



Caribbean Natural Resources Institute
Guidelines Series

Understanding and Managing Natural Resource Conflicts



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CARIBBEAN NATURAL RESOURCES INSTITUTE
GUIDELINES SERIES

**Understanding and Managing
Natural Resource Conflicts**

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1. Introduction

When the environment makes headline news, it is often because of conflict. Caribbean states face difficult decisions when they choose between earning foreign exchange and meeting community needs. When natural resources become valued as commodities, often the people that rely on them lose the most. The decisions and processes that determine the ways that those resources are regulated and allocated can often spark conflicts between management institutions and resource users.

National and regional institutions now recognise the relevance of stakeholder participation to the planning and management of natural resources in the Caribbean. However, this acceptance is not yet widely reflected in the practice of natural resource management as seen from the experience of dealing with conflicts in this sector.

These guidelines contribute to an improved understanding by Caribbean natural resource managers of the conflicts that they increasingly find themselves having to intervene in or moderate. They are in the frontline of disputes generated by the inequitable and unsustainable allocation and use of natural resources. In the Caribbean, most of these conflicts originate outside the natural resource sector, yet managers are placed in difficult situations because of their statutory authority and working relationships with resource users.

In these circumstances, managers are often poorly prepared for the challenges posed by dynamic conflict situations. In recent years, they have consistently called for specific training and materials to help them manage the conflicts they encounter in their work. Some support

These guidelines provide a quick reference guide to help managers and field workers understand the conflict situations that they are working in and inform the development of interventions that suit particular contexts and circumstances.

materials on conflict management exist, but these rarely refer to natural resources. The academic literature often comes from a North American or European perspective and studies from the development realm usually profile cases from Africa, Asia or Latin America. There is little reference material available that is directly relevant to Caribbean experiences.

In response to this demand for relevant materials the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) developed a series of three national training activities titled “Understanding and Managing Forest Conflicts” under the aegis of its European Commission-supported tropical forestry programme “Building Capacity for Participatory Forest Management in the Caribbean,” and with support from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). These were held in Jamaica (May 2001), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (May 2002) and Trinidad and Tobago (July 2002). The workshops promoted participatory approaches to conflict management and provided forums for the discussion of field experiences. These workshops brought together over 70 foresters from government agencies and their partners.

In March 2003, the Institute organised and facilitated a regional workshop on conflict management, with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. This regional activity, which took place in the Dominican Republic attracted participants from both the forestry and marine sectors in anglophone and hispanophone islands. In July 2005, a second regional workshop took place in Trinidad. This activity provided an opportunity to share a draft of the guidelines with practitioners before publication.

These guidelines provide a quick reference guide to help managers and field workers understand the conflict situations that they are working in and inform the development of interventions that suit particular contexts and circumstances. This publication synthesises the learning

generated by more than 100 Caribbean natural resource managers at CANARI workshops. It:

- introduces basic concepts associated with conflict;
- presents methods that can help manage conflicts and disputes; and
- identifies principles that can guide the development of conflict management strategies.

2. Participation and conflict management: an overview

A combination of dense population, fierce competition for the use of natural resources and a history of struggle and resistance has meant that conflict has been a recurrent theme in the planning and management of the Caribbean's environment. The increasing complexity of natural resource management (with resources being seen now as sources of services such as watershed protection and tourist attractions) means that managers find themselves having to reconcile and mediate multiple interests. This is a new role that calls for skills such as conflict management.

The increasing complexity of natural resource management has coincided with a growing emphasis on communicating with stakeholders and encouraging their participation in planning and management. Interest in participatory management - or structured collaboration between governments, commercial and non-commercial users, interested organisations and community groups, and other stakeholders, to achieve shared objectives (Geoghegan 2002) - is growing in the region. It has had a major impact on national policies, plans and processes.

Conflicts and natural resource management go hand in hand. Participatory approaches can help point out where problems are likely to occur and provide a way forward once they do.

The growing acceptance and use by natural resource managers of participatory planning (with its emphasis on identifying and analysing the interests of all parties that affect management) has highlighted the relevance of participation to the management of conflicts.

