Good Governance

Good governance is key for an equitable (fair and impartial) use of natural resources. The management of natural resources should build on participatory and collaborative approaches involving community participation in decisions, responsibilities and management of the natural resources, in close collaboration with other stakeholders.

Governance can be described as the totality of institutions, rules and traditions that steer, rule and regulate the processes within a social or political system, e.g. state, organisation or community. Governance can be characterised by rules and values, power, structure, organisation and processes within a social or political system and can operate at different levels – international, national, provincial, and district or community level.

GOOD GOVERNANCE refers to the quality of the cooperation and division of roles between the state (government), private sector and civil society, in particular how decisions are taken and who gets to participate. Good governance is characterised by the following principles:

- Participation,
- Accountability,
- Transparency,
- Efficiency and Effectiveness,
- Equity and Inclusiveness,
- Rule of Law.

Figure 1 gives an overview of the six principles of good governance. Moreover, the six principles are explained in detail with regards to Water User Associations (WUAs) in Annex 1.

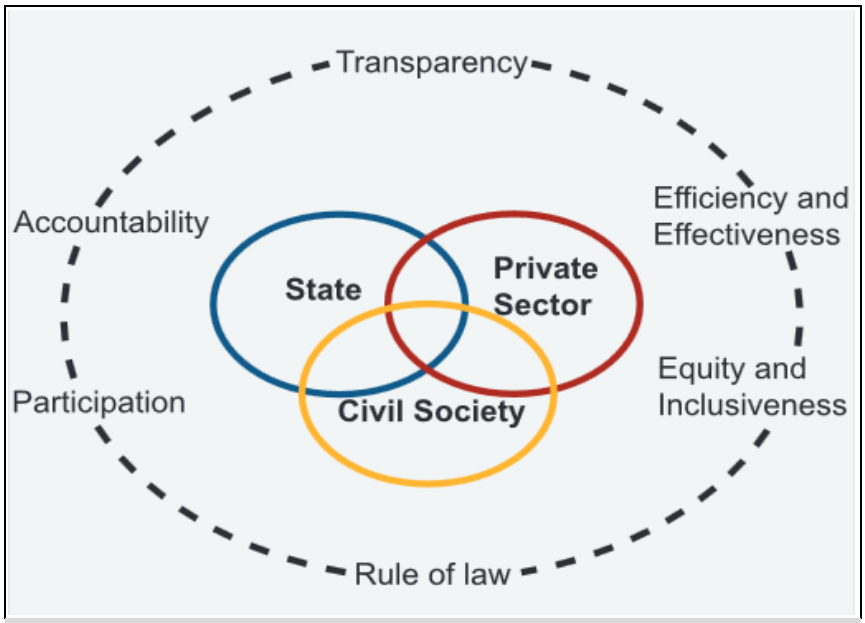

Figure 1: The concept and six principles of good governance (Helvetas, 2009)

Good governance relates to the relationships between and among different kind of institutions. It involves the public sector (state) orienting its work towards citizens' concern in a transparent and accountable way, the private sector acting with social responsibility, and citizens being able and motivated to participate in, and contribute to, public decision-making in the frame of **civil society organisations**. Good governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard and taken into account in decision-making (Helvetas, 2009).

Civil society organisations

Civil society includes organised forms that are not from the government or for profit, and these range from structured and formal Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to informal grassroots groups. Civil society organisations are often self-initiated and regulated (individual citizens develop autonomous, organised and collective activities) and have voluntary membership (interest groups, associations, cooperatives, political parties etc.). Civil society organisation can also operate at different levels - from international to community level. **Community Based Organisations (CBOs)** are defined as community-level organisations (based on membership) which pursue the goal of improving the living conditions of their own members (Helvetas, 2009).

In Afghanistan the Community Development Councils (CDCs) are important civil society actors at community level, but other organisations like watershed committees and farmer organisations also play an important role. Box 1 on the next page gives some examples of important CBOs in rural Afghanistan.

