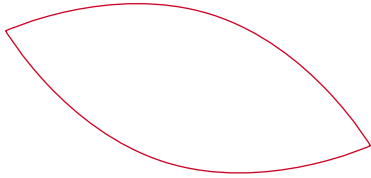


HUMANITY • FUTURE POSSIBILITIES • ENGAGEMENT
COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE • INNOVATION • WHOLENESS

Elisabeth Kühn



COLLABORATION FOR THE SDGS

*THE SET UP OF THE NEBHANA WATER
FORUM IN TUNISIA*



COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP STUDIES - VOLUME 4



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Executive summary

Volume 4 of the Collective Leadership Series focuses on the challenge of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. The SDGs provide a demanding set of aspirations for global development and aim for nothing less than to 'shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path'¹. The goals range from ending poverty and providing resilient livelihoods to clean water and sanitation, from responsible consumption and production to promoting partnerships as a means to the SDGs' implementation. Each of the goals presents a complex challenge on its own, and each is revealed to reside within much greater complexity by their interconnectedness to all the other goals. The SDGs cannot be achieved if projects address singular goals in an isolated manner in an attempt to reduce the complexity of the issues. Rather, **an approach is needed that respects the complexity and interconnectedness of the SDGs** and provides powerful and adaptive tools for all steps along the way.

The Collective Leadership Institute worked together with the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) to shift a **dysfunctional water management system in Tunisia's agrarian heartland** towards sustainability and resilience. It was an issue squarely within the frame of SDG 6, namely to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. In the Governorate of Kairouan in central Tunisia, the water resources have dropped to an alarming level, leading to water cuts in the long summer period, and acutely endangering the predominant source of livelihoods of the region – agriculture.

The need for sustainable water management was at the heart of many hopes and aspirations for Kairouan's future. It touched the wish for resilient livelihoods for its population and a valorisation of the local agriculture as a traditional economic sector. Longer and hotter summer periods as a result of climate change ask for **a holistic and varied adjustment of social and economic structures and interactions**, in order to create a strong perspective for the region.

In the fragile time after the revolution, Tunisia faces **recurring instability and transition challenges towards a democracy**. The issue of a dysfunctional water management system was aggravated by a conflict between the administration responsible for the allocation of water and the farmers of the region. They had come to a deep stand-off about the origins of the issue and how to address it, a separation aggravated by deep **mutual distrust** and an imbalance of power between them.

In this context, **CLI set up a dialogue platform, the Nebhana Water Forum**, in order to bring farmers and the water administration together to jointly develop measures for a better regional water management system. For the facilitation of this collaboration, CLI used a tailored combination of both of its core approaches, the Dialogic Change Model (DCM) and the Collective Leadership Compass. Both of these tools stress **a consistent systemic perspective that allows for holding the complexity and interconnectedness of issues present**. The combination of these tools to address sustainable development issues, such as water management, agricultural development, and inclusive institutions, fosters the emergence of an ideal mindset to facilitate collaboration for

¹ See

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

the SDGs. **The process is an exemplary case of how the DCM and the Compass complement each other** and together provide flexible and effective tools to bring about collaboration for the SDGs.

The specific experience of setting up the Water Forum in Kairouan offers three **key insights**: first, a combination of process tools and a focus on promoting core human competencies bring about the **mindset shift** that SDG implementation aims for. All activities need to pay equal attention to the process of realising an SDG initiative and to the presence of key human competencies like the capacity for collective intelligence along this process. Second, **good dialogue leads to the recognition of the need to change, the power to change, and the need to act**. Disinterest and unwillingness to recognise one's own role in having brought about a problem is as great an obstacle to change initiatives as any of the other challenges. Dialogue, if well facilitated, can lead to a shift in perspective and attitude in these matters. Third, **empowerment of marginalised groups pays off**, even in such a seemingly technical context like water management. In the beginning, the farmers were an

unstructured and heterogeneous group, without a joint vision or proposition on how to improve water management. A careful engagement process of the farmers supported them in developing their own voice, and ended up being the catalyst for the entire process of setting up the Water Forum.

Section 1 outlines the challenges particular to the water conflict in Kairouan and the relevant SDGs. **Section 2** shows how the Compass for Collective Leadership was first used to clarify and analyse the complexity of the challenges in this context. **Section 3** shows how the Dialogic Change Model was adjusted to the particular needs of the collaborative process and the objective of the Water Forum, and how the analysis of the Compass was subsequently integrated in the application of the Dialogic Change Model to provide guidance for every step. Finally, **section 4** summarizes the new Water Forum dialogue structure that was successfully set up as a result, and its contribution to the implementation of several SDGs.

The Nebhana Water Forum in Kairouan: Its challenges and the SDGs

Tunisia has very limited water resources. Most of this available water, 82 per cent, is used by the agriculture sector. Presently in Tunisia, **overall water demand is increasing**, driven by population growth, greater per capita consumption, and significantly higher temperatures². In order

to deal with this supply challenge, the Tunisian government is currently developing a **national strategy for Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM)**. The objective is to promote the coordinated development and management of water, land, and related resources, in order to improve economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the

² See Ben Boubaker, Benzarti, & Hénia, 2003; p. 23.

sustainability of vital ecosystems. The three pillars of IWRM are ecological sustainability, economic efficiency, and social equity. In order to build these pillars, **the Tunisian water sector needs to move towards an enabling environment** of appropriate policies, strategies, legislation, and institutionalized stakeholder consultation structures. Hence, the successful implementation of IWRM **requires not only a technical but also an institutional approach** to ensure that water resources are used more efficiently.

The management of water resources as a common good presents well known dilemmas. Individual, selfish use of the available good will have negative consequences for everyone dependent on it. In Tunisia the water resources have, until now, been regulated by the central government via a quota system. Since the revolution in 2011, the shortcomings of this approach have been highlighted by the sharp increase in drilling of illegal wells, mainly by farmers whose livelihoods are inextricably tied to seasonal access to adequate, clean water. This undermining of the existing system of allocation could no longer be controlled via fines, and the legal consequences for such transgressions could no longer be guaranteed. The **overexploitation led to a rapid depletion of existing groundwater resources** such that **water cuts** started to dominate the summer months. It also greatly increased the risk that the remaining water would be polluted by saltwater intrusion from the coast. The situation as of the end of 2016 represented **a threat to the livelihoods of the agriculturally dominated regions** of the country.