However, it would be a mistake to see participation as a magic cure for all ills. The evidence suggests that processes that involve a wide range of actors in management, far from making things easier actually result in complex arrangements, which reveal conflicts and tensions rather than make them go away. Conflicts and natural resource management go hand in hand. Participatory approaches can help point out where problems are likely to occur and provide a way forward once they do.

3. Defining concepts

When new terms emerge it is often assumed that everyone agrees and understands the underlying concepts. However many of these words are imported from different values and culture. For a subject such as conflict, interpretations are important because perceptions of conflict vary from region to region. In the Caribbean the notion of conflict exists on many different levels each with its own set of expected and accepted responses.

Definitions of conflict vary, but from a natural resource management perspective it is viewed as an umbrella term for divergent aims, methods or behaviour that stem from differences in power between stakeholders. The degree of divergence between the main parties to a conflict can determine the intensity of the conflict. To arrive at an interpretation for Caribbean natural resource managers, the participants at successive CANARI workshops were asked to define what they mean by conflict. They agreed that “Conflicts are differences between related parties that are definite.” Looking at each of these concepts in turn:

Differences: The root of all conflicts can be found in the differences in power held by the various individuals, groups and organisations involved in the management and use of natural resources. Some have more power than others by virtue of their wealth, class, gender or race. Others (such as Forestry Departments) have authority (a form of power) given to them by laws and regulations. All players in natural resource management have varying degrees of power. The ways in which one of those players uses its power can be a cause of conflict when it is unacceptable to others.

Between related parties: There must be a relationship between parties for a conflict to exist. The parties may be diverse, but they will have a common interest in using natural resources. They may be competing for scarce and finite resources, but it is their common appreciation of the reef, forest or beach that can provide a starting point for dialogue.

It is often assumed that natural resource conflicts involve two parties. Practical experience suggests that although there may only be two sides that are immediately obvious, there are always multiple interests and parties involved. For example, some stakeholders will stand by while others debate, to wait and see where their best interests lie. Understanding those interests is a fundamental requirement for managing conflicts. This complexity of inter-relationships between players in natural resource management is a feature of conflict.

Definite: Power imbalances underlie relationships between all natural resource users and managers, but if those differences are not expressed, there is no evidence of conflict. Expressions of conflict may take the form of a physical or verbal confrontation between resource users or a walk out or boycott.

Evidence of a conflict can also be found when systems malfunction. In a natural resource context, power differences are managed through formal or informal

“Conflicts are differences between related parties that are definite.”

It is important to distinguish between conflicts and disputes because they can call for different kinds of action. For example a conflict can be managed by taking pro-active measures, but a dispute calls for re-active approaches.

mechanisms, which allow for give and take between the different parties. Such mechanisms include licensing harvests, patrolling reserves by rangers or liaising with resource users through a forum. Breakdowns in these mechanisms, whether caused by changes or ambiguities in management arrangements, make conflict definite.

These obvious and definite signs of conflict are called disputes. These disputes are the incidents that are most often the focus of efforts at resolution and are a feature of conflict. It is important to distinguish between conflicts and disputes because they can call for different kinds of action. For example a conflict can be managed by taking pro-active measures (such as pre-existing forums for discussion), but a dispute calls for re-active approaches (such as arbitration and negotiation).

Conflict management: Throughout these guidelines, the term conflict management is used rather than conflict resolution. The starting point for the analysis of conflicts is an acknowledgement that there are differences in power between stakeholders in natural resource management. From that perspective conflict can be viewed as a dynamic process of differences meeting and balancing. These differences are unlikely to be resolved, even through participatory natural resource management processes or facilitated negotiations. What participatory approaches and methods can do is manage the differences between stakeholders in a way that enables natural resource management to proceed in an acceptable way.

Conflict management strives for outcomes (some of which will be directly related to natural resource management, but others may address broader socio-economic concerns) that enable stakeholders to pursue their own goals and strategies. Using participatory techniques, managers may also address the tangible manifestations of conflict (drawing on the discipline known as dispute resolution).

