

❖ **Standard 1: Engage key internal and external partners and stakeholders throughout the process.** [CONCEPTUALIZE]

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**Rationale**

Stakeholder and partner involvement is critical to ensure a common understanding and buy-in of the final products and how those products will be used for implementation. It is important to engage them early in the process because they may provide data, analyses, insights, capacities, and resources to develop the conservation plan. Having partners involved in the process provides education and buy-in for the process, and allows opportunities for the assessments to reflect partner priorities, their own planning needs, and better help support their actions. Having critical stakeholders who are not current conservation partners involved in the process offers opportunities for increased understanding and buy-in, and may ultimately lead to more effective implementation and collaboration.

**Recommended Products**

- A stakeholder analysis: Assessment of the most critical and influential stakeholders and partners and a strategy and timeline for engaging them.
- Documentation of the extent and degree of success of partner and stakeholder engagement.

**INTRODUCTION**

Creating and implementing an ecoregional assessment is a complex, labor and resource-intensive undertaking. The overarching goal of an ecoregional assessment is to support biodiversity, and this task is too large for any one organization to achieve alone. Input and assistance from the larger community is crucial at all stages of an ecoregion conservation project.

Any ecoregion contains a wide variety of stakeholders - people, institutions, or social groups that are involved in, or affected by, decision making regarding biodiversity conservation issues. There are no magic formulas to decide who to involve in a collaboration process, how to involve them, or when. Partner and stakeholder involvement is context-specific and what is appropriate in one situation may not be appropriate in another. Institutional structures, cultural values, and approaches to representation and communication will vary at different political levels and within different social, cultural, and political environments. In some cases all the stakeholders will need to be present or represented for decision making to be effective or legitimate. In others, a subset of the stakeholder group (whether it be ministers of a government, elders in a community, or major shareholders in a private sector development) will naturally and effectively assume a representative role.

Before launching into an ecoregional assessment, planning teams should conduct a partner and stakeholder analysis. An effective analysis will:

- Identify the stakeholders and partners (by category).

- Develop a strategic view of the situation, and the relationship between the different stakeholders and partners and identified their objectives, potential contributions and relationships.
- Guide the design of collaboration approaches, including the strengthening of existing positive relationships and the improvement of confrontational ones.
- Clarify partner and stakeholder interests and roles in the assessment (including one's own).

Partner and stakeholder analyses are on-going processes that should engage appropriate groups as issues, activities, and agendas evolve.

### *Identify stakeholders and partners*

**Partners** are entities that want to collaborate in the process because they have similar goals and product needs. Stakeholders can be partners as well. Partners are commonly other conservation organizations, natural resource management agencies and information providers. Stakeholders can become partners through participating in the assessment and provide support for the process and products.

**Primary stakeholders** include those who, because of power, authority, responsibilities, or claims over the resources, are central to any conservation initiative. As the outcome of any action will affect them directly, their participation is critical. Primary stakeholders can include local community-level groups, private sector interests, and local and national government agencies.

**Secondary stakeholders** are those with an indirect interest in the outcome. Depending on the issue, secondary stakeholders may, for example, be the consumer (who is interested in the continuing availability of a product), the company employee (who is concerned about job security), or the tourism operator (who wants to know whether an ecotourism destination will continue to be accessible to clients). These stakeholders may need to be involved in collaboration processes, but their role is peripheral to that of primary stakeholders, so they may need to be involved only periodically.

**Opposition stakeholders** may have the capacity to adversely influence outcomes through the resources and influence they command. While they may negatively influence different aspects of conservation planning, particularly at early stages, it is crucial to engage them in open dialogue. While conservation groups increasingly recognize the importance of involving their adversaries, they have limited experience in doing so. This will no doubt have to change over time if conservation is to be achieved.

**Marginalized stakeholders**—such as women, indigenous peoples, and other impoverished and disenfranchised groups—may in fact be primary, secondary, or opposition stakeholders, but may lack the recognition or capacity to participate in collaboration efforts on an equal basis. Particular effort must always be made to ensure their participation. Strategic foresight is needed to determine the time and support required to enable them to organize themselves and to participate in a collaboration process.

