is gained by participants from another place visiting a locale to observe something specific and to interact with people who are knowledgeable about it.*

Bretos, Heyman, Jenkins, & Peckham (2013), working with fisherman groups, distinguish between three types of peer-to-peer exchanges for participants from different communities to freely exchange information, experiences, and/or lessons

learned about a common practice in order to expand awareness, knowledge, skills, and networks for the betterment of fisheries resource management and/or the communities involved. They note that where appropriate these exchanges may include other fishery stakeholders and members of the wider community. Similar definitions can apply to exchanges in other sectors and with other stakeholder groups:

1. **A model transfer exchange:** community representatives visit a model fishery/ community to learn about a management solution or technology.

2. **A reciprocal exchange:** delegations and other stakeholders from two or more communities reciprocally visit each other to identify and co-derive, solutions to common problems.

3. **A congress-style exchange:** representatives of communities gather in a central location to exchange ideas and solutions
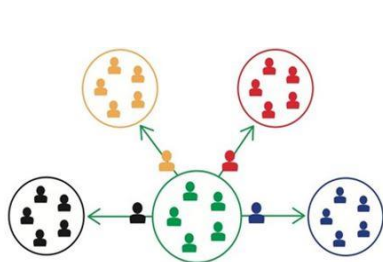


*Figure 2: Model transfer (after Bretos et al.)*
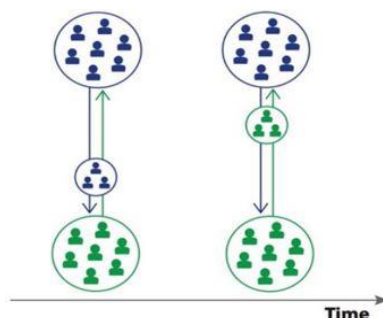
*Figure 3: Reciprocal exchange (after Bretos et al.)*
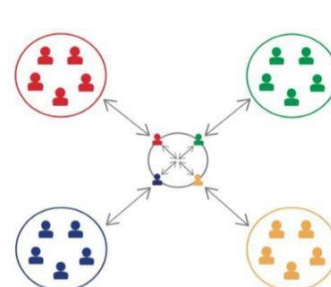
*Figure 4: Congress-style exchange (after Bretos et al.)*

Going beyond the more obvious and classical capacity development tools of publications and other media, and training, coaching and mentoring, the World Bank breaks down different knowledge exchange tools taking time as the primary determining factor as the length of the process has a significant effect on the (combination of) activities available. (WB, 2015). See Box 3 below.

*Box 3: Knowledge exchange tools by length of engagement*

| Short-term Engagement | Medium-term Engagement | Long-term Engagement |
|---|---|---|
| Conference<br>Expert Visit<br>Knowledge Fair<br>Study Tour<br>Workshop | Competition/Challenge<br>Knowledge Jam<br>Multi-stakeholder<br>Dialogue/Consultation | Community of Practice<br>Twinning |

Bretos et al. define the term "study tour" as the engagement instrument that focus on site visits as a principal vector for capacity development. While there are other short-term engagement options, like conferences and workshops, these other approaches do not necessarily involve a site or community visit as part of the content delivery and knowledge transfer experience. But site visits can be a component of other short-term engagement instruments and can be used to amplify an experience, although they are frequently optional and do not usually take the center stage. Bruns (2002) suggests that exchange visits can be distinguished from other kinds of study tours by the emphasis on peer-to-peer interaction between hosts and visitors who are in similar situations, and a concern for mutual learning, rather than one-sided transmission and replication.

Onsite visits can complement other knowledge exchange activities such as trainings, conferences, and workshops, defined below.

> **Trainings** are specifically focused on the teaching of skills and knowledge, typically needed for improved job performance. Here, the location is not necessarily important, but onsite visits and exchanges can be a part of the training as one activity / session. During trainings, onsite visits can help to apply some of the skills learned, to collect information, to share some of the learning and engage in more meaningful discussion than can be achieved in the training room alone.

> **Conferences** are events where different people meet and discuss topics relevant to their work or interest. Onsite visits can be part of conferences as side activities, to promote interaction and discussion. Typically, these onsite visits will be used to raise awareness of certain issues addressed in the conference or present models or best practices, while giving an opportunity to participants to familiarize themselves with the geography and culture.

> **Workshops** are meetings where people meet to engage in discussion and activity on a topic. The location is not necessarily important for workshops, but onsite visits can be a part of the workshop,  to stimulate discussion and inspire participants, for example. There are no blueprints for the organization of the onsite visits during these events, except perhaps that the focus is not only on the onsite visit as such.

**Exchange without site visits**

Valuable knowledge exchange between groups can happen at a conference, seminar, or workshop without any site visit component. There are numerous examples of knowledge exchange (see congress-style exchange in Figure 4 above) where travel to experience local context is not a prominent feature of the model. This analysis will seek to provide guidance for onsite visits specifically, but many of the lessons and best practices regarding learning can be applied to exchanges where location and/or travel to specific sites does not feature prominently. One point brought up in

interviews merits discussion here. Congress-style events can be a very important venue to bring together different groups of stakeholders with a shared interest. A recommendation that surfaced in interviews is the importance of helping stakeholders arrive at their shared positions prior to their attendance at a large international event. This preparation allows these groups the opportunity to present an agreed upon, well developed, and unified position.

**Expanding on definitions of onsite visits**

While conducting interviews for this analysis it became clear that organizations are using some common terms (exchange visit, study tour, learning exchange, field visit) interchangeably. However, for others, some terms hold specific connotations that differentiate one kind of activity from another. There are some important distinctions in how onsite visits may be conducted, and more specific terms (such as study tour, exchange, exposure visit, interaction, internship, etc.) will be used when it more closely explains a particular kind of activity. Definitions of specific types of exchanges found in the literature and as provided by interviewees are described in Box 4 below.

Interview respondents were asked to provide their own definition and classification of onsite visits. Some organizations differentiated between site visits and exchange visits, indicating that in their vernacular, site visits are used when their organization is trying to get multiple stakeholders to understand a common view whereas exchange visits are used for a south-south or community-to-community interchange of viewpoints. Other interview respondents candidly admitted to using the terms exposure visits, south-south exchanges, and study tours interchangeably when some time was spent in the field to observe location specific activities or issues and interact with locals.

The most frequently mentioned onsite visit by interview respondents was a one-way exchange, where participants were brought to a particular site. This could be a stand-alone activity, in that case usually of a longer duration, or part of a centralized event attended by various stakeholders convening around a specific issue (such as a forum or workshop). Less frequently, organizations reported using a two-way exchange where participants alternated between hosting and receiving. Another model that was mentioned less frequency was a learning caravan or a study tour. Bruns (2002) notes that reciprocal exchanges and repeated interactions, such as through a study caravan or learning group foster the growth of networked communities, affirming new views and efforts in the context of discourse among coevolving communities of concern. This outcome can be seen as the result of multiple interactions between individuals that federations and alliances encourage over time.

Most commonly, interviewees explained that their organizations tended to use onsite visits as part of broader capacity development initiatives. There are few organizations that use onsite visits in isolation. This means that a whole variety of

terminology is used depending on how the overall learning agenda is framed. Box 4 summarizes some of the different definitions and ideas shared.

*Box 4: Terms used for knowledge exchange initiatives for which site visits may play a central or peripheral role*

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**Exchange**: cross sharing, learning from others with experience - target audience are those that have certain experience on the subject matter and are willing to learn more. Can use any or combine models discussed above.

> *Example: The China-Brazil Landscape Restoration Exchange: a long-term cooperation between Chinese and Brazilian experts, which will soon include experts from other countries, aims to answer the question "What can Brazil and China learn from each other from their experiences in landscape restoration?"[2]*

**Farmer forum/farmer field school/exchange and visit**: terms to describe learning activities focused at the community level where some degree of action learning is taking place in one or more communities through which others can learn and exchange experiences through onsite visits.

> *Example: FAO – Typical group size is 20 – 25 farmers who meet once a week in local field settings under the guidance of a training facilitator. They observe and compare different plots over a cropping season, some plots use traditional methods and others use what are considered "best practices". It is up to the participants to decide what works best through their own testing and observations. The field schools provide a risk free setting in which to discuss, dissect, modify and experiment with new ideas.[3]*

**Learning Events**: includes training, workshops, dialogues, study tours, exchanges and site visits. Tend to include onsite visits as a complementary part of the broader learning experience.

> *Example: In 2009, forest agency leaders of MegaFlorestais recommended the creation of a leadership seminar for the next generation of forest agency leaders in major forested countries. In 2010, under the auspices of MegaFlorestais and in collaboration with the Rights and Resources Initiative and the U.S. Forest Service, the seminar came to fruition. This seminar series brought together senior executives from forest agencies and related public agencies who are poised to become executive leaders within the next five years. By exposing these officers to cutting-edge analysis and information, the seminar aims to provide them with a deeper understanding of global forest governance issues, while preparing them to meet the challenges that lay ahead.[4]*

**Study tour**: where onsite visits using the model transfer model form the primary mechanism for knowledge exchange, but where other tools may also be used to stimulate discussion and learning. These can also be part of a larger program of reciprocal exchange or a study caravan.

> *Example: Forest and Farm Facility/FAO – "Forest and Trees Supporting Rural Livelihoods – Myanmar and Viet Nam," a study trip that brought government officials, university staff and farmers from Myanmar to northern Viet Nam to learn about the experience and expertise of Vietnamese farmers in the areas of forestry, agriculture and agroforestry in order to improve the livelihoods of Burmese forest and farm producers.[5]*

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[2] https://www.wri.org/blog/2014/12/building-brics-restoration%E2%80%94-china-brazil-landscape-restoration-exchange

[3] http://www.fao.org/agriculture/ippm/programme/ffs-approach/en/

[4] http://megaflorestais.org/activities/next-generation/

[5] http://www.fao.org/forestry/news/92939/en/

> **Study Caravan:** a series of events across multiple sites where some members remain the same throughout and thus visit multiple sites to continue to broaden their learning over a longer period of time and to develop more extensive networks.
>> *Example: Horn of Africa Climate Change Programme aims to both increase the adaptive capacity of most vulnerable communities to the shocks of climate change, and mitigate against its impacts. The Landscape Learning Journey involves a selected group of facilitators from six countries jointly embarking on a journey in which they are empowered to enhance the resilience of their landscapes, the major topic for exchange and collective learning is that of landscape governance.[6]*

## Learning objectives

One of the main factors driving the design of onsite visits is the learning objective and overall desired outcome. This section explores learning outcomes from knowledge transfer activities and then continues with a description of potential learning outcomes for onsite visits specifically. First, findings from the literature are explored followed by responses from interviews with practitioners.

As a starting point, the World Bank (2015) lists the following potential reasons for undertaking knowledge exchange activities:

1. Connecting clients to new information and opportunities across countries and regions.
2. Catalyzing innovative thinking and generating better development solutions
3. Inspiring collaboration between individuals, institutions, countries, or regions.
4. Accelerating decision-making and reform.
5. Overcoming bottlenecks and enhance project impact.
6. Customizing, replicating, and scaling up development solutions.

Another approach is to look at the level of engagement – individual versus groups or organizations. Two basic types of learning outcomes from effective knowledge transfer have been identified by Desjardins & Tuijnman, (2005):

1. Changes that occur in an individual or a group of individuals, such as improvements in knowledge and skills, or changes in motivation and attitude with respect to a particular issue.
2. Changes that occur in the interactions among individuals and groups, and thus in the broader organizational or social environment, which are embodied in improved processes or in new products and services.

When analyzed through the lens of capacity development activities, a slightly different approach is seen. As described by the World Bank and illustrated in figure 5 below, this approach maps outputs into six learning outcomes that for any capacity development effort form the basic building blocks of the associated change process (Otoo, Agapitova, & Behrens, 2009).

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[6] https://www.wur.nl/en/project/landscape_learning_journey.htm

Figure 5: Six potential learning outcomes from capacity development efforts
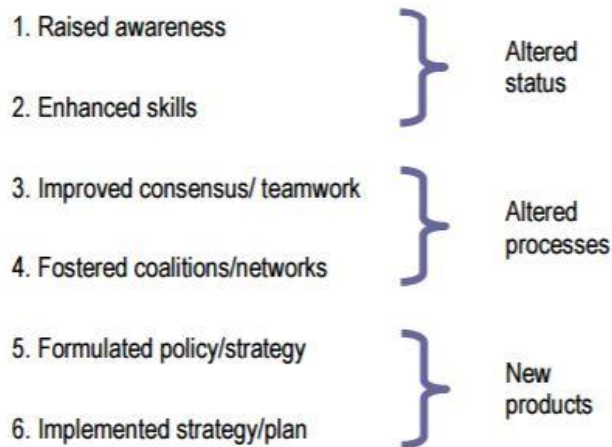


Matras, Sidi, & Treinen (2013) contend that onsite visits allow learning to take place at several levels reflected in the 'adoption ladder' (see Figure 6). They consider that these form part of processes that together lead to changed practice as participants will not immediately adopt a new practice simply because they have been made aware of its benefits. The process is more complex and requires going through certain stages. Once a participant has been made aware of a new practice, he or she will need to have an interest in the practice. For example, when a farmer has understood how to use this practice, the next step will be making changes in the way he or she thinks and behaves. Only when what needs to be done to use the new practice in local conditions has been established will the farmer be able to translate the idea into action, leading to adoption and ownership. This process is not immediate, but progresses with the help of communication for development. It is a process that takes time and requires openness to dialogue, and therefore goes well beyond any single onsite visit. It also explains why onsite visits in isolation are not very effective. Combining them with other efforts to analyze, internalize, and apply the experiences and observations is critically important at the level of the individual participants to reach improved and legitimate practice (i.e. outcomes).

