

Collaborative Conflict Management

Basic knowledge



The aim of the Collaborative Conflict Management Module is to assist conflict-management professionals, forest officers and other stakeholders in managing forest-related conflicts through collaborative approaches. It explains how to move beyond adversarial forest politics, resolve disputes and build positive relationships among forest stakeholders for the smooth planning and successful implementation of SFM.

The module also provides links to key tools and case studies of effective conflict management.

Conflict is a major impediment to efforts to sustainably manage forests and achieve positive development outcomes in the forest sector. Forest conflict can result in a loss of income, employment, government revenues and environmental services, and it can lead to violence.

Given the growing scarcity of land and the increasing value of forests, conflicts over forests are likely to continue.

SFM goals can be realized if stakeholders work together to assess and address the many forest interests, build trust and cooperation, and seek solutions of mutual gain – a process called collaborative conflict management (CCM). CCM may require the involvement of professionals who can facilitate dialogue, encourage participation, bridge differences and facilitate collaborative solutions.

This module provides useful information to assist conflict-management professionals, forestry officers and other stakeholders to manage forest-related conflicts through collaborative approaches. It offers a practical “road map” for people who wish to address conflicts linked to SFM implementation through CCM. It explains how to move beyond adversarial forest politics, resolve disputes and build positive relationships among forest stakeholders for smooth planning and the successful implementation of SFM.

What are forest conflicts?

[Conflicts or disputes](#) occur when people perceive that their goals, needs, interests or values are threatened. This can be the result of a disagreement, but conflicts and disputes go beyond mere differences of opinion. In forestry, they are an expression of people's differing (and often entrenched) values and priorities regarding the use of forest resources.

Conflicts exist everywhere. They are not always negative because they are sometimes necessary to bring about positive change. A conflict, therefore, may be positive, negative or neutral. How conflicts develop depends largely on how they are managed. Much can be done to prevent conflicts from taking violent or destructive courses by addressing their underlying causes at an early stage, whether at the local, national or international level.

Forest management is an inherent source of conflict because it has multiple objectives and therefore many stakeholders – such as local forest users, government agencies in and outside the forest sector, civil society, and the private sector – often with competing interests. In addition, forest management may be fragmented and subject to unclear, overlapping, competing or contradictory legal frameworks.

Conflicts of relatively low intensity may not lead directly to violence, but they may still play a role in fuelling “structural” violence, such as impeded development as well as disease, famine and forced migration. In many parts of the world, forests play important roles in livelihoods, identities and security, and conflicts over their control, management and use must be dealt with expeditiously. Conflict escalations increase the vulnerability of disadvantaged forest users and often result in human suffering, economic decline and environmental degradation.

Conflict over forests is not a new phenomenon. In many countries, forest peoples have been dispossessed of their lands and their forest assets stripped by outsiders such as loggers, pastoralists, settlers and hunters. Historically, forest communities have been hampered in defending their lands and forests by a lack of legal recognition and an imbalance of power, and external forces have often quickly overwhelmed them. Increasingly, however, forest communities with traditional links to forests are being recognized in – and empowered by – statutory laws, increasing the potential for collaborative approaches to conflict management that provide equitable outcomes.

What is collaborative conflict management?

Collaborative conflict management (CCM) can help prevent and manage forest conflicts. It comprises a wide range of informal approaches that involve: stakeholders working together to reach agreement on controversial issues; and the facilitation of social learning among individuals, groups and organizations to resolve forest-related conflicts.

The process of CCM has three main stages:

1. the pre-deliberation stage, involving an analysis of the conflict and the development of a CCM strategy;
2. the deliberation stage, involving the search for agreement; and
3. the approval and implementation of the agreement.

CCM enables forest managers to:

- promote the participation of diverse or competing stakeholder groups in finding an agreement to which all stakeholders are committed;
- assist stakeholders in adopting attitudes oriented towards cooperation rather than the pursuit of individual interests;
- establish new forms of communication and decision-making on important issues, and raise awareness of the importance of equity and accountability in stakeholder communication;
- develop partnerships and strengthen stakeholder networks;
- create space in which stakeholders can communicate, with the aim of bringing about future agreements so that concrete action can be taken; and
- produce decisions that have a strong base of support.

