

❖ Standard 1: Engage key internal and external partners and stakeholders throughout the process.

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## Case Study: **Finding the Balance among Different Stakeholders**

*Excerpt from:* Ecoregional Conservation Strategies Unit (WWF). 2000. Stakeholder Collaboration; Building Bridges for Conservation. Washington, DC: ECSU, Research and Development.

In the Bicchiwara block of Dungarpar district in India, several decades of acute deforestation resulted in the area becoming particularly barren. When the impact of the deforestation was compounded by a three-year drought, the situation reached a crisis point. As a result, many men left the area to find employment in urban areas. It became obvious to an education and development organization working in the region that the natural economy needed to be revived. Since women were the major remaining stakeholders, the organization held a meeting for women to give them an opportunity to propose appropriate strategies. The women requested various species of trees to plant on their private lands, and assistance in rehabilitating common lands. In agreeing to these requests the organization asked that the families holding rights to the common lands accept responsibility for the protection of the trees. A women's group was the first to contribute a fixed sum towards building a village fund from which payments for the protection would be made. Despite this positive outcome, the fact that the project worked only with women began causing tension with men in the community. In response, the decision was made to begin actively engaging men as well. As a first step a joint meeting of men and women was arranged. At this meeting, men's suspicions were alleviated once organization representatives explained why they were meeting (and needed to continue to meet) with the women separately. The organization also began a dialogue with the men to see if there were opportunities for them to participate in the collaborative reforestation effort.

Several lessons on stakeholder identification can be drawn from this case:

- Identification and organization of stakeholders in a community can focus around common issues or problems.
- If objectives are not clearly explained to all stakeholders in a community, actions involving only one group of stakeholders can lead to conflicts with other stakeholders.
- The formation of mixed stakeholder groups can help eliminate suspicions, but care must be taken to ensure that this does not lead to a decreased participation by particular or marginalized stakeholder groups.
- Developing activities with marginalized stakeholders around generally non-threatening issues can create the space needed for those stakeholders to discuss their needs.
- Confidence building is critical to collaboration and can be achieved through formal interaction with groups, awareness raising, and training activities.

Adapted from: Women and natural resource management: a manual for the Asia Pacific region. London, UK: The Commonwealth Secretariat, 1996.