The learning objectives will help define what is being monitored and evaluated: Is what was targeted for participants to do afterwards actually happening or not? Learning objectives therefore need to be formulated so that they can be measured and observed. The adoption ladder suggests various levels of application of what is learned through gradually increasing complexity and difficulty. Although the desired performance may be situated higher on the ladder, the direct learning may be targeting a lower level. It is therefore important to identify the appropriate level, and to ensure results can be adequately monitored and evaluated.

*Figure 6: Adoption ladder (after Matras et al. 2013)*

Given the multitude of purposes for conducting onsite visits found in literature and guidance, it is not surprising that one finding that emerged from interviews is that organizations are using onsite visits as a fit for purpose tool for different objectives, sometimes with different purposes and designs within the same organization. The general expected immediate outcome or purpose of onsite visits as reported by interviewees fell into the following categories, and sometimes there were multiple expected outcomes. The first four listed items below relate to individual learning, while the last three are related to the outcome/organizational level – in line with the categorization presented by Desjardins & Tuijnman, (2005) above.

1. Exposing participants to a variety of new approaches and/or technologies to demonstrate concrete and practical results.
2. Developing technical skills or providing deep training on a particular skill or strategy (this could range from community forest management to how to participate in a policy dialogue).
3. Providing motivation or a spark of inspiration to encourage participants to try new approaches or encourage critical thinking and reflection.
4. Developing trust and confidence that encourages future exchanges.
5. Connecting groups, creating networks for ongoing engagement or learning around an issue.
6. Developing advocacy messages, evidence and solidarity. Forming new leaders to help push forward an agenda.
7. Influencing decision makers.

For example, organizations that work on global and higher-level policy dialogue on challenges in the forestry sector utilize onsite visits as a tool to incorporate voices of NGOs and forest communities who might otherwise not be able to participate or engage in such discussions held in conferences or meetings in cities because of cost, language, and a myriad of other logistical constraints. This differs from the approach of other organizations that use onsite visits to support producer organizations in

improving their business development and organization skills and better advocate at the policy level.  Consequently, the form of onsite visit that they use differs—the first organization brings higher level decision makers to the field to meet indigenous and local communities while the latter brings groups of forest dependent community members to other forest dependent community sites to expose them to new productive activities. In both these examples, the structure of the onsite visit is driven by the learning objectives.

Once learning objectives are identified, it is then necessary to define more precisely how the onsite visit will lead to an exchange of knowledge through the following steps (World Bank, 2015):

1. Determine the more immediate learning outcomes participants of the onsite visit will gain. These have been discussed in some detail above.
2. Identify the groups of people who are needed to achieve the change. This should not only focus on those who will participate in the onsite visit, but also those who participants in onsite visits will interact with and share the learning gained with afterwards. Participant selection is discussed in the next section.
3. Identify groups and individuals with relevant and transferable knowledge and experience to share—these will likely become hosts and resource persons for the onsite visit, and are discussed in the section on location.

These steps are further explored in the recommended practices section.

**Onsite events and policy change**

A key question is the extent to which there is evidence that onsite visits can contribute to policy changes and if so, under what circumstances. The obvious challenge in answering this question is attribution. Not all interview respondents used onsite visits with the objective of driving a policy agenda or creating or strengthening networks of stakeholders for the purpose of advocating for a shared agenda, but those that did stressed that onsite visits were a part of a much broader program of work and that it was difficult to identify the magnitude of the contribution of onsite visits to achieve the higher order objectives. In the words of one interviewee, "exchanges have a role to play in the system, but they are not the entire system."

Best practice indicates a well-articulated theory of change should guide a policy change agenda. Onsite visits could be an input, activity, or part of a results chain relating to a policy change outcome. A recommendation from interviews is that it can be critical to think about timing when trying to influence policy change. Activities should be well planned so that they coincide with legislative agendas or other global initiatives to take advantage of momentum.

Later in this analysis an illustrative example of a program is used that successfully achieved a policy change objective where onsite visits were identified as a contributing factor. Best practices are highlighted from the example presented in the last section of the analysis.

# Some Theoretical Underpinnings

This section will place onsite visits in a theoretical framework of capacity development, knowledge transfer and adult learning, and in doing so highlight key principles for their development and practice.

**Principle 1: Onsite visits should be participant centred. They should be carefully crafted, with the involvement of participants and the purpose of enhancing capacity to deal with real life problems of the participants.**

Capacity development is the process whereby people, organisations, and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time (OECD, 2006). Onsite visits are one of the many methods to develop the capacity of policy makers and practitioners alike. Onsite visits typically are focused on the transfer of knowledge from one group of people to another. This transfer targets improved ability of individuals, groups, organizations and institutions to better perform their tasks and roles, including by enhancing the knowledge and skills of the target audience (Annex C).

**Principle 2: The success of onsite visits depends on striking a good balance between internal motivation and external conditions: participants are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance.**

Even if people have improved capacity, this does not necessarily lead to improved performance. Performance depends both on the internal motivation and the external conditions of the operating environment (Lusthaus, Anderson, & Murphy, 1995) as depicted in Figure 2. Aspects of the operating environment that can strongly impact performance are incentives and reward mechanisms for inovation and/or results. Although onsite visits do not always directly lead to improved performance, the targeted performance should be kept in mind throughout the design and the implementation of the onsite visits: in other words, the closer to the reality and the more practical the onsite visits the bigger their impact. These basic premises hold for onsite visits within the international development arena too, where onsite visits have the potential to directly strengthen the motivation and capacity of the participants.
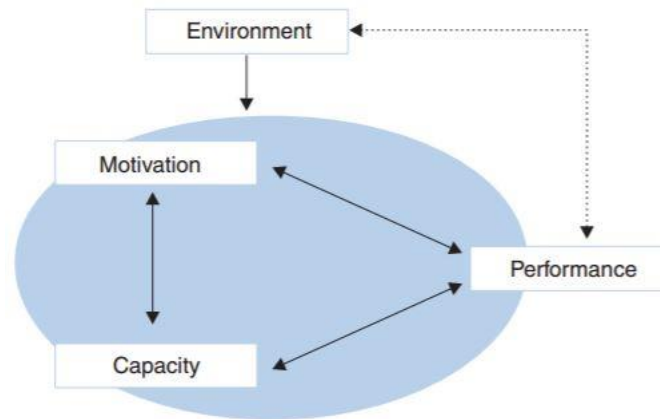
*Figure 7: Relationship between an organization's environment, motivation, capacity, and performance*

Knowledge characteristics also affect organizational behavior for knowledge transfer as identified by Kang, Rhee, & Kang (2010) based on knowledge-based views and organizational learning theory: tacitness, difficulty, and the importance of knowledge. Codified knowledge transfers faster than tacit knowledge that tends to be inherent in an individual is difficult to describe, and sometimes cannot be explained precisely. 'Difficulty' can be a reflection of complexity where knowledge is composed of various interdependent components, such as in relation to policy. Complex knowledge is difficult for recipients to understand and requires more effort to transfer. The perceived importance of knowledge motivates learning so focusing on strategically important knowledge for transfer enhances effectiveness.

**Principle 3: The learning effect of onsite visits is enhanced by extensive personal contact, regular interaction and the building of trust.**

Onsite visits target knowledge that is difficult to transfer to another person by means of writing it down or verbalizing it (i.e. tacit or complex knowledge). This knowledge then is better transferred through extensive personal contact, regular interaction and trust through networking with a community of practice (Goffin & Koners, 2011) and can be best revealed through practice in a particular context with these social interactions (Schmidt & Hunter, 1993). The design of onsite visits should therefore be based on the understanding of the tacit knowledge of the host community, including of the challenges and mistakes.

This principle is further illustrated by the learning theories of experiential learning and action learning. Kolb (1984) contends that learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience from awareness, through understanding and reflection, to improved practice. Accordingly, experiential learning style theory is typically represented by a four-stage learning cycle in which the learner 'touches all the bases.' The process can begin at any of the stages and is continuous. This theory asserts that without reflection we would

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simply continue to repeat our mistakes. These are illustrated against the experiential learning stages in Figure 8.

Diverging – feel & watch

**Concrete Experience**
(a new experience of situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience)

**Reflective Observation**
(of the new experience. Of particular importance are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding)

Accommodating – feel & do

Assimilating – think & watch

**Active Experimentation**
(the learner applies them to the world around them to see what results)

**Abstract Conceptualization**
(Reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept)
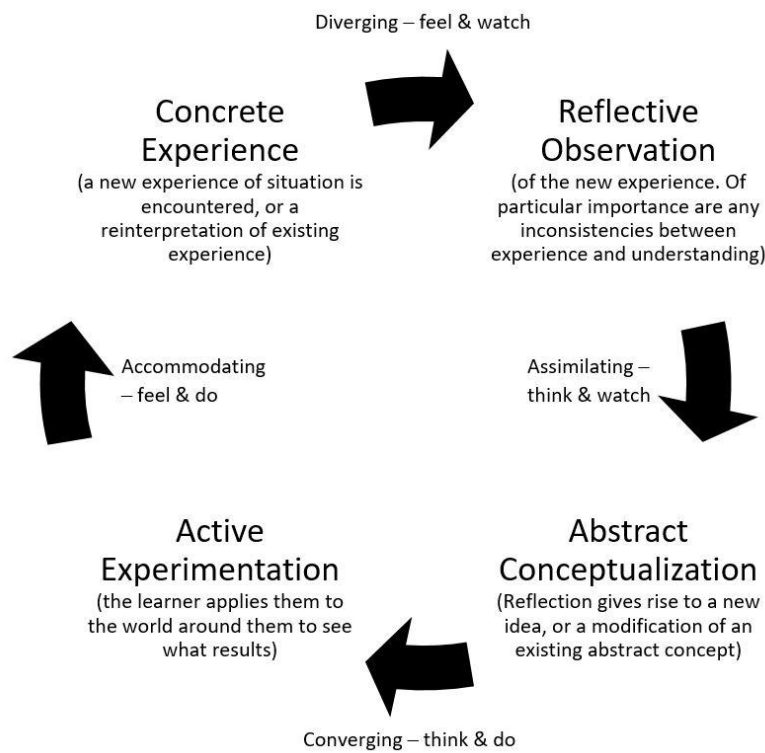
Converging – think & do

*Figure 8: Kolb's (1984) experiential learning stages and styles*

**Principle 4: Onsite visits require the active engagement of participants including their involvement in planning and evaluation of their learning.**

Interaction and personal contact is a key requirement for learning and knowledge development. This creates opportunities for the development of new knowledge. The key added value of onsite visits is that they allow for learning that cannot happen through less resource intensive approaches. As Lam (2000) notes, the key to acquiring tacit knowledge is experience. Effective learning occurs when the senses are stimulated—the vast majority of knowledge (75%) is learned through seeing (Laird, 1985). Nevertheless, without some form of shared experience, it is extremely difficult for people to share each other's thinking processes—something that onsite visits enable as a deliberate experience sharing exercise. Against this background it then becomes more meaningful if the participants can be actively involved in the design and development of the program, and also in the planning and evaluation of their instruction/exposure.

# Findings and Recommended Practices

This section addresses the specific evaluation questions on the extent to which there is evidence that exchange change influence policy or organizational behavior. It also highlights some general recommended practices and addresses evaluation questions on topics such as: optimal numbers of participants; group composition and implications; preparation, facilitation, and documentation; follow up and impact, and monitoring and evaluation. The presentation of the following sections includes a synthesis of responses from the expert interviews to give the reader of sense of the spectrum of approaches practiced by different organizations. When a strong recommendation emerged consistently in interviews, it is highlighted as a recommended practice. Practical tips and illustrative examples are also presented.

## Recommended Practices

The analysis is structured using the elements of onsite visit practices as presented in the figure below (Braakman, 2002) and is organized into three main parts, each of which cover different steps towards improving the quality of onsite visits implementation (Figure 8): (i) Preparation, including a situational analysis (developmental relevance), a needs assessment (learning relevance), and design; (ii) implementation on the ground/site; and (iii) measuring and reporting of results and use of learning under 'follow up', or as Matras, Sidi, & Treinen (2013) put it— 'before', 'during' and 'after.'

