

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.

Lessons learned and tips for action

- 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).