

Personal Reflections from Sweden

Marie Lindgren

Can 40 people from 11 countries unite in a task interesting enough for all to work with during the Managing a Future Search learning workshop? What issue could possibly interest me from Sweden as well as the women from Kenya, the North American participants, the man from South Africa, the group coming from The Netherlands ... and all the rest!

That was my first worry when I entered the conference. Earlier I had worked with a future search conference in Skovde, Sweden, and had seen what the conference had led to in terms of both practical outcomes and engagement from the participants. So I had great expectations for the workshop. I wanted to learn more about how to organize them, how to work with this variety of enthusiastic people and help them find their own common ground, how to make things happen afterward ... but still I was worried about the diversity in our workshop group here in Sweden. Was it possible to agree on our common ground in the simulated task we were to work with?

The conference started and we all took our seats. Who were the others? Could I handle speaking and understanding English during three days without sometimes losing my attention? Could we all understand each other?

We did the presentation ourselves. We did the first group sessions where we proposed ideas for the "simulated task." And suddenly we had agreed on a task most of us felt stimulated to work with—the theme: "Creating Next Generation's Leadership Academy."

continued on page 5

FUTURE SEARCH NETWORK'S FUTURESEARCHING

EXPLORING COMMON GROUND FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

An Implementation Conference: A Personal Story

This is a personal story from two FSN members, **John Goss** from South Africa and **Rita Schweitz** from the United States, about participation in an amazing event run just prior to the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg, South Africa, during August 2002.

Our initial introduction to this event came about directly as a result of being members of FSN when we heeded the call for facilitators on the listserv. Both of us responded to this call without really knowing what it was all about. In the months after our initial expression of interest, we began to learn about the Summit and our connections to it.

The event, called the Implementation Conference, was organized and run by a nongovernmental organization called Stakeholder Forum for Our Common Future (SF)—a unique, international, multi-stakeholder organization committed to the promotion of global, sustainable development through facilitating the involvement of major groups and other stakeholders in the policy work of the United Nations and other inter-governmental institutions.

SF had promoted outcomes from the first Earth Summit in Rio (1992) and wanted to ensure that specific action plans would be connected to

the World Summit in 2002 to counter the apparent lack of implementation since Rio, and also to make visible the political movement toward greater stakeholder partnerships.

continued on page 2

IN THIS ISSUE

Personal Reflections from Sweden	1
An Implementation Conference	1
Planning That Empowers: Accessibility in Leon, Nicaragua	6
Once Again, the Young People Make a Difference	8
The Southwest Michigan Regional Development Project	10
Future Search in the Faith Domain	11
Business Domain Future Search	12
Documenter's Impressions from the Business Domain	13
FSN "Prouds" from Around the World	14
Kim's Spot: Trying to Follow the Webs That We Weave	19
Contributors	20
Bringing the Whole System Together	21
First Future Search: A Collection of Stories	22

An Implementation Conference

continued from page 1, column 3

Recognizing that partnerships offer the opportunity to implement change despite the apparent lack of political will of powerful countries, the lack of courage, and the lack of financial resources for sustainable development, Stakeholder Forum designed its Implementation Conference (IC) to facilitate the creation and continuance of partnerships to develop action plans leading to positive change.

The objective was that stakeholders would commit to *concrete, agreed, and owned collaborative action plans in the four issue areas* selected through a representative process started in the fall of 2001: Energy, Food Security, Freshwater, and Health with a view to poverty eradication, social inclusion and empowerment, good governance, gender equity, and corporate/stakeholder citizenship.

Multi-stakeholder Issue Advisory Groups were established to shape possible collaborative action plans and identify potential partners for each issue. Stakeholder Forum understood and stressed the value of the multi-stakeholder approach, namely: increased credibility by integrating different perspectives/interests, increased quality by integrating a wider range of expertise, increased outreach into various stakeholder communities, and increased ownership by the communities most affected.

The Implementation Conference (IC) was held in Johannesburg in close proximity to the World Summit in order to deliver a powerful message to governments and international agencies on how partnerships can be built effectively among practitioners who take the lead from the sustainable development agreements and work out their contributions.

The IC experimented with creating a space that would enable and empower stakeholders to learn to dialogue openly and constructively as a *precursor* to action rather than as a *substitute* for action. The action plans and partnerships would be made available to the Summit itself, and a follow-up process would be launched.