Accordingly, the following sections cover the critical considerations that need to be thought about carefully to ensure that onsite visits are successful, including the importance of identifying areas of individual capacity that need to be strengthened to contribute to the particular development goals. One resounding message echoed by experts interviewed is the recommendation to keep at the forefront the importance of context. It is essential to understand what steps need to be taken to achieve desired results whilst recognizing that there are many factors that contribute to success that cannot simply be transposed from one situation to another.
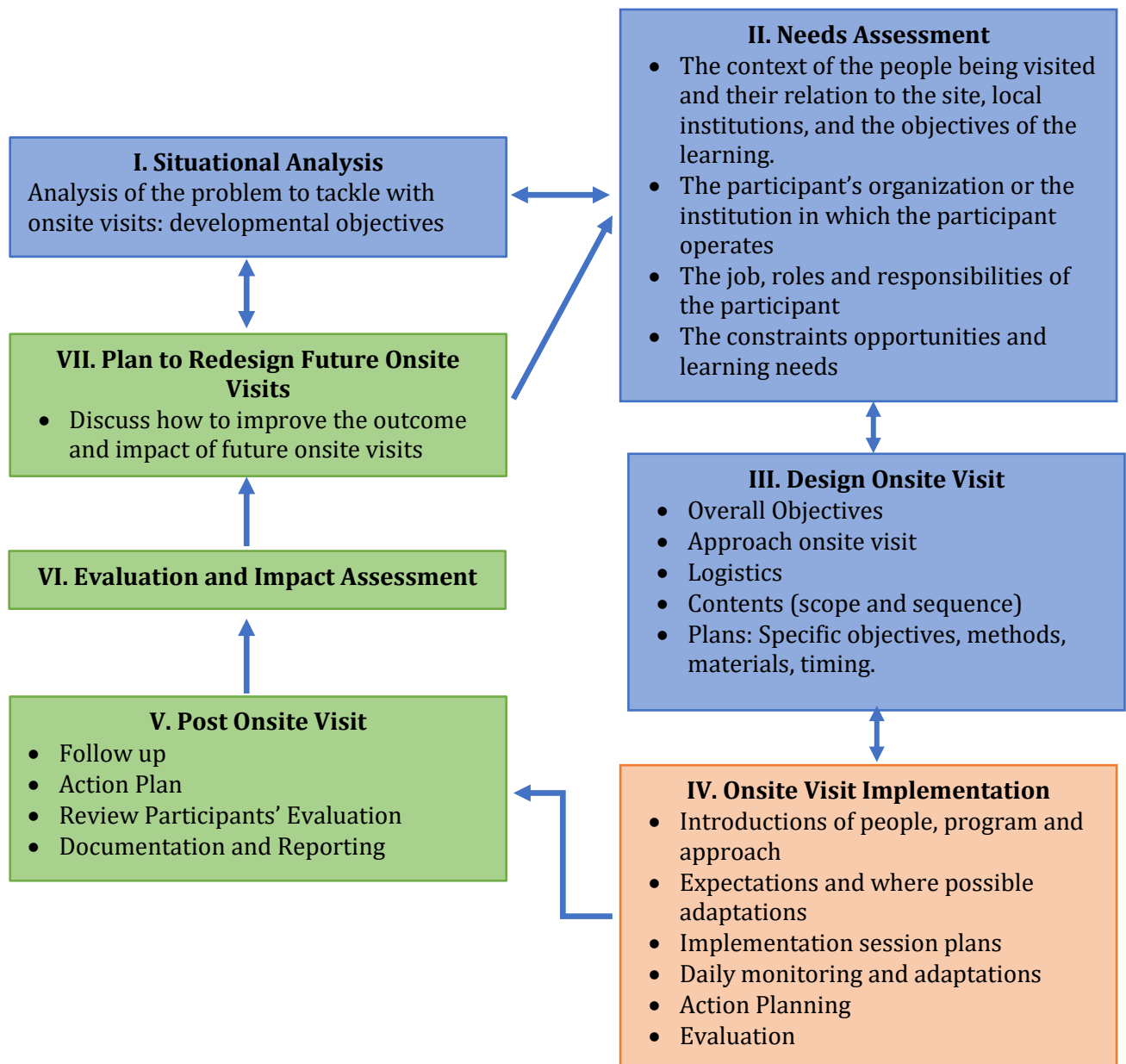
**I. Situational Analysis**
Analysis of the problem to tackle with onsite visits: developmental objectives

**II. Needs Assessment**
- The context of the people being visited and their relation to the site, local institutions, and the objectives of the learning.
- The participant's organization or the institution in which the participant operates
- The job, roles and responsibilities of the participant
- The constraints opportunities and learning needs

**VII. Plan to Redesign Future Onsite Visits**
- Discuss how to improve the outcome and impact of future onsite visits

**III. Design Onsite Visit**
- Overall Objectives
- Approach onsite visit
- Logistics
- Contents (scope and sequence)
- Plans: Specific objectives, methods, materials, timing.

**VI. Evaluation and Impact Assessment**

**V. Post Onsite Visit**
- Follow up
- Action Plan
- Review Participants' Evaluation
- Documentation and Reporting

**IV. Onsite Visit Implementation**
- Introductions of people, program and approach
- Expectations and where possible adaptations
- Implementation session plans
- Daily monitoring and adaptations
- Action Planning
- Evaluation

*Figure 9: Process map for development of successful onsite visits adapted from (Braakman, 2002)*

The figure above illustrates the different steps in the development process of onsite visits. The colors illustrate the three stages: preparation, implementation, and post onsite visit. The situational analysis and needs assessment inform the objectives and purpose of the onsite visits, both for direct learning effect as well as for longer term development objectives. These stages further inform the organizers of the background of the participants and the linkages between their needs and the sites to visits. It also includes developing a deeper understanding of the site to visit. The next stages of the preparation include a detailed design of the activities and the logistics. During the implementation phase, the facilitation and implementation of the learning activities needs to be managed carefully. After the onsite visit, evaluating and monitoring is helpful to assess the learning results and to improve the preparations of future onsite visits. It is also important to realize that the onsite visits are not only an input into the development of the capacity of the target audience, but that the results can in turn also inform programming.

## Preparation

### Situational analysis

The World Bank Capacity Development Results Framework (Otoo, Agapitova, & Behrens, 2009) provides an analytical frame that can be helpful when thinking about situational analysis and development objectives.
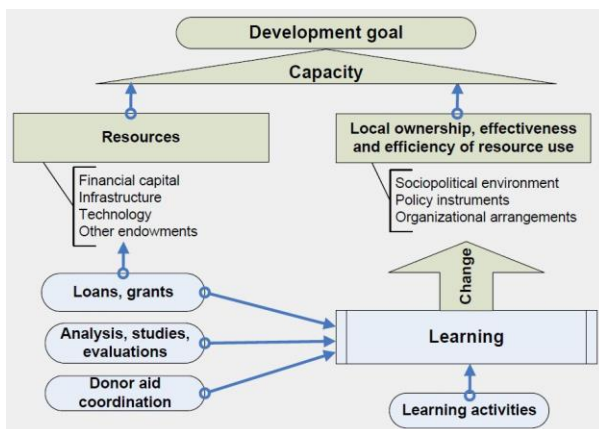


*Figure 10: Capacity development within broader development processes (Otoo et al., 2009)*
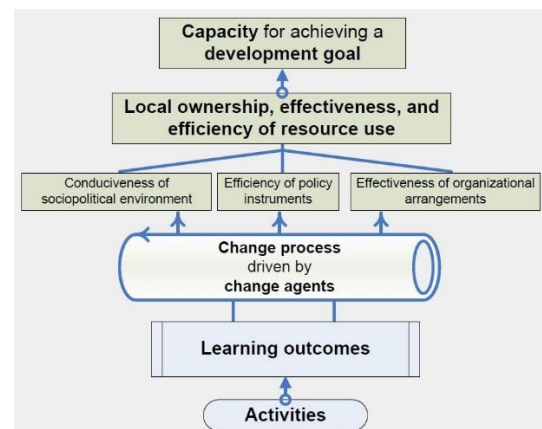
*Figure 11: Capacity development results framework (Otoo et al., 2009)*

The figures above illustrate the role of learning activities (onsite visits) as processes for change. The figure on the left considers learning activities as one input, together with funding, analysis/studies/evaluations, and donor coordination. Together these inputs will inform change in the ownership, and increase the efficiency of resource use. It gives a more instrumental value to the onsite visits than the figure on the right. This figure puts learning and capacity development more as a higher-level

objective, and sees changes in the conduciveness of the sociopolitical environment, the efficiency of policy instruments, and the effectiveness of organizational arrangements as outcomes of learning activities, including the onsite visits.

In practical terms, it is necessary to anchor the onsite visit to a desired change or outcome that is relevant for the participants given their starting point and context (World Bank, 2015).

To achieve this, the supporting organization should determine which development goal the onsite visit will support, focusing on the ultimate objective the participants hope to achieve. The onsite visit should bring the stakeholders closer to realizing this goal by targeting the knowledge, skills, technological, or institutional constraints preventing its achievement.

The framework presented above has been applied to the design and implementation of transformational learning interventions to bring about locally owned changes in sociopolitical, policy-related, and organizational factors to advance particular development goals. Individuals and groups of individuals are seen as 'change agents' who can act in these arenas. The framework can be equally useful for other locally owned changes such as the learning of new management and business strategies, skills, processes, and technologies that can be applied at the community level. The point is that with a well-articulated results chain, stronger links between needs assessments, capacity development activities, outcomes, and impact toward development goals can inform planning and guide later monitoring and evaluation systems. With evidence of what changes take place in different contexts, practitioners can adapt future programs so that appropriate interventions continue and others that are less appropriate can be changed.

**Needs assessment**

A needs assessment will take into consideration the factors that will influence the learning objectives and determine where the gaps are. The following factors can be considered if relevant: cultural context, ecosystems, power dynamics, legal frameworks, political economy, institutional capacity, community  context, market analysis, organizational assessment, etc. Some organizations use baseline tools or surveys to systematically collect this information. The result should be a good understanding of the constraints and learning needs that the onsite visit is trying to address and if onsite visits are indeed the most appropriate tool for the learning needs identified. This needs assessment should involve the participants and factor in their perspective about whether the site selected to visit is a good match for their local context.

**Design of onsite visits**

As discussed earlier, learning objectives must drive the design of the onsite visit. Various possible learning objectives associated with onsite visits were described in the previous section, derived from the literature and interviews. More important than the type of event selected (study tour, exchange, learning caravan, etc.) is that there is an intentional process of design, linking activities to outputs

that tie to the learning objectives for site visits, and also to the overall development objectives of the program. This section describes findings relating to who determines learning objectives, program design, participant identification, location, timing, and logistics.

Organizing onsite visits and exchanges requires a specific skill set, especially at the design and planning stage. Organizers must have a great deal of technical knowledge, political savvy, and discernment to compete key tasks (identify useful participants, communicate relevance of exchange and identify strategic themes or issues). Organizing also requires a good deal of interpersonal skills to build trust and be aware of personal or institutional agendas that may not align with onsite visit objectives.

**Determining learning objectives**

Depending on who the participants are and their knowledge of what learning opportunities are available, the design of onsite visits may be more or less driven by the participants themselves. As reported by interview respondents, the approaches used range along a spectrum. At one extreme, onsite visits may be completely demand driven, in that participants themselves determine the need for and purpose of an onsite visit by asking to learn about something relevant to specific development goals they aspire to and the challenges they are facing in achieving them. At the other end of the spectrum, implementing organizations identify the needs for particular stakeholder groups and develop objectives and design of onsite visits for them.

There are a variety of initiatives that encourage indigenous, community, or producer groups and networks to determine their own capacity development needs and possible sites where useful knowledge could be gained. When participants identify their own needs and learning objectives, they are more likely to be highly motivated during the onsite visit and will hence learn more.

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Some organizations use needs assessments, baseline tools, or pre-event questionnaires. These tools can be implemented by in country staff or by prospective event participants themselves. These tools not only provide critical and relevant background information for planning purposes but they also can include information necessary to ensure prior consideration of important logistical information, for example dietary constraints. A summary of information collection by organizations in baseline tools or checklists is found in Annex B: Synthesis of Checklists.

| Practical tips for design |
|---|
| • Consider the cost and analyze whether potential gains would be commensurate with costs—see logistics section for more detailed information about potential costs—and whether other means (workshop, training, conference) might be more cost-effective. |
| • Onsite visits warrant a word of caution—they can be expensive and logistically challenging, and create high expectations that aren't always possible to meet. |
| • Whatever the purpose of the onsite visit, make sure that SMART[7] indicators by which success can be assessed are agreed beforehand so they can be used for monitoring and evaluation purposes during and after the event by all involved. |
| • In some cases, the term study tour carries a negative connotation, implying that the focus was more on tourism and less on learning activities. Some government officials are allowed minimal time for study tour activities, therefore the preferred term is 'forums' or 'meetings', even though they may be identical in content to an event that under other circumstances would be called a 'study tour' or 'exchange visit'. |

**Program**

As previously highlighted learning objectives should be the primary driver when designing onsite visits. Nevertheless, practicalities such as time and cost against distance and accessibility, will also constrain what is feasible. It is also important to keep in mind that flexibility is important. In the words of one organizer, "The best exchange experience may not necessarily be too structured and 'programmed' – because if we do so then the treatment of learning defaults to the 'classroom type.'"

**Number of onsite visits**

Interview respondents did not uniformly express a strong preference for single versus multiple onsite visits; a more important consideration was the overall duration of engagement with the participants. To that end, some organizations use onsite visits as a catalyst, while others use them as part of a programmatic, longer term engagement. The organizations that used onsite visits as part of an engagement to drive policy change tended to take a longer-term approach and use multiple onsite visits combined with other tools (conferences, studies, workshops, etc.). Interview respondents agreed that using onsite visits as part of a medium or

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[7] SMART = $\underline{S}$pecific, $\underline{M}$easurable, $\underline{A}$ttainable, $\underline{R}$elevant, $\underline{T}$ime-bound

long term programmatic engagement is preferable, some even going so far as to say that onsite visits only make sense if an organization plans to provide ongoing support afterward.

If onsite visits are to be a part of a longer-term engagement, then how and when it fits into the overall program needs to be considered carefully. Again, learning objectives should be the key determinant. If the onsite visit is primarily to raise awareness, develop teams, and stimulate action, then planning onsite visits near the beginning of an engagement makes sense. However, if more complex issues are to be explored through the onsite visit, then a certain amount of preliminary groundwork on understanding the issues at home is helpful. Furthermore, it may be necessary to develop local institutions or local experiences with a new approach so participants at an onsite visit have something to compare the new experience against. Time spent working with beneficiaries before an onsite visit also helps to build trust, identify who might benefit most from participating, and allows for participative planning for the event.

**Schedule/Itinerary of onsite visit**

Scheduling onsite visits is also very important as time is relatively limited and learning must be maximized. Seasonal variation may determine what can and cannot be seen. In terms of itineraries, various interviewees suggested that sometimes 'less is more' in the sense that fewer different stops with more time at each allows for a deeper investigation by participants into the details. Other important considerations should be whether there are smaller breakout group activities, and then plenary discussions to share what has been learned. A simple example itinerary for a half day site visit with time split into three segments is:

> ### Best Practice - Design
> *Time should be explicitly allocated for reflection. Organizers should remember that participants learn differently, details may have been missed or understood and reflection allows time and space to provide clarification and solidify learning.*

1. Presentation of the site and associated issues, observation, questions and answers
1. Small breakout groups discuss the situation with different sets of local stakeholders
2. Plenary reflection session to share the different views heard and reflect on what has been learned (some of these views could be documented and recorded as part of a monitoring program)

Throughout any onsite visit, plenty of time should be given to reflection to ensure that knowledge has genuinely been exchanged and attention paid to how that knowledge can be used when participants return home. It must be remembered that

because people learn differently, some participants may have misunderstood or missed some important details, so the time in reflection allows for this to be overcome. Many interviewees stressed the need to build in time for reflection and recommended a structure that included group discussions and reflections using the field visit segments primarily to stimulate discussion and break up the routine. This is generally more useful when an onsite visit is targeted towards learning about policy and institutional arrangements, or when consensus building is a goal. In other situations, when a more 'hands-on' learning is desired, more time in the field practicing new approaches or using different techniques is important.