Stakeholders: Stakeholders are individuals, groups and organisations with an interest in the management of natural resources. They have a stake in the way that those resources are currently being used: for economic gain, or social or cultural well-being. A stakeholder may also have made some investment (of time, effort or money) in the resource in the past. Stakeholders must be able to influence the outcomes of management (either positively or negatively). For example, future generations may have an interest in natural resources, but they do not have influence, and so cannot be stakeholders for the purposes of planning and management.

Re-thinking conflict

Much can be learnt from conflicts and the disputes that arise from them. They can reveal issues, clarify interests, establish boundaries or provide evidence of a relationship (even though it may be strained) between stakeholders. Whether they are manifested in extreme violence or mild disagreements many people instinctively shy away from conflict. For a natural resource manager the resulting disputes can often have positive aspects.

- They can signal breakdowns in systems used to manage natural resources by demonstrating the weaknesses in mechanisms such as protected areas, seasonal restrictions and harvesting permits.
- They can provide the impetus for creative solutions to problems by providing a focus for the coming together of stakeholders with different perspectives. A mix of conflicting views can often generate new ideas.
- They can help to identify those groups with an interest in planning and managing natural resources by providing a record of those involved in disputes. A look at the history of natural resource disputes can help build a picture of the stakeholders in management.

4. What are the reasons for natural resource disputes?

Natural resource managers need to know why conflict exists and what factors give rise to disputes. Experience suggests that without this understanding, managers can actually make matters worse by getting involved without a full appreciation of the context. An awareness of the linkages and connections that relate to conflict can in turn lead to the development of a fuller range of management responses to the disputes that stem from them. This can result in initiatives such as: improving communications to make messages clearer; creating space for dialogue with stakeholders; involving new stakeholders; addressing new audiences; or developing new alliances with agencies that have access to specialist disciplines and skills.

When natural resource managers were asked to identify the causes of disputes (i.e. the incidents that indicate the existence of conflict) the distinction was made between the issues around which disputes were likely to arise (e.g. poor waste management, unregulated mining for aggregates, bad agricultural practices, squatting, illegal/ improper harvesting of timber and over-fishing) and the underlying reasons why disputes in these fields arose. These reasons could be grouped under four headings and are presented in Table 1.

Economic and Social/Cultural reasons: The reasons for natural resource disputes lie in a broader socio-economic context. This includes for example society's values and social norms, which determine perceptions of state land. It also includes specific economic conditions such as levels of unemployment, which might have a bearing on the numbers of people seeking their livelihoods from natural resources, as well as rural-urban migration. The demand for natural resources (and therefore the levels of use and competition between users) will

be determined by market conditions (e.g. price), which were seen as particularly important by natural resource managers as a cause of disputes. For example, the demand for timber posts for use as scaffold during construction booms has been cited as a cause of theft and illegal harvesting.

Policy reasons: The experiences of managers revealed that there are a number of policy weaknesses in the natural resources sector. Where they do exist policy statements may well favour the inclusion of all stakeholders in the planning and management of natural resource resources,

Table 1: Four reasons why natural resource disputes arise

Category of reasons why disputes arose	Specific reasons cited by managers for natural resource disputes in the Caribbean
Economic and Social/cultural reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Macro-economic trends, including globalisation and regional responses (e.g. Caribbean Single Market and Economy) • Perception of state land and fisheries as free for all • Market conditions (e.g. for agricultural, forest and fish products) • Unemployment (particularly among rural populations) • Increased demand for housing
Policy reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of formal policy to guide management and clarify objectives • Lack of formal policy in sectors that impact on natural resource management (e.g. land use) • Policy undermined by political interference • Policy processes exclude key stakeholders
Institutional reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overlap between agencies involved in natural management • Poor communications between stakeholders • Institutions exclude key stakeholders
Organisational reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clarity regarding the role of natural resource agencies • Poor communications within natural resource agencies • Capacity needs of partners (e.g. resource users and their advocates) in natural resource management not addressed • Lack of capacity (e.g. personnel and equipment) in state agencies to fulfill management mandates

