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## CASE STUDY 2: CONFLICT ON THE DIVERSION OF BOSOKO RIVER IN THE AMANSURI WETLAND

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### Guiding questions for case study two

- 1 How has the introduction of the Amansuri Conservation Integrated Development Project affected the handling of the conflict? How do you think the conflict would have been handled without the project?
- 2 How did the different stakeholders frame the conflict?
- 3 Was this a conflict over livelihoods, communities' rights to manage their environments, or conservation? How does the framing of a conflict affect the way in which it is dealt?
- 4 Why were the people of Gyamozo so resistant to efforts to resolve the conflict?
- 5 Why is the way in which the mediators enter the conflict so important?
- 6 What skills did the mediators use in organizing the conflict management process?
- 7 What skills did the mediators use in facilitating the meetings?
- 8 Why did it take stakeholders in Gyamozo so long to reframe their project?
- 9 Do you agree with the way in which the "troublemaking" secondary stakeholders were handled? How else could their actions have been dealt with?
- 10 How would you have facilitated this process? Do you think it was a good idea to meet initially with only one side in the conflict (including carrying out conflict analysis)?
- 11 Do you think that the mediators were correct regarding the issue of obtaining external support for the fulfilment of the agreement? How would you have handled the situation differently?
- 12 Do you consider this a successful case study? Why or why not?



## Role playing for case study two

Select one of the facilitated meetings, choose appropriate roles (mediator, Tufuhene [traditional authority], community members from Gyamozo [one with and one without relatives in the other communities], community members from Old and New Nzulezo [one with and one without relatives in the other communities], a stakeholder from Nzulezo who has doubts about any agreement that would allow the people of Gyamozo to escape without retribution, a project administrator [separate from the mediator], and an assembly person).

Conduct a negotiation, assuming that all the parties have come to the negotiations – willingly or unwillingly. Try to reach an agreement.

As part of the conflict management process, you may want to engage in conflict analysis using root cause analysis, analysis of relationships, stakeholder analysis, analysis of relationships using the 4Rs, and analysis of power, positions and interests.

## Key issues

This wetland case shows how diverse and complex resource conflicts can be. It also demonstrates that many different benefit streams from wetland resources can be affected by conflict. The case study illustrates that even when tension is high, facilitating a process of restoring communication among the conflict parties can help to settle a conflict. It reveals the positive roles that respected traditional clan leaders or family heads can play in gaining parties' sincere commitment to finding an acceptable solution and in initiating a process whereby traditional relations can be restored constructively. It also illustrates that conflict management based on coercion and force is unlikely to be successful. Because of a difficult and troublesome history prior to the mediators' involvement, it was a long time before all the parties concerned were willing to join the negotiation table.

More specifically, the case underlines:

- how resource conflicts can negatively affect development projects;
- how difficult it may be to understand the multiple effects of resource management measures;
- how essential it is to restore communication links for finding solutions that will benefit all parties;
- how complex resource issues are, and how they involve identity issues as well as the history of social relations,

As in case study one, this case seems to illustrate a win–lose case. One village diverts a river to improve its own access. This affects communities downstream, who lose substantial livelihood resources. At first, the former party is not willing to compromise, and the latter wants the former to be punished for its illegal action.

## Context

The Amansuri wetland lies on the western coastline of Ghana and is within the Eastern and Western Nzema Traditional Areas, and the East Nzema and Jomoro Districts of Western Region of Ghana. The area is about 360 km west of Accra, and its closest large urban centres are Axim and Half-Assini.

Its climate is classified as equatorial monsoon, and the area lies within the wet evergreen forest zone of Ghana. The wetland and its catchments exceed 1 000 km<sup>2</sup>, and consist of ten subcatchments ranging from 18 to more than 140 km<sup>2</sup>. The region forms the watershed for Amansuri Lake and includes the drainage areas for several rivers, as well as the coastal floodplain north of Beyin. The wetland itself is more than 100 km<sup>2</sup>, including small areas of open water (Amansuri Lake). The region's coastal lagoon is of international importance for waders. The Amansuri wetland ecosystem features several wetland categories, and contains highly diverse species of wetland plants and animals. It is the only known swamp peat forest in Ghana, and the nation's best example of freshwater swamp forest characterized by black humic waters. The wetland has been selected as an important bird area of global significance, and preparations are under way to designate the Amansuri wetland as a Ramsar site (Wetland of International Importance).