**Participants**

A key factor for the success of an onsite visit is having the right people involved to ensure a good match between the site and the participants. The selected participants should be those who have a stake in the development issue for which the onsite visit is helping to tackle. Priority should go to those who can and will initiate the actions needed to achieve the change objective, and who can influence others on their return (WB, 2015). It is recommended to also question potential candidates about their motivation, expectations and future commitments (Matras, Sidi, & Treinen, 2013). Where possible, an assessment of the current performance levels might be warranted.

Depending on the type of exchange and desired learning effect it may be important to stick with the same group of participants so as expose them to multiple experiences and to reinforce their learning—such as in the example of a learning caravan explained above. However, in other situations it is recommended to alternate when selecting participants so as to avoid always choosing the same people and to enable more men and women who might not have previously taken part in an onsite visit to benefit (Matras, Sidi, & Treinen, 2013).

**Group size**

Another important consideration is the size and composition of the group of participants. For knowledge exchanges embedded in larger workshops or events, interviewees reported as many as 25 to 100 participants (with one group hosting an exchange for 300 participants); however, all respondents noted that smaller groups work better and are much more conducive to real and deep knowledge sharing. This is especially relevant if there is a large knowledge gap between the knowledge level of the participants and what you are trying to present—if this is the case, then a much smaller group is preferable for learning. Smaller groups allow for more time to actively engage in discussions, exercises and other activities and give more opportunity to the individual to reflect and interact.

The number of participants is also tied to the learning objectives of the proposed event. Organizations that were using onsite visits to promote global high-level policy dialogue had larger group sizes (up to 40) whereas onsite events that

included deep learning as an objective tended to involve smaller groups. Preferred group size also seemed somewhat tied to capacity of the organizing organization and host communities. It is important to brief the community that will be visited about the group and the individual participants so that they are aware and know what to expect. The same applies to the learning objectives and the scope of the onsite visit: what areas of interest do the visitors share and what are they expecting to observe, discuss, and learn.

**Group composition**

One question posed to interview respondents was whether heterogeneous or homogenous groups were more conducive to achieving learning objectives. Respondents indicated that workshop or seminars dealing with larger scale issues such as global trends tended to include heterogeneous participants (from government, international organizations, private sector, NGOs, etc.). At the national and local level, deep local knowledge and expertise on group dynamics of participants is crucial. Interviews revealed scenarios where a mixed group was optimal, and also scenarios where it was less than optimal. The group composition should be driven by the learning objectives and knowledge of local dynamics. The examples below provide a consideration of some of the factors that could influence the decision to have a heterogenous or a homogenous group.

One respondent who works extensively with indigenous groups provided a cautionary tale against bringing indigenous communities and government officials together. The interviewee indicated that a heterogenous event which described ways that other indigenous communities have advocated for themselves on local or national policy might "tip the hand" of the indigenous people and preview intended actions that the government officials could expect. In this example, the exchange needs to be a safe space that allows participants to freely express perceived challenges and issues and a homogenous group is best suited for this.

On the other hand, there are examples of exchanges involving mixed groups that were very rich and considered successful by the organizers. Bruns (2002) notes that onsite visits can strengthen relationships and teamwork, especially if used to bring together people who don't have frequent opportunities to interact at home, noting that the opportunity to talk casually, and at length rather than through formal meetings that might be pressured by crowded agendas and organizational hierarchies. A concrete example of this was provided by another interviewee who described including national government officials, academia, and communities in an onsite visit. This event showcased two different examples of forest management techniques and provided the government officials with a concrete, visible example of the differences as well as an opportunity to hear directly from communities impacted by the differently managed forests. According to the interviewee, the visit contributed to additional support from the elected officials in the form of policy reform and legislative measures.

Another benefit of mixed group exchanges is that it can provide a separate, unique space to discuss issues that may be too controversial or sensitive for traditional venues. For example, issues around transparency, leadership styles, corruption, gender imbalances, and the role of youth can be approached in a new neutral environment, perhaps with the guidance of a trained facilitator.

Onsite visits allow for new ideas to be explored informally, within a diverse group. Bruns (2002) also notes that policymakers can learn from those dealing with day-to-day implementation in the field, and vice versa, and that onsite experiences will stimulate different reactions as farmers and community leaders look at things differently from agency staff. Indeed, putting people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives together can result in a powerful learning experience as well as inspire networks that continue long after the knowledge exchange initiative has ended (WB, 2015).

If multiple actors, belonging to different stakeholder groups (government, civil society, private sector, academia), have roles to play in achieving the development goal the onsite visit is designed to support, then change agents from these different groups can benefit from learning together if they have in common the ability to lead, influence, convene, or act on the institutional challenge. In particular, if the intermediate outcomes of the onsite visit are to improve consensus, enhance connectivity or strengthen collaborative actions, then mixed groups make sense (WB, 2015).

Another note on dealing with mixed groups – they can be very valuable but care should be taken to ensure that the community voices are not drowned out, especially if community participants have limited experience working with other types of groups. Specific considerations for distinct groups based on interview feedback are provided for each stakeholder group in the box below.

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*Government:* Interviewees reported that in some cases (but by no means all) it can be challenging to ensure that government stakeholders participate in a meaningful way. Respondents provided examples of disengaged participants who were mostly interested in tourism or shopping instead of learning from the experiences of others. On the other hand, there were also examples of how including key government officials in an exchange contributed to changes in relevant forestry laws. Suggested ways to ensure engaged government stakeholders included the following: setting expectations from beginning; assigning pre-exchange materials to get stakeholders engaged early on; and ensuring that topics covered are relevant to participants. As with other groups, it is important to relate the event to their roles and responsibilities and ongoing change processes. Another consideration with regards to participation of government officials is that it can be important to strategically include officials who may have longer tenure (permanent civil servants vs. elected officials). Government representatives may not have a lot of time to participate. As one interviewee stated, "if government officials can take many days out of their schedule, they are probably not high level enough to be in a position to impact policy change." Language constraints and access to technology can be a barrier to the involvement of this group.

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*NGO/Civil Society:* Levels of participation varied for this group, it seemed as a whole they are targeted less frequently by the organizations interviewed. In fact, some organizations reported not including this group at all, when they were mentioned it was in the context of tapping them for assistance in facilitating and organizing community level exchanges. This was explained due to their role working more closely with the community level, there is often more exchange and mutual understanding during the onsite visits when NGOs and civil society are involved in the implementation. However, when indigenous or farmers are participating in an onsite visit it is helpful if a trusted local NGO worker from the visitor's location accompanies the visit to maintain a link between where they come from and what is new.

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**Indigenous Groups:** One of the main challenges working with this group is communication; there may be language constraints compounded by constraints in access to cell phones, email, etc. for organizing and follow up. It is important to be aware of administrative challenges, for example it is possible that an indigenous person may not have a passport or required documentation (proof of employment, land ownership, etc.) to travel and will need additional support for this. This is where it is important to rely on local networks with connections with indigenous groups as these local actors can act as a bridge between an organizing agency and the participant. As with other groups, it is also advisable to be wary of elite capture along two dimensions: 1) who participates; 2) who receives any resources allocated for financing activities.

**Women, youth, marginalized groups:** Organizers suggested that there are instances when it is better to separate women, youth, and other marginalized groups. The first reason for doing this is practical - for example, in some cultures it is unacceptable for women to travel in a mixed group. Another reason for separating out these groups is to ensure that their specific needs or interests are addressed in an exchange as they may be specific and distinct from those of a mixed group. Matras, Sidi, & Treinen (2013) note that for FAO onsite visits aiming to empower West African farming communities to increase agricultural output through enhanced access to knowledge and information, it is especially important that women are given the opportunity to take part in this learning approach, particularly because although women are highly active in agriculture, they are under-represented in farmer organizations and are therefore less likely to travel and be able to encounter people facing similar challenges.

**Media/Press:** Media and press can play a key role through using communication as a tool to achieve development objectives. Communication tools allow organizers and those advocating for a policy or network to have a conversation with decision makers and the public. Distribution of stories or facts from onsite visits can leverage the power of television, radio, social media, and email to encourage a dialogue about the framework surrounding an issue. According to one interview respondents, the most important consideration when working with media is that they require very clear and concise messages that are not overly technical. It is important that the messages are also visual and exciting when working with television or print media. This is an important consideration for organizers in order to help press capture the images, sounds or stories that are the most compelling. Given the specific requirements for tailoring events for the media it is not recommended to mix media with other groups.

## Practical tips for promoting active participation

- Matras, Sidi, & Treinen (2013) remind onsite visit organizers to address the expectations of people not taking part in the trip but who could nevertheless benefit from the knowledge acquired by the group of visitors. This will facilitate careful targeting of the practices to be explored during the trip, ensuring that the group returns with concrete solutions.
- It is critically important to level the expectations with the participants and their organizations. These should be communicated and discussed with the community visited, and their expectations should be taken onboard when developing the visit.
- Different stakeholder groups have different levels of technical expertise – it is important to keep this in mind when preparing and implementing an onsite visit. Care should be taken to ensure that learning and activities are targeted at the appropriate level.
- It is advisable to establish selection criteria for determining who will participate – this should be followed up with a transparent selection process so that all involved parties understand the rationale for participation and it will help avoid selection of unqualified stakeholders.
- Consider forgoing a per diem allowance for participants (but ensure that all costs are covered); this helps to remove financial incentives for participation.

**Targeting women or vulnerable groups:**
- In order to increase the participation of women, youth, or marginalized groups, organizers can work with local partners to establish transparent and explicit selection criteria and ensure inclusion of women, youth, and marginalized groups.
- Is it important to communicate with potential participants as early as possible and clearly define the purpose of the onsite visits, the role of targeted groups in the onsite visits, the importance of their participation, and the logistic requirements. Organizers should ensure they understand the work and household responsibilities of women and help them think through the best timing for them to participate and ways to share their household work with others to ensure they are free to participate, especially for instances involving travel.
- In addition, women and vulnerable groups may have specific logistical constraints, additional support may be necessary and it may be culturally appropriate to have a guardian or trusted person accompany them.

## Location

An onsite visit may take place within the same community, area or country, or between different communities, areas or countries of a region or continent (Matras, Sidi, & Treinen, 2013)—it very much depends on the learning objectives, knowledge exchange model being employed, and the resources and time available. Ideas about where to go may come from previous contacts, literature, networks, international associations and professional societies or suggestions from an agency dealing with similar issues in other places (Bruns, 2002).

The most common type of onsite visit is based around the model transfer exchange identified above whereby those wishing to learn something new visit a site where something is usually working well and where 'best' practices can be observed. There are numerous initiatives whereby the same site(s) are visited frequently by different visitors such as, in the forest sector, the 50+ International Model Forest Network[8] forests across the world, various sites in Thailand used by RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests[9], and the Uzachi Union in Oaxaca, Mexico. Indeed, there are examples of business planning for study tour sites, whether for profit or not, such as for rural renewable energy (Szklarzewicz, et al., undated).

There are other instances whereby sites are chosen because of the issues or challenges that they illustrate so as to stimulate discussion on potential solutions. Bruns (2002) considers that locations which help reveal problems and challenges are likely to be much more credible than simple successes.

Of fundamental importance when selecting a locale for an onsite visit is a deep contextual understanding of the host location. In some instances, the local reality of the host organization does not translate well for the exchange participants (for example, due to different customs, legal frameworks, role of the private sector, role

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[8] http://www.imfn.net/
[9] http://www.recoftc.org/

of government, etc.). This can lead to a lack of common understanding and inability to transfer specific lessons as intended (broad lessons are easier to transfer).

If an organization does not have local contacts or networks it is highly advisable to tap into or partner with local organizations with experience and networks on the ground. As noted above, some organizations take a business-like approach to onsite visits and are therefore usually well-prepared. It is also highly recommended to include representatives from participating communities in the design of onsite visits so they understand what proposed locations have to offer.

| Practical tips for site selection |
|---|
| • Carefully weigh the travel time and ease of access against the learning opportunity: not every site is suitable/optimal. |
| • "Celebrate" the visit together with the host, and where possible try to create a memorable experience for both the host and visitors by sharing some handicrafts, stories, music, song and dance, or something else creative. |
| • Leave some time for sightseeing/leisure. Free time can be translated into activities that support teambuilding, networking, alliance building, etc. |

**Optimal timing and duration of onsite visits**

Timing is important in various respects. Firstly, onsite visits should be scheduled so as to contribute as effectively as possible to ongoing processes that are addressing the development goals that the onsite visit has been identified to contribute to. If there are set milestones or deadlines for different stages in these processes, then onsite visits might need to be scheduled so as to provide specific inputs to particular stages.

Secondly, timing should avoid busy times for both hosts and participants. For example, it is advisable to avoid organizing an exchange visit for producers during the planting or harvest seasons, as these are periods of intense work for both hosts and visitors if a community-community exchange is being planned (Matras, Sidi, & Treinen, 2013). Similarly, for agency staff, periods when they are busy with routine annual planning and reporting should be avoided. For all, care should be taken to avoid important public holidays or other culturally important dates for any group involved in the onsite visit.