In order to support local actors in developing a better water management strategy and improving local living conditions, the Collective Leadership

Institute collaborated with the German Development Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ) to set up a regional dialogue structure among all stakeholders in the pilot region of **Sbikha**, in the Governorate of **Kairouan**. These pilot experiences might then provide a template for the development of a nationwide approach.

Sbikha is almost exclusively dominated by agriculture and so **the main water users are farmers**. There is very limited rain-fed agriculture in Sbikha; the majority of farmers rely solely on groundwater supplies, while the remainder draws water from the Nebhana Dam. The Ministry of Agriculture, responsible for the allocation of water resources, has a regional branch in Kairouan and a local branch in the town of Sbikha. Especially in comparison with the public sector, **the farmers are a marginalized and disorganized group of stakeholders**. While small farmer associations of a semi-public character exist, their function is exclusively tied to water allocation issues on the most local level, and the relationship between associations and farmers is marred by deep distrust. Communication and exchange among the approximately 11 farmer associations in the region of Sbikha does not exist. At the time of the beginning of the project in 2015, **the farmers were not organised enough to join a structured dialogue process as a coherent group** with clearly defined interests, positions, aspirations, and communication networks. Nor did they have the resources to establish an organisational level even remotely comparable to the public administration's.

These differences in organization and power between farmers and administration accentuated the stand-off that characterized the initial situation. In CLI's first discussions and exchanges with the farmers, they clearly stated that the water shortage was the unique responsibility of the administration.

The farmers also pointed out that the process of legally applying for a well permit was long and cumbersome, while the need for water was urgent. They clearly demanded that the administration adheres to its obligations of ensuring adequate water supply for their farms. Their position was in line with their experiences with a state-directed economy and an authoritarian system. This **culture of demand**, nurtured for at least two generations, **obscured any consciousness of shared responsibility towards water as a common good**.

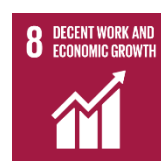
On the other hand, the administration steadfastly maintained that the exclusive responsibility for the overexploitation and water shortage laid with the farmers, who drilled a multitude of illegal wells and managed, in the few years since the revolution, to severely deplete the region's groundwater. **For the administration, the issue was therefore about adherence to the law**: if farmers respected the public quota of allocated water and stopped circumventing it via the illegal wells, the situation would improve and the sustainability of the resources would be restored. The very application of the law, however, proved to be a crux in the matter. **Following the revolution, the distrust between these groups achieved new heights**. An initial divide stemming from class consciousness between administration and farmers was widened following the revolution. Mutual distrust and, in the case of the administration, fear of the farmers was so strong that representatives from the regional administrative branch in Kairouan initially refused to visit the farmers and the local branch in Sbikha. The existing water management system was broken. In addition, the lack of opportunity in agriculture made it easier for terrorist groups to recruit young men from agrarian regions like Kairouan, making Tunisia the

largest supplier of ISIS recruits in Syria.³ It became clear that working toward viable livelihoods both in agriculture and in other sectors could provide important alternatives to extremism.

In this context, the task of CLI was to build a dialogue platform, namely a regional Water Forum, that could bring together farmers and administrators, build trusting relationships, and, together, constructively address **Sustainable Development Goal 6 on ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water (and sanitation)**. In line with the interconnected nature of the SDGs and CLI's holistic approach to sustainability challenges, the present situation also involved the following SDGs:



SDG 2: Zero Hunger - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. Sustainable water management, especially in an agrarian region, cannot be separated from sustainable agriculture. They are mutually dependent and connect to the encompassing IWRM approach.



SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth - Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. As sustainable water resource management and the agrarian livelihoods in Sbikha are so intricately connected, neither can be improved efficiently in

³ See e.g. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-tunisia-became-a-top-source-of-isis-recruits-1456396203>

isolation. Economic viability is a central pillar of IWRM.



SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. Both the quantity of water used and the ends to which it is employed are equally important when sustainable water management is the goal.



SDG 13: Climate Action - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. The increasing variability of rainfall into the basin above the Nebhana Dam means a lower supply of water for farmer associations connected to the irrigation infrastructure. Furthermore, the increase in water consumption is a direct reaction to the significant increase in heat waves in the region that are the result of climate change.



SDG 15: Life on Land - Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss. The adoption of IWRM in the agricultural region of Sbikha demands a system of water allocation and water use that respects the prevailing ecological systems and

addresses the rising desertification threatening more and more regions in Tunisia.



SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The issues of Good Governance underlying the stand-off between the administration and water users, most apparent in the lack of dialogue and opportunities for participation in the governance of water management, are a strong undercurrent that prevents the system from being sustainable.



SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. In order to bring about change around all of the SDGs, actors are required to radically shift their way of thinking, acting and working together. The Water Forum was envisioned to provide room for exchange, learning, and to explore options for a different way of collaboration to achieve sustainable water management.