Collaborative conflict management contributes to SDGs:



Related modules

- [Forest law enforcement](#)
- [Participatory approaches and tools for SFM](#)

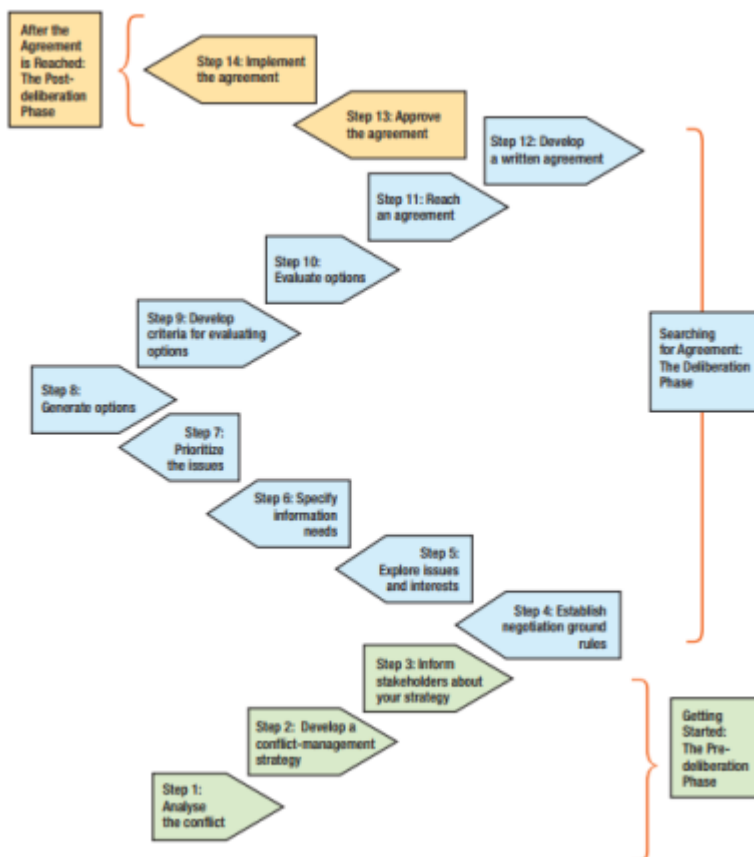
In more depth

Stages of collaborative conflict management

No single framework exists for dealing with all forest conflicts, and the process described here is not intended as a “one-size-fits-all” solution. Instead, it should be regarded as a checklist to consider when designing a CCM process.

A typical CCM process has three well-defined stages, each comprising a number of steps. But the process is not as straightforward as the chart may suggest, and it usually develops a life of its own. Issues unfold, personalities assert themselves and unexpected events occur. The chart is designed to remind CCM practitioners of the important actions they should consider. Ultimately, however, the nature and complexity of the conflict will determine which path the process should take.

Chart: The collaborative conflict management process



Although most stakeholder groups have their own ways of addressing problems or taking decisions, they can benefit from the insights of an expert who is familiar with the situation. For this reason, many CCM processes are led by facilitators or mediators. The terms “facilitator” and “mediator” are often used interchangeably, but “facilitator” is a more general term that can be applied to anyone who guides group processes, while “mediator” refers to a person who is specialized in conflict management.

Unlike arbitrators or judges, mediators have no power to define or enforce an agreement, but they can help the parties reach an agreement on their own by identifying their options and

facilitating negotiations. Mediators can explore the problems and the relationships between the various parties to the conflict to define how the CCM process should be structured. The need for process expertise depends on the complexity of the conflict; it involves judgment, practical skills and specialized knowledge of problem-solving and decision-making.

The facilitator can: help organize a group's efforts; offer advice on how to proceed; create an atmosphere of fairness and respect; ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate; and steer the group toward a successful agreement.