Institutions are associations of stakeholders (which includes resource users and managers). For example a management institution for a forested protected area might comprise: a forestry department as a manager; resource users such as charcoal producers and hunters. These are connected by laws and rules that govern their relations such as a forestry act. Similarly a marine protected area might comprise: a non-governmental organisation as a manager; a fisheries department as a statutory authority; and resource users including large scale; subsistence; seasonal; and recreational fishers, with all of these being connected together by a fisheries act.

but the overall climate remains hostile to participatory approaches. Natural resource managers have a keen awareness of the role of politicians in making policy without reference to stated natural resource management objectives. For example, the issue of squatting may be tacitly encouraged by politicians. This supports the common view among technical staff in the region that “everything is political.”

There are also short-comings in the content of policies. Managers pointed to a lack of formal relevant policies to guide or support their work as a cause of disputes. For example, outdated management plans do not provide adequate guidance or clarity and can be seen as endorsing behaviour that actually undermines management. Managers also pointed to the lack of formal policies in sectors that indirectly affect their work. Specifically they referred to the informal encouragement of squatting and the weakness of land use policy as factors that contributed to disputes. However, practical experience also suggests that even where policies are up-to-date and have been developed with stakeholder inputs, disputes can arise.

Institutional reasons: The increased complexity of natural resource management with its multiple uses and users means that the jurisdictions of institutions involved often overlap. The complexity has increased because resources are no longer purely commodities such as timber or fish. For example they are now also valued for their aesthetic worth and as sources of income from tourism.

Institutional overlap occurs for example where a forested protected area is also a watershed. In this instance in addition to a forestry department, the institutional landscape includes a water company (with associated laws and rules related to water supply). These regulations overlap with forestry laws and rules and could lead to ambiguity regarding roles and responsibilities (such as which organisation is responsible for maintaining drainage). In other examples, an area could have two differing types of protected area status (e.g. a forest reserve as well as a national park) and

be managed by two different institutions. This kind of ambiguity can be made worse by poor communications between stakeholders (in most cases a lack of dialogue between the management agency and resource users).

Organisational reasons: The groups, agencies and departments (referred to here as organisations to distinguish them from the institutions that they form a part of) often lack the capacity to fulfil their mandates leading to a breakdown in management, and this can trigger disputes. Natural resource managers cited the lack of equipment, personnel and finances needed to do their jobs. Another component of capacity – one that is often overlooked - is a clear vision and objectives. Without these basic elements, management agencies are incapacitated and lack reference points when navigating through conflicts.

With the growth of interest in participatory approaches there have been moves to delegate authority for the management of natural resource resources to civil society organisations. Where these partners have not received the resources to carry out their roles and responsibilities, disputes can arise. Allocating resources to civil society partners so that they can perform management tasks are overlooked when they are not involved in decision-making processes. This also results in the needs of statutory bodies (i.e. departments of forestry and fisheries) taking precedence over non-state partners, leaving civil society unable to play their part in management, despite public policy pronouncements.

Three factors to be aware of

In analyzing these reasons there are three cross cutting factors that managers must have an appreciation of if they are to improve conflict management:

- institutional change
- the status of the resource
- the context for management

Many of the causes and reasons for natural resource disputes lie beyond the control of the natural resource managers, who are expected to resolve them. The prevailing economic climate, development priorities, social trends and political expediency are all factors that are outside the realm of natural resource managers.

Institutional change as a factor in natural resource disputes: The management of natural resources is concerned with the rules (either stated formally in statutes or informally as established practice) that determine the rate at which those resources are used and regenerate. Natural resource management is therefore concerned with access to and use of the resource, rather than the resource itself. When the rules that regulate access and use change (for example because of the introduction of legislation that changes the open season for fisheries; or if use patterns change as a result of the emergence of additional groups of resource users) new relations between those with an interest in the resource will be established or existing relations will change.

