
Collaborative conflict management for enhanced national forest programmes

Background:

This training course has been developed as part of a series of training modules on specific issues designed to enhance the implementation of NFP principles within the frame of the “NFP for All” initiative. “NFP for All” is a joint initiative by FAO and the National Forest Programme Facility who are jointly working to build country capacity for the implementation of NFP in accordance with NFP principles.

Relevance and Context

Achieving sustainable forest management and poverty alleviation are enormous tasks which will only be achieved in a concerted effort by many actors. National forest programs therefore rightly call for a cross-sectoral and decentralised approach to address forest issues in a wider policy context.

However, actors as different as government agencies in- and outside the forest administration, civil society, forest users and the private sector tend to have multiple and often divergent interests on forest management and conservation and they also differ in terms of power to influence decisions. Emerging tensions and conflicts are a normal part of forest policy making and not necessarily negative.

How people handle disagreements, conflicts and disputes is what truly matters. Managing and resolving disputes in a participatory and consensual manner can strengthen national forest programs. But ignored or unjustly handled conflicts always have the potential of becoming intractable, putting national forest programme (nfp) processes at risk and often results in increased levels of deforestation and poverty.

Management and resolution of disputes in a participatory and consensual manner is therefore an increasingly important task for all those who are supporting or being involved in nfp processes.

This training course will provide participants with an understanding of the basic principles, skills and techniques used to overcome difficult situations and to find solutions that a broad spectrum of people can support. Participants will increase their knowledge and skills in analyzing complex conflict situations, develop strategies to manage conflict and, learn from a variety of conflict management techniques in order to negotiate and build agreements.

Objectives

The overall objective of the training course is:

To expand and strengthen the capacity of nfp stakeholders to resolve differences and build consensus agreements.

More specifically the course aims to:

- Increase participants’ understanding and knowledge about conflicts, why they arise in a nfp context and how they can be effectively prevented;
- Provide skills, tools and processes for analyzing conflict situations in nfps;
- Inform about different procedures for resolving disputes and their inherent strengths and weaknesses so that participants are able to make informed decisions;

- Explore principles and requirements for meaningful consultation with multiple stakeholders and the tools and techniques that can be used for this purpose, thereby leading to better policy processes and outcomes;
- Enhance participants' understanding of the principles and process of consensual negotiation and its scope of application;
- Increase participants' understanding of the role of a third party (facilitator / mediator) and how a facilitator / mediator can assist consensual negotiations;
- Improve participants' current skills in joint decision-making and joint problem-solving through practise;
- Apply the analytical concepts and tools presented in the course to particular problems that participants bring with them to the course.

Course Design and Process

In order to achieve these objectives, we base our work on the following three assumptions:

There is no one "Right" Way to Approach and Deal with Conflict: We have found, by working with many practitioners and academics from all around the world, that it is possible to develop practical theory, guidelines and useful tools to assist practitioners engaged in joint decision making and problem solving.

The Value of Working on Process Independent of Substance: Busy professionals can benefit from including time in their schedules to focus on the process— Questions on how decisions are made have become almost as important as the content of the decision itself. This workshop aims to provide you with an opportunity to learn from the experience of others, experiment with new ideas in a safe environment, become aware of what works well, and to begin to develop new skills to complement those you already possess.

Learning by Doing: It is hard to improve problem solving only by talking about it. Thus, each day of the workshop will be a mixture of short presentations, interactive exercises, simulated negotiations, and coaching /consulting sessions on real problems. Therefore the value of the training will depend largely on your participation in the exercises, simulations, and discussions of those exercises. Some of these simulations may be "generic" in their substance - cases we have developed to present important conflict dynamics. Other cases are directly developed by and for the nfp context. The purpose of these cases is not to simulate reality, but to provide useful opportunities to reflect on your own assumptions and actions.

The course will incorporate short lectures combined with a range of participatory activities, specific case study materials and participants' own experiences. The design of the course will involve participants in a process of ongoing critical reflection, allowing them to link the course contents with their own experiences and apply conflict management techniques in their daily work.

Course contents

The course contents consist of the following 5 modules:

1. Conflict: An Overview

- Elements, dimensions and characteristics of conflict
- The value of conflict in social change
- Causes for conflict or dispute in the NFP context

2. Exploring various skills and processes for Managing Conflict

- The different approaches and strategies for addressing and managing conflict
- The principles and process of consensual negotiation and its scope of application
- The role of a third party (facilitator / mediator) and how a third party can assist consensual negotiations

3. Analyzing Conflict and Supportive and Obstructive Factors for Cooperation

- The importance of good analysis and tools to improve conflict management
- Identifying who the stakeholders in an nfp are and their interests
- Exploring stakeholder power and relationships

4. Structuring and Designing Multi Stakeholder Processes

- Reviewing basic requirements for dialogue processes and cooperation
- Assessment of stakeholder relationships and cost - benefit of the cooperation

5. Communication, Negotiation and Facilitation/Mediation to Build Agreements

- Conflict anticipation and prevention through facilitation techniques
- Improving negotiation skills to enhance policy outcomes
- Handling intense emotions and value-laden discussions

Who Should Attend

The course is useful to individuals who are leading, facilitating or participating in nfps, i.e. nfp coordinators and facilitators and stakeholder representatives from government agencies in-and outside the forest administration, civil society, private sector and decision or policy –makers - actively involved with the nfp process.

Preparation for the Training

Each participant is asked to describe a problem (or situation) in his/her current, recent, or upcoming practice which presents a dilemma or question for which participants would like to have assistance. This is to give the trainers prior to start of the training an idea of the kinds of conflict issues which seem most challenging to participants. These **cases may be used for discussions in small - or large - groups (with the participants' explicit permission)**. Participants are kindly requested to refer to the attached "Guidelines for Writing a Case."