

How do we learn – by accident, by default, as obligation?

Or do we learn intentionally – *learning by design*?

Can learning actually be designed?

Doesn't that make learning really rigid and linear?

*Learning by Design* is me, myself and I – a web of ideas, a registered company, a network of associates, a diversity of tasks. All bundled around a singularity of intention: working with organisations and people who are passionate about social justice and sustainability to learn our way towards healthier and fairer futures.

Working under this company name since 1999, I have received many questions from development-oriented organisations based in all parts of the world. And we have worked together to find pragmatic answers.

A few examples of *question askers* who have come to me and what emerged are listed below.

**IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), 2000.** Can you help us support the projects we fund to manage for impact with a core set of principles, concepts, methodological options and examples of good practice?

I co-authored '[Managing for Impact in Rural Development: a Guide for Project M&E](#)'.

**RIMISP (Latin American Centre for Rural Development), Chile. 2008 to date.** Can you develop and implement a process for understanding emergent change for a large scale applied research and policy influencing program on equitable rural development?

Currently I work (part-time) as M&E coordinator of the [Rural Territorial Dynamics Program](#) across Latin America

**CIFOR (Center for International Forestry Research), Indonesia.** How can monitoring be an effective tool in participatory resource management?

Experiences from 11 countries in Africa, Asia and South America are analysed in [Negotiated Learning: Collaborative Monitoring for Forest Resource Management](#).

**Oxfam-Novib, HIVOS, Cordaid, and Plan International** asked what the relevance and quality is of their policies and strategies to strengthen civil society participation, particularly in (post)conflict contexts.

With the then International Agricultural Centre, Institute of Development Studies and International Centre for Participation Studies, a [five country study](#) was conducted.

*Questions I have asked myself* over time and sought insights on include the following.



How can supposedly 'participatory' processes of planning and learning acknowledge gender differences and be more inclusive?

[The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development](#)

How do you assess social change? Is it any different than any other kind of change process? If so, why and how?

Discussions were held and [documented](#) with a group of reflective practitioners from 2004-2006.

How can we understand 'power' in a practical way so that it improves our strategic decisions? And how can power analysis be facilitated creatively, intellectually and transformatively?

Much material was developed in workshops with Jethro Pettit of the Institute of Development Studies, and has informed this great website on power analysis. [Powercube.net](#)

"Without surprise,  
learning does not  
expand the boundaries  
of understanding."

Lee1999:4

Commonsense says that monitoring systems should be able to provide feedback that can help correct ineffective actions. But practice shows that when dealing with complex rural development issues that involve collaborative action by a changing configuration of stakeholders, monitoring practice often falls short of its potential. How can we understand and design monitoring

processes that foster learning in concerted action that seeks more equitable and sustainable forms of development?

Written up as '*Seeking Surprise: Rethinking monitoring for collective learning in rural resource management*' my [PhD thesis](#) (2008).