This will have an impact on the rights previously enjoyed by established resource users, and will also alter the responsibilities of those charged with the management of the resource. These changes can bring groups or agencies into dispute with each other or trigger internal disagreements within stakeholder groupings. When stakeholders are excluded from management arrangements or the processes that change those arrangements, they may come into conflict with those that have been included.

The status of the resource as a factor in natural resource disputes: Competition between and among stakeholders in natural resource management is a characteristic feature of Caribbean natural resource conflicts, especially where resources are finite, scarce or have some symbolic meaning. For example, it has been suggested that where fish stocks dwindle, the conflicts between fishers intensify. The status of the resource therefore has a bearing on the intensity of disputes. Stakeholders value natural resource resources in different ways. A single natural resource may be seen variously as: a source of income; a national symbol; or a subject for research. When these values are not negotiable and therefore incompatible, seemingly intractable disputes arise.

Broader conditions as factors in natural resource disputes:

Many of the causes and reasons for natural resource disputes lie beyond the control of the natural resource managers, who are expected to resolve them. The prevailing economic climate, development priorities, social trends and political expediency are all factors that are outside the realm of natural resource managers. In the Caribbean it is not uncommon for these factors to also go beyond national policy and jurisdiction (for example where the tourism industry is affected by global macro-economic trends). The importance of these factors in creating the conditions for conflict and triggering disputes means that natural resource managers must be able to interpret that broader context. This can be helped by strengthening linkages with partners outside natural resource management institutions that can provide feedback and inputs based on different perspectives.

The idealised responses to examples of disputes showed that managers felt management could be improved with the introduction of mechanisms (e.g. forums, user group associations, technical advisory committees) that would enable them to come together with other stakeholders (although the examples also showed that these mechanisms do not prevent conflict). There is a growing awareness of the need to involve all stakeholders, as managers recognise that the exclusion of essential groups of resource users or statutory agencies can undermine management and result in disputes. This is illustrated by the increased demand for tools such as stakeholder analysis, which can help identify key actors.

Stakeholder analysis can help to identify underlying needs as well as hidden agendas by providing a framework for inquiry into the different ways that people relate to natural resources and to each other.

5. Stakeholder analysis as a conflict management tool

A systematic identification and analysis of stakeholders can help to identify the particular issues and parties related to the management and use of natural resources. It is a tool – a means to an end – rather than an imposed requirement of project design, that can be used in the following ways:

- identifying groups, sectors, communities, and individuals that have a stake in the resource or issue that is the object of the planning initiative;
- analyzing expectations, rights, responsibilities of these various stakeholders and the power relations between them;
- defining processes to be used to arrive at decisions and solutions;
- collecting information on which to base decisions;
- understanding the causes and effects of conflicts;
- identifying and assessing options for change in management regimes;
- negotiating;
- formulating management decisions and agreements.

Stakeholder analysis can help to identify underlying needs as well as hidden agendas by providing a framework for inquiry into the different ways that people relate to natural resources and to each other. When a conflict has flared a stakeholder analysis can be used to identify where alliances can be built and which interests might be negotiable. The analysis can also help to develop communications strategies by tailoring messages and media to specific actors.

Stakeholder analysis is only one example of a tool that can be used to develop approaches to participatory planning, negotiation and management. It should be tailored to suit the particular context that it will be used in and developed through an ongoing process that allows for stakeholders to be added and their interests to be reviewed.

A first step in that process is the definition of the particular issue or problem concerned and the determination of the purpose of the analysis. Once this has been clarified the identification of stakeholders can begin. A number of questions can help with this process. These include:

- who uses the resource and how?
- who depends on the resource for their livelihood?
- who wins and who loses from current use and management as well as changes in the current arrangements?
- who impacts (positively and negatively) on the resource?
- who makes decisions that affect the resource?

Once the stakeholders have been identified, the analysis can start. To help structure this, another set of guiding questions can help, for example:

- what are their current and future interests?
- what are the relationships that have affected the resource?
- what can they bring to planning and management?
- what are the areas of potential agreement and conflict with others?