The 14 steps of an idealized CCM process are described below.

Stage 1: Getting started – the pre-deliberation phase

A stakeholder or a trusted outsider raises the possibility of collaboration and initiates a process. Following initiation, the pre-deliberation or planning stage should be carried out with stakeholders who are willing to participate in the process from the beginning (hereafter called "parties").

Step 1 – analyse the conflict. The first step in managing a conflict is to gain a preliminary understanding of the nature of the problem: Who is involved? What are the parties concerned about? How interested are the parties in resolving their issues?

A formal analysis starts with the collection of detailed information about the dispute. Information can be gathered from three sources: direct observation, secondary sources (such as previous studies), and personal interviews. Often, people assume that if they understand the issues they will be able to find a reasonable solution to their problem, but conflicts comprise an often-complex mix of people, procedures and substance. If one party distrusts another or thinks the process being proposed is unfair, a substantive agreement will be difficult to reach, no matter how reasonable the proposed solution might be.

It is important to highlight that the CCM team as well as the stakeholders involved must include women. Gender balance should be a premise for the CCM process. Conflicts could involve women, men and their relationship with the forest and its resources; therefore, it is essential that both parties have a voice. See the [Tools](#) for more information.

Step 2 – develop a CCM strategy. The conflict analysis will clarify whether a particular CCM process is an appropriate way of handling the conflict. If the parties are interested in resolving the issue and there is room for negotiation, a manager should be made responsible for completing the remaining two steps of the preparation phase: designing a strategy, and informing the parties of it.

Each forest conflict is unique, and no simple process template fits all the problems. CCM strategies must therefore be tailored to the particular characteristics of the issue and the parties involved.

Step 3 – inform stakeholders about the strategy. The conflict analysis will disclose whether the parties have worked together in the past and how successful their efforts have been. Parties should understand the strategy being proposed. The less familiar that parties are with negotiation processes, the more important it is to explain in detail how it will work.

Stage 2: Searching for agreement – the deliberation stage

Once all the parties have been informed, the first meeting convened and the protocols ratified, participants can begin to deliberate the substantive issues.

Step 4 – establish ground rules for the negotiation. The parties should adopt the ground rules and protocols drafted during the planning phase. Ground rules only work when all parties agree to abide by them. Rules can be added or modified as necessary, but all parties must approve any change before it is adopted.

Step 5 – explore the issues and interests. Parties educate each other: they describe their perceptions of the problem, identify and discuss the issues, explain their concerns and list their assumptions. This may be a time-consuming step but it is important because it allows each participant to describe their side of the story directly to the other parties. The aim should be to identify and share interests – the reasons, needs, concerns and motivations underlying particular positions – rather than to assert positions.

Step 6 – specify the information needs. In this step, parties:

- elicit more information about issues and interests;
- identify technical background information that is pertinent to the issues;
- identify information that is already available, and additional information that will be needed; and
- agree on methods for generating answers to technical questions, or, when there is no consensus on technical issues, agree on activities or processes such as field trips, data collection and reporting, briefings and interviews to obtain more information.

Step 7 – prioritize the issues. Parties collaboratively assign the issues as high priority, medium priority, low priority, and undecided. Issues that are likely to be easier to deal with should be put towards the top of the agenda. Deciding on a suitable entry point for talks is important because it can have an impact on the entire negotiation process. The entry point should be an issue that is important to all parties but not so complicated that it takes a long time to resolve.

Step 8 – generate options. Parties are encouraged to collaboratively create multiple options for resolving each issue, because the search for a good solution requires a broad discussion and “thinking outside the box”. Multiple options are also advisable because it is quite common for party X to suggest an option that party Y rejects. The goal at this stage is to produce the broadest possible range of alternatives.

Step 9 – develop criteria for evaluating options. In this step, parties collaboratively develop criteria for evaluating the merit of the various options. The use of objective criteria will facilitate the process of deciding the options that are most satisfactory to all parties, and it also ensures that there are fair and independent standards for decision-making.

