Resolving Conflicts to Advance Sustainable Forest Management and Restore Landscapes

Conflict management through stakeholder participation

BACKGROUND

Forest management is greatly impacted by a variety of land and resource interests and stakes, many of which frequently conflict with one another due to the multiple benefits forests provide to society. They also impede the inclusive and sustainable development that countries aspire for. It is therefore important to focus on developing sufficient human resources capable of effectively managing conflicts by responding early and addressing their causes to turn them into opportunities for positive change.

Conflicts can arise when there is disagreement on facts, incompatible interests, polarized values and identities, unequal power, and negative relationships. It is crucial to understand that there are multiple drivers at play in conflicts when looking for solutions or strategies to resolve them. Stakeholders — those interested in or impacted by the conflict and who have the influence and resources to address it — play a critical role in conflict resolution.

Recognizing the need to support and invest in developing capacities on forestry-related conflict resolution at the regional level, AFoCO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) jointly organized a hybrid capacity-building training entitled **"Resolving Conflicts to Advance Sustainable Forest Management and Restore Landscapes"** in the Republic of Korea. The training focused on enhancing participants' understanding of conflicts and different approaches to conflict resolution. Partners involved include the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) and the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC).

The six-day training welcomed 19 participants from AFoCO and FAO member countries — Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam. The training was conducted through lectures, assignments,

Key Messages

1. Understanding conflict drivers and behaviors could clarify the interests and issues of the stakeholders.

2. The more diverse the engagement strategies, the more effectively they deal with stakeholders in a variety of conflict situations.

3. Regular communications and negotiations could accelerate trust-building among the stakeholders.

reading materials, group assignments, and field excursions to introduce the concept of "conflict" and its drivers, approaches to accessing conflict behaviors, stakeholder mapping, and consensus-building for conflict resolution.

The participants visited Yangpyeong National Healing Forestin in Yangpyeong County, Gyeonggi province, where they gained insight as to how trust-building activities and regular communication can help address conflict.

AFoCO RETC training on Community Forest Management in 2018 ©AFoCO

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HIGHLIGHTS

This policy brief summarizes the key learning points and observations from the training.

1. Conflict Identification

It is critical to identify the conflict behavior portrayed when dealing with stakeholders such as communities, other government agencies, or commercial permit holders. Conflict behaviors can be recognized by using tools such as Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model Instrument. Conflict behaviors are influenced by structure, relationship, attitude, and interaction. When responding to conflicts, it is more effective to choose different styles/ approaches based on the conflict situation. By knowing the conflict behaviors of both sides, conflicts can be addressed more effectively and strategically.

2. Stakeholder Assessment

Stakeholders could be individuals or formal or informal groups. Before deciding on stakeholders, it is important to identify their level of support and influence on the conflict. This could be accomplished by mapping the key and potential stakeholders and grouping them according to their interests. For instance, in the case of forest land use conflict, local community vs. farmers could be grouped together because they mostly share the same interest in using land for livelihood improvement and take the similar stance when negotiating with the main government departments. The stakeholder mapping is a good starting point for developing a stakeholder engagement strategy, wherein questions should be raised with a clear purpose in mind to get answers and gain insight on how stakeholders might be involved in conflict resolution.

According to CBI, "Stakeholder assessment is a process of interviewing stakeholders in a conflict and a written product offering analysis and options." It helps the parties involved in conflict determine constructive ways to engage each other and develop/propose recommendations to gather stakeholders. By ensuring that all stakeholders participate properly, issues and interests could be recognized through stakeholder evaluation.

3. Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

CBI identified five approaches to engage stakeholders in addressing conflict:

(1) **Inform:** some stakeholders only need to know that there is an ongoing effort to resolve the conflict and where to go for more information.

(2) **Consult:** some stakeholders may be concerned about the conflict and have a role to play but are not the direct antagonists. They should be consulted periodically about the process and options to resolve the conflict, but do not need to be at the table for negotiation as long as their agreement is not needed for the conflict to be resolved.

(3) **Involve:** antagonists in the conflict need to be directly involved in resolving the conflict through dialogue, joint fact-finding, and negotiation. Sometimes it is not advisable to bring all the parties together, and a government agency or outside mediator may use shuttle diplomacy to engage them and seek a solution.

(4) **Collaborate:** when the antagonists are willing and able, it is usually more productive to bring them together to see if they can work collaboratively to clarify the issues and their perspectives on them and seek to negotiate a mutually acceptable resolution.

(5) **Empower:** in some situations, a pre-existing institution may be a forum where the antagonists are already represented and empowered to work together to find a solution. In other situations, resolving the conflict may create an ongoing platform or organization where the former antagonists now agree to manage issues together.

When identifying engagement strategies, it is important to consider the goal of engagement, representation of interests in terms of process and substance (issue), relevant ways to engage and communicate, relationships and interactions, and structure/institutions. In a complex, multi-stakeholder conflict, it is better to use different kinds of engagement strategies and sequence forms for different stakeholders to build trust and relationships step by step.

4. Consensus-building

Consensus-building is the agreement-seeking process that satisfies everyone's primary interests. Through a consensus-building process, all concerned parties could be represented, understand each other's underlying interests and issues, and mutually develop alternative solutions to resolve a conflict.