Another approach that can help identify stakeholders is to list the uses of the resource in question (e.g. in the case of forest resources, as forest products, as a tourism attraction, watershed or wildlife habitat), outline broad headings of users for each of these, and then list the specific individuals, groups and organisations. This sequence provides a framework for a systematic and rigorous approach to stakeholder identification.

It is important that stakeholder analysis processes place emphasis on exploring relationships and interactions rather than compiling the initial list of actors. Analysing these relationships will help to update the listing of stakeholders and make it useful in ensuring that the relevant parties are involved in negotiation processes.

Stakeholder identification and analysis are tools that support participatory natural resource management, but this

Table 2: An example of a stakeholder analysis matrix

Who are the stakeholders?	What benefits do they derive from the resource?	What are the current impacts (positive and negative) of use on the resource?	What are the main alliances, networks and relationships?	What role do they play formally or informally in management?	What role could they play in planning and management and under what conditions?
Government Departments (e.g. Forestry Department)	Gains income from trails in forest reserve	Is not a user	Ministry of Agriculture, Water company, Tour operators	Statutory responsibility, enforcement of regulations in forest reserve	Facilitating stakeholder dialogue on multiple use within reserve – training needed
Statutory Bodies (e.g. Water Company)	Gains clean and plentiful supply	Uses do not impact on forest reserve	Watershed management officer in Forestry	Beneficiary of management provided by Forestry Department	Investment in forest reserve infrastructure – upstream/ downstream linkages to be proven
Resource Users (e.g. Unlicensed Timber harvesters)	Gain income from logging	Unregulated harvest impacts on water courses	Forest wardens, building contractors	Seen as nuisance and criminalized	Potential to help with patrols and forest monitoring – training and stipend needed

does not mean that all aspects of these processes have to be conducted in a participatory manner. The identification of stakeholders cannot be fully participatory (because the point of the exercise is to find out who should be involved) but the analysis of their interests and relationships must be fed back to test the results. The involvement of stakeholders in the analysis of the interests of other actors in management can play an important part in problem solving. An example of a stakeholder analysis matrix for a forest reserve is shown at Table 2.

6. Stakeholder responses to disputes

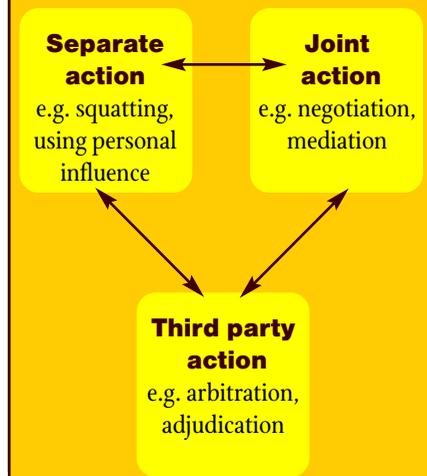
When conflicts come to the surface, stakeholders respond to the resulting disputes in different ways depending on a number of factors, which include the amount and type of power that they have relative to the other stakeholders, the urgency of their claim to the resource under management, and the extent to which their interests are negotiable. Figure 1 illustrates the three principal types of responses to conflict.

Responses can in turn become causes of disputes. For example, if a court ruling results in the eviction of farmers without title from state land they might simply re-locate to another area and squat there. This action could lead back to the courts or to a process of negotiation. If those negotiations are pursued the matter may lead back to court if the farmers are not satisfied with the process or outcome or it could result in the resumption of squatting by the farmers.

Third party action

These responses occur when parties to a conflict are unable to move from their established positions and are unwilling to negotiate, for example because a principle is

Figure 1:
Three types of stakeholder responses to disputes and their inter-relationship



Negotiation is based on the premise that to be sustainable any agreement between stakeholders must meet as many of their complementary interests as possible. This approach calls for an open and flexible outlook rather than grudging compromise.

at stake. In these cases the stakeholders submit to a third party mechanism (usually a court of law) that will determine who is right and who is wrong. Legal systems always favour those with the resources to use them. They result in a winner takes all outcome that can further alienate people already at the margins of society. These responses are also time consuming and cumbersome.