The duration of events organized by interview respondents ranged from half of a day to more than ten days. Decisions about duration of onsite visits were driven by the learning objectives, target audience, resource constraints and logistics. If participants are required to travel internationally the exchanges tend to be longer, up to two weeks, but longer is unusual, as few people have the flexibility to be away from their usual routines for longer than that. The learning objectives can require a longer trip, for example when entire processes, value chains, or in-depth analysis are targeted, or very short, when a simple demonstration of a particular approach, tool or technology is envisioned. The more active role for the participants, the longer the trip is usually. Typically, more governance focused objectives will require longer time than when the focus is more scientific and technological.

> ## Best Practice - Preparation
> *Adequate time and resources should be allocated to preparation to ensure smooth implementation. Interview respondents recommended beginning preparation at least six months before the onsite visit.*

It is important to note here that there are multiple modalities of onsite visits as described above, and that the duration of an event may include some time in a major city with one or multiple intermittent field visits, or the entire time spent in the field, embedded with local communities. Onsite visits that involved community to community exchanges (where community members were both the participants and hosts) tend to be entirely field based, with host families accepting participants in their homes for up to ten days.  Many organizations face resource constraints and reported "piggy backing" an onsite visit onto another existing event (international forum, meeting, etc.) as a way to take advantage of cost efficiencies.

Events targeted at policy makers tended to be of a shorter duration (2-3 days is recommended), keeping in mind that high level government officials have limited time to participate. When the main participants are high level government officials or senior grassroots or civil society leaders, events should acknowledge the experience of the participating stakeholders and give them an opportunity to showcase this experience and expertise.

**Logistics**

Interview respondents candidly described the challenges in organizing onsite visits, challenges that are compounded if international travel is involved.  Logistic considerations are important—participants need to be in the best condition to receive, share, and retain information.  Therefore, it is imperative that adequate time is spent in preparation to ensure logistics are smooth—in optimal circumstances, preparation should start at least 6 months before the intended onsite visit date. Programming is covered in an earlier section, but will clearly determine

many logistical issues. The most frequent logistic considerations that arose during interviews are outlined below:

**Language:** Language and translation is a major logistical constraint. The best possible option is for simultaneous translation (even better if adequate technology is available to assist). Pausing for translation should be avoided as it disrupts the natural conversational flow and slows down the learning, leading people to disengage. One experience with indigenous communities revealed that it is possible to have some meaningful communication outside of spoken language, focusing on direct observation. In this example the indigenous communities used physical demonstrations (for example, feeling soil to determine composition).

**Schedule/Time-Keeping**: Building a tight itinerary is not advised. A tight schedule led to decreased time for reflection and for informal discussions between participants. During time set aside for discussion, ask participants to share their reflections and present on what information they are coming away with, what further questions they still have, and what steps they will take (pilot activities, conversations with key individuals, meetings, awareness campaigns, etc.) to share or use what they've learned when they get home. Additionally, it is recommended to always build in a buffer to compensate for any delays or overruns that occur. If schedules are kept to, extra time for reflection is always useful.

**Travel**: Some organizers also had "rules of thumb" about how far away the participants would travel (assuming they were not staying with local communities). One organization said no more than one hour on a bus, another said 4-5 hours was the maximum allowable transit time. Such issues also relate to total travel over the entire duration of the visit. People are more accepting of a long journey to arrive at a site if subsequent travel is minimal for the next days.

**Culture**: Different cultural norms and expectations can impact an onsite event. For example, expectations around promptness and adhering to a set schedule might not be the same among all participants. It is important to be explicit about expectations around attendance, promptness, levels of participation up front. Gender norms are important to consider—for example, it might be more appropriate to separately house people of different genders on mixed trips.

**Food**: It is imperative to build in adequate time for meals and snacks. Consider dietary restrictions or considerations relating to religious norms (fasting, avoiding certain types of foods, etc.).

**Compensation**: Some organizations reported a practice of compensating hosting communities. The rationale behind the community compensation is that there is an opportunity cost for hosting communities, they have to give up time they could otherwise be spending in productive activities to host the onsite event. Other organizations do not pay hosting organizations for hosting duties as such, but rather they provide money to cover any expenses incurred (covering meals and decorations). Decisions on compensation often relate to the degree of reciprocity in the exchange or the frequency the same host is visited by multiple groups of visitors.

All the above are equally important considerations as an onsite visit can be derailed if any of the various aspects described are not addressed in an appropriate manner. Below we focus on a couple of issues that are not discussed elsewhere in the paper and which require a little more exploration.

| Practical tips for coordinating logistics |
|---|
| • Responsibilities for arranging logistics should be clearly delineated, and if possible, aligned with financing authority so that there isn't a disconnect between the person/organization organizing or overseeing an activity and the person/organization financing the same said activity (for example booking international flights). |
| • Assign an "on call" logistics person, and put emergency and contingency plans in place |
| • Avoid rainy seasons, or any time of year with weather events that would make travel difficult or unpredictable. |
| • Some participants may need permission to travel (from managers, organizations, families, etc.), so it is important to give them a lot of advance notice of the date of the onsite visit |
| • Participants may need assistance obtaining travel documents – some interviewees reported that many indigenous stakeholders had to first obtain national identification in order to apply for a passport, thus adding additional time for preparation. |
| • It is advised to build in an extra cushion for onsite visits where visas are required. |

**Participant preparation**

This is an area in which organizations vary enormously in terms of the amount of focus. At one extreme are those that do little more than share a brief or concept note describing the onsite visit and the learning objectives, to those that send a small scouting or organizing team on an initial onsite visit and involve participants or their representatives closely in determining the learning objectives and visit itinerary. Most organizations are somewhere in between and engage with potential participants long before the trip takes place in order to anchor the visit to ongoing development challenges. This is especially the case when onsite visits are part of longer-term or ongoing initiatives.

> ### Best Practice - Preparation
> *Preparation should be treated like an investment, where the foundation for future action and follow up should be built.*
> *At a minimum, some form of workshop should take place prior to the onsite visit to prepare participants. This workshop will allow participants to come up with main questions which will shape the agenda.*

Many organizers of onsite visits share background materials before the trip takes place. However, if participants have low literacy levels, then pictures, diagrams or audiovisual materials, or simple face-to-face presentations or discussions are more appropriate than written materials. Nevertheless, many organizers prepare at least a background paper explaining the key features of the sites that will be visited in relation to what is similar and what is different to where the participants come from and how these are linked to the learning objectives of the visit.

If an onsite visit is truly meant to be an exchange, then visitors should also prepare to present their situation to their hosts. This may be in done in many different ways, such as through written documents, photographs video, drama, etc. It is recommended (e.g. Matras, Sidi, & Treinen 2013) that the group of visitors, and the organizations that they represent, should describe in a 'Terms of Reference' their position and the situation at the outset;  the areas of interest for both men and women participants, their motivation and the questions they have, as well as the practices they hope to learn about; and the purpose and objective of the exchange visit, including any changes expected after the group's return home. Ideally these should be developed jointly with or at least be shared with hosts so they can make appropriate preparations. They also consider that it important to prepare participants psychologically for what might otherwise be a stressful experience for men and women not used to making such journeys. It is also important to assist families of participants, so that they can plan for their absence especially if work or domestic issues such as childcare may be impacted.

| Practical tips for preparing participants |
| --- |
| <ul><li>Approach preparation like an investment—use videos, slides and discussions to talk through the experience prior to an event. During preparation, the foundation for future action and follow up should be built, before the onsite event takes place.</li><li>Ask participants to prepare something short before the onsite visit. This encourages them to think through how they will present their questions, context, issue, challenge, opportunity, etc. prior to departure and ensures accountability.</li><li>Include a one-day seminar or workshop prior to departure— this model works particularly well for instances where participants must come to a major city from distant communities for the international flight to attend the onsite visit. It can also be used for a larger group to discuss issues and select those to be their learning ambassadors. This also encourages feedback afterwards, as those that didn't participate will expect a debriefing and sharing of the lessons.</li><li>Send background paper, concept notes and checklists prior to event. If a checklist and preparatory documents are used, it is important to also engage in dialogue, as checklists alone can seem prescriptive and collaborative approaches engage people better.</li><li>Provide a list of questions to think about prior to the onsite visit.</li><li>Implement a baseline tool, this provides context and background information in addition to collecting data that can be used to measure progress on selected indicators. This can relate simply to the learning (knowledge or skill levels) or to how learning is expected to be applied (before and after scenarios).</li></ul> |

Best practice based on interviews is at minimum, some form of workshop before the onsite visit. Such a workshop could integrate some or all of the approaches described above but should at a minimum help participants solidify what they want to get out of the program, present the host local context in order to help participants think about similarities and differences, and lay the foundation for thinking about follow up activities.  Any preparatory approach can be greatly enhanced through technology. Interview respondents reported using videos to capture and share local context either as preparation for an onsite visit, or to share information more widely with communities recognizing that not all community members are able to participate in onsite visits.

**Host preparation**

The organizations that routinely depend on different hosts have prepared guidelines or checklists for hosts so that onsite visits meet expected results and standards. Obviously a well prepared onsite visit will include the preparation of the host. The more these are aware of the participants' backgrounds and their learning needs and interests, the higher the chances for success. On the other hand, if the preparations with the hosts are minimal or incomplete, then the risk of things going wrong and suboptimal interaction is higher. Risks for confusion and misunderstandings are higher. Preparations should cover developing an agreement over the scope of the visit, including the people, area, and time to visit. Learning objectives and expectations of the organizers should be shared and discussed to ensure that during the visits there is a clear understanding by the organizers. In line with the objectives and expectations, information from the host should be collected and where helpful shared with the participants prior to the visit.

## Implementation of Onsite Visits

Previous sections have covered important considerations for designing onsite visits; these should be well planned. In this section, we turn to two other aspects identified by interviewees that are also important to consider in advance: facilitation and documentation. Decisions about facilitation were described as particularly important.

**Facilitation**

Facilitators play a key role in onsite visits as the person (or people) that systematizes learning and maintains focus. The general consensus among interview respondents is that it is extremely important to use a facilitator that understands the participant background and context. In many cases organizations use their own staff to facilitate onsite events, but other categories of people (that know the sites and topical issues well) were also referenced as potential facilitators including academics, NGO staff and government officials.

Although hiring a formal, trained facilitator reportedly leads to a more results-oriented and process focused approach versus an informal dialogue, this was viewed as less preferable to a peer facilitator as respondents indicated that participants respond more positively if one of their peers is facilitating. Some respondents indicated that an outside facilitator was not recommended because of lack of contextual knowledge and because their level of investment is lower, but there was not consensus on this point—other respondents thought that it was enough that facilitators be quick, skilled at inclusive conversations, and "knowledgeable enough" about the subject matter. However, in a context where the primary objective was to build consensus, then a skilled independent facilitator who was unbiased was considered useful.

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Motivating participants to fully focus their learning is considered by some to be a critical role of facilitators. This can be done using a variety of 'tricks' to stimulate interest and show respect for participants needs. Some examples from the literature on adult learning and onsite visits include the following:

- Frequently check participants' understanding of what they are seeing and hearing. Don't get too far into detail before ensuring that participants are following. Summarize. Encourage questioning when things aren't clear.
- Use examples from participants' workplaces to help to associate what is learned with its application. Sometimes they might need reminders and a clue to help them make that connection.
- Facilitate exploration by having all sorts of materials, references, infographics, diagrams, short videos, and other resources available.  Make it visually-compelling as more than three quarters of learning occurs visually—maps and images can be useful for visual learners.
- Challenge through games and problem solving exercises and case studies. Make participants look for and find solutions.
- Use humor. When participants expect humor, they will listen carefully, so as not to miss jokes.
- Chunk information. Chunking is essential, as it helps people remember and assimilate information. Small bits are easier to process.
- Add suspense. Don't give out everything about the onsite visit at the beginning. Yes, you need an overview, but keep some interesting points until the time is right.
- Accommodate individual interests and career goals. Empower participants to work on these goals and individualize the experience to suit their needs.
- Stimulate participants. Encourage them to think by providing them with brain teasers, or by asking thought-provoking questions.
- Get Emotional. Facilitators and resource persons should be inspiring, and materials exciting. Get participants emotionally involved too—come up with controversial statements, tap on memories, add real-life stories.
- Be respectful and patient.

*Source: Pappas, 2013b and Bruns, 2002*

**Documentation**

Before discussing actual documentation practices, it is first important to establish a few principles. Many organizations operate under the Chatham House Rule, whereby neither the identity nor the affiliation of the holders of particular opinions may be revealed. The expectation being that this encourages people to speak as individuals, and to express views that may not be those of their organizations, and therefore encouraging free discussion.

There was wide variance in documentation practices among organizations interviewed, ranging from no organized documentation of onsite events to assigning

a staffer accompanying the visit specifically to take detailed notes. Documentation was often linked to fulfilling donor requirements (for example submitting a participant list and a high-level overview). Organizations with little to no documentation requirements indicated that they placed a higher premium on ensuring that participants were learning and engaging, in their view this was much more important than a full reporting of the onsite events and they were willing to make a tradeoff reflecting the relative importance of learning and engagement vs. documenting events. This approach is reflected in the approach of one organization that used a "quality over quantity" approach when it comes to documentation.

Additional examples of approaches to documentation include the following:
- Two types of documentation—capturing the learning that occurs onsite (outputs could include questionnaires, reflections on the agenda, photos/videos, etc.) and reporting of the event itself (output is usually a standard report, often annexing handouts, presentations and other materials collected during the visit, but could include videos, etc. and be linked to future events).
- Extensive and detailed note taking, usually assigned to a designated staff member. Notes are shared with facilitators and event chairs and used during nightly conversations and planning for upcoming discussions.
- Instead of intensive documentation, one organization preferred a follow up workshop a few weeks/months after onsite event. In this type of event, targeted at government officials, participants could reflect back on what they learned and indicate what additional support they would need to move forward.
- Depending on the type of information shared or topics covered it might be imprudent to make some of the information public. One organization uses video with no audio to showcase events, and does not publicize detailed notes for this reason.
- Some organizations reporting a more evolved documentation process linked to a monitoring and evaluation mechanism, participants are asked to reflect and share what they learned, this is tracked and reflected. These documents could be used to produce outputs, e.g. analysis on fact finding related to the exchanges, assessments, consultations, etc.