The indigenous people in the conflict area are the Nzemas, but Fantes and Ewes fishers have settled in some of the coastal communities. The wetland falls within the Western Nzema Traditional Area, whose capital is Beyin. The landowners in the traditional area are family heads, but the paramount chief has final authority on land issues. Land is held under a number of different systems. Family members have user rights to their own holdings. People may lease land to settlers and non-family members under a share cropping system called "abunu" or "abusa". There are about 19 communities around the Amansuri wetland and five within it. The main means of transport within the wetland is by boat. All the communities within the wetland depend heavily on its resources for their livelihoods.





The main occupations of these communities are fishing and fish processing, palm wine tapping, local gin (Akpeteshie) distilling, farming and agroprocessing, and general trading.

The Ghana Wildlife Society (GWS), an NGO, in partnership with the Western Nzema Traditional Council is implementing the Amansuri Conservation Integrated Development (ACID) Project in the Western Nzema Traditional Area's portion of the Amansuri wetland. The ultimate situation envisaged by the project is a conserved wetland system where ecological functions and scenery are maintained alongside low-impact resource use, based on the principles of sustainable management.

## Conflict history

Two major and three minor rivers drain into Amansuri Lake. The Bosoke is the largest of these and serves as the shortest access route from Old Nzulezo to communities such as Gyamozo and New Nzulezo within the wetland. The people of Old Nzulezo also use the river as a route to their farms and palm wine tapping and alcohol distilling areas. The Bosoke river is the main access route to the Half-Assini-Sameneye main road from Gyamozo to New and Old Nzulezo. It is about 2 km from Gyamozo to the banks of the Bosoke, and the people of Gyamozo normally wade through the swamps for that distance before boarding their boats. During the rainy season, it becomes virtually impossible to walk through the swamps, owing to flooding.

Between late 2001 and early 2002, the people of Gyamozo diverted part of the Bosoke river through a natural channel. This enabled them to avoid having to wade through the swamps, but drastically reduced the volume of water flowing into Amansuri lake. The Bosoke has been the only major river flowing into the lake since the people of Sameneye diverted the other major river, the Ayevula, some 25 years ago.

In March 2002, the people of Nzulezo who were affected most by the diversion informed the people of Gyamozo of its effects, and asked them to restore the river to its original course. However, nothing was done. The elders of Nzulezo then reported the case to the ACID Project Management Committee (PMC), as the diverted area fell within the community nature reserve that had been established by the project. In May 2002, the PMC asked three of its members (the chief of Old and New Nzulezo, the assembly person of Beyin electoral area and the ACID project manager) to resolve the conflict by visiting the diversion site and Gyamozo. The site was visited, but the people of Gyamozo refused to meet the three PMC members on two occasions. When the people of Nzulezo realized that the PMC's intervention was not addressing their interest, they issued threats and ultimatums to the people of Gyamozo, insisting that they redivert the Bosoke.

In August 2002, the PMC reported the case to the Jomoro District Assembly (JDS), under whose administration the conflict area falls. Existing assembly by-laws prevent the diversion of natural watercourses without authorization. However, even after several attempts, JDS could not resolve the issue. Two police officers accompanied JDS staff to Gyamozo, but the villagers had left in advance in order to avoid confrontation with the police. When the assembly sent police officers on a second occasion, there were quarrels in New Nzulezo between relatives of the people from Gyamozo and

the police. In January 2003, renewed tensions were reported when an Old Nzulezo resident almost shot dead a Gyamozo resident because the latter did not allow the former to tap palm wine in the traditional area. The person from Old Nzulezo argued that palm tapping had been banned in the areas traditionally used by people from Old Nzulezo in retaliation for the river diversion. Quarrels and violence between people from the two villages seemed to be breaking out over the most minor issues. Some people from Old Nzulezo said that “if the assembly cannot solve the problem, we will solve it in our own way” (meaning by force).

### Conflict management and resolution process

It was in these highly charged conditions that an ACID staff member suggested using a collaborative approach to resolve the conflict.

**Preliminary conflict and stakeholder analysis:** First, ACID staff members who had assumed the role of mediators conducted an internal meeting to assess the current situation in the area. They determined who the stakeholders were and planned a strategy for entering the conflict setting, including whom to contact first. This newly formed mediation team planned to meet the Tufuhene, the second in command in the chief system, who lives in New Nzulezo. The team recognized that, as staff members of ACID, they were secondary stakeholders because the conflict was having a negative effect on the work of the project.

STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT		
Primary	Secondary	Interested Parties
Old Nzulezo	Ghana Wildlife Society	Miegyinla
New Nzulezo	Jomoro District Assembly	Ngelekazo
Gyamozo		Ekebaku
Beyin		Ebonloa

**Stakeholder consultation:** During the first field visit, the mediators met the Tufuhene to obtain permission to mediate a settlement to the conflict. The Tufuhene agreed to this, but expressed his doubts that the people of Gyamozo would do the same. He fixed a date for a community meeting. The mediators then planned to meet people in Gyamozo, and contacted an elder in New Nzualzu, who sent a message to Gyamozo. However, the people in Gyamozo were not willing to accept the mediators and did not attend the meeting. The mediators presumed that some people in Gyamozo perceived them as biased because of their earlier involvement in the conflict as ACID staff members.

After this failure, the mediators invited people to conduct a root cause analysis in Old Nzualzu. Two opinions emerged as potential reasons for people in Gyamozo to divert the river: 1) to secure access



in times of flooding; and 2) to destroy the palm wine, which some people from Old Nzulezo obtained from nearby forests. By diverting the river, these palm wine resources would virtually dry up, and reduced competition in palm wine production would enhance the value of products from Gyamozo. The mediators then conducted an effect analysis of the river diversion, and identified more stakeholders, such as farmers whose fields became inundated, and fishers from neighbouring Beyin who could no longer fish in the dried out wetlands.

The mediators realized that families from Old Nzulezo, New Nzulezo and Gyamozo had kinship relations. Many people in New Nzulezo, although affected by the river diversion, continued to have close relations with their relatives in Gyamozo. The mediators then divided the stakeholders into two groups depending on how they were affected by the river diversion. One group was comprised of farmers, fishers and traders, and the other of tappers and distillers. When the mediation team returned to New Nzulezo it met separately with farmers, palm wine tappers and alcohol distillers. This allowed the mediators to improve their understanding of the different ways in which these stakeholders were affected.

**Stakeholder engagement:** The mediators presented their preliminary findings at a public meeting in Old Nzulezo. The initial response from villagers was that Gyamozo should redirect the river and should be punished for having diverted it in the first place. After the analysis, they realized that sticking to this position would not help them. At the end of the meeting, the people of Nzulezo softened their position and suggested that the only way to bring the people of Gyamozo to negotiate and resolve the conflict was to ask the elders of New Nzulezo (who had good relations with Gyamozo) to convince them to attend a negotiation meeting. In the meantime, Old Nzulezo villagers were the ones to suffer most from the river diversion. They were ready to meet the other party and negotiate a settlement of the issue.

The mediators then explained that they would meet with the people in Gyamozo to increase their readiness to negotiate with Old Nzulezo. Three moderate elders from Old Nzulezo then accompanied the mediators to meet with elders from New Nzulezo. The New Nzulezo elders readily agreed to ask the people of Gyamozo to come to their community for a meeting.

However, the people of Gyamozo had already refused several times to become involved with the mediators. The family head of New Nzulezo sent a linguist to the community to invite its members to meet on common ground. Such an invitation has very strong traditional implications. Subsequently, three men from Gyamozo attended this meeting. They were all palm wine tappers, although the mediators had asked that a range of different stakeholders come from Gyamozo. The representatives from Gyamozo explained that they wanted access to the road. Overall, they presented their case in a moderate way, arguing that access to their village would be extremely difficult during the rainy season. They stated that they did not aim to destroy the livelihoods of their brothers, but they urgently needed road access.

The mediators asked them whether they were aware of the effects that the river diversion had had on the other communities, and showed them the effect analysis. The people from Gyamozo responded that they had not been aware of the severity of these effects. At this stage, the family head of New

Nzulezo confronted them with the difficult situation in Old Nzulezo and explained that its people now suffered from access problems, in addition to the destruction of their livelihoods. At the end of the meeting, the mediators asked the participants whether they would be prepared to negotiate if nobody from the police or assembly was present, and suggested New Nzulezo as neutral ground.

After this meeting, the mediators analysed the situation. They realized that people would recognize ACID staff members who had been involved in the conflict earlier, and would perceive them as biased. So, the mediators invited a third person to join as the lead mediator. This person had not been involved in the conflict before.

**Negotiation meeting:** During the meeting, the mediators allowed each party to make its statement. Although the mediators had asked the two parties to send ten representatives only, a huge crowd was gathered in the surrounding area. Ground rules were very effective, partly because the Futuhene and family head were present, as well as a representative of the assembly. The representatives from Old Nzulezo made their case first. They came up with their position and took a hard line (“redivert the river and face punishment”). The family head cooled tempers by pointing out that the two parties had met to negotiate, not fight. The representatives from Gyamozo stated that they were happy with what they had done. They then brought up an old story in which the incumbent chief had not enforced action against individuals who had broken resource use rules, which had been to the cost of people in Gyamozo. This, they claimed, gave them legitimacy to break the rules as well. At this stage, the family head brought the situation under control again. The mediation team presented the results of the effect analysis, as well as a relationship diagram emphasizing the kinship relations across the village divides. They invited the two parties to consider a solution that was acceptable to both.

