Chapter 6. Supporting reflective practices in social change processes with the Dynamic Learning Agenda: an example of learning about the process towards disability inclusive development

In the previous chapters, I have introduced a framework and several tools that may reduce the functional task uncertainty faced by managers. These tools were developed in the context of sustainable development of the agricultural sector. Following Essink et al. (2010), I have argued that one of the underlying principles of sustainable development is the balancing of core values. This makes the concept of sustainable development more widely applicable, for instance to health system innovation or to the field of international development where values may include accessibility to the healthcare system and inclusion of marginalised groups. The functional task uncertainty experienced in achieving this balance is also found in these other contexts. To explore the generalizability of my findings I will try to determine if and how the tools proposed in this thesis are also relevant to these contexts. Therefore, in this chapter I will describe and analyse in this chapter, the implementation of one of these tools, the Dynamic Learning Agenda, in the Thematic Learning Programme on the inclusion of people of disabilities in the field of international development.

6.1 Introduction

Change processes are common in both the private and public sector as organisations need to adapt continuously to an ever-changing environment (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). Social change refers to even more complex processes wherein multiple organisations and individuals work together towards a common goal in order to address entrenched social problems (Elzen & Wieczorek, 2005). Examples of current social change processes are the transition towards corporate social responsibility, sustainable development in different sectors (agriculture, mobility), and the inclusion and empowerment of marginalised groups.
In this chapter we address a social change process towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development programmes. Realising inclusion of persons with disabilities in development programmes is described as a social change process for several reasons (Bickenbach, 2011; Harris & Enfield, 2003). First, the inclusion of people with disabilities involves a range of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) with differing interests and ideologies that are operating in different sectors of development cooperation (WHO, 2011). Secondly, there is the challenge of ensuring coherent practices of disability inclusive development at different levels within NGOs, from fieldworkers in the community, to national and international actors. Third, realising disability inclusive development requires that all actors start to view disabled people as persons with abilities. This is described as a paradigm shift towards a ‘social’ perspective on disability (Bickenbach, Chatterji, & Badley, 1999; Harris & Enfield, 2003; Roush & Sharby, 2011).

Social change is often difficult to realise, since it implies adjustments or even transformations at several levels within organisations and society (Dodgson, 1993; Senge, 1990). Therefore, learning is central to social change processes (Blackman & Kennedy, 2011; Kumar & Singhal, 2012; Senge, 1990; Dodgson, 1993; Argyris & Schön, 1978). Also actors in development have acknowledged the importance of learning and formed alliances to develop thematic knowledge to address worldwide issues that require social change processes (Le Borgne & Cummings, 2009; van Poelje & Maarse, 2013). With the aim of better understanding the role of NGOs in realising disability inclusive development, a Thematic Learning Programme (TLP) was started in 2009, comprising a group of Dutch disability specific- and mainstream NGOs, expert organisations and an academic institute. To support learning on disability inclusive development, the primary focus in the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities was on learning how to include persons with a disability in development practices by practising inclusion and reflecting upon this in a collective setting.

To structure the process of learning for social change the participants in the TLP adopted a tool, the Dynamic Learning Agenda (DLA). The DLA supports reflectivity; focussing on practice based learning (Regeer et al. 2009). The DLA is a participatory, dialogical tool that is based on the principle of emergent design. Its primary purpose is to support learning processes towards change by explicating the challenges encountered and directing change agents within a programme towards solving these challenges through stimulating reflective practice. This chapter aims to show how the DLA integrates learning with social change by analysing and reflecting on the
application of the DLA in the case of facilitating learning on the process towards disability inclusive development in development organisations.

We will first introduce the DLA and explain the theoretical rationales behind the DLA. Then we will further explain our case story; the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities. In the results, we will describe how the DLA tool was practically applied in the TLP on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development practices and reflect on its added value in supporting reflective practices to enhance learning for (social) change.

6.2 The Dynamic Learning Agenda

Change processes are often unpredictable and therefore require an emergent approach (Smith & Hauer, 1990) that includes continuous learning and reflection (Regeer et al., 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The DLA can be applied as a tool to integrate learning and reflection in social change processes. The DLA supports reflection on practice, facilitates dialogue and informs emergent design (Regeer et al., 2009). Its primary purpose is to support learning processes towards change by explicating the challenges encountered and directing change agents within a programme towards solving these challenges through stimulating reflection on practice.

This purpose is operationalised within the DLA by translating the challenges encountered by change agents into learning questions that are put on the singular learning agendas (e.g. LA1 in Figure 6.1) at a particular moment in time. These learning questions result in the formulation and implementation of activities and interventions to solve the encountered challenges. A successive sequence of singular learning agendas results in a DLA that provides insight in the process of change. Due to the activities and interventions employed, learning questions may for example disappear from the DLA because they are dealt with or are no longer relevant for change agents. Other learning questions may be revised by the change agents as the result of newly generated knowledge and new insights or new learning questions can be added to the DLA at another moment in time (LA2). Learning questions may also stay on the DLA for a longer period of time. These questions are referred to as persistent learning questions (Regeer et al. 2009) and require extra attention within the programme. The insight in the dynamics of learning questions on the agenda of change agents helps to document and highlight the process of learning and change. In Figure 6.1, a schematic
representation of the DLA is shown and box 6.1 gives a more schematic guideline for implementing the DLA within social change processes.