The objective was that stakeholders would commit to *concrete, agreed, and owned collaborative action plans in the four issue areas* selected through a representative process started in the fall of 2001: Energy, Food Security, Freshwater, and Health with a view to poverty eradication, social inclusion and empowerment, good governance, gender equity, and corporate/stakeholder citizenship.

Implementation Conference Results

After three days of intense activity, stakeholders reached agreement on 26 new action plans, programs, and partnerships aimed at delivering sustainable development. Some 400 stakeholders from over 50 different countries worked in 25 working groups, supported by 25 facilitators from around the globe, to finalize their action plans. Fourteen official partnership agreements (Type 2) were submitted to the World Summit. Many other groups considered the submission of Type 2 partnership initiatives.

The new partnerships are about action, not about lobbying governments. Impacting policy making is not the primary concern of the participants who gathered at the IC. They met to agree on action to implement existing (and emerging) policy agreements. However, it is hoped that the stakeholders' actions and learnings from them will

indeed feed into policy making in the future.

Building the Bridge While Walking Across It

Despite difficulties in obtaining adequate funding, Stakeholder Forum continued to make arrangements for and adjustments to the plan for the IC. Lack of funding (SF received approximately 30% of what was originally targeted, by our estimate) contributed to the following:

- Cut one day: four-day event became three-day
- Moved the IC to later in August (last day on the day WSSD began) to ride on the back of participants coming to the WSSD to reduce travel costs
- This meant that not everyone stayed for the whole IC.
- Reduced number of participants from 800 to approximately 400
- Invited more African and South African participants and facilitators to save travel costs
- Cut out simultaneous translations
- Did not use documenters
- Delayed the confirmation of agendas and invitations until the last minute
- Cut one day off facilitator preparation time
- SF Group arrived in South Africa late—only four days before the start of the conference
- Used many volunteers—some who were very young (early 20s)

Our Experience

In early April, SF notified us that we had been selected for the facilitator pool of 36 and that they were unsure of how many facilitators would actually be needed because of uncertain funding. Although we continued to receive and share information, it was not until late

June that we found out we would actually be attending. We were both thrilled.

Two days before the event, the conference team met for the first time to build our team and learn more about our specific assignments. The facilitator team was truly diverse—men and women, young and old, indigenous and non-indigenous people from Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, South America, and North America. We felt privileged to be included on this team.

John worked on the issue of health, specifically focusing on nutrition. He recalls that in spite of two lengthy conference calls to agree on an agenda and program in advance of the Implementation Conference, all the last-minute dynamics led to a very different set of participants in the room and a considerable change in conference focus. Facilitation focused on allowing connections between delegates to build naturally and for the conference agenda to emerge.

In spite of the pressure created by the tight deadlines, the group produced two concrete outcomes: a holistic declaration of principles and actions currently being circulated in World Health Organization circles, and a South Africa-initiated research project, now with new partners in Kenya, Malawi, the United Kingdom, and Armenia.

Rita worked on the issue of food security, specifically on eco-agriculture. “My group was very focused to learn from each other, to create an action plan that would increase awareness of eco-agriculture, and to develop a partnership. My facilitation was quite basic because we had only 12 hours to accomplish our tasks. My plan

My facilitation was quite basic because we had only 12 hours to accomplish our tasks. My plan was to establish personal connections before delving into content.

was to establish personal connections before delving into content; to ensure that everyone had a chance to speak and that people listened to each other; to agree and focus on our objectives; and to assist the group in developing a concrete, agreed on, and owned collaborative action plan. I was delighted to read

the following participant statement from the final report:

‘I think we achieved much more than I had anticipated.’ ”

John recalls, “The event itself was amazing on many levels”:

- The World Summit on Sustainable Development was to take place in my hometown, Johannesburg, and was by far the biggest thing ever staged in South Africa. (Could we pull this off after the major problems with the Race

Conference in Durban during 2001?)

- This was a UN event; the build-up through Preparatory Conferences was not a good indicator of the possible success to be expected
- A total of about 50,000 visitors to all events was anticipated
- On a global stage, over 100 heads of state were expected
- Significance of RIO plus 10
- Was expected to provide a “once in a lifetime” learning opportunity

Some Key Personal Learnings/Experiences

- Provided the opportunity of a lifetime to actively engage in something personally meaningful, important for sustainability, involving diverse stakeholders

from all around the globe. Fast-paced, dynamic, high-profile event

- Opportunity to participate in a real experiment with a very high purpose: multi-stakeholder collaboration on a global scale on critical issues of sustainability
- Stakeholder Forum took a big calculated risk: very limited funding, compacted timeframes, a real-time experiment; for most participants, the gamble paid off (this will, of course, ultimately depend on what really happens to the IC outcomes)
- The international team arrived, planned, and completed the three-day conference in one week, which pushed the limits of what is possible in three days

Many things contributed to the successful staging of the conference:

- Use of professional facilitators was critical (real current practice of facilitating large-scale events)
- Design team came together for several months prior to event—crucial glue that held it all together
- Because of late and changing dynamics, facilitators really had to think on their feet

Because of late and changing dynamics, facilitators really had to think on their feet.

- Logistics came together only during the IC
- Indaba venue for plenary groups was being built 14 days prior to opening event.
- Participant experience was varied: some groups were further advanced than others prior to the IC; some

groups came together (even as far as agendas were concerned) for the first time at the IC.

Some inevitable outcomes of the above dynamics were:

- Many groups didn’t focus or coalesce around a task until they met at the Implementation Conference, well into the first day.

continued on page 4

An Implementation Conference

continued from page 3

- This resulted in many changes in what was planned prior to the IC.
- Many participants were not clear on the reasons they were invited and needed time to get into the process.
 - All delegates were very pressed for time.
 - Facilitators had to attempt to get action plans agreed on in a day and a half.
 - The conference didn't really have time to develop cross-issue connections.
 - Facilitation of larger groups (action groups of more than 30) would have been a real issue.

FS Connection to Our Facilitation

Rita—"As we were leaving the team meeting the night before the conference, John asked me how future search was going to influence my facilitation. This statement made me refocus on my understanding of

future search and facilitating the whole system in the room."

In retrospect, we realized that:

- We had no control of getting the whole system into the room and therefore defined the system by who actually made it into the room, and to a large extent this also defined the task that was possible in that meeting.
- We focused on the whole elephant in getting people to understand all the points of view in the room.
- We focused on the future and on avoiding getting totally held up in examining potential conflicts.
- We encouraged self-management by letting groups struggle and decide on what they were going to commit to.
- We had a process and stuck to it and did not allow very strong participants to take over the process.
- We had confidence that the groups could come together toward the end of the process on day three.

The Implementation Conference experience has increased our appreciation for the integral nature of the complete future search process—how everything integrates.

- We knew the importance of letting our groups find connections at a personal level before getting into detail.

The Implementation Conference experience has increased our appreciation for the integral nature of the complete future search process—how everything integrates: the planning, the identification of task, the stakeholders, the timing of the conference, the process, the time taken during the conference, creating the space for dialogue, etc. And further, how subtle, deep, and powerful it all is.

We now have a deeper understanding that FS is so much more than "facilitation" and that this is hard to see without experiencing FS first-hand.

The Stakeholder Forum experiment illustrates that a group connected with the UN system understands the need for collaborative action planning and the importance of multi-stakeholder processes.* **FS**

*Although the Summit is over, the official Johannesburg website still (at 7 October) has some interesting views:
www.joburgsummit2002.com

Let's Share Our Stories!

As I've said before, everyone has a number of stories about their future search experience—the kind of anecdotes that we sit around and swap with each other, often in casual conversation.

Anecdotes tell us about something that occurred during a future search experience—something that excited the author—or amused or taught or challenged or surprised or tested or stimulated or encouraged or disappointed or confused or touched or interested, or ... or ... or....

Anecdote (an'ik-dōt'), *n.* a short, entertaining account of some happening, usually personal or biographical.

Anecdotes for *FutureSearching* may be of any length, but as the definition above suggests, they are usually short (100 to 300 words) and to the point. And they're entertaining (not necessarily "amusing")—or why would we enjoy hearing or telling them? And why would we enjoy reading them?

So why not send me a brief story that you'd like to "swap" with others in these pages? Please send it directly to me—srchnews@san.rr.com—rather than to our listserve. I'd like to get a bunch of them.

—Larry Porter
Editor, *FutureSearching*