

World Café: A key method to link disciplines in international research

Katharina Löhr¹, Michael Weinhardt², Stefan Sieber¹

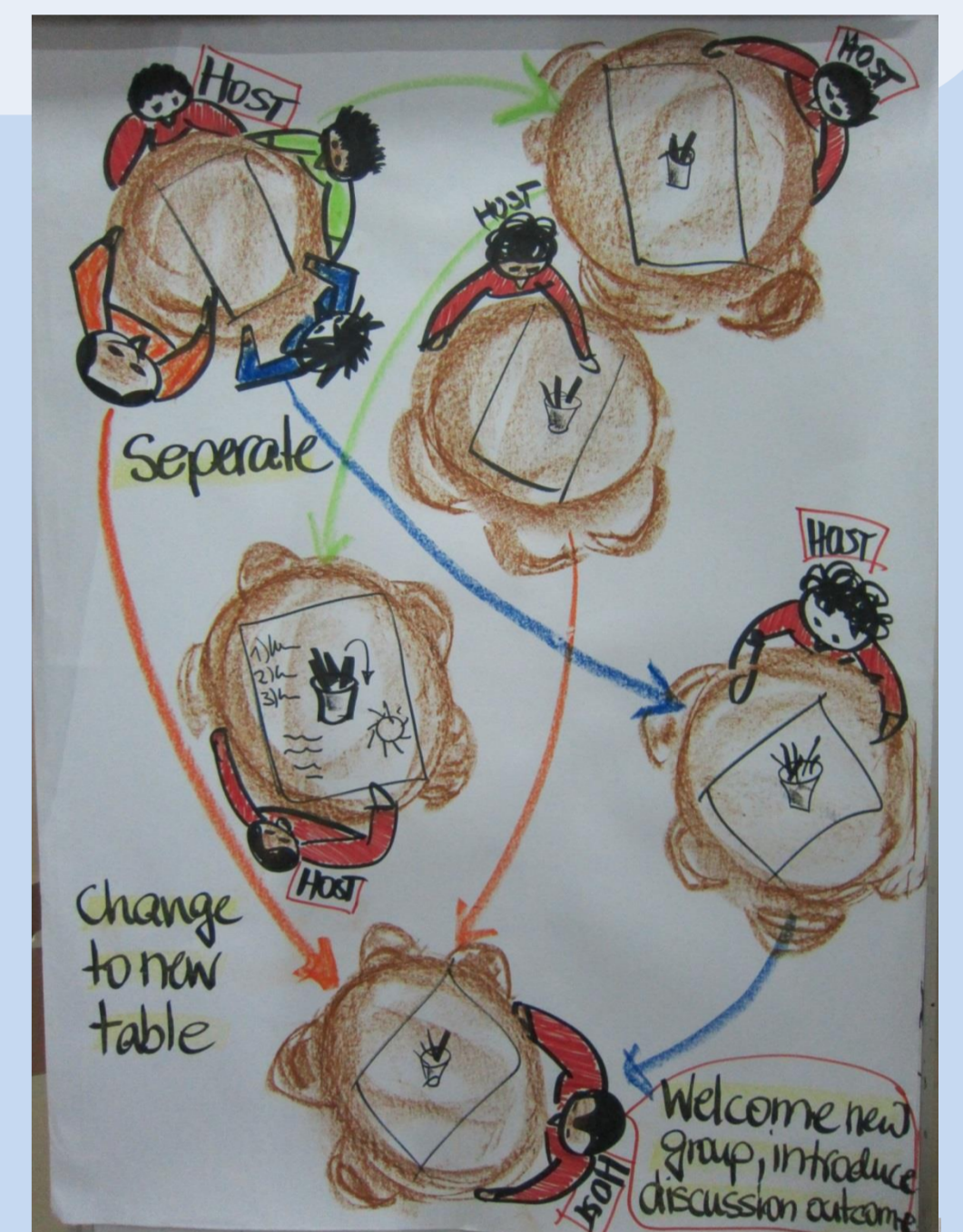


Introduction & Research Question

- Integrating the knowledge and skills of scientists of multiple disciplines, institutes and cultures and a high level of stakeholder involvement has become everyday practice in research on food security or climate change adaptations.
- We introduce the 'World Café' as a participatory method of data collection for a large group of participants to facilitate knowledge exchange between scientists and/or stakeholders.
- The 'World Café' is widely used as an assessment tool in community development and organizational change processes but has not found its way into standard text-books of qualitative research.
- Is the World Café a suitable method to collect qualitative data, especially in comparison to individual interviews and focus group discussions?