![Diagram of DLA](image)

**Figure 6.1.** Schematic representation the DLA supporting a change process

The DLA was developed to integrate learning in change processes, by providing insight in the change process through a sequence of learning agendas. Many scholars have described the intricate relationships between learning and (organisational) change processes (Brown, Gordon, & Rose, 2012; Malan, 2011), particularly in the past 40 years since the seminal writings of Argyris and Schön (1978; 1974) and Schön (1983) on reflective practice in organisations and the influential writings of Revans (1973) on action learning in organisations. Since then, ideas about development through interaction between individuals and learning through reflection on action have found their way in both theory and practice. Practical concepts and tools to support learning and reflection in change processes are emerging, to name just a few; Communities of Practice (Etienne Wenger, 1998), the Most Significant Change Technique (Davies, 1996; Dart & Davies, 2003), Learning Histories (Kleiner & Roth, 1996) and Socratic Pedagogy (Boghossian, 2006). In this section basic principles for learning and change derived from practice and theory, are presented and related to the DLA, highlighting the power of the DLA to support learning in change processes.
6.3 Principles to support learning in the context of change processes

6.3.1 Emerging design

As described in the introduction, change processes are often unpredictable and develop en route. The route towards change may seem clear beforehand, but obstacles on the road may display or require an alternative route that yields less resistance. Moreover, as new insights are gained in the process of inquiry, objectives and strategies may be re-defined, changing the scope and practice of programmes (Smith & Hauer, 1990). Guba and Lincoln (1982), in their considerations on the epistemological and methodological bases of natural inquiry, state that a pre-ordinate design is unsuitable for inquiry in real world settings. They state “change cannot be engineered; it is a nonlinear process” (Guba & Lincoln 1989, p45). They suggest that, rather than specifying all steps of the process beforehand, designs should be considered emergent; they unfold as time and events proceed. Adopting an emerging design process implies that “changes are built in with conscious intent” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p247).

Similarly, Schön (1983) describes emergent design as an activity involving reflection on the construction of the problem and on the proposed or applied strategies of action. Subsequent actions are informed by this ‘reflection in action’ rather than by a predetermined plan. Thus, the adaptive nature of change processes demands an emergent approach towards learning with continuous attention for flexibility. This implies that a tool to support learning processes towards change needs to be emergent and responsive to changing conditions and unexpected results.

The DLA is a tool that supports an emergent and responsive design of change processes by revealing the process of social change at different moments in time (Regeer et al., 2009). The DLA is a brief document containing the challenges encountered, summarised as learning questions. Lessons learned regarding the learning questions can inform emergent and responsive design (van Mierlo et al., 2010).

6.3.2 Learning from experiences (of others)

The adaptive nature of change processes requires actors to learn en route what activities and interventions are (not) effective in realising social change in a specific context. This indicates that they need to learn from experiences in practice. Experiential learning, is defined by Kolb (1984) as reflecting on experience, interpreting and
understanding the concepts that arise from reflection, understanding how to use these concepts to improve practices, and taking action which lead to new and improved experiences (Guitj, 2008; Kolb, 1984). In this context, learning and change originate from real world experiences, related to their context (Kolb, 1984). Others have pointed out that observation of others play an essential part of learning (Hume, 2012 reffering to Bandura, 1977). Learning from the experiences of others is referred to as learning from vicarious experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) or vicarious learning (Cox et al., 1999).

The rationale behind vicarious learning is that one can learn from the problems others encountered and especially from the way they solved or dealt with these problems in a specific context (Cox et al., 1999). In the past two decades, different scholars and practitioners have developed several means to learn from real world experiences, such as through a story teller as practiced in the Most Significant Change technique (Dart & Davies, 2003), via written presented stories as practiced in Learning Histories (Kleiner & Roth, 1996) or through audio visual tools as practiced in TransLearning (Regeer et al., 2009; De Wildt-Liesveld et al., forthcoming). These tools and techniques present learning experiences in the specific context in which the experience is acquired and in a personal, first hand manner.

**Box 6.1. The DLA: a stepwise guideline**

**STEP 1 Explore the dreams and challenges**

The first step in the formulation of a singular learning agenda entails the exploration of the dreams and challenges encapsulated in the change process. After the explication of the dreams, it is time to think about the realisation of these dreams in practice: what challenges are associated with realising these dreams? The challenges are then re-formulated into learning questions.

This process of dreaming, explicating challenges and formulating learning questions can either be done collectively within a network or organisation, or on an individual level. The key of this step is to reflect on the underlying mechanisms of dreams and challenges. Hence, learning questions often include aspects that hamper progress and are hard or even painful to deal with. To support this reflection process towards the formulation of clear learning questions, facilitation, both collectively and individually, is essential.

**STEP 2 Plan activities that relate to the learning questions**

The learning questions on the singular learning agenda are taken as guidance for the planning of interventions or activities to tackle the challenges faced within the programme. During this second step, participants state clear objectives and action perspectives in relation to the learning questions.
The resulting activity plans give the participants direction in the process of change and dealing with the challenges that hamper change.

STEP 3 Execution of the **activities** that relate to the learning questions

During the next phase of developing a DLA, the participants implement the activity plans in their daily work related to the change process. In this part of the process, the participants direct themselves and the facilitator is less involved, but can be asked for advice as a ‘critical friend’.