The Challenges according to the Collective Leadership Compass

Following the DCM, the first Phase in the process of setting up a dialogue between stakeholders is to (1) understand the context, (2) create resonance, and (3) build a container, i.e. a small group of dedicated change agents from the variety of stakeholders. To understand the context is a primary step of the DCM. During this step, **the Compass was instrumental in uncovering the layers of and interconnectedness within the challenging context** in which the Water Forum was to be set up:

a. **Future Possibilities: How to create resonance for the need to dialogue?**

Both the water users and the administration were wary of the dialogic approach of CLI and of the Water Forum. Naturally, the administration in particular was apprehensive of setting up any permanent dialogue structure that might result in a loss of authority on their side.

b. **Engagement: How to include the water users?**

Any successful dialogue and collaboration effort for sustainability needs to be built with the inclusion of all key actors, including the target group. Dialogue between stakeholders thrives in a space of mutual trust and belonging for each group, where identities, diverse interests, and common goals can emerge. However, their geographical dispersion and their lack of identity as a whole marked farmers as a

group whose inclusion in dialogue would prove difficult. This could manifest in simple matters such as farmers using access to a basin in the south did not feel their problems were connected to those receiving their water from a dam in the north.

c. **Collective Intelligence: How to launch dialogue between distrustful and averse groups?**

The stand-off between the water users and administration was clear from the beginning. They blamed each other for the ongoing problem; neither trusted the personal integrity – an important cultural factor – or the technical expertise of the other group. Each claimed to have the ‘real’ problem and solution figured out. A fragmented ego-system needed to be shifted to a collaborative ecosystem.

d. **Humanity: How to ensure the necessary empathy for constructive dialogue in a class-conscious society?**

This aspect aggravated the problem identified on Collective Intelligence. The class consciousness added to the divide between both stakeholder groups and added to the existing wall of distrust. The ability and willingness to put oneself in the other’s position, however, is essential to a constructive dialogue, especially when dealing with issues concerning a common good, which require a high level of trust and shared responsibility.

e. Wholeness: How to shift the mindset to the common good of water, to the larger picture?

The particular interests of each stakeholder group needed to be expanded to include the larger goal of ensuring the protection of the remaining resources for the good of all and their sustainable management for future generations. The goal of better water management needs to be put in context by recognizing its connections to climate change, sustainable agriculture, gender equality, and participative government processes in the wake of building a new democratic

government. In short, it asks for each stakeholder group to be aware of the connection of IWRM to the SDGs that surround it.

f. Innovation: How to create space for innovative solutions?

The challenge CLI faced was one of complex change: To build a dialogue structure, the Water Forum, in a distrustful and socially divided context, with one stakeholder group marginalised and unorganised. Both groups claimed to have the solution to the problem. A space for the emergence of shared problem definitions and new solutions was urgently needed.

Adaptation of the Dialogic Change Model and guidance via the Compass

The Compass provided CLI with a more detailed understanding of the situation. It also helped to dissect the intricate and interdependent layers of aspects that comprised the challenge. At the same time, **the Compass did not reduce the complexity of the challenge to a 'simple', linear problem-solution definition.** Rather, it helped to keep in sight the interdependence of the challenges to sustainability in this context and the need to pay attention to all dimensions - if not at the same time, then at least in close succession.

In a first step, the Compass provided the concrete assistance to adapt the DCM to the local context in Sbikha. **CLI differentiated the first Phase of Exploring and Engaging into three stages: Preparation for Dialogue, Transversal Dialogue, and Mixed Dialogue.** In each stage, due

attention could be paid to the three important aspects of Phase 1: Understand the context, create resonance and build a container for change. Dividing Phase 1 in three stages provided the opportunity to pay attention to the layer of challenges that the Compass analysis had revealed. The DCM has the necessary versatility for adaptation to local needs. Its flexible 'translation' to real, concrete collaboration problems shows its intuitive centre.

Below, this connection is illustrated by the development of the Water Forum in the three stages of Phase 1, together with their connection to the dimensions of the Compass that each stage addresses.

THE FIRST STAGE OF PHASE 1 - PREPARATION FOR DIALOGUE: FOCUSING ON FUTURE POSSIBILITIES, WHOLENESS, AND ENGAGEMENT

This stage of a preparation for dialogue was necessary mainly because of the **lack of structure and organisation** among the water users in the region. CLI had a sequence of meetings with small groups of overall about 400 water users – farmers – of the region. These first, very informal meetings provided the opportunity to analyse the needs, interests, and positions of the target group.

To begin with, resonance for the idea of the Water Forum needed to be built, i.e. the notion to address water management issues via a dialogue with the administration. Equally important, however, was to give the water users the opportunity to voice their opinions, ideas, and assessment of the issues with the current water management.

To **give a space to voices, interests, and positions without judgement** is a vital pillar of successful dialogue, and at the same time a highly efficient way to build stakeholder enthusiasm for the larger idea of using dialogue as a means to address sustainability problems.

It was important for CLI to refrain from pushing the dialogue towards a constructive exchange too early, and to remain in its role as a neutral facilitator of the process. **Engagement for the dialogue itself was primary to introducing any constructive discussion** about concrete measures for better water management. It was exactly this suspension of judgement or a push for a particular position that secured the water users' engagement and motivation for the dialogue. It also provided the necessary space for the emergence of a sense of Wholeness, i.e. sustainability and the intuitive connection to the other SDGs.

While still in small groups, in recurring meetings, the water users appreciated the



Source: GIZ

Source: GIZ

connection to the larger context of sustainability, which had an increasingly prominent presence. The informal meetings of this nature therefore ensured the emergence of a resonance for the dialogic approach and for the idea of the Water Forum, as well as stronger clarity of the Water Forum's goal of better – and sustainable – water management. In addition, the water users recognised their need to organise in order to enter in a structured and constructive dialogue with the administration. They decided to **mandate representatives** from each small region that ended up forming a group of about 100 farmers. They called themselves the **network of water users from Sbikha (le réseau des usagers)**. They even developed their first ideas about short-term measures, as well as core principles for better water management.

At first glance, the **administration** did not need as much attention to prepare for dialogue, as they were already an organised group with established communication patterns. CLI talked to about 200 representatives from the responsible administration – the Ministry of Agriculture – at the national, regional, and local levels, but the engagement process was much slower with this stakeholder group. While they were open to the idea of the Water Forum, they **focused on the need of the farmers to 'see sense'** and adhere to the quotas of water allocation instead of using water from the illegal wells.

While the administration's engagement was therefore much lower compared to the water users, the resonance for the process of a Water Forum nevertheless existed. Both parties were committed to the Water Forum, even though the goal of convincing the other group of their faults during the dialogue was still the prevalent motivation for each.

This stage gave CLI the opportunity to address three challenges identified within

the dimensions from the Compass: **Future Possibilities** (ensure goal clarity and resonance for the Water Forum), **Engagement** (give space to a shared identity and connect the unorganised farmers), and **Wholeness** (create resonance not only for better water management, but a sustainable one) were all present and addressed at this stage. Not all of these dimensions were equally present with both stakeholder groups, and neither could they be checked off a simple to do list. But vital progress was made on all accounts. The informal exchanges also allowed CLI to make a thorough stakeholder analysis, the first step in creating a container for change in this process. This analysis revealed that, unfortunately, the civil society sector in the region was very interested in joining the process, but stated that their capacities were too small for them to provide any significant support to the process in this first Phase.

THE SECOND STAGE OF PHASE 1 - TRANSVERSAL DIALOGUE: A CONTINUED FOCUS ON COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE, INNOVATION, AND WHOLENESS

The Transversal Dialogue is a dialogue **internal to each stakeholder group**, so an exchange just between either water users or administration employees in this case. The water users met in their new network of 100 representatives. For logistical reasons, their

dialogic capacities and collaboration in a contextualised manner.

The meetings promoted understanding among the water users and gave room to build the important **social capital** of this marginalized group. They also provided a **space for learning**, where innovative and experimental ideas about how to improve water management in the region could be proposed and developed. These important meetings helped to create a **space of belonging and solidify an identity and, furthermore, a vision for the future of**



Source: GIZ

first ideas on problem analysis and proposed solutions from the preparation phase were separated into **four thematic areas**. The network subsequently met in those thematic groups to develop the propositions. This approach allowed the water users to work in a constructive way, and at the same time offered CLI the opportunity to **integrate training** on

the region. The vision was memorialized in a picture that was developed in cooperation with a local artist.

Wholeness was also improved during this preparation for dialogue. The water users' ideas for better water management had already started to include a certain degree of sustainability. This development was then deepened: **the ideas clearly started to**

move from conditioned propositions (like the constitutional right to access to water that had to be ensured by the administration) **to measures that reflected the recognition of their own role and responsibility in the issue.** A change in agriculture for example, became a centrepiece of detailed measures. The voluntary change from water-intensive agricultural products, like citrus fruits and melons, to those that can be grown with

power to contribute to the change, and eventually the urgency of the need to act.

In order to address the problem of illegal drilling, the water users collected data to form an inventory of all water points – legal or illegal – in the region. This inventory provided the **first quantitative data on the existing water access points in the region since the revolution in 2011.** The data was collected with the intention to give the



Source: GIZ

significantly less water, like olives and arboriculture, was a strong sign: the water users had become aware of their own role and responsibility in changing the current situation towards a more sustainable future. Furthermore, they started to extend the range of their proposed measures to include matters of sustainable economic growth, development of the agricultural sector in the region, and ensuring a stable income from farming. The dialogue helped the water users to recognize the need to change, their

upcoming exchange with the administration a more factual basis. The action represented an **unprecedented move by the water users of extending trust towards the administration.**

Both this inventory and the constructive work on measures for better water management – then grouped in measures for short-term improvement and a Water Charter for Sbikha, outlining principles and guidance for long-term sustainable water management - were the key instruments to

fully engage the administration in the dialogue. Presented with this collected work from the water users, the administration was positively pushed into action and to follow up on their commitment to the Water Forum. With **inspiration from the measures proposed by the water users and the results of the inventory on water points, the administration developed its own propositions** for measures to improve the local water management. It is important to note here that the administration took

This highlights a central lesson learnt during this process: **Empowerment of marginalized groups pays off in many ways.** Concepts of collaborative ecosystems have already outlined on a theoretical level how the empowerment of vulnerable groups and stakeholders is not only an ethical requirement, but that **empowered stakeholders also have an essential role in the vitality of the system.** This experience gives evidence to this assessment. The process of setting up the



Source: GIZ

comparatively very little time to mirror the change of attitude that the water users had undergone. They moved away from their unilateral viewpoint that a simple adherence to the existing water policies (i.e. the respect for the water quotas and the legal access points to water) would solve the problem. Instead, their ideas focused on supporting some of the measures proposed by the water users with a reward system, for example.

Water Forum in Sbikha went beyond a simple bottom-up and participative approach. It not only included the marginalized target group, but gave them the space to develop their ideas for the Water Forum and empower them to be on equal footing with the administration in the dialogue. In addition, the innovation and engagement present in this transversal dialogue of the water users developed such a catalytic force that it drew in the hitherto hesitant administration. Contrary to a

common assessment, the empowerment of the water users did not create an antagonistic and potentially destructive force. Instead, the example of this process shows that **trust in the transformative and collaborative potential of empowerment processes is a key element** in dialogue and collaboration for the SDGs.

resonance, and build a Container – both understanding of the problem and resonance for dialogue were deepened in this stage. From the water user network and the local and regional administration, potential members for the initial container began to emerge from the groups.



Source: GIZ

In this second stage of Phase 1, Exploring and Engaging, CLI therefore improved the dialogue on the dimension of **Wholeness** (the water users connected their issue to the wider aspects of sustainable development and other SDGs), **Collective Intelligence** (establish a space for shared understanding, learning, identity, and social capital among stakeholder groups, in particular among the target group of water users), and **Innovation** (use space of dialogue for the development of creative measures). As pertains to the central tenets of Phase 1 in the DCM – understand the context, create

THE THIRD STAGE OF PHASE 1 - MIXED DIALOGUE: INTENSIFYING THE FOCUS ON HUMANITY AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

As both water users and administration employees had developed their clear propositions about how to address the issue of water management in the region, they could now start to come together in order to develop a joint plan⁴. However, it was at this point in the process that **the fear of power loss by the administration emerged stronger than ever**. The step to actually enter into the dialogue was – rightly – considered a point of no return in the process. Once a dialogue process is started, it is difficult to step out of the dynamic without angering or at least disappointing the dialogue partner. What is more, **the result of the dialogue could in no way be clearly anticipated**; both administration and water users realised more than ever at this point that dialogue processes, while certainly focused on an impact goal, have to allow the emergence of specific content and measures along the way. It was almost impossible to convince the administration that these dialogue processes as supported by CLI are not a zero sum game, where one group gains what the other loses. In this case, the administration assumed that the goal of better water management – which

⁴ The facilitation of this process by CLI paid careful attention to support a dialogue on this joint plan, meaning a **co-creational process for its development, instead of slipping into a negotiation** of the proposed measures. While dialogue aims at harvesting differences between stakeholders to jointly create a new understanding and thus new ideas from which to develop collaboration activities, negotiation intends to circumvent the differences and reach an agreement among opposing stakeholders *in spite of them*.

they certainly supported – came at the price of loss of influence and executive power on their side and a gain of local influence and even rights on the side of the water users. **The administration subsequently refused to actually meet the water user representatives in person and continue the dialogue.**

The **key success** factor of the process at this point was to **circumvent an official launch of a mixed dialogue - via a workshop on capacity training** for key representatives from both administration and water users. During this two-day event, any 'official' exchange about the way forward in the context was off the table. Instead, the focus could be shifted to **building trust and reorienting the participants to the larger picture** – the bigger issues of sustainability at hand, the connection of their efforts on matters like long-term economic viability of the region, a future for the coming generations, a future for the agriculture that defines the local identity, and finding a response to climate change, in short, all the SDGs pursued by the initiative. Supported with key elements of CLIs methodological toolbox, a unique level of trust among all roughly 40 participants emerged, which again created a **strong dynamic of engagement and motivation to pursue the goal of better water management together**. With the same stroke, the initial container of change agents for the process was created.

In the collaborative atmosphere following the training, the mixed dialogue could officially begin and the technical content proposed by both groups, the short term measures for better water management and the principles outlining the long-term strategy were jointly refined by the representatives from the water users and the administration. The final Water Charter

then expressed a shared vision for better, and sustainable, water management in the region.

'This CLI training has managed to break down the barriers between administration and water users.' (administration)

'We thought that the water was imperishable and always available. With this dialogue, we have understood that we are in danger of losing our access to water [...] the dialogue has changed mentalities.' (water user)

he **collaborative dynamic established between the participants of the mixed dialogue was so creative and strong that in the short time of two months, they developed a comprehensive proposal for**

a continued dialogue structure - the Nebhana Water Forum structure - that was envisioned by the project. This structure was named the Coordination Committee of Sbikha, and was assigned the responsibility for both the monitoring and evaluation of the proposed measures as well as the continued development of the next steps outlined by the principles of the Water Charter. The container of water users and administration in the mixed dialogue developed a detailed organisational chart for the Committee, outlining the role of every sub-group of actors - regional groups of water users, the different departments of the administration and the water user network at large. What is more, together **they designed and agreed on its financing structure**, a key issue and often a contentious aspect for such structures that is nevertheless vital for its continued existence and sustainability. In this third stage of Phase 1 of the Dialogic Change Model, the three aspects of shared understanding of the context, resonance, and building a container for change **developed into a strong enough**



foundation⁵ to continue with Phase 2.

This assessment was visible during the first public event, the Water Forum, in the region. The two stakeholder groups used the event as an opportunity to transition into Phase 2⁶. The Water Charter was refined in such a way as to present a format that reflected unanimously shared common goals. At the event of the Forum itself, **the Charter was presented in its final form, an official agreement or road map for the continued collaboration of water users and the administration. It was signed publicly** by key representatives from the water users and administration, and **even gained the official approval of the Minister of Agriculture**, who was present at the event. The Charter had a **strong symbolic force** for the shared trust and the engagement of both stakeholder groups. Its signature reflects **a moral contract** between water users and the administration to commit to the collaborative dialogue process addressing sustainable water management and the other Sustainable Development Goals that the stakeholders connected to the issue. In addition, the detailed plan for the Coordination Committee was also presented publicly at the Forum. The Charter and the plan for the Committee represent the first instances of clarifying

common goals and resources, a key element of Phase 2 in the Dialogic Change Model. Likewise, the agreed-on measures for short- and medium-term relief to the overused water resources in the region are elements of the third element of the Phase, planning the future together.

In this final step of Phase 1 – and the transition of the process to Phase 2 – the focus of CLI's support was therefore on the Compass dimensions of **Humanity** (promote an understanding and respect of each other's differences between the water users and administration, and overcome recent and traditional patterns of distrust) and **Future Possibilities** (create a common understanding of the goal and impact that both stakeholder groups want to achieve, develop a strong partnering structure in the Coordination Committee, and ensure accountability to the agreed on goals and activities via the public commitment to the developed measures and principles).

⁵ A crucial characteristic of Phase 1 is its continuity, an important success factor for dialogue processes with the Dialogic Change Model. Phase 1 can never be considered completed or finished. Instead, activities of exploring and engaging have to be continued throughout Phase 2 to 4 in order to maintain the vital basis of the process and to ensure its impact.

⁶ The support given by CLI to the project was limited to an 18 month period, during which the activities were temporarily suspended due to security issues in the region. In this time period, the dialogue process could only advance to Phase 2, and it is for this reason that the present analysis is restricted to these parts of the Dialogic Change Model.

The results

This experience of facilitating the set-up of the Water Forum in Kairouan therefore led to three key insights for the realisation of the SDG goals. **First, empowerment of a marginalised stakeholder group pays off in often unexpected ways**, even in often seemingly technical contexts like water management, where solutions tend to be resolved by technical ‘experts’, and the people concerned by the problem at hand are only included or even consulted at a later stage. Supporting the farmers to develop their own voice as a group was a key success factor in developing the first ideas for concrete solutions to the water management problem. What was more, the collaborative dynamic and the engagement for finding a sustainable solution developed to such a strong constructive and inclusive level that it managed to engage a previously reluctant and fearful public administration into the process. A careful division of the DCM’s first Phase of Exploring and Engaging into three different steps and a particular

focus on the Compass dimensions of Engagement and Wholeness proved to be the crucial methods to achieve this feature.

Second, this process showed that **careful dialogue facilitation with the methods of the DCM and the help of the Compass dimensions can lead to the recognition of the need to change, the power to change, and the need to act**. In collaborative processes, especially those that target complex goals like the SDGs, this mindset shift is crucial to achieve change. The combination of the DCM and the focus on the Compass dimensions of Humanity, Future Possibilities, and Collective Intelligence supported both the farmers and the representatives from the public administration to realise that a change in water management was necessary, that their individual and collective action made a difference, and that the necessary change in water management needed to be brought about urgently.



Third, this example shows how the Dialogic Change Model and the Compass are powerful approaches. Efforts for any SDG implementation reveal their complex and interrelated nature. **The Dialogic Change Model and the Collective Leadership Compass are both flexible enough to adapt to the particular SDG context** – in this case, SDG 6 of Clean Water and Sanitation - **without reducing the complexity of the interconnectedness of the goals**. Taken together, they offer clear guidance for bringing about the mindset shift and collaborative action needed to address the sustainability issues at the heart of the SDGs.

Below are **excerpts from the short- and medium-term measures for better water management**, as well as the core aspects of the new **Coordination Committee** that the farmers and the public administration have developed together.⁷ In connection with the principles from the **Water Charter**, the long-term measures adopted by the farmers and the public administration show how the Water Forum dialogue structure managed to address not only SDG 6, ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water (and sanitation), but also seven other SDGs (see respective highlights where the connection to the SDGs in the Forum's results are particularly clear):

Box 1: Short- and medium-term measures:

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 1: Zero Hunger, SDG 13 – Climate Action

- Encourage farmers to pursue rain-fed agriculture
- Promote less water intensive crops
 - Offer (financial) incentives
 - Support small-scale farmers to designate small surfaces for vegetable crops in order to facilitate the transition towards less water intensive farming
- Look for alternative and non-traditional water resources
- Use alternative energy resources
- Set up a wastewater treatment plant

⁷ All results of the first Nebhana Water Forum are unofficial translations of the official Arabic versions

Box 2: Charter Excerpt

This document defines the principles and the agreements between the stakeholders... it has been developed in the framework of a participative dialogic approach. It was presented at the Water Forum in Sbikha on 24 and 25 May 2016. It was approved by those present and signed by the representatives of the water user network and the representatives of the administration as an act of engagement and commitment by the stakeholders to pursue this approach of dialogue and collaboration.

[...]

Convinced of

- The need to reduce the water consumption in order to re-establish the balance between supply and demand
- The appropriation of a participative management system so as to guarantee the balance and sustainability of the resource and to avoid the depletion of the water resources

[...]

The stakeholders ratify and adopt the following principles:

- The right to water is guaranteed by the constitution
- Water is a public and national common good. Its preservation and economy of its use are the responsibility of all
- Adopt a dialogue between administration and water users as principle of water resource management (SDG 17 – Partnerships for the goals)

The stakeholders undertake to:

- Pursue the common effort to structural dialogue and to create the 'Coordination Committee for Participative Water Management in Sbikha' (SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)
- Charge the Committee to redistribute, in an equitable manner, the water resources in Sbikha, and to monitor its distribution within the range of the fixed quota
- Promote irrigation techniques that support low water consumption

Box 3: Principles of the Coordination Committee:

- Respect the Water Charta and continue the dialogue.
- Improve and continue the awareness-raising among farmers on the importance of the water resources in order to ensure their sustainability.
- Promote the participation of beneficiaries in the management and implementation of projects related to water resources.

Tasks of the Coordination Committee

- Modify the seasonal cultivation programmes according to the available water resources
- Ensure the application of the Water Charter Principles
- Actively participate in programmes and projects for local development in the delegation [*administrative unit*] of Sbikha (SDG 8 – Decent work and economic growth and SDG 15 – Life on Land)

Annex

The Collective Leadership Compass

The Collective Leadership Compass is the tool to measure, plan, and assess the level of Collective Leadership in collaboration settings, like the Water Forum envisioned in this context. The concept of Collective Leadership is a practice-oriented approach to lead complex change in settings with several stakeholder groups and actors. The Compass provides guidance in order to navigate successful collaboration settings in an integrative, inclusive way by attending to a pattern of human competences in interaction in six dimensions. The six dimensions that need to be attended to are:

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES: Take responsibility and consciously shape reality towards a sustainable future. This gives priority attention to goal clarity, governance and accountability of the process.

HUMANITY: Reach into each other's humanness. Attention here is on an appreciative approach to all stakeholders, to a balance of power and influence, and on mutual understanding.

ENGAGEMENT: Create step-by step engagement towards building effective collaboration ecosystems. Focus points are process and relationship management and result orientation.

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE: Harvest differences for progress – this relates to attention to diversity, inclusivity and learning mechanisms.

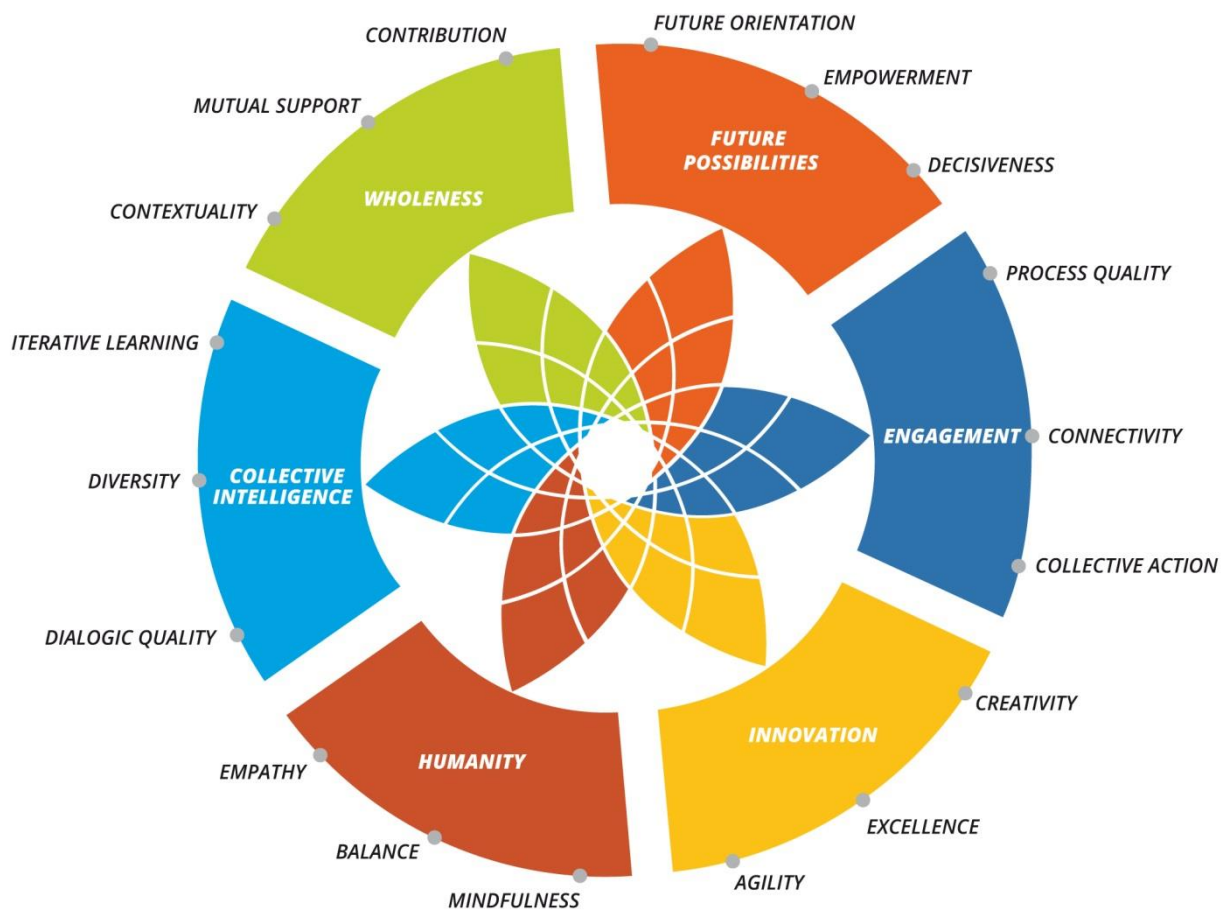
INNOVATION: Create novelty and find intelligent solutions by being open to new approaches, ensuring sufficient knowledge and expertise on the issue at hand and managing disagreements and crises with agility.

WHOLENESS: See a larger picture and stay connected to the common good. Context management, capacity development and shared value creation are the areas of attention in this dimension.

The Compass is singularly versatile in its use. While it is a tool for guidance, its design also reflects the focus of complementarity and balance of all dimensions. It is not a matter of finding the single 'defective' dimension in any dialogue process or collaboration effort. Rather, it is a question of regaining a healthy balance of all dimensions, in order to transform the process at hand into a thriving **collaboration ecosystem**: a system centred on a particular issue involving the variety of (institutional) stakeholders that complex issues like the SDGs need to engage. What distinguishes a collaboration ecosystem from other systemic perspectives on collaboration is its characteristic for maintaining its own vitality and functionality in the face of external and internal crises, of constant contact, exchange and adaptation to other ecosystems that surround it. Collaboration ecosystems are autopoietic, meaning they are capable of reproducing and maintaining themselves. They turn situational changes and challenges into learning opportunities for adaptation and development of their systemic collaboration capacity instead of imploding. The use of the Collective Leadership Compass' six dimensions ensures **the presence and upscaling of a collaboration ecosystems vitality and functionality**. The Compass' focus on simultaneous

intervention points **matches the interconnectivity of the SDGs** and significantly improves the possibilities for successful achievement of the goals

COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP COMPASS



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The Dialogic Change Model

With the challenge of building a fruitful dialogue platform that would address these eight Sustainable Development Goals in an integrated and effective manner, CLI combined its two fundamental methodological approaches - the Dialogic Change Model (DCM) and the Collective Leadership Compass. The DCM provided the guidance for the process of setting up the Water Forum, while the Compass offered analytical insights into the needs of the collaboration process at every step.

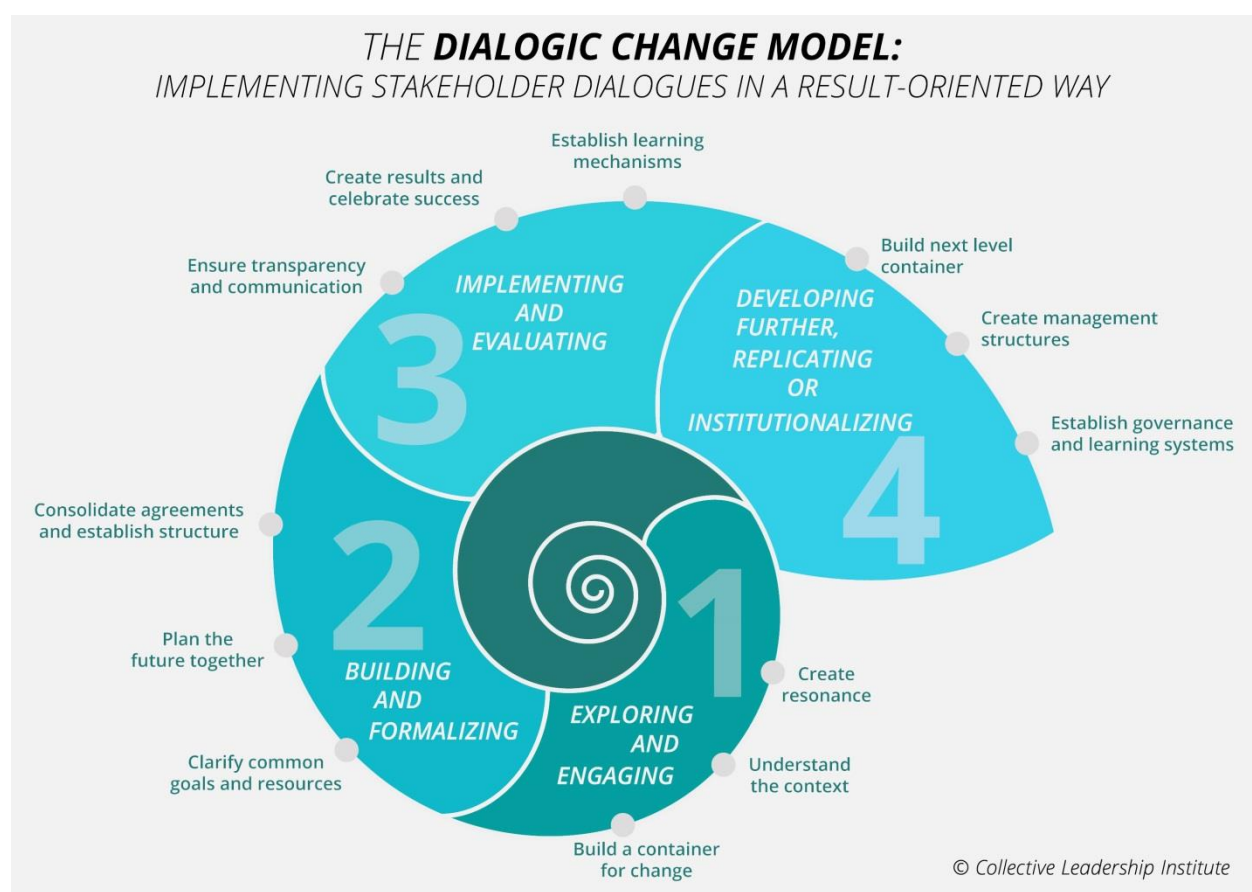
The Dialogic Change Model is CLI's tool for result-oriented, structured planning of dialogue processes involving several stakeholder groups. It differentiates the process in four Phases:

Phase 1: Exploring and Engaging

Phase 2: Building and Formalizing

Phase 3: Implementing and Evaluating

Phase 4: Developing Further, Replicating or Institutionalising



In **Phase 1, Exploring and Engaging**, core stakeholders explore the dialogue's context, thereby taking other existing initiatives and the people involved into account. This requires understanding the external circumstances, the factors that will influence the dialogue, and the dynamics of the complex system within which the Stakeholder Dialogue will take place. Talking informally to selected but relevant stakeholders and opinion leaders in this Phase can help to clarify the prospects and potential obstacles for the initiative. Central to Phase 1 is building trust, creating resonance, and building the case for dialogue and change. The quality of an engagement process

is the key element in Phase 1. Good relationship management and a broader understanding of the context are crucial. Formal structures for the Stakeholder Dialogue, agreements or defined procedures are not a priority at this point.

Phase 2, Building and Formalizing, is geared toward consolidating the system of stakeholder collaboration and formalizing the stakeholders' commitment to change. The objective of this Phase is to find an appropriate formal structure to move an initiative forward and to build a stable collaborative system for implementation. Goals are agreed upon jointly, and roles and resources are defined. This usually leads to agreements – the signing of a contract, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), a project plan, or a public address in the interest of the change endeavour. The initiative shifts to a formalized process. In more complex dialogue processes, there may also be issues of division of tasks, decision-making, resource allocation, or internal and external communication strategies.

Phase 3, Implementing and Evaluating, can be seen as the actual implementation of planned activities and includes the establishment of an internal monitoring system to ensure results and learning. Its focus is on creating visible results in a reasonable time frame so that all actors involved can see the success of the dialogue. If a dialogue process never moves past the stage of discussion and exchange of ideas, it may be a sign that the stakeholders can discuss the issue, but are not willing enough to implement actual change. However, for such dialogues to deliver, it is crucial that stakeholders perceive visible change during the dialogue process; otherwise they might lose interest in the dialogue and in implementing change. Result orientation is a key factor for success. The complexity of a process often becomes evident during this phase, sometimes in the form of a crisis. Crisis symptoms may include criticism from external parties, counter initiatives, or endless non-productive discussions. The more stable and trusting the relationships that have been created in Phase 1 and 2, the better such phases of instability can be overcome.

Once a dialogue process has reached the agreed-upon results at the beginning of **Phase 4**, the question remains whether an initiative should stop there, or whether it should be further developed. If the desired goal has been achieved, success should be adequately celebrated: participation and contributions of individual stakeholder groups should be acknowledged and appreciated. Many dialogues terminate successfully after Phase 3. Some dialogue processes may want to consolidate their outcomes into sustainable structures. This may mean scaling the endeavour up, replicating it at another location, integrating a new issue, or further institutionalising the dialogue on a more formal level. The goals of Phase 4 differ from dialogue to dialogue; for example, they can be institutionalising a successful dialogue form or using the experience gathered in the dialogue in another process. If conducted correctly, a dialogue process can ultimately ease the implementation processes and help attain sustainable results, as actors will begin to shift their perspective on the issue at hand.

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About the author



Elisabeth Kühn is an experienced international project manager in sustainable natural resource management and integration of marginalized communities. Having worked extensively on informal sector integration as well as environmental issues in Tunisia and the MENA region, she joined the CLI to support its project on the Water Forum in Tunisia. Following its huge success, she now develops CLIs strategy on projects in the region, and facilitates in particular all French speaking courses.

About the Collective Leadership Institute

The Collective Leadership Institute is an internationally operating non-profit organisation located in Potsdam (Germany) and Cape Town (South Africa) with focus on educational programmes in the area of Collective Leadership and Stakeholder Dialogues.

We offer capacity building for sustainable approaches to stakeholder dialogues, provide process consultancy, research, and build networks and communities. In Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, we work with leaders, project managers, and change agents from the private sector, the public sector, and civil society. We support and empower them to create and implement collaborative change initiatives for innovative and sustainable solutions to global, societal and local challenges.

We specialise in large-scale change processes around sustainability with a focus on transformation through high-quality stakeholder engagement and with Collective Leadership as our core methodology.

The Collective Leadership Institute is a cutting-edge organization with deep expertise in bringing emerging paradigm leadership concepts to multi-stakeholder processes and projects in support of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This work is vitally important to the long-term flourishing of the human family, as well as serving the preservation of life and its beauty on planet earth.

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