Separate action

These responses occur when parties to a conflict think that they have more to gain outside established conflict management systems than by participating in them. They have chosen a “Better Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement.” This strategy is associated with the very powerful as well as those with little or no power (or confidence) in institutions.

Where stakeholders in a dispute have little power and refuse to cooperate with natural resource managers, or act outside the law, for example by harvesting without a permit, they place themselves outside the realm of policies and institutions. This can lead to their isolation from others (some of whom may be supportive). It can also lead to hardship as a result of prosecution.

The ability of stakeholders with power to pursue separate action strategies such as exerting influence on key decision makers may be temporary and often depends on personal relationships. The nature of these relationships is fragile and changes constantly. This could leave the stakeholder without a point of entry to pursue their interests.

Joint action

These responses occur when the stakeholders to a dispute can be identified and their underlying interests negotiated. In these cases there is a forum or mechanism that enables the stakeholders to make their case on commonly agreed terms. These terms will emphasise mutual respect for stakeholders. They might include agreements on neutral venues for discussions, equal access to information and the use of accessible language. It is under this heading that

conflict management strategies (including dispute resolution) are grouped.

Negotiation is one of the strategies that can be used, both to manage conflicts, and to resolve disputes once they arise. In these cases stakeholders voluntarily come together (formally or informally) with a view to reaching agreement. The next section describes the characteristics of successful negotiations and outlines the pre-conditions that they require.

7. Negotiation

Negotiation is based on the premise that to be sustainable any agreement between stakeholders must meet as many of their complementary interests as possible. This approach calls for an open and flexible outlook rather than grudging compromise. In some instances, for example where multiple stakeholders are involved, a facilitator (an individual, group or organisation) can help to guide processes towards a desired end. Successful negotiations are processes, which have the following characteristics:

- they move stakeholders from entrenched positions, values and beliefs to a point where underlying negotiable interests can be identified.
- they address the different layers of conflicts. These include the procedural issues, such as the right to be heard and recognised as well as the substantive matters such as livelihood needs.
- they include all the stakeholders that can impact (positively or negatively) on their outcomes.
- they factor existing power relations and structures into processes so that gender, wealth, ethnicity and class do not prevent stakeholders from making their case.

Addressing power differences in negotiation processes

If negotiations are to be effective as a conflict management strategy they must address the power differences that exist between participants. This will entail work with stakeholders that have the least power. Some of the ways in which this can be done include:

Assessing and building the capacity of stakeholders to enable them to participate effectively in negotiations. This can be done through a joint assessment of existing and potential strengths (building on and including assets such as traditional knowledge) and needs (e.g. a need to verify traditional knowledge, by using appropriate technology such as geographic information systems). Organisational as well as technical aspects of capacity should be assessed.

Ensuring that marginalised voices are heard. Internal group and organisational structures will reflect power differences in society at large. For example, this may mean that women's or youth perspectives do not register in a stakeholder group's negotiating position. In helping groups to prepare for a negotiation, specific activities (e.g. radio call-in programmes, popular theatre or focus group meetings) could be conducted around particular issues and these may succeed in drawing out the concerns of those not represented in formal processes.

“Levelling the playing field” for negotiations. All participants should have an equal say in setting the agenda for negotiations. There should be equal access to any resources that become available during negotiation processes (e.g. technical information about the status of natural resources). The style of negotiations should also enable full participation, by using venues, language and timing that are acceptable to all.

Ensuring that all parties can have outcomes re-visited. Adverse changes in the socio-economic context for negotiations have a greater impact on stakeholders with little power, than on those with more power. Changes in economic circumstances (such as a drop in the price of crops, or the closure of an industry that was previously a large employer) may make agreements irrelevant and mean that they have to be re-negotiated. Processes should allow for monitoring and review by all parties.