Box 1: Examples of CBOs in rural Afghanistan

- CDC
- Watershed Committee
- Rangeland committee
- Water User Association
- Mirab systems
- Community bakeries
- Farmer organisations
- Seed banks
- Marketing association
- etc.

Farmers, herders and other rural people - especially women and members of disadvantaged groups - should be empowered to participate in civil society organisations, such as the CDCs, to enable them to make their voices heard. Moreover, many CBOs need initial support to manage their organisation sustainably and in the framework of good governance. Capacity building of local communities should emphasise governance aspects alongside technical aspects. Such an integrated approach helps to improve livelihoods and manage common resources in an equitable and sustainable way.

Equitable and sustainable resource management

Management of natural resources is closely linked to local governance. Farmers, herders and other rural people, both women and men, depend on natural resources for their livelihood. In many cases, natural resources are considered common goods (in contrast to private goods) and property rights may vary from access, withdrawal, management, exclusion and alienation for the different stakeholder groups. Good local governance is key to supporting the equitable and sustainable use of these common goods (also called common pool resources) within and between communities, up- and downstream, and also among different social groups and between the various stakeholders.

Good governance should consider the following aspects (Helvetas, 2009):

- Empower the rural population to formulate, claim and obtain their rights to manage and use their surrounding natural resources;
- Empower the rural population to identify, formulate and demand the type of support and services needed;
- Support attitude change and capacity building amongst service providers (public and private) to assure that appropriate support and services are increasingly delivered efficiently, effectively and equitably;
- Promote the development of clearly defined policies and legislation, foresee, and encourage the development of local private sector that respects equitable benefit-sharing.

