

# Who's interests does it serve?

## Forest landscape restoration requires a stakeholder approach

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**T**HIS ARTICLE looks at how forest landscape restoration initiatives should use a stakeholder approach to identify, understand and address the interests and concerns of key stakeholder groups. This kind of approach is important in FLR for two reasons. First, the success of FLR initiatives will depend on the willingness of stakeholder groups to cooperate with each other and with the FLR efforts. Second, since stakeholders will affect and be affected by the FLR activities, they need to be involved in decisions regarding the goods, services and processes of the landscape that are to be restored. Thus, a stakeholder approach will help achieve the goal of equitable benefit-sharing among the key stakeholder groups.

### Understanding the context of stakeholder processes

Despite the importance of stakeholder approaches to FLR, caution is required when using them. For example, it is not always possible to assign distinct identities to stakeholders, as they are often engaged in many overlapping roles and activities and these can change over time.

FLR practitioners also need to understand the context in which they will work with stakeholders and be aware of why stakeholder involvement is critical to their work. The importance of stakeholder involvement stems from various aspects of the natural resource management context, including the following points:

- natural resource management issues cut across social, economic and political spheres and involve many different stakeholder groups;
- natural resource management issues are often on a large scale (covering, for example, a watershed, province or nation). This means that some stakeholders may have to bear the costs (or enjoy the benefits) generated by the management actions of other stakeholders. For example, the excessive use of fertilisers by upstream farmers may pollute the soil cultivated by downstream villagers; and
- use rights over resources can be unclear, conflictive or open to common-property resource problems. In such situations stakeholders may compete with each other for the available resources.



**Scenarios:** women in Bolivia use scenarios as a tool for joint decision-making. Photo: K. Evans

### Identifying the key stakeholders

A stakeholder, as defined here, is an individual, group of people or organisation that can directly or indirectly affect the FLR initiative or be directly or indirectly affected by it. Key stakeholders need to be identified early on in an FLR initiative, as the information revealed may influence the activities and results of the restoration work. This identification will then need to be revised, reviewed and revisited at later points throughout the FLR initiative; stakeholders initially identified as key may later become less relevant and new groups may become apparent only during later stages of the restoration. For this reason, stakeholder identification and verification should be viewed as a continual and ongoing process that is undertaken alongside the actual fieldwork.

### Understanding stakeholder interests and interactions

Having identified the relevant stakeholders for the FLR initiative, practitioners then need to learn about the interests of, and interactions between, the different stakeholders. Some information on this will probably have been gathered

### Conflicts and trade-offs

A *conflict* is a situation of disagreement between two or more different stakeholders or stakeholder groups. In some cases there may also be internal conflicts within stakeholder groups. Conflicts are normal wherever human beings interact and do not always involve violence. Conflicts can be managed constructively.

A *trade-off* is a situation where a balance needs to be reached when choosing between two desirable but incompatible objectives or outcomes. Trade-off situations are the rule rather than the exception in natural resource management. The successful implementation of FLR requires that trade-offs are made explicit and joint solutions sought.

## Who does what

The 4Rs framework: stakeholders' rights, responsibilities, returns and relationships linked to forest land and resources: an example from Jambi, Sumatra (Indonesia)

STAKEHOLDERS	RIGHTS	RESPONSIBILITIES	RETURNS	RELATIONSHIPS
<b>Nomadic group (Orang Rimba)</b>	Customary rights (for which official recognition should be sought)  Limited formal rights, particularly because the group has no administrative 'home'	Traditional management and protection of natural resources  No formal, legal responsibilities related to natural resources	Non-timber forest products (NTFPs), crops and other forest goods; environmental services, homesteads; social security from patron-client relationship with some villagers	Customary rights over land and forest resources not recognised by the state  Weak relationship with villagers  Weak relationship with public bodies  Patron-client relationship with some villagers
<b>Original inhabitants</b>	Customary rights (for which official recognition should be sought)  Limited formal rights	Traditional management and protection of natural resources  No formal, legal responsibilities related to natural resources  Pay taxes	Timber and NTFPs, crops, income and other forest goods; environmental services; benefits from land (including grazing)	Customary rights over land and forest resources not recognised by the state  Poor relationship with government because traditional shifting cultivation is officially not recognised and because customary land has been allocated to settlers  Poor relationship with settlers because the latter were officially allowed to 'occupy' customary lands
<b>Settlers</b>	Formal rights over registered land-holdings under resettlement programs (rights of inheritance and land transaction)	Develop agricultural land-holdings under resettlement program  No formal, legal responsibilities related to forest resources  Respect customary authority of original inhabitants over land and tree resources  Pay taxes	Annual crops from dry swiddens; crops and perennial products from registered land-holdings under resettlement program	Poor relationship with original inhabitants because of 'occupation' of customary lands  Little commitment for resource management and protection other than on their own agricultural holdings
<b>Sawmill owners, small-scale timber investors, middlemen, loggers</b>	Illegal sawmill owners hold no official rights  Official licence-holders hold official permits	No formal, legal responsibilities  Pay levies in the case of licence-holders	Income from the sale of products, the services provided, or wage labour	Working and commercial relationships with original inhabitants and some settlers  Poor relationship with government in the case of illegal sawmill owners  Official relationship with government in the case of licence-holders
<b>Government logging company</b>	Logging rights	Community development  Job creation  Sustainable practices of natural resource management	Financial benefits  Financial objectives met  Income  Homes for staff	Poor relationship with original inhabitants  Official relationship with local government
<b>District forestry agency</b>	Rights to give permits regarding forest products (including timber)  Rights to arrest illegal users  Rights to propose resource management procedures	Implement government forestry policies, programs and management plans  Arrest illegal users  Control implementation of management plans	Policy and program objectives met  Prestige (respect/fear)  Recognition of authority  Financial benefits	Limited relationship with original inhabitants, mostly during incidental monitoring visits
<b>NGO implementing the integrated conservation and development project</b>	Rights to develop and manage park and buffer-zone implementation plans  No legal rights to forest	Develop and implement park and buffer-zone management plans  Coordinate with national park agency for project implementation	Project objectives met  Jobs	Relationship with original inhabitants and settlers limited to project activities  Official relationship with local government

during the stakeholder identification process, which can serve as the basis for this investigation. The key objective of this stage is to ascertain how stakeholders see their current and potential role in resource management within the forest landscape.

Various tools are available for collecting this kind of information. Some of those used most commonly include various participatory rural appraisal techniques, focus-group discussion and semi-structured interview. These should be complemented by other methods, including direct observation of stakeholder actions and behaviours, to cross-check the information obtained.

When exploring stakeholder interactions, practitioners should look out for any situations of conflict or trade-off (*see box*); understanding the conflicts between stakeholder groups is a necessary first step of any conflict management strategy. Similarly, understanding the trade-offs involved in choosing between mutually exclusive objectives will help practitioners to encourage stakeholders to see the value of FLR and to better manage the process.

Once the information on stakeholder interactions has been collected, it needs to be organised in a way that facilitates further analysis and discussion. One useful tool for doing this is the '4Rs framework', which sets out stakeholder rights, responsibilities, returns and relationships (see Dubois 1998). The *table* (previous page) presents an example of such a framework from Indonesia, where this tool was used in preparation for an action-learning process involving different stakeholder groups within the context of an adaptive, collaborative forest management project. It made explicit several imbalances in stakeholder roles and responsibilities. For example, those with most stake in the forest (that is, the original inhabitants) had limited legal responsibilities related to forest management. On the other hand, while the government had the responsibility to manage and protect the forest, they lacked the means to do so effectively. In principle, responsibilities (and therefore rights) should be transferred to those who have more stake in the forest and arrangements created for effective relationships between stakeholders. The role of an FLR practitioner is to assist stakeholders in negotiating a more balanced set of 4Rs.

This stage of an FLR initiative requires a considerable level of communication between FLR field staff and a variety of stakeholder groups in order to gather the necessary information. These interactions with stakeholders should be used as an opportunity to build trust with local groups and this is also an appropriate point at which field staff can begin to systematically encourage communication and collaboration between the different stakeholders.

## **Managing multi-stakeholder processes**

As discussed in the article on page 7, FLR should be implemented using an adaptive management approach that involves an action-learning process whereby stakeholders collaboratively, systematically and deliberately plan, implement and evaluate the restoration activities. Through this process of learning the stakeholders build experience in order to act collaboratively as a group. The role of FLR field staff here is to manage this process by facilitating collaboration between stakeholders.

To enable practitioners to take on this facilitation role, FLR initiatives need to develop appropriate arrangements for the action-learning activities. These arrangements need not be set up especially for the FLR initiative; some may already exist, including community-wide meetings, encounters among

neighbouring communities, or government consultation meetings involving local groups and other stakeholders.

## **Joint decision-making**

Once these arrangements have been established, FLR practitioners can begin the actual facilitation work. Here we will look at an important aspect of the facilitation process: joint decision-making.

To properly facilitate joint decision-making, practitioners need to:

- focus on the core values of joint decision-making. These values are: a shared responsibility for the consequences of decisions; the inclusiveness of decisions; a mutual appreciation of one another's views; and active participation by all stakeholders. Joint decision-making means that the facilitator does not make the decision himself/herself but guides the process by which the different stakeholders collectively arrive at a decision;
- have the appropriate attitude. This implies that process facilitators should have a sense of fairness so that stakeholders consider the facilitated processes equitable, and they should also be empathetic and good listeners. Having the appropriate attitude is more important than any facilitation or learning tool; a facilitator's ability to adopt the right attitude can improve as they gain more experience with multi-stakeholder processes;
- provide the right conditions for stakeholders to learn new ways of joint decision-making. There are three important conditions here. First, stakeholders need to feel encouraged to propose new, creative ideas, even if they seem absurd; the more creative the group and the more alternative the decisions proposed, the more likely it is that an innovative decision will be taken. Second, stakeholders should be encouraged to take time to think and to reflect critically on their assumptions and old ways of thinking. Third, the facilitation should aim to build constructive relations between the stakeholders; and
- be equipped with effective tools to facilitate group processes. Effective facilitation tools are those that encourage joint learning and may include, for example, participatory mapping, focus group discussion, brainstorming, community meetings, scenarios, role-plays and computer-based simulation modelling.

## **Reference**

Dubois, O. 1998. *Capacity to manage role changes in forestry: introducing the '4Rs' framework*. International Institute for Environment and Development, London, UK.