In some instances natural resource managers may be asked to facilitate a process of negotiation. Essential questions that the facilitator must ask before negotiations commence include:

- Can the power differences between the various parties be addressed in a process of negotiation?
- Are they willing to participate in a process of negotiation?
- Can the key stakeholders and their underlying interests be identified?
- Can spokespeople for the various parties to the dispute be found?
- Do the immediate livelihood needs of stakeholders and the status of the resource allow enough time for a negotiation process to take place?

Steps in the negotiation of natural resource disputes

When managers were asked to design negotiation processes aimed at managing conflicts and the associated disputes, the strategies that were advocated were characterised by the following step by step approach:

- **Gather information before intervening.** Underlying interests can be revealed through a systematic identification and analysis of stakeholders and

other methods of analysis from disciplines such as sociology, which can be adapted for use in the natural resource sector.

- **Clarify areas of ambiguity.** Disagreements over data, boundaries, and other points of fact (e.g. ownership of land) should be settled to the satisfaction of all participants. This process should aim to arrive at a shared understanding of the issues at hand.
- **Set an agenda.** Managers should be clear as to their own desired natural resource management outcomes (which should look beyond immediate objectives) and use these to negotiate an agenda for the process that is acceptable to all parties. The agenda should aim to achieve shared outcomes that benefit all stakeholders.
- **Use disputes to strengthen management.** Negotiations should aim to strengthen the support of stakeholders for management objectives, rather than alienate them. This can be done by developing solutions to shared concerns in ways that are open and inclusive for example by enabling the entry of stakeholders to the negotiation at any stage of the process.
- **Use all tools available.** In generating solutions to problems, managers should look beyond traditional responses to conflict, which have emphasised enforcement and rigid implementation. They should incorporate participatory approaches to planning and make use of mechanisms such as incentives (e.g. reduced fees for permits or grants) awareness raising (including environmental education) and technical assistance (e.g. through extension) to achieve management outcomes.
- **Monitor and evaluate agreements.** The results of negotiated settlements should be reviewed by those who were a party to the agreement to ensure that it is contributing to shared objectives. The results of monitoring should be used to revise and amend agreements if needed.

8. Conclusion

Reflecting on their involvement in conflicts and disputes, staff from government departments and their civil society partners cited three important lessons learned from experience:

- **Conflicts provide an opportunity for dialogue.** When the actions of resource users have a negative impact on the resource and cause a dispute, the consequences may not be intended or desired. These impacts may even have long-term negative effects on the resource users themselves. This can provide an opportunity for managers to engage with existing and emerging stakeholders.
- **It is difficult to define conflicts as being specifically related to natural resource use.** They often overlap with broader social or economic issues that lie beyond the scope of natural resource managers (e.g. macro economic policies, and market trends for commodities). This calls for alliances and collaboration with actors from other sectors (e.g. working with community development units to identify social needs and explore problem solving options) so that the fullest range of resources (e.g. skills, knowledge, contacts) are available to managers as they engage with conflicts.
- **Natural resource managers have an interest in conflicts and are not neutral parties.** They have values, objectives, rules and structures, which affect the way they are perceived by other stakeholders in management. These must be considered when interventions are being designed together with the usual operational factors such as the level of resources available, the degree of urgency over the matter at hand, and the expectations that other stakeholders have of the managers.

Conflict is a given. It cannot be avoided and will continue to be a significant feature of natural resource management, particularly in small island developing states where the competition for finite or scarce resources among stakeholders is intense. The challenge is to learn from conflicts to achieve management objectives and contain their negative impacts.

Conflict is a given. It cannot be avoided and will continue to be a significant feature of natural resource management, particularly in small island developing states where the competition for finite or scarce resources among stakeholders is intense. The challenge is to learn from conflicts to achieve management objectives (which are increasingly reflecting national development objectives such as poverty reduction and tourism development) and contain their negative impacts.

In order to meet that challenge, natural resource managers require a sound understanding of the nature of conflicts. Skills and methods that enable managers to identify and understand the underlying interests of stakeholders involved in conflicts are also required. Without these insights and tools the interventions of managers in conflicts can aggravate situations, alienate stakeholders and jeopardise the resource.

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