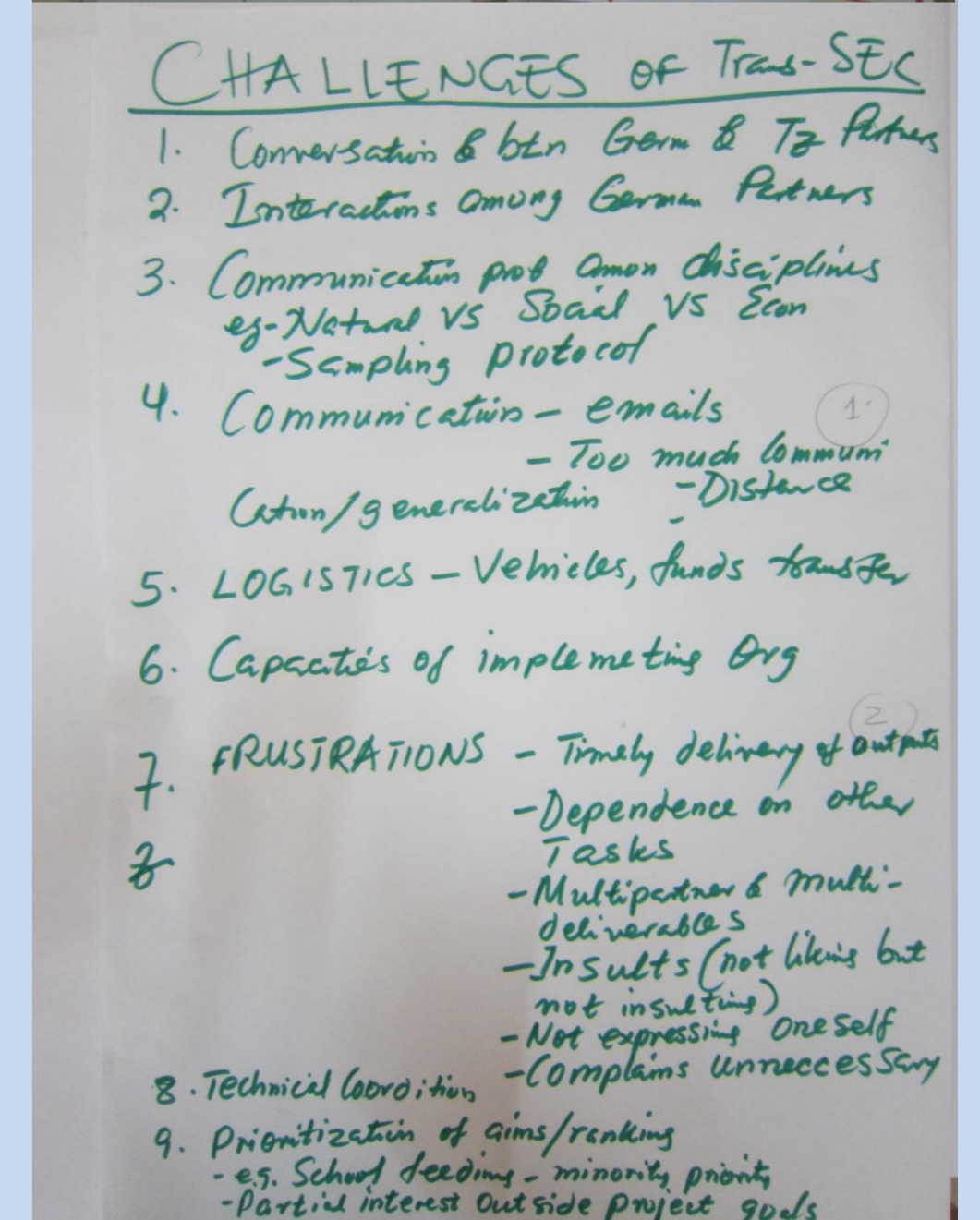
What is the World Café ?

- Developed 1995 by J. Brown und D. Isaacs as a participatory tool to facilitate community change by hearing the ideas and opinions of as many community members as possible
- Aims:** collective knowledge-sharing, webs of personal relationships, new possibilities for action.
- Widespread international use e.g. in community development and organizational change processes.
- Groups of 4-5 persons discuss research questions at small Café-style tables.
- At least 3 consecutive rounds of conversation (approx. 20 minutes each).
- One host at each table who conveys preceding discussion results to subsequent discussants.
- Participants record results in the form of text, sketches, or symbols on the paper table cloth.
- Presentation and discussion of discoveries & key insights in the plenum concludes the process.



Case Study Description

- Context:** Implementation of a Conflict Management System (CPM) in an international and interdisciplinary research project on food security in Tanzania (Trans-SEC).
- Data collection on organizational conflict experience and expectations on the CPM- System using: semi-structured interviews (IDI), focus group discussions (FGD) and 'World Café' (WoCa).



Comparison of Methods

	Objectives/Criteria	IDI	FGD	WoCa
Planning	Researching individuals	++	+	-
	Researching groups	0	+	++
	No. of Participants (per session)	1	4-12	>12
	Duration (per session in minutes)	15-60	60-120	>90
	No. of research questions (per hour)	6-15	4-6	1-3
Implementation	Exploration of new topics and concepts	+	++	++
	Obtaining an overview	+	++	++
	Depth of exploration	++	+	0
	Researching delicate/sensitive topics	++	0	-
	Level of researcher-participant interaction	++	+	0
	Interviewer influence	++	+	-
	Spontaneous adaption of research question	++	++	-
	Impact of power relations	0	+	0
	Interaction with third parties	-	++	++
	Degree of participation	-	+	++
	Input of researchers' time and effort	+	++	0
Results	Confidentiality	++	+	++
	Degree of reality of communicative setting	0	+	++
	Analysis of interaction patterns	-	++	++
	Data quality	++	+	0
	Differentiation of individual responses	++	+	-

Discussion & Conclusion

- World Café is well suited as complementary method in qualitative research for specific purposes:
 - well suited when working with large groups; especially in the area of participatory and action research
 - helps exploring and verifying themes and topics with a large number of participants
 - and is therefore ideal for the field of interdisciplinary and international agricultural research.
- Mutual gain:** A method that does not only produce data for the researcher but also benefits the participants as it facilitates dialogue and mutual learning
 - between researchers of different backgrounds and disciplines
 - between researchers and research participants / stakeholders
- A tool for research as well as for management and development of scientific projects
- Researchers in diverse scientific projects where stakeholder involvement is key should consider the World Café as a method to gain insights from broad range of perspectives.

Photo 1: World Café Trans-SEC Consortium, Photo 2: World Café Process; Photo 3: World Café Table Results. All photos: Trans-SEC Consortium, Morogoro- Tanzania; September 2013 © Löhr, Katharina.

References

- Aldred, R. (2011). From community participation to organizational therapy? World Café and Appreciative Inquiry as research methods. *Community Development Journal*, 46 (1), 57-71.
- Brown, J., D. Isaacs & the World Café Community (2008). *The World Café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Fouché, C. & G. Light (2011). An invitation to dialogue 'The World Café' in social work research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 10, 28-48.
- Jorgenson, J. & F. Steier (2013). Frames, Framing, and Designed Conversational Processes Lessons From the World Café. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 49, 388-405.
- Partridge, M. (2015). Evaluation Café-A review of literature concerning World Café methodology used as an evaluative tool in education. *Innovative Practice in Higher Education*, 2.
- Straus, R. A. (2010). When and Why to Choose Focus Groups vs. One-on-One Interviews. <https://researchplaybook.wordpress.com/2010/01/21/when-and-why-to-choose-focus-groups-vs-one-on-one-interviews/>

Affiliations

¹Leibniz-Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF) e.V., Inst. of Socio-Economics, Germany; ² Universität Bielefeld, Germany.