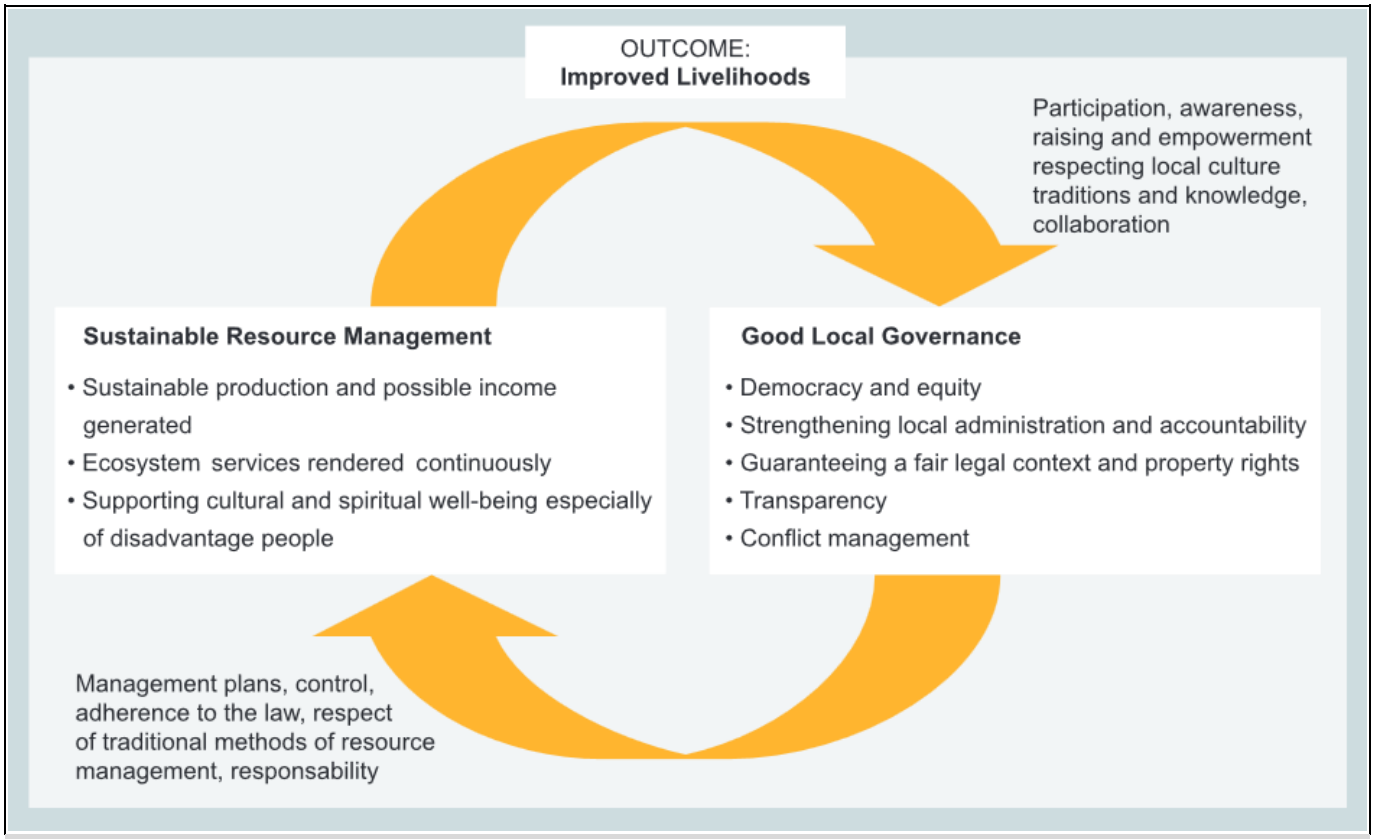

Figure 2: Linkage between sustainable resource management and good local goverance (Helvetas, 2009)

Even then, conflicts may occur, which often present a big challenge for the functioning of CBOs. While it is important to address these issues, they are extremely complex and some of the most contested in many countries. Therefore, it is important to address the issues of ownership of natural resources, allocation of power to manage and control natural resources, and the sharing of benefits from natural-resource. Conflict sensitive project management is key to implementing natural resource management in a successful, sustainable and equitable way.

