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## NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONFLICT

### Why natural resource management is conflict management by definition

Land, water, forests and livestock as well as marine life are primary sources of income for a good part of the population of developing countries. In many cases, natural resources are considered common goods or are utilized by several users. Resource management always involves cooperation but also different – often competing – interests. Drawing on experiences in more than 20 countries, HELVETAS learned that any complex management of natural resources will likely have to address the issues of ownership of natural resources, allocation of power to manage and control natural resources and the sharing of natural-resource benefits. Many political contexts are therefore inevitably affected by conflicts. To prevent violent conflicts, assess risks and foster adaptation as well as innovation, we advocate for increased analysis of interest and needs of actors, as well as their power relations and rights that influence resource management in different settings. Evidence shows that good analysis and subsequent measures allow projects to increase their impact and contribute to conflict prevention.

## CAUSES AND FACTORS FOR CONFLICT

### OVER NATURAL RESOURCES

Conflicts over natural resources are not a new phenomenon. A series of **factors or trends are known which often trigger or substantially exacerbate conflicts over natural resources**. The result is that local/traditional mechanisms are no longer able to address or solve conflicts and mediate diverging interests. The following list gives an overview of such factors:

- In most cases, natural resources have more than one user. Without clear agreements and/or legal status, this opens doors for conflicts, which reflect the power relations between users.
- Economic and population growth, combined with the destruction of eco-systems leads to a situation where competition over resources increases. Such conditions can easily exacerbate the potential for conflicts, particularly where other conflict factors (e.g. politicized ethnicity or social inequality) are also present.
- Climate change substantially affects developing countries. More and longer drought periods increase the pressure on natural resources, thus triggering new or worsening existing conflicts.
- A richness in natural resources (e.g. timber, mining, gold) can increase corruption and create a so-called “resource curse”. Here, conflicts between state officials or companies on one side and rural people and their organisations on the other side are likely to occur.
- Political changes in many countries, especially in fragile contexts, can create new aspirations in terms of exploitation of resources. Functioning institutions, arrangements and regulations are especially necessary in such situations.
- Official laws regarding natural resources management do often not match with traditional indigenous user rights and regulations, thus causing conflicts between government officials and local users.
- Privatisation policies of common natural resources or services can trigger serious (political) conflicts within a society (e.g. land grabbing).
- Especially in post-war situations, but also in areas with neighbouring countries experiencing armed conflict, weapons are easily available. At times, armed groups play a role in controlling the access to natural resources or landlords are having their possessions guarded by armed militia. If safety and security are not guaranteed by the state, even small producers resort to weapons. This often leads to smaller or larger scale war-like confrontations between different ethnic groups or producers.

### TYPICAL NRM – RELATED CONFLICTS

- Conflicts over land tenure due to an unclear “legal” situation and unclear transfers in the past
- Conflicts between traditional and government authorities about competences and power over a natural resource
- Conflicts between different herders in access to pastures and water holes
- Conflicts between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders on traditional grazing rights and damages to crops and fields
- Conflicts over the use of water by different actors (private and public) or interest groups for different purposes
- Conflict over forests (common property or state property) between different stakeholders, including state authorities regarding user rights and access
- Conflicts between local resource users and external (often bigger and more powerful) actors

### ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT AID

Development practitioners must be aware that any intervention they might make around natural resources – even the most well-intended and humanitarian one – will introduce new factors, which might change the existing balance of power. Any such intervention may increase existing conflictive situations or even create new ones. Assistance brought into a context becomes a part of the context. Organisations can be neutral, but aid is not.

Development projects dealing with natural resources may trigger or exacerbate conflicts by having the following (possible) effects:

- They may change or modify production forms, processes and (informal) agreements.
- They often create new decision making procedures or modify existing ones, thus affecting existing power relations.
- They contribute with resources (directly or indirectly), and might create “winners and losers”.
- They convey or introduce values and intend to change attitudes, which might be embraced by certain members of the target group while others might resist or reject it (e.g. a project which is primarily addressing minorities).

## CONFLICT SENSITIVE PROGRAMME

### MANAGEMENT

Conflict sensitive development cooperation is aware of existing and potential conflicts and recognizes different identities of stakeholders' groups. Projects and their staff do not consider themselves as "neutral" but as players in the process with roles and space for action.

Through conflict-sensitive programme management, our staff constantly analyzes and monitors the context and how it interacts with the project and adjusts programmes and projects accordingly.

(→ See also: Manual & Field Guide: 3 Steps to Working in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations)

### HOW TO ADDRESS CONFLICTS

Well-designed interventions, based on a sound analysis of the situation, have the potential to mitigate conflicts. In those cases, projects and their staff can play a positive catalyzing or facilitating role in a conflict.

