

4. The learning-by-doing phase

Starting point for learning by doing

- Several institutional actors (stakeholders) have participated in the negotiation process.
- The institutional actors have produced and ritualised a common vision of the future they desire.
- The institutional actors have also identified a strategy to achieve that vision, including key components and objectives for each component.
- For each strategic component, the institutional actors have agreed on a course of action, and have produced relevant co-management plans and agreement(s).
- For each plan and each agreement, the institutional actors have identified expected results and impacts, as well as indicators and procedures to monitor and evaluate them (follow-up protocol).
- The institutional actors have agreed on organisations and rules to implement and remain in charge of the co-management plans and agreements.
- The relevant communities are aware of the co-management plans, agreements, organisations and rules that have been collectively produced, and consider them legitimate.

4.1 Setting to work the co-management plans, agreements and organisations

As soon as possible after the public celebration of the end of negotiations, the co-management plans for the natural resources and the agreements that complement them as part of the same strategy are implemented. The organisations and rules agreed on by all institutional actors are also set up and enforced. This allows the partners to capitalise on the momentum of the negotiation phase.

A committee and/or specific individual should be in charge and made accountable for each component of the strategy, co-management plan or main activity, reporting to the institutional actors (and/or to the organisations set in place by them) on on-going progress.

Compliance with the plans, agreements and rules is essential to the effectiveness of the whole CM process. If some actors violate the rules or do not accomplish what they agreed to do, others are soon likely to follow suit. To prevent this, the co-management plans and agreements need to specify who is responsible for enforcement, what means are at their disposal and what regular checks they are to carry out.

4.2 Clarifying the entitlements and responsibilities of the institutional actors

In the course of implementing activities, diverging interpretations of the co-management plans and agreements may surface. For the more formal agreements, contract law and environmental law will provide some basic reference. For the less formal agreements it is important to foresee in advance who will assist the parties to clarify entitlements and responsibilities and to mediate in the event of conflicts.

'accountability' —
the clear and transparent assumption of responsibilities, the capacity and willingness to respond about one's own actions (or inactions) and the acceptance of relevant consequences

In this sense, an important concept and principle to apply is that of "accountability". It is also important that the process is not entrapped in some rigid and bureaucratic enforcement system. Co-management feeds on the passion and creativity of the groups and individuals involved, and on their ability to manage human relations in an informal and convivial manner. Flexibility and good human relations may go a long way towards solving even complex and thorny controversies.

It often becomes clear during implementation that the effectiveness of an agreed course of action depends on specific changes in the country's policies and laws. These changes can be pursued, as far as possible, by the institutional actors (different actors may be able to use different pathways towards the desired changes).

4.3 Collecting data and information as described in the follow-up protocols

In the negotiation phase, follow-up protocols are prepared for the co-management plans and agreement to be implemented, and individuals are identified to apply them. The protocols make explicit the results each activity is expected to obtain, what indicators will be used to assess them and what changes each indicator is expected to reveal. The indicators will likely refer to the status and quality of the natural resources in the NRM units as well as to the social and economic objectives of the accompanying agreements. Besides monitoring results,

'monitoring' —
the regular recording and analysis of selected information on a given phenomenon or activity

however, the *process* of co-management itself deserves to be monitored. To do so, a variety of qualitative indicators are useful (see some examples listed later in this section). All indicators should be monitored regularly and the measured data and collected information should be made accessible to the institutional actors and general public. Unplanned collection of unexpected information may also be extremely useful.

In order to learn by doing it is not only important to collect data and information, but also to have a constructive attitude. If mistakes are regarded as opportunities for learning and if people are rewarded for identifying problems and promoting innovative solutions, learning by doing is strongly encouraged. On the other hand, it is important that innovations, and in par-

ticular innovations regarding NRM plans agreed on by all institutional actors, are not introduced without careful analysis and authorisation.

4.4 Identifying the main factors with an impact on natural resources and stakeholders, and experimenting with innovations

A great deal of learning takes place while the co-management plans and agreements are being implemented and the NRM organisations are tried out on the ground. This may include the gathering of data and information not even mentioned in the follow-up protocol. Such data and information should be documented and analysed, to understand in detail the main factors that have an impact on the natural resources and the stakeholders. This should be in the sense of both negative impacts and positive influences and accrued benefits. The factors identified shall be brought to the attention of the responsible CM organisations in the monitoring, evaluation and review meetings.

While the co-management plans and agreements are being implemented, the people with access to the natural resources generally develop a heightened sense of responsibility and legitimacy of their role. This may encourage them to refine NRM rules and apply more efficient and complex technical solutions. In addition, the area in which the co-management plans and agreements are enforced may grow in size (e.g. when new communities wish to sign the plans and agreements) and/or new actors (e.g. a federation of village associations) arrive on the scene. In such cases the organisations in charge of natural resource management will have to experiment—judiciously—with innovation. Judicious innovation, a key component of learning-by-doing, is facilitated by flexible management plans and budgets.

