

Developing our capacity to build effective arguments



The Brief in brief

This brief explains that having an insufficient capacity to argue – having weaknesses in our capability to define and achieve objectives in constructing, developing and communicating arguments – may impede effective argumentation for biodiversity conservation. We identify five key factors relevant to building effective arguments and use these to provide guidance to help develop capacity to argue successfully in different situations, involving different audiences.

Intended audience

This brief is intended for the broad range of actors involved in developing and communicating arguments for biodiversity. These actors will benefit from a greater understanding of current challenges and possible solutions for developing effective argument across different situations and with different actors.

Topic

Capacity development has been defined by the United Nations as “the process through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time” [1]. This definition highlights the different scales at which capacity development can and should take place, and the role of the broader environment on allowing potential change in terms of developing capacity. In this brief we address the development of capacity to argue successfully for biodiversity.

It is important to note that capacity development of arguments should not be approached as a one-off but rather should be addressed in an iterative manner as part of a long-term process. Indeed, as highlighted by the case studies examined in BESAFE arguments are often used within processes that may span several or many years and involve multiple stakeholders. Furthermore, similar arguments may be used in different situations with varying degrees of success. Thus development of capacity will be different for all depending on needs, motivation, resources, etc and these may also evolve over time: A “one size fits all” is not appropriate.

Usefulness

Developing capacity is of high policy relevance across and between different levels of governance and stages of policy processes. At the international level, Aichi strategic goal E calls for the need to enhance implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building [2]. At the European level, in the 5th Report of the European Union to the Convention on Biological Diversity of June 2014 the European Commission included elements of the Committee of the Regions’ Opinion stating: “The EU recognises the key role played by local and regional authorities, together with Member States, in the delivery of a multilevel, cooperative and integrated approach towards the Aichi targets and the related targets of the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy. Several local and regional authorities are actively

involved in the programmes for capacity building and sharing good practice.” Following on from this, there is a call for “Member States and subnational governments [...] to develop, in cooperation with their local & subnational governments’ national associations, guidance material and administrative capacity building [...] for local and subnational biodiversity strategies, action plans and measures” and for local and subnational authorities to “carry out capacity building within their administrations, whilst making best use of administrative capacity building projects provided for at national, European, or international level” [3].

Transferability

The lessons learned identified in this brief have wide applicability, not only to build effective arguments but also to achieve broader objectives in the context of biodiversity and ecosystem services and beyond.

Lessons learned

- **Build mutual understanding between arguer and audience**
- **Have clear goals and objectives within a strategy to develop and deliver arguments**
- **Attain an ability to adapt and learn**
- **Identify training needs**
- **Involve communication specialists**

Build mutual understanding between arguer and audience

Many of the challenges associated with developing effective argument stem from being unaware of your audience or assuming they know less than they do or framing arguments in ways that are not consistent with their beliefs, values and/or objectives, or using inappropriate language. Much of the capacity development in relation to these aspects will focus on better understanding ones audience through increased contact and discussions leading to more tailored communication [4]. For example, water companies setting up customer challenge groups (CCG) to engage more with water customers (see case study on ‘Water Company investment planning in the UK). Such capacity development will also allow a more in-depth understanding of how actors understand themselves and one another (so-called disciplinary and sectoral perspectives), how they communicate, collaborate, and work together through finding common ground [5]. For example, developing arguments linked to local livelihoods can widen the scope of debates and engage wider actors. Building mutual understanding requires investment in terms of effort, time and resources for the development of interpersonal relationships, common understanding and deliberation to enhance effective communication and successful collaboration to deliver mutually beneficial outcomes.

Have clear goals and objectives within a strategy to develop and deliver arguments

Developing capacity to build effective arguments can be improved by having clear goals and objectives in terms of what is understood by an effective argument, and the strategy to develop and deliver such arguments. Leadership is often an important aspect in such goal and strategy setting providing a steer for others to follow. It is important, however, for leaders to understand how they are perceived both

within their own group or institution, and outside, as these perceptions will often have an impact on the way in which arguments are framed, developed, delivered and challenged. Such reflection can in turn lead to a need to adapt leadership, as well as goals and strategies.

Attain an ability to adapt and learn

Adaptability is essential in developing capacity. For example, there is a need to keep re-building capacities with audiences such as policy decision-makers (e.g. civil servants and politicians) who often move jobs regularly. Furthermore, wider policy frameworks may change. This constant change can impact negatively on communication if the policy context is not understood and knowledge refreshed. However, learning from these different audiences and contexts (see also the point above on building mutual understanding) can help re-build those capacities quicker and more effectively in the future.

Identify training needs

One key issue in terms of building capacity is to identify why, where, for whom, and when training may be required. It may be useful to carry out a capacity assessment for this purpose, i.e. an analysis of desired capacities against existing capacities [1]. Training needs may be in relation to identifying the relevant audience for one's argument, becoming more aware of that audience or of a range of different audiences, training in terms of framing arguments according to relevant audiences, or could be around understanding certain concepts or contexts better (for example training on how other sectors or disciplines operate and relevant policy goals and frameworks). Other training needs may relate to using broad sources of evidence and identifying gaps to contribute to the effectiveness of arguments by anticipating challenges, for example water companies providing training to staff members on value transfer methods to examine wider benefit delivered from catchment management schemes. In addition training needs focus on exploring more novel or less familiar methods of communication, for example emphasising positive instead of negative framing of arguments (see UK case study 'Arguing for biodiversity in practice'). Each individual or institution will have very different training needs, at different times. A key issue is to be able to identify certain areas of development where training might be useful and allocate resources for such training to meet one's objectives.

Involve communication specialists

Whilst training will help build capacity to develop effective arguments, there may be a need to involve external experts, such as translators, facilitators and/or communication specialists in certain situations. Indeed, the expert on an issue or an argument may not always be the best to communicate or disseminate the argument. Knowing when and for what purposes to involve communication specialists will therefore be important, will require critical reflexion on one's strengths and weaknesses, and will be based on learning experiences.

References

[1] UNDP Practice Note: Capacity Development. http://www.unpcdc.org/media/8651/pn_capacity_development.pdf

[2] Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi Targets. "Living in Harmony with Nature" <https://www.cbd.int/doc/strategic-plan/2011-2020/Aichi-Targets-EN.pdf>

[3] European Union Committee of the Regions. 2014. Multi-level governance of our natural capital: local and subnational governments' contribution to the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020 and the Aichi

Biodiversity Targets. <http://cor.europa.eu/en/documentation/brochures/Documents/Multilevel%20governance%20of%20our%20natural%20capital/2299-Brochure-Biodiversity.pdf>

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[5] Marzano, M., Carss, D.N & Bell, S. 2006. Working to make interdisciplinarity work: investing in communication and interpersonal relationships. Journal of Agricultural economics, 57 (2): 185-197.

Looking for more information on effective arguments for biodiversity?

For more BESAFE results, including separate briefs focusing on other case studies and various aspects of argumentation, see <http://www.besafe-project.net> and BESAFE toolkit <http://tool.besafe-project.net>.

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The **BESAFE** project is an interdisciplinary research project funded under the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme, contract number: 282743.