Step 10 – evaluate the options. Parties apply the criteria developed in Step 9 to determine which options adequately meet their key interests.

All parties should be encouraged to look closely at their “best alternatives to a negotiated agreement” (BATNAs); in other words, each party needs to determine whether it is better off with or without the proposed agreement. BATNAs are influential factors in determining the outcome of a negotiation, because parties are often motivated to find common ground by their knowledge of what will happen if no agreement is reached. The no-agreement alternative is an important baseline from which all parties can evaluate the merits of the various options.

Step 11 – reach an agreement. There are several ways of coming up with an agreement:

- *Standards and criteria* – for example, find out which basic standards would be reasonable to all the parties. These should be reformulated as criteria on which to base future decisions.
- *The status quo* – consider which aspects of the relationship between parties are currently working, and include these in the agreement. Seek mutually acceptable and fair standards and criteria for framing the agreement.
- *Agreements in principle* – start with general principles on which all parties can agree, then clarify how these principles can be put in place to lead to an agreement.
- *The building-block approach* – break down the overall problem into several smaller problems, and put the solutions to each of these together to form a general agreement.
- *Links and trades* – to solve one problem, link it with another. If a local community wants compensation and jobs, a company could offer a set number of jobs as part of a compensation package.
- *Procedural solutions to substantive problems* – instead of a single solution, there may be a need to develop a process for tackling the issue over time.
- *Vision building* – this involves the parties imagining the future and working back from that vision.
- *Model agreement* – past successes from other areas are used to build or revise a suitable agreement for the current case.
- *Single-text document* – the mediator listens to all possible options and writes a draft. One by one, the parties add to or change the draft so that it works for them, until the document works for all parties.

Step 12 – develop a written agreement. Generally, an individual or a group of negotiators is assigned the task of preparing a draft agreement. If the agreement contains specialized information, such as complex legal or scientific language, the job of drafting may be assigned to a subgroup of negotiators who are familiar with the subject. All parties should review the document to determine whether it reflects the oral agreement they have already reached.

Stage 3: After the agreement is reached – the post-deliberation phase

Once an acceptable solution has been identified, it must be approved and implemented by all stakeholders. In stage 3, the objectives of the

collaborative process are to approve and implement the agreement.

Step 13 – approve the agreement. The negotiating parties may wish to confirm the acceptability of the draft agreement to their broader constituencies. This is important for obtaining broad support and acceptance. Before final agreement, the full support and commitment of all stakeholders must be confirmed. If some subgroups remain apart from the main group, the document needs to clarify which participants are party to the agreement and which are not.

A final point of discussion is the extent to which stakeholders wish to make their agreement public. Depending on its nature, the final agreement may be enacted through a formal signing in front of witnesses, or it may require government approval. If the agreement affects many people, stakeholders may consider holding a public forum. Some groups may choose to bind their decision formally by entering their agreements into the legal system. Others may opt to announce their agreements at local council meetings or through the media.

Step 14 – implement the agreement. A negotiation is not successful until the methods for achieving its goals have been mapped out. For this reason, a plan for implementation should be included in the final agreement and not added as an afterthought. Although the parties will now understand each other better and are likely to have a greater understanding of their differences, they may remain adversaries. It would be risky to assume that differences of opinion and competition for resources will disappear completely.

E-learning

[Addressing disputes and conflicts over the tenure of natural resources](#)



This course provides guidance on managing competition over the use of land, fisheries and forests. It introduces a process for analyzing the underlying causes of disputes and conflicts. It also illustrates...

[Addressing tenure issues in the context of natural disasters](#)



One of the impacts of climate change is an increase in the incidence, severity and unpredictability of natural disasters. This course explains how livelihoods and tenure rights are affected by natural disasters, and illustrates how responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests...

Further learning

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Credits

This module was developed with the kind collaboration of the following people and/or institutions:

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This module was revised in 2018 to strengthen gender considerations.

Initiator(s): Gender Team in Forestry

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