**Information sharing**

There is no consensus on sharing of documentation of events, the decision to share, and with whom to share, was driven by the objectives of the engagement and resources available. The extent to which organizations shared documentation varies widely. Some produced internal reports only, and reflected that this was important because of the sensitive nature of some of the topics covered during onsite events. At the other extreme is public sharing of onsite events, in the form of videos, blogs, photos, reports and the like.  A few organizations noted the importance of having participants report back to their own communities, the opportunity to present

findings can build confidence, promote buy-in among the entire community, and lay the contribute to continued engagement.

**Use of technology**

<u>Social Media:</u> Technology can greatly facilitate rapid dissemination of information, including real time coverage of onsite visits.  Interview respondents noted the critical role of social media for disseminating strategies, establishing communication networks, and advocating for community needs. For example, some organizations invite groups of youth to workshops to train them in how to use social media, and also to get youth to understand the relevant policies so they are able to translate them for their communities when they return.

<u>Video:</u> The use of video technology can allow for a wide audience to learn about onsite events. Similar to recommended practice for reporting described in the preparation section, video can be especially useful for the members of a community that were unable to participate in an onsite event.  Some organizations are relying heavily on videos to share knowledge and will bring the required screens and audio equipment directly to villages so local stakeholders can watch videos translated into their own language.

In instances where there are limited resources, a 'less is more' approach may be most appropriate given the trade-offs (i.e., it is more important to focus resources on efforts to ensure that the right participants are at the right sites and that the focus is on learning through expertly focused facilitation, potentially at the cost of excellent and detailed documentation).

## Follow up/Getting to Impact

Follow up was considered a challenging area mostly due to lack of financing when onsite visits are projects in themselves—it seems that the bulk of funding is allocated to the actual onsite event with little to no money available for follow up. The length of funding in relation to achieving tangible results through follow up is frequently a factor in this. Organizations that have built an onsite event into a programmatic approach face this problem to a much lesser extent, so long as they are actually closely programmatically linked to other activities.

> ### Best Practice – Documentation and Communication
>
> *Best practice is a well-planned strategy for documenting events based on what it is intended to achieve, with a clear delineation of responsibilities, an understanding of the mechanism for capturing events including outputs and a clear use for any information used to capture events (i.e., not documenting for the sake of documenting).*

Given that most resources are geared toward the actual onsite event, organizations have incorporated or used synergistic approaches or found a low-cost mechanism to follow up. Examples of this include:

- Partnering with or involving local organizations or NGOs that can continue ground support in an onsite event. This strategy was especially relevant for organizations that only funded an exchange, but used partnerships to both implement the exchange, and ensure a programmatic approach that included follow up activities.
- Some organizations interviewed used a follow up phone call, about four months after the event, to monitor progress on stated commitments and to offer additional assistance if needed.
- Asking participants to create a strengthening plan based on feasible resources they have in the coming months; this comes with the directive to participants to not plan based on assumption that policies or practices will change but rather to plan on moving forward using their current resources.

> ### Best Practice – Impact
> *Best practice for follow up includes planning for monitoring and evaluation activities (described in the section below) with activities and outputs mapped to outcomes, and a clear plan and strategy for monitoring and measuring. All of this should be done with a clear idea of who will be responsible for tracking follow up activities. Local organizations are resource constrained and must make tradeoffs including reducing programming to undertake data collection activities.*

The design of the onsite visit should include plans to allocate time before, during, and after the event for participants to identify what they expect to learn, reflect on what was learned, and consider the corresponding follow up activities they will commit to. There are multiple benefits from having participants express out-loud what they have learned and what they plan to do with it. By saying it themselves it tends to sink it more. It reaffirms their commitment and their role as partial owners of the process. It allows facilitators to identify and clarify possible misconceptions.

**Monitoring and evaluation**

Most of the organizations interviewed conduct limited formal monitoring and evaluation activities, and admitted this was a weak area for them. Monitoring and evaluation is reported to be easier if the onsite visit is part of a longer engagement or project as it can be tied to the overall objectives. Organizations with an in-country

presence can tie their monitoring and evaluation activities to this. There were a few organizations that either use or intend to begin to use a systematic framework for evaluating capacity development (e.g. the Kirkpatrick Model; see Table 1).

Typically monitoring and evaluation of capacity development activities such as onsite visits focus on the efficiency of the investment, as well as on the effectiveness towards reaching the desired learning effect. The evaluation could look at the following distinct levels, each of which is assessed at different times and using different tools. Given the relatively high cost of inputs into onsite visits, it is well worth thinking this through carefully and investing in the setting up of a careful monitoring and evaluation system.

A word of caution regarding on designing monitoring and evaluation frameworks. It is important to consider the burden placed on local organizations through requiring them to undertake ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities. Local organizations are typically quite resource constrained, and therefore they must make tradeoffs in order to collect monitoring data. Local organizers stressed that some of the impacts of onsite visits are hard to measure, for example improved self-esteem, increased profile of community groups, and increased leadership opportunities for onsite visit participants, especially women and youth.

The implications of the Kirkpatrick model for the monitoring and evaluation of onsite visits are synthesized below.

Successful monitoring and evaluation of onsite visits requires:
- Assessing pre-existing knowledge and learning expectations.
- Clear tools and measures for participants to apply when returning to their area/project/institution/organization.
- Clear and measurable objectives at the output and outcome level: describing observable behaviour changes and intended practices.
- A mandate of the participants' organizations for promoting change through the onsite visits.
- A commitment to continuing monitoring and evaluation, even months after the event itself. This includes having the resources to do so.
- A selection of sites and exchanges that is conducive to the intended objectives.

*Table 1: Monitoring and Evaluation of Onsite visits after (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016)*

| | Results | | Behavior | | Learning | Reaction | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Effectiveness / Efficiency** | Sectoral Changes | Changes in the community of the participant | Changes in the organization of the participants / the role of the participant | Applying what is being learned | Learning of the Participants | Reaction of the participants | During the Onsite Visit |
| **Level** | Results | | Behavior | | Learning | Reaction | |
| **Logic** | IMPACT | | (INTERMEDIATE) OUTCOME | | OUTPUT | INPUT | |
| **Time** | After a long time (a year and more) | | After some time (weeks/months) | | Immediately After | During and Immediately after | |
| **Attribution** | Low and difficult to attribute (paradigms/ economic, social, environmental and cultural changes across the sectors) | | Relatively difficult to attribute (e.g. policy change, institutional change) | | Knowledge and skills are relatively easy to measure, attitudinal change more difficult | Directly and easy to measure (indicators of reaction to onsite visit organization, performance of organizers and facilitators, logistics, materials etc.) | |
| **Measuring** | Relatively difficult | | | | Testing can be culturally unacceptable so alternatives may need to be found | Easy | |

The following is a list of potential indicators, synthesized from the literature and from interviews (some are tracked; others are a "wish list").

### Practical tips - list of potential indicators

- Continuity of participation
- Output oriented objectives (share key principles with other stakeholders, give recommendations, make presentations, signed MOUs, etc.)
- Pre quiz and post quiz to measure knowledge acquired–(Kirkpatrick model)
- Exit survey to measure opinion/perspectives and feedback and solicit suggestions for changes, followed by a survey a year or two later,
- Adaptation and use of tools, methods, tactics learned during onsite visits
- Changes in approaches to and results of socio-economic activities from applying learning acquired during onsite visits
- Increased capacity for economic activities, policy advocacy, etc.
- Assessment of peers or supervisors on enhanced performance

# Illustrative Examples

Below are two examples of onsite visits that provide real life examples of the best practices described above.  Also provided are lessons learned reflective of insights from practitioners directly involved with the onsite visits.

**Best Practice Illustrated - Onsite Visits' Contribution to Policy Change**

_Water and Sanitation Program in India_

Background: In order to provide sustainable and efficient sanitation infrastructure in urban India, the World Bank embarked on intensive upstream work with the Government of India. The main goal was to enable the government to prioritize issues of water and sanitation. This meant supporting the government to design policy and technical assistance, addressing the problem of a lack of sustainable options for sanitation in slums and a need for well-functioning infrastructure to safely dispose and treat waste. The technical assistance and onsite visits were aimed at influencing policy makers at the national, state, and local levels to adopt strategic planning approaches for providing water and sanitation services to urban communities.

_Best Practice Illustrated:_
- Clear objective identified at the outset, onsite visits played supporting role in achieving national policy change.

The program was part of a lengthy engagement (four to five years) targeted at policy makers in the water and sanitation sector. There were a series of site visits and study tours, both domestic and international.  In the beginning, the Bank supported an international study tour to Australia to showcase examples of advanced sewage networks and systems and integrated planning.  The goal of this site visit was to inspire officials, showing them what was possible with integrated planning processes. After this initial study tour a few champions were identified. These were government officials who showed commitment to the approach. This trip was part of the beginning of a creation of strong and committed networks, which was crucial down the road.

_Best Practices Illustrated:_
- Onsite visits were used as part of a broader program of engagement, and linked to future activities (explored below).
- An initial onsite visit (study tour) to a best-case example in the relevant sector provided inspiration for participants.
- The initial engagement helped organizers to identify and build relationships and networks that were relied upon during later interactions.

The identified champions within the Government played an important role in the next engagement, a national policy workshop.  During the first (and subsequent)

policy workshops these individuals advocated for the types of systems they had seen on their study tour. This advocacy was complemented by a consultative policy formulation process, which ensured that participants felt included in the process. The consultative approach was extremely important for the national context. It was important to involve major stakeholders in policy formulation to ensure buy-in and operationalization of the policies.

*Best Practices Illustrated:*
- Identification of key champions among stakeholders. These individuals were relied upon to guide the process among their peers.
- Recognition of the need for a consultative approach to policy development to ensure buy-in from all stakeholders (instead of a top down approach).

The policy workshops continued throughout the four years of engagement. One of the champions from the initial engagement used his state as a pilot to design an integrated urban sanitation strategy to show proof of concept.

*Best Practices Illustrated*
- Ensuring continued participation of relevant stakeholders (including through logistics support when necessary).

Additional study tours were conducted for state government officials to continue to promote mixed approaches for water and sanitation (some areas were connected to a sewage system while others would be better served by septic tanks (on-site) or other sanitation infrastructure). There was a training course for selected participants that included international site visits to Malaysia, selected because Malaysia had also addressed the mentality/preference for entire sewage systems and this was perceived to be a relevant learning site given the current challenges the program was facing.

*Best Practices Illustrated*
- Continued use of onsite visits (study tours) to address challenges as they arose throughout the policy change process.
- Selection of contextually relevant sites.

The Bank supported development of technical manuals and in this instance they ensured participation of engineers. This was extremely important given their role as permanent members of government administrations.

*Best Practices Illustrated*
- Ensuring participation of stakeholders that have a relatively permanent position in the process, not just elected officials whose presence may be more short term in nature.

Result: During this time the policy reform process faced challenges, the most notable of which was a change in government and a loss of anticipated funding. By

this point other states were following suit and developing their own integrated plans after seeing success in the pilot state. The leaders from these states exerted pressure on the new government to ensure funding for the policy. The pressure from the states was successful and after four years of working on this agenda the national urban sanitation policy was approved and funding was made available for state strategies and city level sanitation plans. It is also worth noting that the Bank collaborated with other internal development organizations and encouraged them to integrate the government vision on the urban program into their agendas, reflecting a collective effort.

**Best Practice Illustrated – Collaborative Approach to Onsite Visit Ensures Continuity and Leverages Strengths of Participating Organizations**

*Community-to-Community Exchange Indonesia - Guatemala*

Background: In April 2017, the Resources and Rights Initiative (RRI), the Rainforest Alliance (RA), Samdhana Institute, the Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN) from Indonesia, and Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén (ACOFOP) from Guatemala participated in an exchange program pilot that brought seven participants from Indonesia to the Petén region in Guatemala. The aim of the exchange visit was "to deepen the knowledge of experience of some of the more advanced community forest enterprises in Mesoamerica, identify potential and needs in Indonesia, and plan next steps in community forests in Indonesia with the support of Samdhana and Rainforest Alliance."[10]

Preparation: The genesis for the exchange program described here was a convergence of interest between RRI and Samdhana for an exchange series. For Samdhana, this initiative was triggered by an earlier sabbatical of a former Samdhana Executive Director. The Samdhana Executive Director then initiated communication with AMAN to share results and findings. RRI and Samdhana (as a RRI coalition member) developed a concept and budget for a Center of Excellence exchange process (see footnote 10). Both Samdhana and RRI agreed this would be a program, into the future, the mechanics of which will continue to evolve. The knowledge exchange activities targeted at the community level should be designed to sustain and respond, translate lessons to be learned from the Mesoamerica region to Indonesia.

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[10] It is important here to note that not only was this an exchange program with its own objectives, relevant to the participating communities but also that this was also a pilot for a planned program to create International Centres for Community Excellence which intends to promote south/south learning through community exchanges. Therefore, there were also learning objectives related to lessons learned on the effectiveness of exchange programs and the extent to which they can contribute to overall objectives for the proposed Centres.

Prior to moving forward with a full exchange, RRI and Samdhana organized a scoping mission, with the intention of visiting three potential sites for the exchange—two in Mexico and one in Guatemala. Due to visa issues, the scoping mission delegation was denied entry into Guatemala so this part of the scoping mission was cancelled. Feedback from participating Indonesian community representatives during the scoping mission led organizers to exclude one of the sites visited in Mexico. This was partially due to the perception that the forest enterprises at one of the sites were too advanced (i.e. global exports, chemical processing plants, luxury product projects, high levels of financial outputs) to be contextually relevant and therefore not well aligned to the starting point of the Indonesian delegation. The other site visited in Mexico was also less than ideal for a contextually relevant exchange, partially due to the difference in land ownership in comparison to Indonesia. These considerations would be taken into account in preparing for the full onsite visit for a larger group of Indonesian participants.

*Best Practices Illustrated and Lessons Learned*
- Clear learning objectives were established at the outset and defined design and content of the exchange.
- The participants were involved in the planning process: the exchange was demand-driven, and a subset of participants from Indonesia accompanied the scoping mission.
- The scoping mission allowed the participating organizations to ensure that the hosting site(s) would be relevant for the context and objectives of the onsite visit.
- The scoping mission provided critical experience that allowed for better logistical coordination later on, including the recognition that interpretation was going to be a critical need—this increased the cost.
- Obtaining visas for visiting groups of indigenous stakeholders can be particularly challenging. Confusion over visa regulations led to the inability of the group to visit one of the planned sites. Moving forward, more attention will be paid to visa requirements with clear delineation of responsibility on obtaining visas, following guidelines, and liaising with local participants to ensure their paperwork is in order.

Convergence: Resulting from the earlier exposure (visits and readings during the one month Sabbatical of Samdhana Executive Director) and the subsequent scoping, Samdhana sought RA contacts in Guatemala and Mexico. RRI provided a "forum" in Bern, for the first meeting of Samdhana and RA. This led RA to share its community forestry enterprise baseline toolkit with Samdhana/Indonesian partners, and for the latter to explain RA's learning opportunities in Central America to Ford Indonesia, that now provides the funding for the initiative.

Implementation: RRI's model includes a one-year budget cycle, and therefore when a partnership opportunity with Samdhana and RA presented itself, the synergy of

the partnership and strengths of the participating organizations allowed for continued, programmatic approach to initiatives emerging from the exchange.

The partnered organizations reflected on the scoping mission and after a collaborative decision making process Guatemala was selected as the final exchange site. Samdhana oversaw the selection of exchange participants using agreed upon criteria and twelve individuals were confirmed as participants. A professional facilitator with sector experience and Bahasa and Spanish fluency was contracted and one additional interpreter was hired.

Each organization added value in the context of this onsite visit:
- RRI brought together different members of their broad coalition, including Mexican, Guatemalan and Indonesian partners and affiliated networks. RRI exercised some budget flexibility and provided the majority of the financial support for the onsite visits in addition to logistical support from Washington.
- RA provided extensive technical support and supported and financed a baseline data collection exercise. Additionally, RA has good relations with ACOFOP and has a local office in Flores, Petén that provided crucial on the ground support including logistics, local contextual knowledge, and access to the hosting community in Petén. ACOFOP also played a critical role in organizing the event. RA also proposed to visit different cooperatives in Cobán, with the assistance of FEDECOVERA. RA is also well positioned to support proposed follow up activities in Indonesia that emerge from the onsite visit as they have a global program with activities in SE Asia as well as the Americas.
- Samdhana and AMAN played a key role in developing programs in indigenous territories that they assisted to be mapped and recognized in Indonesia, and requesting the onsite visits. They also selected, prepared, and supported the participants from Indonesia and, using their own donor funding, will work to support, organize, and link up their partners in various landscapes to undertake the follow up activities from the onsite visits.

*Best Practices Illustrated and Lessons Learned*
- A synergistic partnership was formed between different organizations that have existing commitments for Indigenous Persons rights recognition and sustainable forest management in Indonesia. This cluster of organizations have prioritized programs in tenure, livelihoods and institutions, which likely allowed for a longer term engagement than would be possible if only one or two organizations had been involved.
- An expert set of content facilitators with the required language skills was contracted. These facilitators were on site before, during, and after the onsite visits. In addition, both the facilitator and the RA staff understood the local context very well.

- Selection criteria were used to determine participation of local community members.
- It is critical to determine content and administrative and financial responsibility for all of the activities up front.

Samdhana worked with the communities to ensure they were prepared and briefed prior to the exchange visit. RRI and RA provided relevant background materials and studies and technical support. As the exchange visit date approached there were multiple logistic challenges including changes in US visa regulations, which made it difficult to transit through the US as planned, and resulted in a need to change the flight itineraries. There were also challenges booking hotels because of the timing as it was high tourist season in Guatemala. At the last minute, some of the participants dropped out, including the government official planning to attend and two community members, this brought the total number or participants for the visit to seven (plus two interpreters). The two-week event involved visits to community sites to learn and discuss a wide variety of topics including but not limited to: processing, cold storage, community forestry models, legal frameworks, non-timber forest enterprise models, harvest planning and operations, and community organizational structures. The itinerary included time for planning follow up actions and local tours.

*Best Practices Illustrated and Lessons Learned*
- The local NGO/partner organization worked with participants prior to the event and provided technical background information and logistics support.
- Participation of government officials and of women was lower than desired (no government representatives or women attended, the one expected government official dropped out at the last minute). Upon reflection, a more targeted socialization process prior to the exchange, involving more intentional outreach to government officials and potential female participants is recommended. The presence of international organizations such as RA and RRI could add credibility and support to the socialization and outreach process, especially one targeted at government participation.
- Last minute participant drop out is a disappointment and a waste of resources. Unexpected emergencies can't be avoided but organizers can and should work to ensure the right participants are selected and are appropriately committed, prepared, and engaged.
- Visa and logistics can be extremely challenging. This team was able to work through the challenges because of dedicated staff both in Washington and on the ground in Guatemala.
- The length of the exchange (two weeks) was too long, a shorter duration was recommended. Hotel rooms were shared to minimize costs; this was not ideal given the long duration of the program.
- Built in time for reflection and follow up was included.

- A small amount of time was allocated for the Indonesian delegation to experience a tour.

Follow up/Impact: This event occurred recently and insufficient time has passed for reporting of results. Therefore, this section outlines steps taken to lay the foundation for future activities. The event organizers took notes and have drafted a preliminary report on the onsite event. In addition, participants from each community were asked to draft a Terms of Reference to determine and commit to their own next steps. This will feed into the convergence of Samdhana-AMAN, RRI, and RA work program for Indonesia and shall guide their own donor financing and fundraising efforts. Activities include outputs and outcomes, for example training in processing products, training in strengthening cooperative governance and financial management are outputs related to the outcome of increased capacity to develop CFEs, but also more specifically in product development for NTFPs and timber in selected areas.

*Best Practices Illustrated and Lessons Learned*
- Collaborative drafting of a report synthesizing the onsite visit
- Creation of a participatory plan for next steps as well as a plan for follow up.

## Conclusion

Onsite visits have the potential to be a powerful tool for knowledge sharing, capacity building, network formation, and policy promotion. To augment their impact, it is important to include participants in the design and preparation of the onsite visit. Continued, programmatic support is preferred to short term engagement. In fact, many organizers feel strongly that if resources for follow up activities are lacking, then it is an onsite visit is not recommended. Investment in preparation is extremely important, and staff working on organizing visits should be well versed in local context, technical issues, and group dynamics. Organizing logistics can be very time consuming, and adequate time for these activities should be allocated. Quality facilitation plays a critical role in ensuring the success of an event. Advance consideration of monitoring and measuring impact is important, with clear delineation of responsibility for monitoring and follow up, and reasonable expectations for local partners. Careful planning and design, as well as consideration of the recommendations and practical tips outlined in the analysis will improve the likelihood that onsite visits will be achieve their intended objectives.

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# Annex A: Methodology

The following steps comprise the methodology used to conduct the analysis:
   a.   Literature review
   b.   Semi-structured interviews (28 respondents)
   c.   Defining 'onsite visits'

## Literature Review

A full list of references is given at the end of the document. Papers and literature were identified following interviews with practitioners and through searches of academic databases. Literature reviewed also included analysis or guidance from development organizations that deal with knowledge exchange methodology generally, and others relating to field-based exchanges more specifically. Some academic literature was also reviewed, as were papers on related issues such as capacity development, knowledge management/transfer, organizational development, andragogy, anthropology, and monitoring and evaluation where they added relevant theoretical insights. Also reviewed were checklists used by organizers and reports documenting specific events.

The broader literature has helped to develop some theoretical underpinnings that should guide those organizing and implementing onsite visits. These relate to the different levels of capacity development, the factors that influence knowledge transfer (knowledge types and participant characteristics) and different knowledge transfer theories. Theories of learning are reviewed briefly, as are broader capacity development tools and different kinds of knowledge exchange events.

Insights from literature that more specifically covers onsite visits have generally been incorporated into the more detailed sections on preparing for, implementing and following up on onsite visits as they fit into the analytical framework that this report follows. This also includes ideas from various documents such as checklists provided by interviewees on their own onsite visit protocols.

Examples from reports of particular onsite visits are mainly used to illustrate outcomes from taking particular approaches, and in the discussion on documentation and reporting of onsite visits. In a few cases, these also inform the discussion on monitoring and evaluation under the section on follow up.

## Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews with experienced practitioners from a wide variety of organizations across various continents took place over a period of months. Interviewees included those who commissioned events, as well as those that organized them, and those that took part directly and/or facilitated knowledge exchange. Interviews were intended to take around one hour, but frequently exceeded this as such rich

discussions unfolded based around a set of questions that had been shared with interviewees in advance of interviews. The questions used to frame the interviews are given in Box 5 below.

*Box 5: Guiding questions for interviews with onsite visit practitioners*

<u>**Background/Classification**</u>
- How does your organization use onsite events? What type of events (site visit, learning exchange, study tours, etc.) are used and how do you determine which types you will use?
- How many events have you been involved in and what were the characteristics (number of attendees, length of time, vertical/horizontal, etc.)?

<u>**Targeting/Preparation**</u>
- What are some important considerations when preparing an event (possible differentiation between logistics and content considerations)
- What are the key activities undertaken to prepare for an event – do you have any checklist or documentation you utilize (if so, would you be willing to share)?
- What are some of the challenges you faced during preparation and how have you overcome them?

<u>**Implementation**</u>
- How do you select a facilitator for your event, and what are some best practices that you've identified for facilitation?
- What type of challenges have you faced while an onsite event was underway and how have you addressed them?
- How do you document onsite events?

<u>**Follow up and Results**</u>
- What follow up activities occur after onsite events?
- How can impact of onsite events extend beyond the actual event, and how do you measure this?
- How do you define success of an onsite event? What does this look like?

Interviewees were informed about the purpose of the interview and that interview responses might be paraphrased or quoted unless confidentiality was requested. Additionally, examples of successful onsite events, and the factors that led to this success were sought, as were recommendations for relevant literature, organizations with extensive experience organizing such events, and other potential interviewees.

The authors would like to sincerely thank all of the interviewees for their candor, time, and dedication to their respective sectors.  Their insight and practical experience was extremely valuable and much appreciated.

| Name | Organization |
|---|---|
| Claire Biason | Rights and Resources Initiative |
| Tom Bewick | Rainforest Foundation |
| Omaira Bolanos | Rights and Resources Initiative |
| Esther Carmen | University of Dundee |
| Teresita Chinchilla | Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén (ACOFOP) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Marcus Colchester | Forest Peoples Programme |
| Sara Cuervo | Consejo Civil Mexicano para la Silvicultura Sostenible (CCMSS) |
| Toon De Bruyn | RECOFTC (former) |
| Clement Doleac | Rights and Resources Initiative |
| Gary Dunning | The Forests Dialogue |
| Abraham Guillen | VPASU |
| Christine Halvorson | Rainforest Foundation |
| Benjamin Hodgdon | Rainforest Alliance |
| Michel Laforge | Weaving Ties |
| Marcial Lopez | Alianza Mesoamericana de Pueblos y Bosques (AMPB) |
| Lucia Madrid | CCMSS |
| Serge Marti | Life Mosaic |
| Isabel Pasos | AMPB |
| Ruben Pasos | AMPB |
| Femy Pinto | Non-Timber Forest Products |
| Vivek Raman | World Bank |
| Nonette Royo | Samdhana |
| Miguel Segur | Cesefor Foundation |
| Levi Sucre | AMPB |
| Ronnakorn Triraganon | RECOFTC |
| Gerardo Segura | World Bank |
| Jhony Zapata Andia | Forest and Farm Facility |
| Ivan Zuniga | POLEA Mexico |

# Annex B: Synthesis of Checklists

The authors requested check lists, baseline tools and preparatory forms from interviewees when available. This annex contains a general synthesis of the type of information collected.

## Participant Information
- numbers of participants
- demographics – age, gender, etc.
- age
- gender
- role (academic, NGO, government, student, community leader, etc)
- education level
- nationality/passport
- languages spoken
- dietary requirements
- participant contact information
- types of activities (research, policy development, advocacy, training, implementation, networking)
- level of engagement (community/local, sub-national, national, regional, international)
- experience with sector/topic
- main issues and challenges
- topics/themes of interest

## Community Information
- background on community
- forest enterprise location, tenure, structure and membership
- enterprise management and member contact information
- community livelihood activities (typology, number of households involved and % contribution to yearly income)
- resource management area information
- notes on deforestation/degradation
- access to markets
- enterprise management data
- technical assistance received
- public policy and government support
- main issues and challenges

# Annex C: Theoretical Background

This annex discusses how various kinds of onsite visits link with and fit into broader capacity development and knowledge transfer concepts and frameworks. The literature on adult learning and action learning indicate that occurs in three types of setting: formal institutional settings, non-formal settings, and informal contexts (Coombes, 1985). We have seen that onsite visits tend to mostly combine the latter two, although the former can also be part of a broader program.

### *Capacity Development*

One important theoretical distinction for capacity development and knowledge transfer is the level at which it takes place. This applies to onsite visits in terms of at which level change is expected to be influenced by the visit. A three-level framework is usually invoked by development agencies (e.g. DFID, 2013; UNDP, 2008, 2009; OECD, 2006; OED, 2005) to describe this comprising:

- **The broader system/societal level/enabling environment**
  Dimensions include: Policies, legal/regulatory framework, management and accountability perspective, and the resources available.
- **The entity/organizational level/institution/sector/network**
  Dimensions include: Mission and strategies, culture and competencies, processes, resources (human, financial, information) and infrastructure.
- **The individual level /team/group-of-people**
  Dimensions include: education and training programs to meet the gaps within the skills base and the number of staff to operate the systems in the short, medium and long term perspective.

### *Knowledge Transfer*

Knowledge transfer is one of the major strands of the area of knowledge management. It concerns with the movement and development of new knowledge across the boundaries created by specialized knowledge domain (Carlile & Rebentisch, 2003). However, the impact of knowledge transfer on performance is highly contingent on specific characteristics and circumstances (Levine & Prietula, 2012). Writing on organizational behavior and human decision processes in a business sense, Argote & Ingram (2000) define knowledge transfer as the process through which one unit (e.g., individual, group, or department) is affected by the experience of another, and argue that the creation and transfer of knowledge are a basis for competitive advantage in firms. The rationale of onsite visits is that knowledge transfer will lead to improved results for those receiving knowledge.

### *Knowledge creation and conversion*

The knowledge spiral model of Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) identifies four modes of knowledge conversion that operate in a cyclical manner as illustrated in Figure 2 below.
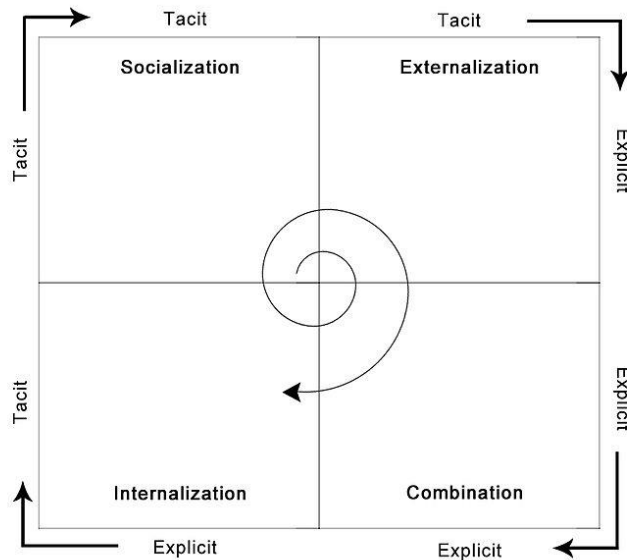
Tacit    Tacit

Socialization    Externalization

Tacit    Explicit

Tacit    Explicit

Internalization    Combination

Explicit    Explicit

*Figure 2: Nonaka's & Takeuchi's SECI knowledge spiral model (1995)*

'Socialization' is the process of sharing tacit knowledge through observation, imitation, practice, and participation in formal and informal communities. Socialization usually begins with building a field or space of social interaction. 'Externalization' is a process of articulating tacit knowledg as explicit concepts; this is the key to knowledge creation. 'Combination' is the process of integrating concepts into a knowledge system to integrate multiple bodies of explicit knowledge. 'Internalization' is the process of embodying explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge. Onsite visits are an important means for socialisation. Externalisation enables participants to capture knowledge that can be used and transferred to colleagues through combination with existing realities in their own situations. The process is complete when internalisation occurs and learning is applied.

Lwoga, Ngulube, & Stilwell (2010) are among the few researchers to apply the model in the context of the local communities. Their study indicates that knowledge creation theory can be used to manage indigenous knowledge in local communities. For sustainable agricultural development, communities have to be placed within a knowledge-creating setting that continuously creates, distributes and shares knowledge within and beyond the communities' boundaries and integrates it with new agricultural technologies, innovations and knowledge. This supports the idea that people from diferent communities should interact and learn from one another.

### *Knowledge*

Stacey (2001) argues that knowledge is not a 'thing' or a system but an active process of relating. He also argues that knowledge is participative self-organizing processes patterning themselves in coherent ways, a view that supports the importance of groups of individuals participating in onsite visits together and exchanging views and experiences whilst observing and learning together.

A categorization of knowledge types explored by Blackler (1995) is also useful for determining what kind of knowledge may be best transferred through onsite visits:

- **Embrained knowledge** is that which is dependent on conceptual skills and cognitive abilities. We could consider this to be practical, high-level knowledge, where objectives are met through perpetual recognition and revamping. Tacit knowledge may also be embrained, even though it is mainly subconscious.
- **Embodied knowledge** is action oriented and consists of contextual tacit practices. It is more of a social acquisition, as how individuals interact in and interpret their environment creates this non-explicit type of knowledge.
- **Encultured knowledge** is the process of achieving shared understandings through socialization and acculturation. Language and negotiation become the discourse of this type of knowledge, which is primarily tacit.
- **Embedded knowledge** is tacit and resides within systematic routines. It relates to the relationships between roles, technologies, formal procedures and emergent routines within a complex system. In order to initiate any specific line of business knowledge transition helps a lot.
- **Encoded knowledge** is information that is conveyed in signs and symbols (books, manuals, data bases, etc.) and decontextualized into codes of practice. Rather than being a specific type of knowledge, it deals more with the transmission, storage and interrogation of knowledge.

As most of the above knowledge types are at least partially tacit they are suited to knowledge transfer through onsite visits.

### *Characteristics of Learners*

Participant characteristics also affect knowledge transfer. Among various participant characteristics, onsite visits should be informed by the five distinctive characteristics of adult learners assumed by Knowles (1984) and the consequent principles of andragogy (see Box 6), although these are contested by some (e.g. Kerka, 2002) in terms of whether they only apply to adults, whether they apply to all adults in all situations and how learner-centered knowledge. Interviewees also highlighted a number of these characteristics as important.

*Box 6: Assumptions and principles of andragogy (after Knowles, 1984)*

Knowles' 5 Assumptions of Adult Learners
1. Self-concept
   As a person matures his/her self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being
2. Adult Learner Experience
   As a person matures he/she accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
3. Readiness to Learn

> As a person matures his/her readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his/her social roles.
> 4. Orientation to Learning
>    As a person matures his/her time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his/her orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem centeredness.
> 5. Motivation to Learn
>    As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal
>
> Knowles' 4 Principles of Andragogy
> 1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
> 2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities.
> 3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life.
> 4. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented

To the above can be added the following additional adult learner characteristics (Pappas, 2013), all of which can also have a direct bearing on the design of onsite visits:

- Less open-minded and therefore more resistant to change.
    Maturity and profound life experiences usually lead to rigidity, which is the enemy of learning. Adults need to know the "why" behind any change or new concepts that can be linked to already established ones, so as to promote the need to explore.
- Slower learning, yet more integrative knowledge
    Aging does affect learning. Adults tend to learn less rapidly with age. However, the depth of learning tends to increase over time, navigating knowledge and skills to unprecedented personal levels.
- Use personal experience as a resource
    Over their lives, adults have seen and done a lot and thus have a tendency to link their past experiences to anything new and to validate new concepts based on prior learning.
- Multi-level responsibilities
    Adult learners have a lot to juggle; family, friends, work, and the need for personal quality time. This leads to difficulties for adults to make room for learning, necessitating the design of flexible programs that accommodate busy schedules.
- High expectations
    Adult learners have high expectations. They want to be taught about things that will be useful to their work and expect to have immediate results. They therefore seek learning opportunities that will be worth their while and not be a waste of their time.

### *Adult Learning Principles*

The above discussion leads to the need to consider some basic principles relating to learning. Burns (1995) conceives of learning as a relatively permanent change in behavior where behavior includes both observable activity and internal processes such as thinking, attitudes and emotions, although learning might not manifest itself in observable behavior until some time after the learning activity has taken place. There are a number of theoretical approaches to stimulating learning, all of which can play a part in onsite visits to differing degrees depending on how the program is designed.

- Sensory stimulation theory
- Reinforcement theory
- Cognitive-Gestalt approaches
- Holistic learning theory
- Facilitation theory
- Experiential learning
- Action learning

*Box 7: Theories of learning (after Dunn, 2000)*

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**Sensory Stimulation Theory**
Traditional sensory stimulation theory has as its basic premise that effective learning occurs when the senses are stimulated (Laird, 1985). Laird quotes research that found that the vast majority of knowledge held by adults (75%) is learned through seeing. Hearing is the next most effective (about 13%) and the other senses - touch, smell and taste account for 12% of what we know. By stimulating the senses, especially the visual sense, learning can be enhanced. Theoretically, if multi-senses are stimulated, greater learning takes place. Stimulation through the senses is achieved through a greater variety of colors, volume levels, strong statements, facts presented visually, use of a variety of techniques and media—all of which can be provided through onsite visits.

**Reinforcement theory**
This theory was developed by the behaviorist school of psychology that believed that behavior is a function of its consequences, i.e. that a learner will repeat a desired behavior if positive reinforcement follows the behavior (Laird, 1985; Burns, 1995). Burns also notes that much competency based training is based on this theory, and although it is useful in learning repetitive tasks and those work skills that require a great deal of practice, it is less useful for higher order learning. It can be useful in onsite visits that focus on learning new skills and techniques or how to operate new machinery, etc.

**Cognitive-Gestalt approaches**
The theory emphases the importance of experience, meaning, problem-solving and the development of insights (Burns, 1995) this theory has developed the concept that individuals have different needs and concerns at different times, and that they

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have subjective interpretations in different contexts. This theory is important for designing onsite visits in relation to participants' characteristics and learning objectives.

**Holistic learning theory**
This theory asserts that the 'individual personality consists of many elements, specifically, the intellect, emotions, the body impulse (or desire), intuition and imagination (Laird, 1985) that all require activation if learning is to be more effective. The immersive nature of onsite visits, if well-designed, should lead to stimulation of many elements.

**Facilitation theory (the humanist approach)**
The premise of this theory is that learning will occur better through establishing an atmosphere in which learners feel comfortable to consider new ideas and are not threatened by external factors (Laird, 1985). Other tenets include the belief that although human beings have a natural eagerness to learn, there is some resistance to giving up what is currently held to be true, so the most significant learning involves changing one's concept of oneself. Therefore, good facilitators are less protective of their own constructs and beliefs; more able to listen to learners, especially to their feelings; inclined to pay as much attention to their relationship with learners as to the content of learning activity; apt to accept feedback, both positive and negative and to use it as constructive insight into themselves and their behavior. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning; provide much of the input for the learning which occurs through their insights and experiences; are encouraged to consider that the most valuable evaluation is self-evaluation and that learning needs to focus on factors that contribute to solving significant problems or achieving significant results.

**Experiential learning (discussed in the main text under 'Principle 3: The learning effect of onsite visits is enhanced by extensive personal contact, regular interaction and the building of trust'**
Kolb (1984) contends that learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Accordingly, experiential learning style theory is typically represented by a four stage learning cycle in which the learner 'touches all the bases'. The process can begin at any of the stages and is continuous, ie there is no limit to the number of cycles you can make in a learning situation. This theory asserts that without reflection we would simply continue to repeat our mistakes. Kolb also contends that different people naturally prefer different learning styles, of which he identifies four learning styles that reflect one's approach to a task and one's emotional response.

Honey & Mumford (1982) building on Kolb's work and identify four alternative learning styles:
- Activist (enjoys the experience itself),
- Reflector (spends a great deal of time and effort reflecting)

- Theorist (good at making connections and abstracting ideas from experience)
- Pragmatist (enjoys the planning stage)

The above concepts are useful for considering how to structure onsite visits so as many different learning stages are touched upon, as well as for selecting teams of participants so different styles can be combined to enhance joint learning.

**Action Learning**
Action learning, as described by McGill & Beaty (1995) as an approach that links the world of learning with the world of action through a reflective process within small cooperative learning groups known as 'action learning sets' and some characteristics of action learning that differentiate the approach from others identified by Ingles (1994) is given in the main report under 'Principle 3: The learning effect of onsite visits is enhanced by extensive personal contact, regular interaction and the building of trust'.

Action learning is the approach that links the world of learning with the world of action through a reflective process within small cooperative learning groups known as 'action learning sets' (McGill & Beaty, 1995). The 'sets' work on individual members' real-life issues with the aim of learning with and from each other. Revans (1997) argued that action learning is ideal for finding solutions to problems that do not have a 'right' answer because "the necessary questioning insight" –can be facilitated by people learning with and from each other in action learning 'sets'.

Ingles (1994) identifies some characteristics of action learning that differentiate the approach from others:
- Learning is centered around the need to find a solution to a real problem.
- Learning is voluntary and learner driven.
- Individual development is as important as finding the solution to the problem.
- Action learning is a highly visible, social process, which may lead to organizational change.
- Action learning takes time.

In anthropology, beyond observational methods for documenting details of individual cultures, it is often said that the only method is the comparative method as it allows a systematic comparison of information and data from multiple sources. However, as pointed out by Sarana (1975), there are three distinct methods: global-sample comparison, controlled comparison, and illustrative comparison.

In global-sample comparison, a sample of the world's societies is chosen. Then the sample is analysed with respect of the distribution of selected cultural features. Conclusions are drawn on cause and effect, and thus the sample is believed to yield

explanation of relations between cultural features broadly applicable worldwide. However, of relevance for developing onsite visits are illustrative and controlled comparison.

Illustrative comparison is in essence exactly what onsite visits are all about—they are used especially, and legitimately, for learning purposes by highlighting specific outcomes of social or cultural phenomena that are different at the host site to those where the visitors come from, in order to stimulate thinking on what needs to change if they are to achieve similar outcomes. This would be the case with many 'best practice' or 'model' sites.

Controlled comparison, however, as Eggan (1954) explains, allows for more meaningful comparisons to be made by narrowing the range of variables that might be the cause of similarities or differences of interest through working on similar societies, especially but not necessarily ones within an ethnographic region or cultural area. For onsite visits, taking visitors to sites where as many variables are similar to their own circumstances enables the visitors not only to relate better to the host situation but also to determine more specifically what factors are different that may be leading to the difference the visitors have come to learn about.