4.5 Evaluating co-management plans, agreements and organisations

Throughout implementation, meetings are held at regular intervals to evaluate the results of the co-management plans and agreements. If the activities and the financial and human commitments are particularly substantial, the evaluation should be both internal (participatory) and external (independent), and the results of these evaluations should be compared and analysed together. Various participatory methods can be used, including methods that may already be known by the institutional actors who have participated so far, such as the SWOT analysis (see Annex 1).

‘evaluation’ —

result evaluation is the measuring of progress with respect to some original objectives, assessing whether they have been attained and/or whether they are still pertinent. Impact evaluation is the measuring of the intended and unintended, positive and negative consequences of an initiative.

In a participatory evaluation process, the institutional actors ask themselves whether the co-management plans and agreements succeeded in progressing towards their own objectives as well as the agreed common vision, and thus whether the hypotheses on which the work was based are correct. They also ask themselves whether the context conditions have changed, whether lessons have been learned from experience and whether the process is on the right

track (using CM process indicators). Most importantly, they examine the environmental and social results and impacts achieved in relation to those expected.

On the basis of these discussions, the institutional actors decide whether the co-management plans and agreements have to be modified and, if so, what modifications are needed and who should carry them out. If necessary, the process reverts to a phase of negotiation— although generally at a faster pace than the first time. It is also useful to have an Emergency Plan for situations in which fast intervention is needed.

Examples of *process* indicators for co-management

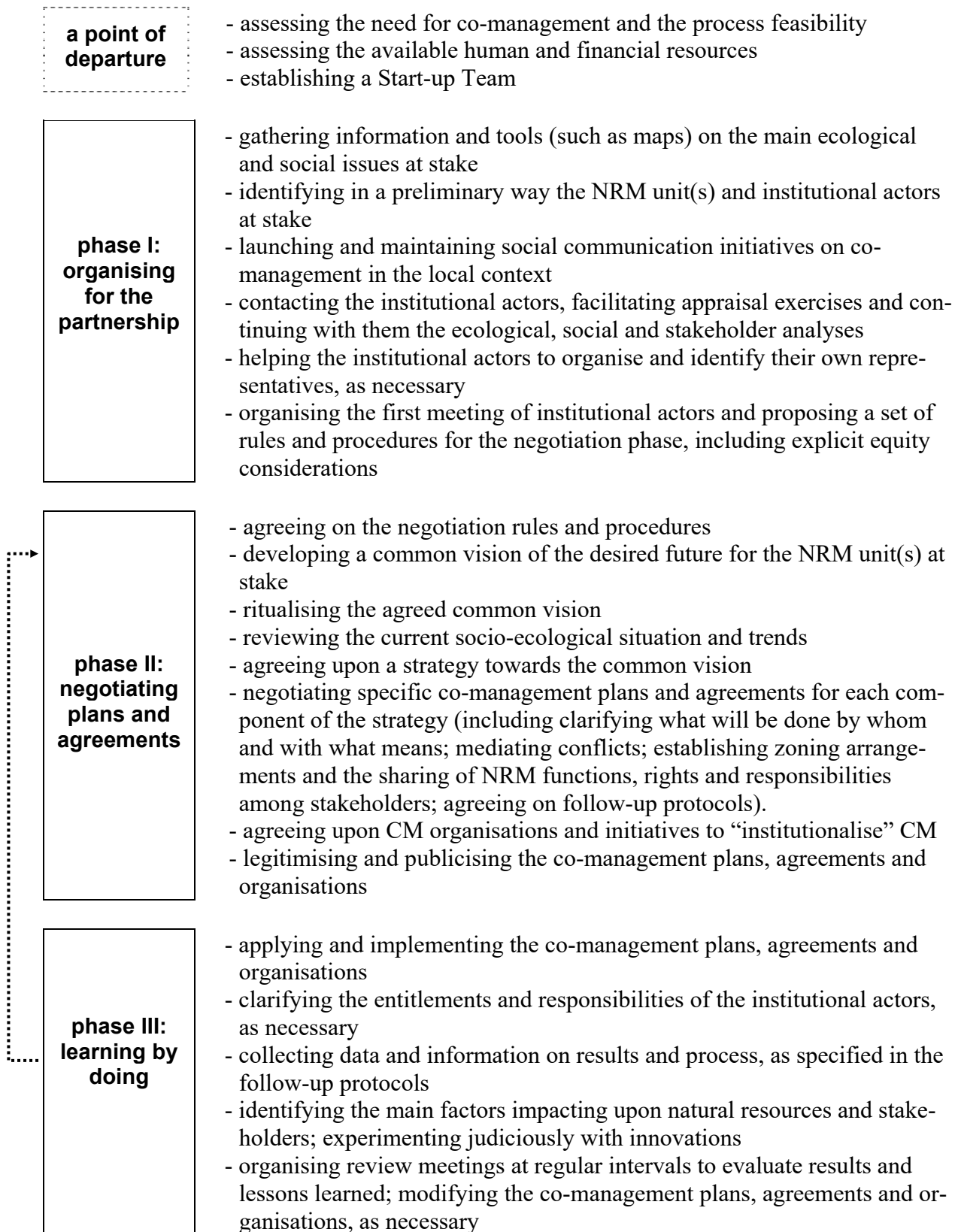
- knowledge and understanding of the institutional actors about the CM process, co-management plans, agreements, organisations and rules; about the CM objectives and schedule of events; about the management entitlements and responsibilities assigned to each concerned actor; etc.;
- existence of regular mechanisms for exchange and dissemination of NRM information as well as platforms to communicate and negotiate co-management plans and agreements;
- actors' ease of access to communication and negotiation platforms (are some actors discriminated against?);
- availability of facilitators to assist during meetings, mediate conflicts and help institutional actors to communicate among themselves;
- active participation of the institutional actors in the preparation of co-management plans and agreements (presence at meetings, effective expression and defence of the respective interests and concerns, willingness to take on responsibilities, etc.);
- existence of co-management plans and agreements linking various institutional actors (either oral or written, formal or informal);
- specific definition of the functions, entitlements and responsibilities of each institutional actor in the co-management plans;
- existence of CM organisations (with executive, advisory, decision making or mixed roles) expressing a plurality of NRM entitlements in the context at stake;
- institutional actors adhering to and complying with their agreed entitlements and responsibilities;
- institutional actors satisfied with the co-management plans, agreements and organisations;
- availability of competent personnel to clarify entitlements and responsibilities and mediate in the event of conflicts among the institutional actors during implementation of the plans and agreements;
- institutional actors committed to and active in promoting political and legal changes that facilitate the implementation of the co-management plans and agreements;
- in time, plans and agreements extended in both geographical scope and complexity;
- in time, the co-management plans, agreements and organisations progressively “institutionalised” in society.