One of the key steps in consensus-building is the Mutual Gains Approach (MGA), which is to seek mutual gains between stakeholders. In order to achieve consensus among the stakeholders, it is essential to understand the process and repair the strained relationships between stakeholders. This could be done through negotiation, the process by which two or more parties with conflicting and compatible interests seek a mutually acceptable exchange to reach a voluntary agreement on a decision or transaction. In any negotiation, three domains are in play: substance, relationship, and process. By putting these three pieces together, the stakeholders could see more clearly how their disagreements on substance could be addressed through a more constructive process and potentially lead to improved relationships that are mutually beneficial as well.

5. Conflict Resolution

Most of the conflicts are resolved in ways that are either lose-lose or win-lose, or win-win for both sides involved. It is important to understand the distinction between conflict drivers that are potentially resolvable through investigation i.e., facts, those that are negotiable e.g., interests and power), and those that require dialogue and deeper engagement e.g., values, identities, relationships). Conflict resolution should increase the likelihood that options will effectively meet the key interests of all parties with minimum impacts on both parties. To avoid "take it or leave it" moments, conflicts should be solved using standards that all sides can agree on.

Moreover, it is important to consider sustainable relationships when negotiating and resolving conflicts, as highlighted by one of the conflict cases in the ROK in the Yangpyeong National Healing Forest, which maintains regular communications with stakeholders.

BOX 1. Case study in Yangpyeong National Healing Forest

The Republic of Korea has seen an increase in demand for forest-based recreational activities, leading to the enactment of the "Forest Welfare Promotion Act" in 2015 and the establishment of the Korea Forest Welfare Institute (FoWI). One of the most popular forest welfare activities is forest healing, which utilizes natural elements such as tree scents and scenery to enhance immunity and promote health. However, conflicts arose between the local communities and FoWI during the construction of Yangpyeong National Healing Forest (YNHF), leading to concerns such as traffic issues, negative environmental impact, and low income in the community. To address these issues, the institute tried to ease their concerns by building roads, establishing facilities to prevent landslides, and designing joint projects with the community members.

As part of the AFoCO-FAO joint capacity-building training, participants had the opportunity to explore the conflict resolution mechanism put in place to address previous conflicts such as that of the YNHF construction. Participants interviewed the community stakeholders of with questions focusing on assessing the effectiveness of the conflict resolution mechanism, identifying current issues faced by stakeholders and the potential for new conflicts, and examining how new and potential conflict issues are being managed. Overall, the participants and stakeholders discussed the importance of collaboration and communication between the agency and the community to ensure sustainable forest welfare.

(For more information on FoWI: https://www.fowi.or.kr/user/contents/contentsView.do?cntntsId=142)

THE WAY FORWARD

The crucial role of stakeholders in achieving sustainable forest management was highlighted in the Seoul Forest Declaration adopted at the 15th World Forestry Congress:

"Forest-based solutions must be inclusive of the perspectives of family farmers, smallholders, forest communities, indigenous peoples, women, and youth and respectful of their rights, and they must empower them to participate equitably in decision-making and sustainable forest value chains."

At the end of the training, participants were asked to share the actions they plan to undertake to resolve conflict in their home countries. The following key actions mentioned by participants highlight the importance of stakeholder participation in addressing and resolving forestry-related conflicts:

• Apply and customize knowledge gained

• Consult local authorities

• Convene roundtable discussions

• Gain trust from stakeholders while attracting funding support (using the MGA)

• Provide more time for stakeholder consultations

• Share details of the situation with stakeholders

• Maintain patience during the conflict until a consensus is reached

• Understand the differing opinions and perspectives of stakeholders

BOX 2. Training Summary

The AFoCO-FAO Joint Capacity Building Training on "Resolving Conflicts to Advance Sustainable Forest Management and Restore Landscapes", was organized online (17 and 22 November 2022) and face-to-face (29 November-2 December 2022) at the Forest Literature House, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

Training partners include the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) and the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC). CBI is an organization with decades of experience helping leaders collaborate to solve complex problems with expertise in facilitation, mediation, capacity building, citizen engagement, and organizational strategy. RECOFTC strives for a future where people live equitably and sustainably in and beside healthy, resilient forests by the means of building capacities of communities, governments, civil society organizations, and companies so local communities can sustainably manage and benefit from their forests.

The training aimed to:

• Analyze sources of conflict and the different ways to manage and resolve conflict in the forestry sector with specific focus on sustainable forest management and restore landscapes

• Assess stakeholders' interests and develop stakeholder engagement strategies to manage and resolve conflict

• Practice tools and approaches related to addressing conflict in specific case studies and an identified field site

• Design a conflict resolution and consensus-building process for conflict situations in their own work contexts as part of action planning

• Connect as a community of practitioners to learn and share experiences and best practices in conflict resolution to advance sustainable forest management and restore landscapes.

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[1] The Seoul Forest Declaration, https://www.fao.org/3/cc0160en/cc0160en.pdf

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Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO)

AFoCO is a treaty-based intergovernmental organization that is committed to strengthening forest cooperation and taking concrete actions to promote sustainable forest management and address the impacts of climate change.

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