STEP 4 **Observe** the execution of activities related to the learning questions

The fourth step involves observation of the different activities employed to tackle the challenges. During this observation process, the participant needs to keep in mind the challenges underlying the learning question. Good practices and pitfalls are documented to show the progress in solving the challenges. In this process the facilitator can help the participants by giving guidelines for observation and documentation.

STEP 5 **Reflect** on documented practices to formulate lessons learned

During the fifth step, the documented observations are reflected upon, formulated into lessons learned and archived in the DLA. In this way, participants are enabled to learn how the interventions relate to the learning questions and whether or not these interventions are effective in answering that question. To support mutual learning, the experiences related to the learning questions are shared among and jointly reflected upon the participants. The lessons learned during the reflection may result in new learning questions and by the revision of old ones. The new learning questions do not always exemplify new challenges, but may also be a specification of an earlier recognized challenge.

The singular learning agenda is dynamic, implying that steps two to five are repeated cyclically which result in updated versions. The sequence herein shows the DLAs. It is the role of the facilitator to fully and continuously document this cyclical process.

The presented insights suggest that a tool to support learning in the context of social change should enable participants to **learn** from their own experiences as well as from the **experiences of others**. The DLA is designed to enhance learning from experiences since multiple people or organisations are involved in its formulation (Regeer et al., 2009). In its implementation experience in practice forms the basis on which learning questions are formulated and / or refined. The learning agenda is also a tool for commencing dialogue about the challenges faced in practice among the actors involved, facilitating
discussions on experience (Regeer et al., 2011). Thus, the DLA is a means towards mutual sense making; resulting in vicarious learning (Cox et al., 1999).

6.3.3 The importance of participation

Development experts have realised for long that social change can only be brought about successfully and meaningfully if those who are subject to the changes are actively involved from the start. In 1983, development expert Chambers (1983) introduced new development practices that were participatory and interactive and empowered people to own their change process. Since then a host of participatory approaches has been developed, tested and disseminated within and beyond the development sector (Chambers, 1983). Similarly, Guba and Lincoln have introduced a participatory evaluation approach, fourth generation evaluation, in which the relevant stakeholders join the evaluator to establish the claims, concerns and issues that are considered important by both the stakeholders and the evaluators (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). By applying a participatory approach, solutions for change are developed by the change agents themselves. This results in ownership for the problem and its solution, fostering commitment among all stakeholders and ensuring the inclusion of relevant experiential knowledge (Regeer et al., 2011; Bryson et al., 2011). The Most Significant Change technique and Learning Histories are examples of participatory approaches in the context of learning for social change; multiple change agents are involved in deciding the sorts of change to be recorded, in analysing the data (Dart & Davies, 2003) and in presenting a jointly told story based on experiences (Kleiner & Roth, 1996). This need for a participatory process results in a third principle: tools to support learning and change processes need to be participatory.

The DLA supports the participation of all actors involved in its formulation by including a wide range of perspectives of different participants (e.g. initiators, followers, an opponents of the social change process at stake) (Regeer et al., 2009).

6.3.4 The need for dialogue and reflection

Change processes encompass changes on several levels and require the involvement of multiple actors from different disciplines and with different backgrounds (Senge, 1990; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Sanginga et al., 2007). Inducing discussion and facilitating dialogue between actors is therefore an essential part of change processes. Scholars and practitioners that have developed tools and techniques to support learning for social change have emphasised that these tools are not an end in itself, but a means to facilitate discussion about and reflection on the content of the tool. Herein consensus on
the subject is not necessary, but mutual understanding is. The Most Significant Change technique is not only a story-based technique but also a dialogical technique, substantiated by repeated deliberation amongst and between groups of stakeholders (Dart & Davies, 2003). Similarly, Kleiner and Roth (1996) emphasise that the purpose of Learning Histories lies in “...promoting a more effective form of conversation. The document itself is just a means to that end.” (1996, p11). Furthermore, TransLearning is shown to be effective in supporting learning through facilitating reflective awareness (Kupper et al., 2010; De Wildt-Liesveld et al., forthcoming). This process is an important step in learning as learning is defined by Kolb as reflecting on experience, interpreting and understanding the concepts that arise from reflection, understanding how to use these concepts to improve practices, and taking action which leads to new experiences (Kolb, 1984). This brings us to the fourth principle: tools for supporting learning in change processes need to promote dialogue and deliberation between actors to make mutual sense of experiences and inform further changes.

The DLA is a tool that promotes dialogue and deliberation by integrating learning and reflection with change since the formulation of learning questions is a process of mutual sense making that is inextricably linked to the intervention process (Regeer et al., 2009).

6.4 Methodological considerations

In the following section, we introduce why and how the DLA was implemented in the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities. Then we elaborate on the research approach and the role of the authors of this chapter in facilitating the usage of the DLA in the TLP and conducting research on the DLA at the same time.

6.4.1 Introduction to the case story

The DLA tool was first introduced and experimented with in several projects within TransForum - an innovation programme to stimulate sustainable agriculture in the Netherlands in the period 2005-2010. Based on our experimentation we introduced the DLA in the TLP on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development practices, a transformation process of NGOs from non-inclusive to inclusive organisations with regard to persons with disabilities (2011-2012).
The TLP on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development practices brings together different organisations to systematically and collectively learn from their practices (Britton, 2009) on how to include persons with disabilities in development practices. The learning programme has been initiated by five Dutch NGOs to counteract the observation that although most NGOs are determined to reach the marginalised groups in society, disabled persons are often excluded from their development programmes. Around the five initiating NGOs, a network had been established and together with the partners in India (11 organisations) and Ethiopia (nine organisations), they have been starting to include persons with disabilities in their programmes with the intention to contribute to social change. This process was assisted by disability specific, facilitating organisations in India, Ethiopia, and the Netherlands, supported by the Athena Institute of the VU University Amsterdam. In the course of the programme, about ten other European NGOs joined the programme out of interest for the topic.

The TLP is thus a multi-actor programme in which several organisations are aiming for the same change: the transformation from the exclusion of persons with disabilities to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development practice. During this change process, it is likely that the organisations involved encounter similar challenges or problems. One way to overcome these challenges is to promote (inter)organisational learning through vicarious experiences. This implies that organisations learn their way towards including persons with disabilities in their development programmes through the experiences and lessons learned by other organisations aiming for inclusion. The exchange of experiences and formulation of lessons learned was supported in a structured way by adopting the DLA.

Moreover, the change towards a more inclusive organisation is unpredictable and adaptive because of unexpected results and a changing environment. It requires a tool that is flexible and dynamic, also towards the different perspectives and ideas of the change agents involved. To stimulate the integration of the perspectives and mutual learning among the change agents, dialogue and reflection are essential. Since the DLA incorporates both vicarious learning, emergent design, and reflection and dialogue within a participatory approach, the DLA was implemented to integrate learning and change within the TLP on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development practices.
6.4.2 Methodology

Together with a disability specific NGO that coordinated the TLP, the authors of this chapter facilitated the process of change and implemented the DLA herein. We have chosen for an action research approach to facilitate the process of change and simultaneously study this process (see also Veen et al., 2013). Action research approaches, developed by Kemmis and McTaggert (1988) and others, comprises a cyclical process, starting from a dream, and circling from planning to taking action, observing and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggert, 1988; Senge, 1990). The DLA was integrated in this cyclical process of action research, by formulating new learning agendas in the planning phase and reflecting on the learning questions after action in the observation and reflection phase.

The research on which this chapter is based took place during October 2010 – December 2012, and consisted of a number of cycles in which new learning questions were formulated and old ones were revised or solved. The learning agendas from all these cycles together form the DLA, that is the object of this research. From the sequence of learning agendas in the process of action research, more general lessons emerged, leading to new insights related to the understanding of disability inclusive development.

In action research, the researchers have a dual role since they are part of the action that is being studied (Whyte, 1991). The authors were aware of their dual role in implementing and reflecting on the application of the DLA in the TLP. All steps in the action research were carefully and explicitly documented through recording of all sessions, transcribing all data, and keeping observation and planning logbooks. Furthermore, additional interviews and evaluation sessions were planned, transcribed and analysed to acquire in-depth insights into key challenges and the process of knowledge co-creation. Multiple methods (Gray, 2004) were used to operationalise disability inclusive development. Different participatory and dialogical tools were used at different times to supported vicarious learning, participation and dialogue and reflection among all involved. These participatory methods included focus groups, timeline workshops, world café, open space meetings, eye-opener workshops, intervization meetings and case story workshops (briefly described in Table 6.1).

The tools were used to create a creative and imaginative atmosphere, encouraging the development of new perspectives. In addition to the listed methods, participant observation provided a deeper understanding of how the learning questions support
the change agents in directing the process of change within their organisations. This gave insight in how the change agents succeed in monitoring the process of change, with a clear direction as focus, ensuring ownership among them. In this process, the facilitators adhered to the principles of naturalistic inquiry which stresses the importance of contextualisation, collaboration between researchers and subjects, links to action, and appreciation of values (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Validity was improved by triangulation of the methods, data and analysis (see also van Veen et al., 2013).

6.5 Results: applying and reflecting on the usage of the DLA

In this section we will consider how the DLA supported learning and change in the practice of inclusion of persons with disabilities in development practices. We will first discuss what we learned about the role of change agents to promote the facilitation of learning for social change. Then we will highlight the importance of the formulation of learning questions with steering capacity so that they inform action. Finally, we will reflect on what we have learned from applying the DLA and how this makes learning and change processes tangible.

6.5.1 The role of the DLA in supporting change agents to promote facilitation of learning for social change

To facilitate learning in social change processes it is important to ensure felt ownership over the change process by change agents (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Regeer et al., 2009). In the facilitation of change within the TLP on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development practices we found two factors that positively influence the social change process. A first factor that supports the social change process and the implementation of the DLA herein, is the careful appointment of a change agent within each participating organisation. We found that the change agent, that owns the DLA in an organisation, acts as a lobbyist within their own organisation to keep the issue of inclusion of persons with disabilities on the agenda, and as a spokesperson towards the TLP when formulating and reflecting on learning questions on the DLA. It is important that the appointed change agents are motivated for the issue, in this case disability inclusive development, out of their own interest. Especially personal experience helps change agents to feel the urgency for social change (e.g. a focal person with the personal experience of having a disabled sibling easier adopted the idea of disability inclusive development).
Table 6.1. Explanation of tools to facilitate the learning process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the tool</th>
<th>Principles of learning and change</th>
<th>Relation to DLA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus group</strong></td>
<td>• Vicarious learning</td>
<td>We used focus groups to explicate shared challenges encountered within the network during their search on how to become inclusive. Furthermore, in focus group discussions possible solutions for obstacles were explored mutually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports: discussion and mutual sensemaking (Litosseliti, 2003).</td>
<td>• Participatory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yields: in-depth insight into range of opinions, ideas and experiences (Litosseliti, 2003).</td>
<td>• Dialogue &amp; reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeline workshop</strong></td>
<td>• Participatory</td>
<td>We used this tool during organisation visits to visualise the progress of an organisation towards disability mainstreaming. This was used as a starting point to identify challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports: joint reflection on project events (Regeer et al., 2011).</td>
<td>• Dialogue &amp; reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yields: in-depth insight into the process of change, including challenges and successes (Regeer et al., 2011).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>World café</strong></td>
<td>• Vicarious learning</td>
<td>We used this method to think together about shared learning questions and thereby collectively create new insights. Common ownership was created by connecting ideas and persons in the TLP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports: group discussion, sharing knowledge and innovative thinking (Brown, 2005).</td>
<td>• Participatory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yields: common ground for change and new knowledge (Brown, 2005).</td>
<td>• Dialogue &amp; reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open space</strong></td>
<td>• Emergence</td>
<td>We used this tool to give participants the opportunity to discuss the challenges on their agendas that were not planned in overall workshops. By matching participants that are dealing with similar learning questions, they were able to share knowledge and experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports: finding creative solutions for complex issues in a short time (Owen, 1997).</td>
<td>• Vicarious learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yields: in-depth insight into range of opinions, ideas and experiences (Owen, 1997).</td>
<td>• Participatory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eye-opener workshop</strong></td>
<td>• Dialogue &amp; reflection</td>
<td>We used eye-opener workshops to stimulate vicarious learning among the participants during workshops or exchange visits wherein a practice of one organisation was a central example for further discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports: reflection on lessons and insights from others experiences and translating them into generic lessons learned (Regeer et al., 2011).</td>
<td>• Vicarious learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We found that the DLA provides the change agent a tool to structure his lobby in the organisation for the issue at hand, as it helps change agents to make challenges tangible and provides overview of the (social) change process. Secondly, we found that to ensure that the DLA supports change agents adequately, attention for training of change agents is necessary. We learned that not only attention to content is important in training, but also attention to the process of learning. Since the DLA aims to support change agents in addressing complex, entrenched social problems by making persistent problems more tangible, it is important to train change agents in this respect. In the implementation phase of the DLA in the TLP, this training encompassed how to formulate learning questions, how to interpret the dynamics of the DLA, and how to facilitate dialogue and reflection on the singular learning agendas. From the TLP we have learned that to train the change agents and organisations it is recommended to organise training sessions per organisation at the beginning of the change process. In these sessions preferably a wider audience than the appointed change agents is present, from different departments and levels in the organisation to fully exploit the participatory nature of the DLA. From experience in the TLP we learned that

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case study workshop</th>
<th>Yields: synergy in the experiences of others that are translated into more generic guidelines for change.</th>
<th>Supports: reflection on case stories around similar problems to extract generic lessons.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Yields: learning by ‘outsiders’ through reflection on the challenges, successes and learning experiences (Regeer et al., 2011). | • Vicarious learning  
• Participatory  
• Dialogue & reflection | We used the case study workshop to support the translation of vicarious learning into action. The participants co-created new knowledge on the practice of inclusion of persons with disabilities in development. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervision meeting</th>
<th>Yields: in-depth understanding of work-related issues that need clarification or are perceived as problematic (Ovens et al., 2012).</th>
<th>Supports: exchange of experiences between- and mutual consultation of colleagues (Ovens et al., 2012).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Yields: learning by ‘outsiders’ through reflection on the challenges, successes and learning experiences (Regeer et al., 2011). | • Emergence  
• Vicarious learning  
• Participatory  
• Dialogue & reflection | We used intervision meetings to discuss the challenges the participants encountered during the change process. In this way, participants helped each other to find solutions to their problems and learned strategies for change from others. |
alternation between separate training sessions for staff and management and joint training sessions is recommendable as in separate trainings all actors can formulate their standpoints creating fertile grounds for a balanced dialogue. In addition we found that the organisational visits and informal talks support change agents in the practical implementation of the DLA within the organisation. Network sessions among the change agents of all participating organisations supports the reflection on the social change process as a whole. As a result, we found that the change agents after multiple training and reflection sessions were more capable of recognising persistent problems and translating them into an action perspective.

6.5.2 Application of the DLA; formulating learning questions with steering capacity

When change agents are facilitating social change processes, they often express the desire to learn about bringing ideologies into practice. They feel the urgency to approach challenges systematically, but find it difficult to determine a starting point. The DLA provides change agents with a clear starting point, like an explicit challenge, that can give steering capacity so that activities for change emerge. We found that formulating learning questions supported the change agents to become more sensitive towards challenges encountered during the process of change. Furthermore, they showed the ability to translate learning questions into activity plans that steer towards action.