Results of the learning-by-doing phase

The learning-by-doing phase generally has some or all of the following outputs:

- Co-management plans and agreements implemented and enforced
 - CM organisations and rules in operation, and new values and behaviours slowly becoming part of social normality (institutionalisation)
 - On-going clarification and adjustment of the entitlements and responsibilities of the institutional actors
 - Data and information collected, analysed and made available as described in the follow-up protocol on the results of the NRM plans and related agreements, as well as on the CM process itself
 - Experience with some judicious NRM innovation
 - Positive and negative impacts of activities, and lessons learned in the process, monitored, analysed and evaluated
 - Activities, plans and agreements modified on the basis of on-going monitoring and evaluation, as necessary
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5. The co-management process: a summary view



6. Lessons learned and tips for action

Lessons and tips for all phases and seasons

- Remember that social dynamics have their own rhythm and cannot be forced. Developing an effective and equitable co-management regime in most contexts involves profound political and cultural change, which, most of all, needs *time*.
- Understand the cultural and traditional roots of the activities to be implemented and rely on them, possibly by developing a syncretic approach (e.g. *ad-hoc* fusion of traditional and modern NRM practices).
- Stress the *complementarity* of the capacities of different institutional actors, and of the roles they can play for the sound management of natural resources and socio-economic development.
- Identify and bring to the fore the benefits derived from the *ecological functions* performed by the natural environment (e.g. maintenance of local climate, forests retaining and slowly releasing water, regenerating soil, etc.), which may not be well known or appreciated by all. If recognised, such functions represent effective incentives for sustainable resource management.
- Recognise and highlight the value of *non-economic benefits* accruing to individuals involved in the participatory process (e.g., social standing and prestige, experience, personal contacts).
- Recognise and highlight the value of *economic benefits* potentially accruing to communities and individuals involved in the participatory process (e.g. via sustainable productive activities, Community Investment Funds, etc.).
- Disseminate information on the *positive process outcomes* to be derived from co-management and the negotiated plans and agreements (e.g. enhanced local authority and responsibility in NRM; enhanced sustainability of local environment; promotion of a more mature and responsible society; experience with participatory practices; etc.).

‘syncretic approach’ —
the development and use of a more or less consolidated synthesis of knowledge and practices of different historical and cultural origin

Lessons and tips for the preparatory phase

- Ensure clarity of purpose in the preparatory phase and methodological confidence and skills in the Start-up Team: people practice well only what they understand and feel comfortable with.