### *Develop a strategic view*

All partners and stakeholders should rapidly appraise the costs and benefits of their involvement in the ecoregional assessment. The facilitator of the assessment can develop a matrix of criteria with relative weights that can help guide the process. This should be adjusted based on feedback from the group. The assessment team will need to make adjustments as the assessment unfolds. Preparing for these changes is imperative and requires understanding what options exist, which service providers are available to assist, and what indicators can be used to trigger adaptive responses.

In some instances initial dialogue may lead to consortiums, alliances, or coalitions. This approach can provide for a strong and coherent voice, but carries associated risks. These include establishing partnerships before the team has defined issues, opportunities, and appropriate stakeholder roles and responsibilities. Forming alliances only with like-minded groups runs the risk of generating negative reactions among other stakeholders can increase due to perceived “exclusivity.” Effective information sharing, communication, and public education can help alleviate these risks. Development of a strategic plan for progressively bringing in other key stakeholders—primary, secondary, or opposition—will also be essential. The number of parties engaged in the collaboration process is also an important consideration. Not all stakeholders need to participate all the time, or to the same degree. The team should regularly review the participants in a conservation initiative and revise participation as needed.

### *Design collaborative approaches*

Initially, dialogue should be as open and participatory as possible, encouraging stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives to contribute to the identification and framing of collaboration goals and objectives. The strongest, loudest, or best resourced groups can quickly dominate and shape the process for their own objectives if it is not participatory. Over time the assessment team may determine that additional interests must be brought into the dialogue and the process needs to be open enough to facilitate this.

Where initiatives lack a cohesive structure, or require unrealistic levels of participation (because all stakeholders—priority, secondary, and peripheral—demand equal access to the process at all times), collaboration may not be a feasible option. Other initiatives may lack credibility if certain groups have little or no say in decisions. Ensuring genuine collaboration involves recognizing the existing or desired degree of opportunity for collaboration. The degree to which stakeholders are involved in collaboration processes can vary from a limited, consultative role in which they have little say in decisions, to shared management and decision-making responsibilities.

Given the challenges that open participation in a collaboration process brings (in terms of multiple, often conflicting perspectives and interests), many groups choose to promote collaboration more gradually. In these cases, start-up involves bringing together like-minded groups and allies (partners). Steering committees can be established by these groups to formulate shared goals and objectives, and assess and strengthen capacities before a wider collaboration process is initiated.

### *Clarify partner and stakeholder interests*

Collaboration is most effective when assessment team clearly defines the objectives, process, and roles so that those involved know what to expect. For example, is the purpose of collaboration to facilitate information exchange, with conservation decision-making occurring at other levels, or to enable stakeholders to set the conservation agenda in full partnership with others, even though some may already have ideas about what should be done?

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATION**

The vexing questions of partnerships and stakeholders provide ample opportunities for innovation, though perhaps not many general lessons can be drawn. Every conservation situation is unique, with unique geographies, issues, organizations (or lack thereof), and personalities. For each situation, we need to identify all the relevant stakeholders (including potential partners and opponents), clearly define expectations, and assess progress.

We need innovations in stakeholder and partner situational analyses, and examples of implementation of these analyses to refine them. In addition, we can learn from experiences in managing partnerships in working groups in terms of collaboration and compromise. One particularly important innovation is a technique for measuring the costs and benefits of engaging stakeholders in affecting conservation actions.

## **CASE STUDIES**

- ❑ **[Okanagan Ecoregional Assessment Team Charter](#)**. The team formed to conduct the Okanagan ecoregional assessment included 3 major partners along with collaborators from many other agencies and organizations involved to varying degrees depending on interest of the participating group. Terms of involvement were established early.
- ❑ **[Multinational collaboration in Central America](#)**. The Selva Maya, Olmeca, Zoque ecoregion contains portions of 3 countries in Central America. The team developed several strategies to deal with the difficulties of identifying and working with a diversity of partners in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico.
- ❑ **[Finding the Balance among Different Stakeholders](#)**. Lessons learned from stakeholder involvement in reforestation and common lands management efforts in rural India.
- ❑ **[Participants in the ERC process in the Carpathian Mountains](#)**. A summary of the participants, and their roles. While this example covers all participants including biological experts, it puts major partners and stakeholders into context.

## **TOOLS**

**[Partnership Toolbox](#)**. WWF-UK Organization Development Unit. 2000. This short summary provides simple tools for working in partnerships and a quality list of resources on this subject.

[Stakeholder Power Analysis Power Tools: Tools for Working on Policies and Institutions.](#) International Institute for Environment and Development. (2001). *Series 2*. A six-step process is presented for stakeholder power analysis.

[Stakeholder analysis exercise: A quick process for identifying stakeholders and developing community outreach strategies.](#) (2000). Government Relations Department, The Nature Conservancy.

[Where the Power Lies: Multiple stakeholder politics over natural resources. A participatory methods guide.](#) Sithole, B. (2002). Jakarta, Indonesia, Center for International Forestry Research: 87 pp. Tools and approaches to identifying and working with stakeholders.

## **RESOURCES**

### *Websites*

World Bank Participation Sourcebook. 1996.  
See <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/sourcebook/sbhome.htm>

Power Tools: for policy influence in natural resource management. See <http://www.policy-powertools.org/>

The Guide to Effective Participation is available through Partnerships Online at <http://www.partnerships.org.uk/guide/index.htm>

### *Publications*

Biodiversity Support Program. 2000. [In good company: effective alliances for conservation.](#) Washington, DC: BSP, Analysis and Adaptive Management Program.

Brown, K., W. N. Adger, et al. (2001). "Trade-off analysis for marine protected area management." *Ecological Economics* 37(3): 417-434.

Brown, K., E. Tompkins, et al. (2001). [Trade-off Analysis for Participatory Coastal Zone Decision Making.](#) Norwich, UK, Overseas Development Group, University of East Anglia.

Beltran, J. (Ed.) (2000). [Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Protected Areas: Principles, Guidelines and Case Studies.](#) IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK and WWF International, Gland, Switzerland. xi + 133pp. [Pre-publication]

Daniels, S.E. and G.B. Walker. 1999. [Rethinking Public Participation in Natural Resource Management: Concepts from Pluralism and Five Emerging Approaches,](#) in *Pluralism and Sustainable Forestry and Rural Development: Proceedings of an International Workshop, Rome, 9 - 12 December, 1997,* Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Ecoregional Conservation Strategies Unit (WWF). 2000. [Stakeholder Collaboration; Building Bridges for Conservation](#). Washington, DC: ECSU, Research and Development.

Ecoregional Conservation Strategies Unit (WWF). 2000. [A Guide to Socioeconomic Assessments for Ecoregion Conservation](#). Washington, DC: ECSU, Research and Development.

Gray, Barbara. 1989. Collaborating: finding common ground for multiparty problems. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.

Holmen, H., and M. Jirstrom. 1997. Strengthening NGO networking for sustainable development. Sweden: Lund University.

Russell, D. and C. Harshbarger. 1999. Studying the social dimensions of community based conservation: a practitioner's political ecology. Washington, D.C.: Biodiversity Conservation Network, WWF-US.

Sandwith, T., Shine, C., Hamilton, L. and Sheppard, D. (2001). [Transboundary protected areas for peace and cooperation](#). IUCN, Gland Switzerland and Cambridge, UK. Xi + 111p.

Stern, Alissa J., with Tim Hicks. 2000. The process of business/environmental collaborations: partnering for sustainability. Westport, Conn.: Quorum Books.

The Nature Conservancy (2001). Emerging Issues in Conservation Science: [People Matters](#). Washington, D.C., The Nature Conservancy: 27.

Also see People Matters [Case Studies](#) and [Appendices](#) at [conserveonline.org](http://conserveonline.org)

WWF (2004). [Situation Analysis](#)- Experiences and lessons learned in the ICD Programme. Issues in Natural Resource Management. Improving Conservation and Development in Ecoregions Programme, World Wildlife Fund. Issue 2.