In the following paragraphs we will reflect on how the change agents formulated learning questions. At the beginning of the programme we noticed that change agents found it difficult to translate encountered challenges into learning questions. When analysing the formulations of the learning questions, we recognised four pitfalls (see Table 6.2). First, the early formulated learning questions show difficulties in grasping the underlying problem of the encountered challenge; the change agents formulated learning questions that did not quite hit the core of the underlying issues. Second, many questions were not specific in their formulation. For instance the question ‘How to translate inclusion into policy?’ is very unspecific; what does inclusion mean in the context of this organisation?, and does the organisation have one programme policy, or several policies on different themes? Third, the questions showed difficulties in assigning an owner to the problem. Sometimes change agents formulated learning questions that were not in their scope of influence, and did not address the rightful owner. Finally, the learning questions often did not include a specific goal and thereby did not provide the change agents a clear direction in resolving the learning question.
Examples of these four pitfalls are visualised in Table 6.2. In all, only careful formulated learning questions have *steering capacity*; that is, the ability to attribute agency to change agents.

**Table 6.2.** Pitfalls in identification of challenges through learning questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial question</th>
<th>Pitfall</th>
<th>Improved question(s)</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“How can I raise awareness within my organisation?”</td>
<td>It is not clear why this is difficult. What is the underlying problem? Why is this a challenge?</td>
<td>“How can I raise the awareness of our fundraising department to communicate about disability in a right based manner to our donors while their regular way of communicating emphasises pitiful children?”</td>
<td>Underlying problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“How to translate inclusion into policy?”</td>
<td>The topic of this question is very broad. What kind of policy needs to be developed? What opportunities for policy development are there within the organisation?</td>
<td>“How can we develop a policy on inclusion in such a way that it is supported by all departments within the organisation?” “How can we link inclusion to other thematic areas that are important for our organisation?”</td>
<td>Specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“How can the local churches do more to include persons with disabilities?”</td>
<td>Solving this issue requires someone else than the question owner to take action.</td>
<td>“How can I support my partner organisation to help the local churches including persons with disabilities in their services?”</td>
<td>Ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What is quality of inclusion?”</td>
<td>This question gives no clear direction. What is quality? What is inclusion? Where and when is inclusion happening?</td>
<td>“What are the main criteria for inclusive education, benefitting both disabled and non-disabled children?” “How to include the needs of persons with disabilities in emergency situations?”</td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we had traced these four pitfalls we aimed at ensuring that the next round of learning questions on each singular learning agenda were carefully formulated and had steering capacity. To support the change agents we developed four sets of questions as a strategy to tackle the four pitfalls (see Table 6.3). For example, we found that it was
helpful to add the word ‘while’ in the learning question to ensure that the underlying problem was covered. Thus, the question ‘how to include children with disabilities in the classroom’ becomes much more focussed when adding ‘… while the classes are overcrowded, special learning materials are not available, and the environment around the school is not accessible’.

Our experience shows that the formulation of the learning questions does not happen by itself. To further facilitate the formulation of learning questions, we identified two important strategies for facilitators that are conducive to this process. First, it is important to continuously coach the change agents during the process of formulating learning questions. Together, the facilitator and change agents discussed in-depth the challenges related to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in their development practices. Second, peer discussions helped to enhance participation, ensuring extensive probing using the four sets of questions to aid the formulation of learning questions. Discussing the formulation of learning questions with peers helped, at the same time, to ensure thorough understanding of the challenges by exchanging experiences.

Table 6.3. Solution to the pitfalls for formulating learning questions with steering capacity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the difficult part of this question? Why is this question so difficult? What is the context of the problem? (explicate the dilemma by using a ‘while’ construction)</td>
<td>Underlying problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will bring the solution to this question? What needs to change to solve this question?</td>
<td>Specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who needs to change and what is going to motivate change? Who is the owner of the problem? What could be your own role in relation to the problem and the other actors involved?</td>
<td>Ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you want to achieve? When do you know a goal is achieved? What timeframe do you want to take as guidance?</td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thereby vicarious learning was stimulated by intensive discussions on challenges in relation to the context of the work of the participants. Through these intensive participatory discussions it became easier to sense a challenge and formulate it into a learning question. This provided grip on the challenges encountered and made it easier to grasp the underlying problem. Now we have explained how the formulation of learning questions can be facilitated, it is important to reflect on how these learning questions steer towards action. The topic of disability inclusive development was new for most of the change agents, and they first experienced it as a fluid subject that seemed to relate to everything. Apart from the concrete formulation of learning questions, the change agents were also asked to relate their programme activity plans
to the learning questions to get grip on the fluidity they experienced. Hereby the cyclical process was stimulated the formulation of learning questions, planning for action, observing the action and reflecting on it. New insights fed into a new round of learning questions.

The facilitators of the TLP stimulated the change agents to alternate between action and reflection in learning questions. In their daily work in their own organisations the change agents worked on mainstream development programmes (e.g. in the fields of education, water and sanitation, or health care) in which they experimented with the inclusion of disability issues.

Often, the learning questions guided these experimentations. The activities undertaken by change agents show that the learning questions help them to make their actions on disability inclusive development more concrete. Concrete actions can accelerate the process of change within the programme. At other occasions, new issues to take action upon emerged from practice. This guided the formulation of new learning questions in the next round of reflection. The change agents also reflected on learning questions that did not lead to action. Their testimonies show how these unanswered learning questions provided change agents with insight in the process of change; sometimes issues were no longer relevant, but other learning questions were considered to be more persistent than was thought in advance. One change agent stated that, “even though priority was not always given to the predetermined learning questions, I liked that I was reminded later of their existence”.

In the end, the identification and celebration of the small steps of change that were successful, was emphasised by the change agents as added value of the specific focus on action that the DLA ensured. Through dialogue and reflection on experiences that related to change, change agents and facilitators felt encouraged and strengthened in their dedication to work on the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

6.5.3 Reflection on the application of the DLA; enhancing learning and change

As is explained in the introduction to the DLA, the dynamic nature of the DLA provides insight in the change process of individuals, within organisations, and network wide. Reflection on the sequence of singular learning agendas makes the process of learning on social change tangible. The DLA integrates learning in the process of change, according to the rationale of vicarious learning. In the process of change, the obstacles encountered are discussed among different actors and translated
into learning questions on the DLA. In this section we will reflect on the power of a sequence of learning agendas, that together makes it dynamic.

**Level of learning that the questions address**

When we analysed all learning questions that were formulated in the TLP we found that the DLAs comprised learning questions that addressed both single loop and double loop learning. Single loop learning refers to modifying perspectives on solutions and strategies, while double loop learning concerns the values and underlying assumptions an organisation adheres to and are therefore often hard or even painful to deal with (Argyris & Schôn, 1978). Questions on the level of single loop learning are easily solved by concrete actions. They can be recognised in the sequence of learning agendas as questions that are easily specified or stay on the DLA only for a brief period of time. An example of a single loop learning question in the TLP, at field level in rural Ethiopia, was: *How can we ensure accessibility of our school for children with physical disabilities?* After a short training on assisting devices, a simple ramp was built from some stones and a bag of concrete that made the school better accessible for children walking with crutches. Maybe not all aspects of the accessibility barrier were addressed, but this little intervention led already to the enrolment of more children with mild physical disabilities.

Questions on the level of double loop learning, also referred to as persistent learning questions, are more difficult to resolve. They can be recognised in a sequence of learning agendas as they are not resolved or revised for a long period of time, despite efforts taken to address these questions with concrete actions. These persistent learning questions may need more attention or intervention. For example, a learning question can address the problems with making a water and sanitation point accessible, while the environment of the water and sanitation point is not accessible and cannot be made accessible because of powers out of reach of the change agent. Social change processes encompass many factors, processes and complexities that often seem out of reach. Rather than reverting to solving only first order problems, the DLA keeps confronting change agents with persistent questions, as a reminder of their importance. The DLA furthermore helps to analyse underlying aspects and elucidate action perspectives. In the case of the water and sanitation point, one may move from questions regarding the accessibility of the water and sanitation point itself, to the accessibility of the surroundings, to the question how to create awareness, appreciation and a sense of urgency in the local community and with local officials for the needs of people with a
disability. Only by addressing these second order questions alongside the first order questions will ensure the sustainability of the change.

Vicarious learning through the exchange of experiences

Thus, the assessment of the sequence of learning questions shows the complexity of the change process, in this case the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development practices. In the TLP we saw how change agents from different organisations learned from each other’s formulation and progress on resolving learning questions. They shared information on the process of change when a breakthrough was achieved, enabling outsiders to learn from the experiences of their peers, and thus supporting vicarious learning through reflection on practice. For instance, in the North India network one change agent was ahead in writing a policy on inclusion of persons with disabilities. Her flamboyant approach to disseminate the policy in her organisation led to fast adoption. In one of the learning sessions her experiences on this success story were shared with the other participants, including the challenges she faced during the process. In response to this success story, other participants in the North India network were encouraged to develop their own policy. In their mind the sparkling image of their peer acted as a motivator to address the importance of policy for inclusion of persons with disabilities in their organisations.

To enhance vicarious learning in the TLP the facilitators supported the exchange of experiences through dialogue and reflection. Hereby, the participants became aware of the similarities in learning questions, and they learned from each other’s processes of change. The facilitators in the TLP stimulated the exchange of experiences in several ways from their oversight of all learning questions. With this knowledge in mind, they carefully planned the topics of the learning sessions in the network. When organisations clearly matched in terms of learning questions they proposed exchange visits between them. During the organisation visits, the facilitators also worked as agents of change by bringing the experiences from one organisation to the other. Another way of exchanging experiences was the publication of case stories from change agents in a network newsletter, that were complemented with the reflections of other change agents. This shows how the DLA can be used as a means towards mutual sense making of experiences, as it helps to construct and discuss the main challenges and opportunities to resolve them in change processes (Regeer, 2009).
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**Reflections on how questions change over time**

Next to providing insight in the (inter)organisational learning process in the network related to the process of change, the DLA also visualises the organisational learning process of individual NGOs within the network. Our analysis of the sequence of learning questions per NGO shows that the questions became more specific over time. During this process of specifying the learning questions, the learning questions become more tangible. Figure 6.2 shows an example of a sequence of learning questions related to inclusive education that was part of the DLA of one of the change agents. The specification of learning questions is informed by actions undertaken to resolve the questions on the singular learning agenda. This is implicitly visible in a sequence of learning questions.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 6.2. Example of specification of learning questions for inclusive education**

In relation to the example in Figure 6.2 the questions ‘*What are the main criteria for inclusive education?*’ was answered by the Education For All (EFA) framework developed by the World Education Forum, that is initiated to achieve universal primary education completion (UNESCO, 2000). This framework is criticised because the goal envisioned in EFA is considerably broad and lacks affirmative action to address the needs of the most disadvantaged children, most specifically in low-income countries (Lei & Myers, 2011). This resulted in a new question, ‘*How to deal with broad theoretical frameworks that describe inclusive education?*’ In addition, the question ‘*How is inclusive education practiced in Ethiopia?*’ became more specific after the change agent visited some schools in rural Ethiopia. Here she learned that inclusive education was already happening, but was not captured in monitoring formats. For this reason, she
was not aware of the progress at executive level. Therefore, she formulated the learning question ‘How can children with disabilities that are actively included in the schools be monitored?’

At the same time, we noticed in our analysis that some questions that seemed very important in the first learning agenda, became less important over time. For example, the majority of NGOs was initially very interested in the costs and benefits associated with inclusion of persons with disabilities. However, during their learning process, they left this learning question behind them. Several change agents indicated they could not understand the relevance of this learning question anymore. The question was not important anymore since they became more value driven in their efforts to include persons with disabilities (van Veen, 2012).

By documenting a sequence of learning agendas, the DLA thus provides insight in the learning process within the programme. We found that this insight can facilitate the learning and change process in several ways. The facilitator can document the learning questions and the newly acquired knowledge of all change agents and organisations involved during the learning process, and share this information with the network in dialogue and reflection sessions. This process of learning and change is documented in the TLP in the publication ‘Count me in’ (Bruijn et al., 2012). Over time, two overarching questions appeared essential to process of change. First, the participants wanted to learn ‘How to create disability inclusive development programmes.’ Second, the participants wanted to learn ‘How to become a disability inclusive development organisation.’ Table 6.4 shows the main lessons related to these two questions that resulted from the TLP on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and four main conclusions that can motivate others that embark on the change process towards disability inclusive development practice. However, the participants in the network learned more than the conclusions presented. They learned about the underlying experiences in the process of change and acquired a deeper understanding of issues that influence change. This reflective practice cannot be caught in a simple table of outcomes.

Moreover, the sequence of all learning questions showed us how different change agents dealt with a specific challenge that relates to a learning question. The cumulative progress on addressing learning questions on the DLA of all organisation involved in the Thematic Learning Agenda provides insight in the overall learning process of change. Thereby, the DLA facilitates mutual learning and supports the process of social change. Learning is also stimulated by the feedback loops that are generated within the
Supporting reflective practices in social change processes with the Dynamic Learning Agenda

DLA by linking actions and interventions to the learning questions. In this way, successes and failures were identified and the change agents learned what action is (not) effective in solving a specific learning question. According to the participants, this shortened the process of trial- and error which is supportive to establishing emergent change within the programme.

Table 6.4. Lessons from the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities (based on Bruijn et al., 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lessons learned on realising disability inclusion in development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning question 1:</strong> How to create disability inclusive development programmes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Address training needs among project staff on disability inclusive development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify persons with disabilities in the programme area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Realise participation of persons with disabilities in the whole project cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Include disability data in all planning, monitoring and evaluation reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Refer when necessary participant with disabilities to specific service providers for disability specific needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Build networks with involved actors, for instance in government, disability specific organisations, businesses etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

• Everything starts with attitude change
• Quick results are possible, but a long breath is needed
• Organisational change takes time
• Good company makes the journey easier

6.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter we addressed the complexity of supporting the change process towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development programmes. As learning is central to (inter)organisational change and development (Dodgson, 1993; Senge, 1990; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Regeer et al., 2009), the primary focus was on integrating learning and reflection in social change processes by applying a new tool; the DLA.
The DLA is a tool that integrates learning in social change processes, by making the challenges encountered tangible through dialogue and reflection on the experiences of all actors involved. We have shown that the DLA is a tool that helps sensitising change agents to challenges encountered in social change processes and formulate them into learning questions. Participative discussions on learning questions stimulate vicarious learning, resulting in emergent changes, as shown in the results. In this way we have demonstrated that the DLA ensures that persistent challenges are not overlooked in the realm of daily practice (Regeer et al., 2011). Moreover, the results show that reflection on challenges encountered provides change agents that apply the DLA with an action perspective on how to overcome these challenges. This relates to Vogezezang (2000), who states that through reflection, theories that underlie action become interlinked and change agents may develop new forms of action and interaction. Last, the final part of the results shows that the DLA creates insights into the learning process of the organisation or programme in change. Progress made concerning disability inclusive development at different organisations that participated in the TLP shows that emerging insights from the cyclic process that the DLA applies informs change. This relates to the theoretical notion of Kolb (1984), Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Smith and Hauer (1990) who describe how ideas develop over time whereby concepts are derived from and continuously modified by (vicarious) experiences.

In conclusion, the focus of the DLA on sensitizing challenges, translating challenges into action, and reflecting on the process of change shows how the DLA integrates learning in the process of social change. These three characteristics constitutes the added value of the DLA, as compared with other tools developed to integrate learning and reflection in social change processes, like the Most Significant Change technique (Davies, 1996; Dart & Davies, 2003), Learning Histories (Kleiner & Roth, 1996), TransLearning (Kupper et al., 2010) and Socratic Pedagogy (Boghossian, 2006). However, the DLA should not be used as a substitute for other tools that involve participative reflection to enhance learning for change, since we believe that the strength of emergent design lies in combining different tools to enhance vicarious learning through reflection and dialogue. The primary focus is on the change process, in which the DLA is a helpful tool to keep a focus on the direction towards inclusive development.