- Pay great attention to issues of language, in terms of both idioms used and coherence and cultural significance of messages conveyed. On the one hand, the people supposed to take a role in the CM process should be able to express themselves in their own idioms. This may introduce the need for translations fairly often in the process. On the other hand, the Start-up Team should be careful regarding concepts, words, the “name of the process”, titles, stories, examples, descriptions of the starting point for the local situation, description of the common vision of the desired future and all sorts of messages in non-verbal language (e.g., attitudes, clothing, eating and drinking habits, transportation, housing, sitting and seating arrangements).
- Invest in social communication even before launching the process. Use a variety of local media (traditional and modern) to promote discussion of the NRM situation and related socio-economic conditions; make sure that people understand what CM is all about, including its potential advantages and problems.
- Insist that all institutional actors hold internal discussions on their interests, concerns and entitlements, and that they are all well organised and prepared to express themselves in the negotiation meetings. Local community people, who are not often used to the ways of outsiders, deserve special attention and assistance.
- Improve communication among the institutional actors. Facilitate informal direct contacts between individuals belonging to different groups and conveying different interests and concerns to the negotiation table. For instance, it may be useful to share transportation or housing facilities, or to eat together for a few days on the occasion of a workshop.
- Ask all the institutional actors to say which other actors ought to be invited to the negotiation meetings. Ask all institutional actors what, for them, constitutes a legitimate claim to manage natural resources. Produce and discuss a list of “roots of entitlements” in the local context.
- Always maintain a clear distinction between the Start-up Team and political parties (political parties usually thrive on conflict rather than on collaboration).

Lessons and tips for the central phase of negotiation

- The Start-up Team has to be as transparent as possible, for example, about who their members are and why, what resource allocation they have, etc.
- If you circulate preliminary reports, such as a short report on the NRM context prior to the meetings, clearly state that the reports are not final, on the contrary, everyone can discuss them, correct them and add their contribution.

- Reassure everyone that no “solution” will be imposed on any of the institutional actors and that the process will take place at a comfortable pace.
- Professional facilitators? Yes, but also as trainers of local people, who will then have a chance to act as facilitators in sub-committees, working groups, etc.
- Consider carefully the desirability of observers at negotiation meetings: in some cases they may have a negative influence on the process (some negotiators may take a populist stand for the sake of the audience). In other cases, closed meetings cause the excluded to distrust the process. The decision on whether the meetings should be open or closed needs to be carefully evaluated vis-à-vis the specific context. In fact, the decision to allow close meetings should be taken by the institutional actors themselves, rather than by their representatives.
- Make sure that the representatives of the institutional actors have a solid mandate and are not just self-appointed. Encourage them to consult with the groups they represent whenever necessary, and give them enough time to do so.
- Use as many visual aids as possible: maps, videos, photos, etc. Make the discussion as concrete as possible. Conduct field trips during negotiations. Give plenty of opportunities and time for the local communities to show what constitutes a problem for them, and to express their views on solutions.
- Give all the institutional actors enough time to think and to voice their ideas; problems need to come out and people need to be listened to! Stimulate people to think and express themselves by asking specific questions, to which all should reply.
- When negotiating access to resources, use imaginative ways of promoting effective compromises (e.g. uses based on limited permits, leasing, security of access even in the absence of a cadastre, detailed conditions of use, zoning, etc.).
- Appoint sub-committees and working groups to deal with specific issues.
- Ask the institutional actors several times, even on a one-to-one basis, whether all main obstacles and problems have been dealt with.
- Probe in depth the feasibility of agreed activities and the availability of means to implement them.
- Involve the authorities *personally*, via meetings, public events, etc.
- If one of the institutional actors exerts pressure on the others in the form of corruption, coercion or violence, the negotiation is no longer valid. The situation may be resolved with higher authorities taking a stand or through internal dissociation within the group exerting pressure (possibly not all the members of that group agree with certain methods).

Lessons and tips for learning by doing

- Find someone to be the “champion” of every major task or area of responsibility
- Promote voluntary contributions and offer plenty of social gratification in return.
- Make sure that *all* those working for the CM initiative are recognised and appreciated.
- Remember that any important NR management activity and / or change therein should be closely monitored.
- Learn from mistakes, transform them into sources of knowledge, and tell “stories” of what has been learned along the way.
- If community animators are to be employed, make sure that the communities themselves choose them and support and reward them adequately for their front-line work. This should be done through community-based funding mechanisms and not direct pay from outsiders. Community-based funding strengthens the animators’ allegiance to their own communities while direct pay may even infringe upon it. The compensation of animators through community mechanisms also ensures better transparency and trust.
- Maintain a network of relations with colleagues working in other locations and countries, yet facing similar problems (as in the case of the Co-management Network in the Congo Basin).