Various people started to make suggestions. People from New Nzulezo argued that the river should be rediverted. They discarded the arguments about the old case, and insisted that the issue should be resolved. When the mediator asked “who owns the place?”, all the stakeholder representatives fell quiet and looked down, it had really hit them. The family head replied that nobody owns it, but everybody has access to use its resources. The site is for all three communities. One person from Gyamozo said: “We have done more harm than good. We did not understand the seriousness of the effects. So, we should redivert the water. If there is a funeral in Old Nzulezo, we cannot go because of this issue”. This was a turning point in the negotiation process, and other people from Gyamozo agreed with this statement.

Once general agreement had been reached that a redirection was essential, the family head suggested that the three communities should work together to restore their relationships. One person from Old Nzulezo raised the issue that the access problem to Gyamozo still needed to be solved. The meeting agreed that a footbridge should be constructed. The mediators asked both parties to select representatives to finalize the detailed agreement.

**Troubles:** After this meeting, some palm wine tappers, mainly young men, from Old Nzulezo started to talk badly about people from New Nzulezo. The mediators returned to Old Nzulezo to clarify the



issues. Some people complained that they were contributing to the river redirection and building of the footbridge, even though the problem was Gyamozo's. The proposed solution had created resentment. The mediator realized that there had been a miscommunication about the negotiation meeting's process and outcomes, and clarified these issues. As a result, some young men went on to develop additional ideas for joint work with the other communities to restore relations. When some people realized that there had been miscommunication, a dispute arose in Old Nzulezo. The mediators then learned that a powerful stakeholder from outside the village had influenced some people to pass on misinformation about the negotiation meeting and its outcome. They decided to resolve the issue at a community meeting with representatives from New Nzulezo and Gyamozo. At this meeting, those who brought the misleading message were confronted. The family head warned them against fuelling conflict, and new community representatives were selected.

**Draft agreement:** At a subsequent meeting in New Nzulezo, the parties agreed on the procedure to follow – first construct the footbridge and then redirect the water. They acknowledged that the agreement involved costs for materials, a chainsaw operator, fuel and labour, and asked the district assembly and the ACID project to provide funds for the bridge construction. The agreement is now being drafted. However, no development funds have yet been raised, and so the parties are unable to implement it. In the meantime, the negative effects continue.

## Lessons learned

In particular, this wetland case study shows the following:

- Trying to resolve conflicts can be difficult when there is a history of coercion, violence and distrust.
- Mediators need to be careful about how they enter a conflict, and aware of how their initial entry may influence stakeholders' views of them. In some situations, mediators' involvement as stakeholders in the situation may influence how they are regarded, especially in terms of being biased or unbiased. It is possible for mediators to undermine their own credibility, even when they have very good intentions.
- Traditional leaders can be important in helping mediators to develop local trust and in establishing a positive atmosphere for negotiations.
- A resource conflict can affect various stakeholders in very different ways. Stakeholders from outside the immediate conflict location may also be affected.
- When working to restore relations among conflict parties, building on existing kinship links can be a helpful way of increasing conflicting parties' willingness to consider each others' situations. This also makes it easier to find common ground in negotiations.
- When one of the primary stakeholders is unwilling to negotiate, it may still be possible to carry out worthwhile conflict management processes with the other primary and secondary stakeholders. Strategies and tools such as participatory conflict analysis may give the parties important insights, which help them to consider ways of reframing the conflict. Such processes may also give the mediators significant information about the conflict. However, when not all the stakeholders are involved, mediators must always bear in mind that they are obtaining only a selected framing of the conflict. They must always obtain information about the missing stakeholders' framing of the conflict.

- Some stakeholders, including secondary ones, may perceive their interests as threatened by a conflict management process, and may act deliberately to undermine it.
- Agreements that depend on external funding or resources for their resolution require special care. It should not be assumed that such support will be easily or automatically forthcoming after agreement has been reached, unless firm commitments have been obtained beforehand. If this is not the case, the agreement is highly vulnerable to collapse (indeed, it may have been obtained under false premises if disputants were given the impression that resources were available when they were not).