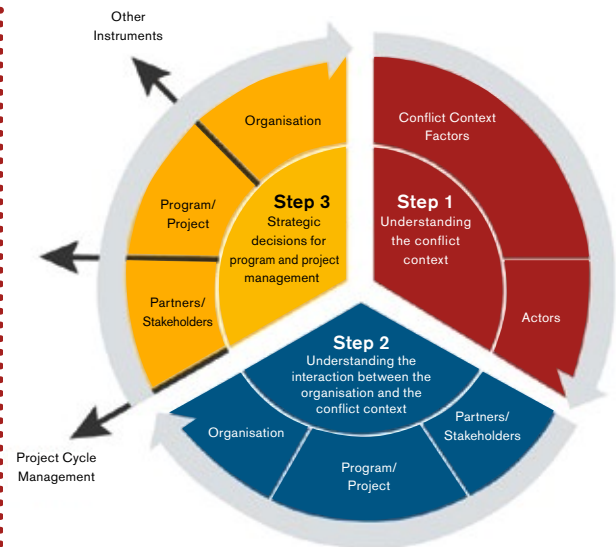
Capacity building in non-violent conflict transformation techniques for individuals and institutions has proven successful and will be intensified in the future.

A further important key for projects in conflicting situations around natural resources is to promote and adhere to the principles of Good Governance, particularly: participation, non-discrimination, transparency, accountability, legitimacy and legality.

In most cases, conflicts around natural resources start at a local level and must be dealt with on this level, by including all stakeholders/parties concerned in the process. Traditional community-based mechanisms are mostly well suited to local conditions and are thus easily adopted by the communities.

However, local conflicts can have their root causes outside the project realm or spill-over to sub-national or even national levels which are usually outside the reach of projects. Here, advocacy strategies can be considered and donors have an important role to play as they are positioned to establish and lead a dialogue at higher levels, particularly if they can refer to concrete and relevant own project experiences.

### 3-STEP approach to work in fragile and conflict affected situations



**Step 1: Understanding the (conflict) context**

**Step 2: Understanding the interaction between organisation and the conflict context**

**Step 3: Strategic choices**

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### PROJECT EXAMPLE: MYANMAR

Helvetas is implementing an SDC community-led coastal management project in the Gulf of Mottama, Myanmar, in a consortium featuring one local and one other international partner. The project is designed to support the fishing industry, promote alternative livelihoods and support sustainable natural resources and biodiversity management. However, illegal fishing is common in the area. So Helvetas also has the challenge of identifying illegal fishers and entering into a dialogue with them in order to reach a consensus and persuade the entire population to support the conservation project. This is necessary, as Helvetas would otherwise risk being attacked by illegal fishers, whom our intervention would deprive of their main livelihood.



Fishers catching little fish in the Gulf of Mottama, Myanmar.

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Only through detailed conflict analysis will it be possible to understand the interests, needs and fears of the stakeholders we are working with and then design appropriate measures to prevent conflict and resistance to our work. In order to get both legal and illegal fishers on board, Helvetas must identify a sensitive strategy that involves everyone, and build trust with the fishers to better inform them about Helvetas' project aims and organisational values. The project will therefore focus on awareness-raising before continuing with other activities. At the same time, the organisation will need to develop a strategy to deal with illegal fishers caught in the act. Helvetas is currently discussing reporting illegal practices and supporting local authorities through capacity development and infrastructural resources, which would enable them to enforce the law, while at the same time setting up platforms for dialogue and exchange about conserving the area and combating illegal fishing.

### PROJECT EXAMPLE: MALI

The north-western Sahel region in Mali was affected by a violent conflict between ethnically diverse herders and farmers. One of the root causes and drivers of the conflict was competition over access to natural resources (water, grazing land, pastoral corridors), which cannot be settled easily and tends to get worse with climate change. Helvetas therefore set up a support scheme for community based conflict resolution, building on existing traditional structures. At the same time Helvetas provided technical assistance to sustain and facilitate negotiated solutions for the benefit of all stakeholders (e.g. fences to protect gardens, wells for access to water).

Enlarged and representative committees are empowered and trained to facilitate and mediate in all kinds of inter-community and ethnic conflicts; increasingly they are also managing internal conflicts of communities. The support structures of specialized local partners furthermore allow for regional conflict resolution, coordination and advocacy up to the national level. Violence has been reduced significantly and outbreaks of new violent conflicts have been largely prevented, stereotypes and perceptions have changed, women are more involved and people are feeling much more secure.



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Building a well in Mali.

## HOW CAN HELVETAS SUPPORT YOU?

### Backstopping

- Provide access to tools and instruments for conflict analysis, Conflict Sensitive Program Management, etc.
- Discuss project ideas, issues to work on
- Assist in designing analysis (e.g. ToR, suitable tools, lines of inquiry, etc.)
- Provide relevant further documents and guidelines
- Assist in the assessment of the situation
- Assist in finding specialized partners or consultants
- Assist in elaborating and disseminating Best Practices and Lessons Learned

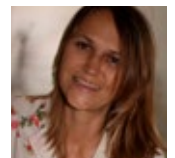
### Field Consultancies

- Provide feedback and advice to programmes
- Conduct trainings or workshops on NRM and conflict, Conflict Sensitive Programme Management, conflict analysis, peace building and development
- Conduct assessments, evaluations and planning missions
- Assist in necessary specialized analysis throughout the PCM
- Elaborate Best Practices and Lessons Learned

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