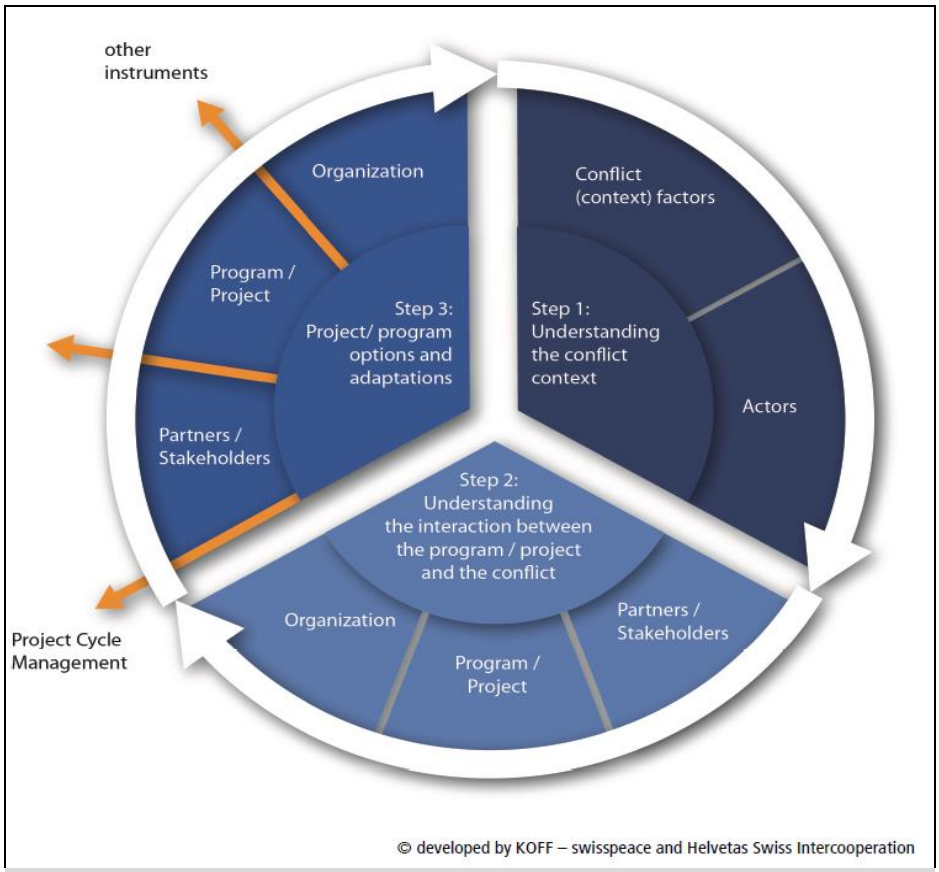

Figure 3: Conflict-sensitive Project Management in 3 steps (KOFF, 2012)

Conflict sensitivity

"Do-no-Harm" is a conflict-sensitive development planning and management tool. Conflict sensitivity is the ability to (KOFF; 2012) (see Figure 3):

1) Understand the context, in particular to understand tensions and issues with a potential for conflict and the issues with the potential to mitigate conflict and strengthen social cohesion;

2) Understand the interactions between interventions and the context;

3) Act upon that understanding, in order to avoid unintentionally feeding into further division, and to maximize the potential contribution to strengthening social cohesion and peace.

For more information, please refer to Helvetas Guidelines on Natural Resources and Conflict as well as KOFF, 2012.

Further reading and references

- Helvetas, 2009: Making Good Local Governance Grow – Improving Local Governance through Equitable Sustainable Natural Resource Management, Experience and Learning in International Co-operation No. 8. Available at: http://assets.helvetas.org/downloads/making_good_local_governance_grow.pdf
- Helvetas Guidelines on Natural Resources and Conflict – Why natural resource management is conflict management by definition. Available at: https://assets.helvetas.org/downloads/4_naturalresourcesandconflict_rot_final_engl_a4_portrait.pdf
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Annex 1: Good Governance in Water User Associations

Governance principle	What does it mean?	An example related to irrigation governance (Water User Association)
Participation	Participation includes not only the representation of the people but also their active, free, effective and voluntary participation in decision-making processes, especially if directly affected. Citizen engagement based on civic education is crucial.	WUA members (men and women) attend the WUA general assembly and ask questions to the WUA executive about the information presented.
Transparency	Transparency means that relevant information is freely accessible to the concerning stakeholders.	The budget (income and expenditure) of the WUA is posted outside the WUA office, so that it can be reviewed by all WUA members.
Accountability	Accountability is broadly defined as the obligation of power holders to take responsibility, and to be answerable and liable for their actions and choices. Power holders are those who hold political, financial or other forms of power.	The WUA makes the schedule for water distribution, but does not provide the water according to this schedule. An institutional space exists for WUA members to take up this issue with the WUA executive and receive an explanation for why the schedule was not kept.
Equity and Inclusiveness	Equity and inclusiveness deal with the inclusion of all groups of a society, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised. In addition, questions of equitable or equal sharing of benefits and burdens are raised, bearing in mind that eventually both the process and the outcome have to be considered fair by the people.	The WUA takes special measures to ensure that water reliably and equitably is distributed to women-headed households and tail-end users.
Efficiency and Effectiveness	Processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of the resources at their disposal. It refers to the extent to which the expected results of a particular project have been achieved, and also includes aspects of sustainability.	Farmers (WUA members) implement efficient water-use techniques, ensuring that more water is available to their downstream neighbours.
Rule of Law	This principle focuses on fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. It also contains full protection of human rights, especially those of minorities. The processes by which the laws are enacted and enforced are fair and efficient. Access to independent justice is assured for everybody.	The rules of the WUA concerning who can use the water and when are equitably and fairly applied to all WUA members.
Source: HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation		