# *Probing the Powers at Play in Co-Management from the Bottom Up:*

# The Case of Cahuita National Park, Costa Rica

*By*

**Viviane Weitzner**
Natural Resources Institute
University of Manitoba

email: umweitzn@cc.umanitoba.ca

# 1. Introduction: Putting People Back into Co-Management

*"There are two reasons why Cahuita is still in the hands of the people here:*
*1) Its leaders; 2) Its dignity."*
**– Cahuita Playwright Claudio Reid (Pers. Comm., 1998)**

While experts are increasingly noting the lack of critical edge given to the treatment of the concept of community in common property theory (e.g., Agrawal 1997; Leach et al. 1997), the same lack of critical edge is evident with regards to the treatment of the concept of power. Aside from recent inquiry into the sociological underpinnings of power in co-management (e.g., Jentoft 2000) and the questioning of the real interests and motivations of states in decentralizing power in environmental decision-making (e.g., Ribot and Agrawal's panel at the 1998 IASCP and the field of political ecology in general), three common assumptions related to power pervade the literature on co-management: 1) power is something that is devolved from the state to the local level/co-management institution; 2) co-management spans a spectrum of arrangements with different degrees of power-sharing, where state management is at one end of the spectrum and community self-control is at the other; and 3) the degree of public participation and power-sharing can be evaluated using adaptations of Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation.

This paper presents a critical inquiry into these three assumptions and sheds light on the various types of power at play in co-management through an examination of the process of conflict and collaboration in Cahuita National Park, Costa Rica. The Cahuita experience is precedent-setting in that it is the first case of collaborative management between the state and local people in a national park in Costa Rica, and was the outcome of a conflict management process. With over 25% of Costa Rica under protected area status – 12% of which has national park status – there is a lot riding on the possibility that the Cahuita approach can be adapted to other conservation areas as the government shifts from the *"fences and fines"* (Wells and Brandon 1992) approach to protected areas management it adopted in the 1970s, towards a process of *"deconcentration, decentralization and democratization"* (Solórzano 1997).

The Cahuita case pushes against the conventional view of co-management as a devolution of power, and highlights a missing link 'assumed away' in the picture of co-management envisioned above – namely, the role of individuals and leaders. The experience offers some very rich insights

into how individual empowerment and leadership on the one hand (both on the part of community members *and* government officials), and community identity or "*dignity*" (to use Claudio Reid's description cited above) on the other hand, can affect the negotiations and outcomes of co-management (cf. Pinkerton 1998; Geddes 1998). These insights invite reflection on the appropriateness of using the Arnstein ladder for evaluating co-management. Furthermore, from a broader perspective, the Cahuita case provides the opportunity to begin to probe the question: What types of power are at play in co-management, and how do they affect outcomes?

This paper begins by briefly outlining the Cahuita case study. It then reflects on the three common assumptions about power outlined above through the lens of the Cahuita case, and by drawing on relevant critical literature. The various insights into the different power spheres and types of power that affect co-management are charted. The paper concludes by highlighting the main lessons from Cahuita with regards to power issues that affect co-management theory and practice.

The analysis is based on six-and-a-half months of fieldwork conducted collaboratively with Marvin Fonseca Borrás of the University of Costa Rica. The fieldwork took place in three main stages between February 1998 and September 1999, and combined a variety of qualitative and participatory approaches aimed to strengthen the collaborative management arrangement in the park. Activities included interviews based on open-ended questions with the Management Committee, community organizations, government officials and community members in Cahuita and neighbouring communities; participant observation through attending Management Committee meetings, community events and park tours; focus groups and participatory mapping with resource users in Cahuita and in neighbouring communities (fishers, tour operators, guides, turtle users and hunters); a women's gathering to better understand the role of women in decision-making; presentation and verification of preliminary results through a workshop with the Management Committee and interested parties; and a planning session to address some of the issues that arose in the research. By spacing our visits over a period of one-and-a-half years – and through ongoing follow-up and involvement with Cahuita since then – we have been able to follow the process closely.

## 2.      From Conflict to Collaboration:

# The Case of Cahuita National Park, Costa Rica[1]

## 2.1 From Cocoa and Coconuts to Conservation and Catering

The history of conflict and collaboration between the Government of Costa Rica and Cahuita, a largely Afro-Caribbean community located on the southeastern Pacific coast of Costa Rica, begins in 1970 (Figure 1). That year, the coral reef lining Cahuita Point and 1067 ha of coastline were declared a national monument without any consultation. The state wanted to protect the coral reef, considered the most important in the country, as well as the historical artefacts in the area, the flora and fauna and the various marine ecosystems (Executive Decree 1236-A). But for the farmers who survived from small-scale cocoa and coconut production and subsistence hunting and fishing within the national monument boundaries, the restrictions that came with the new protected area foreshadowed the end of a way of life that had endured for over 100 years. Concerns grew when they heard the state was contemplating changing the category of protected area to national park, which would mean even greater resource use restrictions and expropriation of lands (Palmer 1977).

Spurred by growing community concerns, an *Ad Hoc* Commission of government officials and community leaders was established in 1974 to review the needs of local people and propose amendments for consideration by the Legislative Assembly during its legal review of the change in protected area category. Although Cahuita took the lead, neighbouring communities were also asked for input. In 1977, the Commission presented its report – an Agreement between the community of Cahuita and the government – to President Oduber.

Among other things, the Agreement recognized that local people were a *"favourable factor"* in terms of conserving the natural and cultural resources of the area. It stated that those people living within the boundaries of the proposed park should continue to reside on their property and engage in subsistence activities *"as long as they do not extend beyond their currently occupied areas nor change their traditional methods of work"*. A 1977 study revealed that 87% of the land was owned by small-scale farmers, and, of these, 93% did not want to sell their land (Ramírez

---

[1] For a more in-depth description of this case see Fonseca and Weitzner (1999); Weitzner and Fonseca (1999); and Weitzner (2000); see also Palmer (1977) for a vivid account of Cahuita's folk-history.

1977). The people living within the boundaries of the park therefore had a large stake in ensuring that the government pay heed to their proposed amendments.

When the national park was established in 1978, however, the *Ad Hoc* Commission's proposed amendments were disregarded in the Executive Decree declaring the park. The government's official position was that in the long term, the lands in the park would be expropriated, and their owners paid compensation. Due to lack of fund and because many owners did not have the necessary documents to show title or possession, only a few people have received compensation even today.[2] It should be noted, that in practice many people continued their traditional livelihood activities and continued to work their farms after the establishment in the park. It was not until the *Monilia* fungus hit the region in the late 1970s and early 1980s, destroying 95% of the cocoa crops, that farmers decided to give up their cocoa farming activities (Kutay 1984). Those with crops within the park boundaries were more disposed to sell their land to the state, and many who were previously against changing their livelihood to tourism turned to the expanding industry as the only viable alternative. In short, in the space of 15 years, Cahuitans were forced to change their main source of livelihood from small-scale agriculture, subsistence fishing and hunting to tourism because of the establishment of the national park, the decimation of the area's cocoa crops, and the development of the tourism industry.

Today there are approximately 70 businesses in the town, ranging from tour agencies and hotels to restaurants and bakeries (Cruz 1996), all of which depend on tourism directly or indirectly. Cahuita's 15 or so fishers – and the majority of people from neighbouring communities – still engage in subsistence resource use activities in the park (fishing, turtle-egg gathering, hunting and some farming).[3]

### Figure 1: Cahuita National Park and Neighbouring Communities
(terrestrial portion: 1067 ha; marine portion: 22, 400 ha)

---

[2] Required documents were available for only 25 of 71 affected plots of land, and of these only 10 have been paid off 20 years later (MINAE 1997).

[3] By the late 1990s, the population in the town centre was approximately 1100 (EBAIS 1998) – with 3,983 people living in the entire district of Cahuita (i.e., Cahuita and its neighbouring communities) (Minsiterio de Economía y Hacienda 1997) – consisting of English-speaking Afro-Caribbeans, Spanish-speaking *ladinos*, and a growing number of North Americans and Europeans investing in the tourism industry.
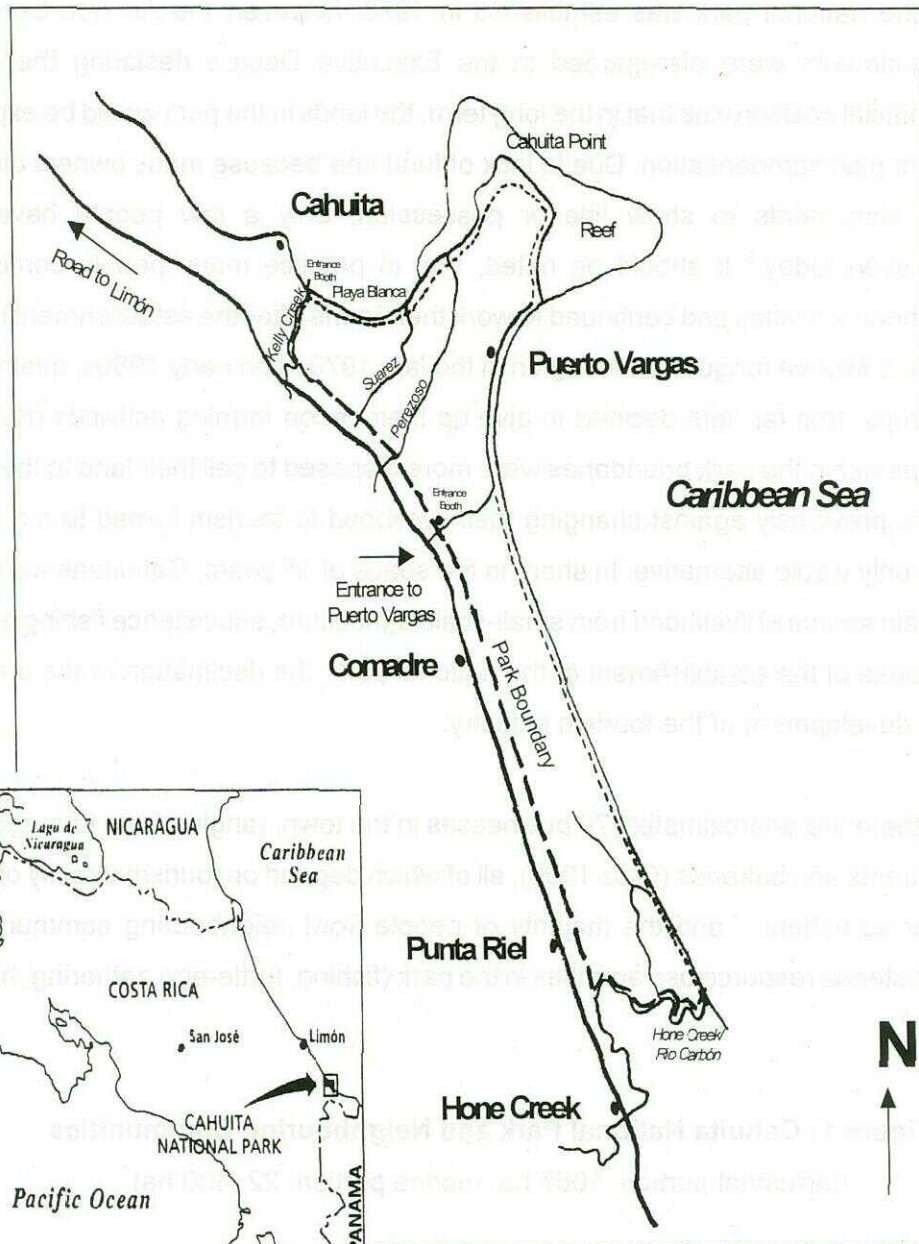
Source ............................................................................................................................ : Adapted from and Weitzner Fonseca

(1999) and Vargas (1993)

## 2.2 Cahuita Rises Up: Price Hike Threatens Cahuita's Livelihood

Things came to a head on September 1, 1994, when the state imposed a nation-wide price hike in park entrance fees for foreigners from 200 colones to 2,400 colones – from approximately $1 to $15 USD – an increase of over 1000%. The state's rationale for this hike was to gather more funds to improve the infrastructure, services and conservation in Costa Rica's national parks. But if the government had its way, a foreign family of 4 would have to pay $60 USD a day to visit Cahuita's beach, an amount that would have almost certainly meant the death of the tourism industry in Cahuita. For Cahuitans there were two main issues at stake: economic survival (the state was once again threatening Cahuitans' livelihood) and sovereignty (Cahuitans felt strongly that Playa Blanca, the beach adjacent to the community, was their beach).

In reaction to the increase in fees and the threat to their livelihood, the people of Cahuita staged a peaceful takeover of the park. The wardens were asked to leave their posts and tourists were invited into the park free of charge. In addition, the community struck a Committee of Struggle (*Comité de Lucha*) comprising three community leaders and the president of Cahuita's Development Association (the local elected government) to begin negotiations with the government.

> *"When the problem emerged, the people took the park....in a pacific way. What we did was to sit next to the entrance of the park and play dominos. When a tourist arrived, we said: "Sir, don't pay. The community of Cahuita invites you to enter the park free of charge." We knew we were in our just right, because we knew that the law backed us given that many of us were still owed compensation for our lands."*
>
> – Member of the *Comité de Lucha*
> (pers. comm., 1998, emphasis added)

### 2.2.1 Towards a Negotiated Solution

Intense negotiations between the Committee of Struggle and MINAE ensued, mediated by Costa Rica's Ombudsperson (*Defensoría de los Habitantes*). The immediate interest for the state was to generate more funds for protected areas and to remain in control of Cahuita National Park. The bottom line for Cahuita was free access from Kelly Creek to Rio Suarez, the two kilometres of beach adjacent to the community (Figure 1). Following a series of proposals and counterproposals – ranging from Cahuita controlling the whole park, to five kilometres and finally two kilometres of beachfront – the parties came to a mutually agreeable solution.

On February 13, 1997, the Minister of Environment and Energy, René Castro Salazar, and the President of Cahuita's Development Association, Rolando Shirley Brooks, signed an

Agreement of Cooperation which:

- Prohibited charging entrance fees to people who use the portion of the park between Kelly Creek and the Rio Suarez (Playa Blanca).
- Reconfirmed the government's commitment to complete compensation payments to the landowners whose lots were expropriated.
- Created a Services Commission made up of community representatives and government officials to co-administer the services of the park, including: the director of the La Amistad Caribe Conservation Area (ACLACA) or a representative; the administrator of Cahuita National Park; two representatives of Cahuita's Development Association (Cahuita's elected local government); and one representative of Cahuita's Chamber of Tourism (an elected body representing Cahuita's business interests). The functions of the Committee were to ensure the adequate functioning and quality of new services to park visitors (washrooms, camping areas, a locker room, first aid services and information about the park and its biodiversity), establish fees for these services; and develop guidelines for the operations and administration of the Committee.
- Had a five-year term, starting from the date of validation by the Contraloría General de la República, a government office in charge of officially approving these types of agreements.

In addition, the community was given the go ahead to accept and administer donations from tourists entering Playa Blanca, and to reinvest these funds for the upkeep of Playa Blanca. The community had in fact been operating on this principle since July 1995 (Joseph 1995).

Besides this local outcome, Cahuita's struggle also had an impact on national policy: national park entrance fees for foreigners were reduced from USD $15 to USD $6. Clearly, this had a positive impact for other communities neighbouring national parks whose livelihood depended on tourism.

## 2.3    The Transition: From Co-Administration to Co-Management

In January 1998, the Services Committee changed its name to the Management Committee, reflecting a shift in vision from the collaborative administration of Playa Blanca only, to the collaborative management of the entire park. It received legal recognition when the rules of use for the Cahuita National Park were published May 20, 1998. This was a very significant event, as the Services Committee never received validation from the *Contraloría*, and was in effect operating *de facto* rather than *de jure* for one year. But the transition also shows the extent of the trust-building that had taken place between the community of Cahuita and the government since the 1994 conflict, and government support of the collaborative process. Highlights of the Executive Decree (26929-MINAE) outlining Cahuita National Park's rules of use are that it:

- Refers to the Organic Law of the Environment, calling for the involvement of civil society in the planning and development of Cahuita National Park;
- Officially establishes the Committee for the Management of Resources and Services (referred to as the Management Committee throughout this article), outlining its structure, administration and process (essentially the same as those in the Services Committee);
- Describes the functions of the Management Committee: to ensure the adequate functioning and quality of services offered in Cahuita National Park; to establish fees for these services; to take the administrative measures necessary to ensure that the park is functioning well; to ensure the fulfilment of the public use rules outlined in the document, as well as those entrenched in Costa Rican environmental law; to modify the rules of use as stipulated in the Executive Decree;
- Notes the role of the Management Committee is to recommend to the Director of ACLACA actions needed to ensure the park is functioning well;
- States that if the services offered to the public are not carried out satisfactorily, MINAE will assume temporary responsibility;
- Describes public use rules, public use zones (but locations not identified), carrying capacity of the park, and subsistence fishing rules. Only 20 local licensed fishers can use the park, and of these no more than 5 will be licensed to fish lobster (outside the reef area only). Turtle hunting and turtle-egg gathering are prohibited;
- Does not include a termination date.

## 3.    Rethinking Assumptions about Power in Co-Management

The negotiation, implementation and evolution of the management institution in Cahuita National Park provides rich material for the examination of the three common assumptions about power that pervade the literature on co-management. For the purposes of this discussion, I am assuming that co-management involves local resource users or community representatives and government officials.

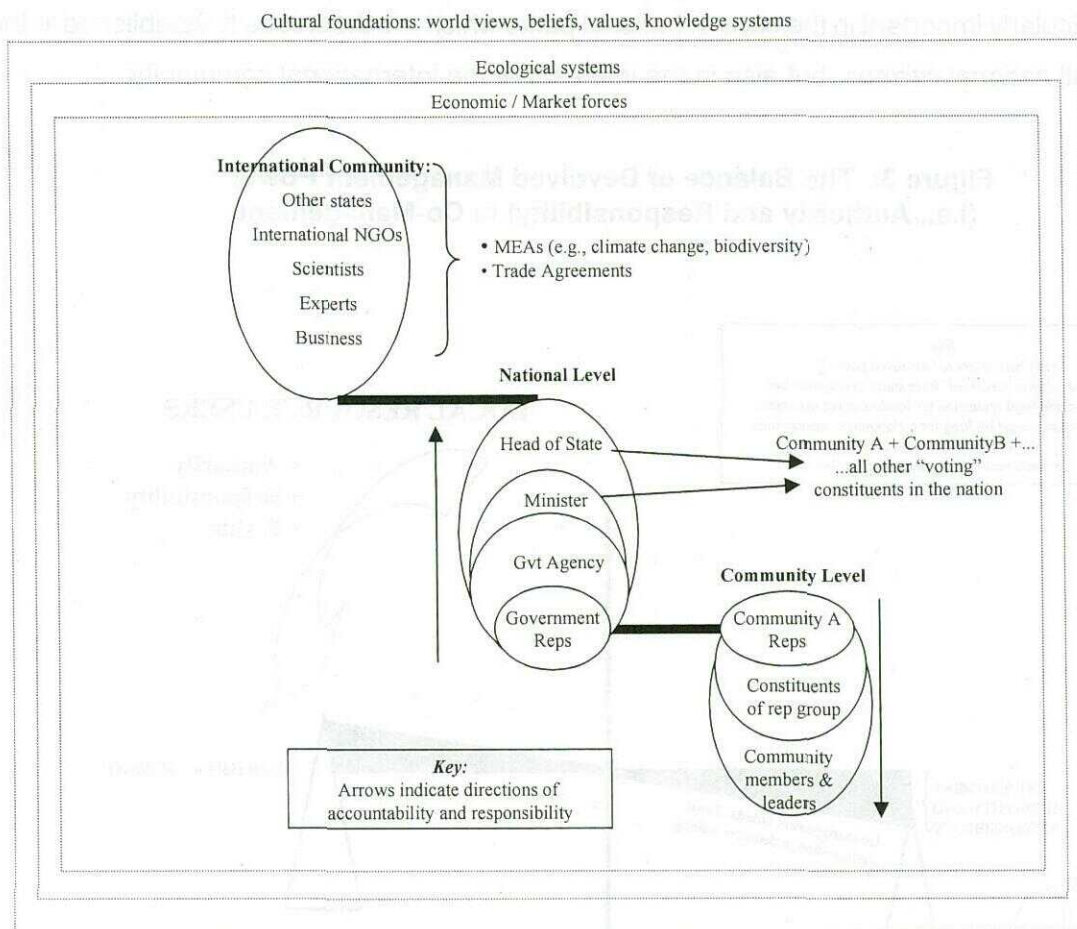## 3.1    Top-Down or Bottom-Up Management Power(s)?

*Assumption:   Power is 'devolved' from the state to the local level/co-management institution*

In most writings on co-management, the type of power that is devolved to the co-management institution is referred to as 'management power,' i.e., the authority and responsibility to make and enforce rules. Devolution implies a *"transfer of power and responsibility for the performance of specified functions from the national to the local level governments **without reference back to the central government**. The nature of transfer is political (by legislation)..."* (Pomeroy and Berkes 1997, my emphasis). The assumption is that the state is the source of management authority and responsibility and that through the devolution of management power a co-management institution could achieve autonomy with few – or no – strings attached to the government. Three main problems arise with regards to this assumption:

*1) It seemingly contradicts the role and legitimacy of nation-states.* Critics have pointed out that there are relatively few examples of management arrangements *"in which there is a significant devolution of power to local people"* (Pimbert and Pretty 1997; Murphree 1994). Ribot and Agrawal (1998) suggest this is linked to the inherent contradiction in the proposition that states give up the very control and authority that gives them legitimacy (and that is also, in theory, the result of their legitimacy).

*2) There is a conceptual problem with the idea that co-management arrangements comprised of government and community stakeholders be devolved power "without reference back to the government"*. This conceptual problem relates to the nature of accountability and responsibility of nation states not only to *all* their national constituents, but also to their international commitments and other 'structuring agents' that shape national policy (Sanderson 1995) (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Constraints, Accountability and Responsibility in Co-Management**

Cultural foundations: world views, beliefs, values, knowledge systems

Ecological systems

Economic / Market forces

**International Community:**
Other states
International NGOs
Scientists
Experts
Business

• MEAs (e.g., climate change, biodiversity)
• Trade Agreements

**National Level**

Head of State

Minister

Gvt Agency

Government Reps

Community A + CommunityB +...
...all other "voting" constituents in the nation

**Community Level**

Community A Reps

Constituents of rep group

Community members & leaders

*Key:*
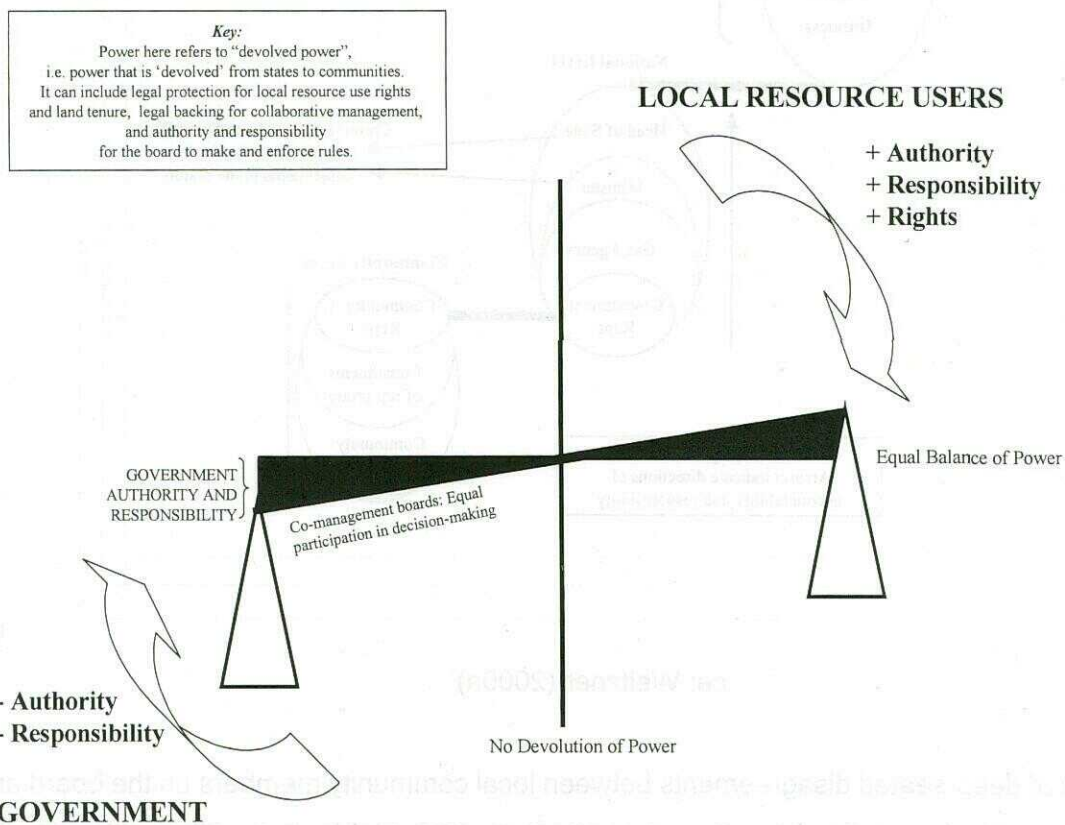Arrows indicate directions of accountability and responsibility

So ur

ce: Weitzner (2000a)

In the event of deep-seated disagreements between local community members on the board and people not on the board to whom the government is accountable (e.g., other citizens), the government's responsibility is to ensure that the views of the external actors can influence the final outcome. Likewise, external actors to whom the government may not be accountable, but who have

a powerful influence over government decision-making (e.g., multinational corporations), would likely have an important role in swaying the government's position and final outcome.

Of necessity, then, co-management stops short of full autonomy and, regardless of the rhetoric of devolution, there is always reference back to the government (Figure 3). Making this clear is important in ensuring that the discourse of devolution does not raise expectations that cannot be met which could lead to *"misunderstanding, disappointment and withdrawals of trust"* (Covey 1992), and is useful in designing and strengthening co-management arrangements. This point is particularly important in the case of national parks which are theoretically established in the interest of all national citizens, but also in the interests of the international community.

## Figure 3: The Balance of Devolved Management Power (i.e., Authority and Responsibility) in Co-Management



*Key:*
Power here refers to "devolved power",
i.e. power that is 'devolved' from states to communities.
It can include legal protection for local resource use rights
and land tenure, legal backing for collaborative management,
and authority and responsibility
for the board to make and enforce rules.

**LOCAL RESOURCE USERS**

+ **Authority**
+ **Responsibility**
+ **Rights**

Equal Balance of Power

GOVERNMENT
AUTHORITY AND
RESPONSIBILITY

Co-management boards: Equal
participation in decision-making

- **Authority**
- **Responsibility**

No Devolution of Power

**GOVERNMENT**

Source: Weitzner (2000a)

*3) It does not acknowledge agency and responsibility at the local level.* Devolution implies that management power resides with the state and must be transferred to the local level; that authority and responsibility are transferred from the centre to the periphery. However, this top-down image obviates the responsibility and agency at the local level. Many co-managers – especially Indigenous co-managers – have a very different conception of who owns the resources and land that is co-managed, and the source and type of responsibility that is assumed in 'management', a conception that is rooted in their cosmology, spirituality and relationship with the land.

In the case of Cahuita, several insights emerge regarding local level agency and responsibility which reveal an alternative perspective:

- The negotiation and recognition of the Management Committee was not the result of a state-willed devolution, but of the community's socio-political empowerment (Rocha 1997), assertion of control, and ability to negotiate its demands (a statement further supported by the fact that to date Cahuita National Park is the only co-management arrangement involving national parks in Costa Rica);

- As Agrawal (1999) has put it, *"state formation in community spaces is not just about the reproduction of state structures and logics through acts initiated by states, or through coercion. It is as much about how this reproduction relies on the willingness of locally situated actors to use new laws to extend state control over themselves."* In other words, just as decentralization is a means by which states can access loci of power to which they had no previous access, so too is it a means by which the local level can have access to the state. It provides the opportunity for local people to attempt to have their views heard, and their rights protected, in ways not previously available. Cahuita took control of Cahuita National Park, and assumed administrative functions in the protected area even before it settled on a joint administrative arrangement in which it would be a party in decision-making. By moving from self-control to joint management, the community acknowledged the benefits of entering into a partnership with the state.

- There is a sense of ownership and sovereignty over the park and, according to interviews, a feeling that the local level has far more at stake – a greater responsibility – in conserving

the national park than 'nomadic' government officials who are just passing though.

This discussion questions the appropriateness of relying on the discourse of devolution in the context of co-management. While there is no doubt that state recognition of co-management arrangements through legal backing is critical – i.e., that co-management has legitimacy from the perspective of the state (cf. Jentoft 2000) -- whether management power is always 'devolved' is the question.

## 3.2    Sharing One Power or Accommodating Powers?

*Assumption:    Co-management spans a spectrum of arrangements with different degrees of power-sharing, where state management is at one end of the spectrum, and community self-control is at the other*

The concept of power-sharing is central in the literature on co-management, and is often used to define this type of arrangement: e.g.,*"co-management signifies [community-led initiatives'] political claim to the right to share management power and responsibility with the state"* (McCay and Acheson 1987); co-management is *"the sharing of power and responsibility between the government and local resource users"* (Berkes et al. 1991); or *"co-management involves formal power sharing between government and users and is a process, rather than a tool, of management"* (Hanna 1995).

The fundamental problem with the notion of power-sharing, however, is that it implies that in co-management one type of power, one set of responsibilities and one constituency is being shared. Moving away from political theory to how people actually conceive themselves and their interests, it becomes clear that co-management is at the confluence of various types of powers, responsibilities and constituencies. Just as state officials may feel they are sharing power that inheres in the state – whether on the basis of democratic, or some other, form of legitimacy – so too local co-managers may feel they have power that inheres in their own cosmology and/or immediacy to and relationship with the resources at stake (cf. Figure 2). In this context, the key is to negotiate, respect and balance the diverse views and interests, including the diverse views on the source and legitimacy of the powers at play. In light of this, it might be more appropriate to use

the language of accommodating different powers, rather than sharing one type of power. Table 1 underscores this point by highlighting the various spheres and types of power at play in co-management, with particular reference to Cahuita National Park.

## Table 1: The Spheres and Types of Power at Play in Cahuita National Park

| Sphere | Power Type/Issue | Source | Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Supra-national | Economic and Political 'Structuring agents' | Multinationals International Governments International NGOs | Shapes International Policy that drives Costa Rica's national policy; multinationals influence Costa Rica's policy directly |
| National | Political authority and responsibility Judicial power | Constituents: Citizens, Industry NGOs | Shapes Costa Rica's national policy |
| Management Committee Level | Legal authority and responsibility (i.e., Executive Decree) (legitimacy from the perspective of state)<br><br>Knowledge and Education (regarding the resource, legislation, participatory processes, etc)<br><br>Representation (i.e., power vested in individuals, legitimacy)<br><br>Personality and ability/openness to understand (i.e., attitude, respect)<br><br>Ability to speak in public and negotiate (i.e., to participate and affect outcomes, manage conflict)<br><br>Economic (i.e., ability to implement) | Community and state reps<br><br>Community<br><br>State | Shapes the outcomes of decision-making and rules of use in the park |
| Committee-Community | Information<br><br>Legitimacy/Credibility (in the eyes of community members) | Committee members | Shapes the potential input of community members in the Committee's decision-making process |
| Community level | Culture/Identity/Spirit/ History (social cohesion)<br><br>Market forces/elitism<br><br>Socio-political empowerment | Individuals<br><br>Leaders<br><br>Community | Shapes who is elected to the Committee, and the input that community representatives bring to the Committee negotiating table<br><br>Nurtures and helps shape the abilities of Committee members<br><br>Helps shape who is elected to the local, municipal and national governments |
| *Note: All 'power spheres' are embedded and interconnected, as per Figure 2.* | | | |

### 3.3 Putting Individuals Back into Co-management

*Assumption:*   *The degree of public participation and power-sharing in co-management can be evaluated using adaptations of Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation*

Co-management practitioners have tended to examine the degree of public participation and power-sharing in co-management using adaptations of the Arnstein ladder of citizen participation for particular common property resources (e.g., Berkes et al. 1991; McCay 1995; Pinkerton 1994; Pomeroy 1995; Sen and Nielsen 1996; Borrini-Feyerabend 1996). However, while variations of the Arnstein ladder are useful in labelling the structural type of arrangement in place as viewed from the outside, there are critical power dynamics and experiences that take place among Committee members, within individuals and at the community level that affect outcomes that these adaptations do not capture.

Rocha (1997) highlights this point in her synthesis of relevant literature and elaboration of a ladder of empowerment. She notes that Arnstein's ladder is founded on the classical Dahlian notion of power, namely that actor *"A has the power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do"* (Dahl 1957), and locates the source of this power in the community. In reality, however, there are a variety of different types of power and empowerment experiences by individuals and communities that are combined in different ways *"to create individual and community outcomes"* (Rocha 1997). Rocha's points are very relevant in the case of Cahuita, both with regards to the negotiation and the implementation of the management arrangement.

### 3.3.1 Conditions Leading to the Negotiation of Cahuita's Management Arrangement

In the negotiation of the collaborative management arrangement for Cahuita National Park, for example, both community and individual socio-political empowerment played critical roles. Rocha (1997) underscores that in socio-political empowerment, there are two core elements:*"1) critical reflection of the community and members-of-the community (individuals) rethinking their relationship to structures of power and 2) collective action upon those structures"*. Seymoar (1997) notes that this type of empowerment is the result of community groups tackling successive inequities: after a community identifies, acts on and 'resolves' an inequity, it achieves increased

space to negotiate beyond that point, and to tackle a new inequity; with experience and success, community groups are able to handle conflicts easier and negotiate settlements more effectively. This 'self-empowerment cycle', as Seymoar calls it, is evident to a large extent in the negotiation skills and tactics Cahuita's leaders have learned over the years. Ideas such as peaceful takeovers and other types of social action or 'civil disobedience', recourse to Costa Rica's Ombudsperson, going to the courts, or contacting people in powerful political positions for political leverage, come easily to those who have a long history of fighting on behalf of the interests of the community (and themselves).

The critical point to make in the case of Cahuita, however, is that it is not so much community groups who catalyze structural change in Cahuita, but individual leaders on the one hand, and on the other hand, what Claudio Reid – one of Cahuita's cultural leaders – refers to as community *'dignity'*. Going back to Reid's quote at the very beginning of this paper, in essence there is a feedback loop between leaders and community dignity: community dignity creates the environment for the emergence of leaders; and leaders enhance community dignity.

There are a variety of different types of leaders working to influence different parts of this feedback loop in Cahuita, ranging from *the aggressive or political leaders* who negotiate with external actors and are motivated by both personal and community interests (such as the members of the Committee of Struggle); to *cultural leaders* who keep the history and

*"I'm in* la lucha *(the struggle), and when I enter the struggle I'm revolutionary; I don't even forgive my mother. That's how I am, revolutionary. And that's how it has to be."*
– **Cahuita 'political' leader (pers. comm., 1998)**

*"[Community leaders] may not even know they are leaders. They are people who act, not just talk... A leader is someone who does things for the community, and does not expect anything back"*
– **Cahuita female leader (pers. comm., 1998)**

culture of Cahuita alive through song-writing and theatre; to *sports leaders* who play an important role in organizing team sports and creating community cohesion and spirit; to *women leaders* who work towards cultural empowerment, creating economic opportunities for women and providing nurturing environments for their children, in addition to playing an important role in being the life-force (literally, providing food and drink) and supporting other leaders negotiating on behalf of the community. In the context of a community where there is increasing competition among families and individuals for access to scarce and valuable resources such as tourism, and where drug and alcohol use is on the rise, the role of Cahuita's leaders in fostering community spirit, identity and dignity is particularly important.

In addition to the role of local level leadership and socio-political empowerment in creating the conditions leading to the negotiation of the management arrangement in Cahuita National Park, there is one very critical element that helped shape the process: the role of 'visionaries' in the state system. For example, the director of the Conservation Area and the administrator of Cahuita National Park during the time of the negotiations played key roles in facilitating the process not only by providing the community negotiators with access to resources (e.g., fax machines, telephones), but by maintaining an open mind and being able to walk between and link the local and government levels (both are of Afro-Caribbean decent and are natives of the area). Costa Rica's Ombudsperson was also a key element as the official mediator.

> *"In this process, it was necessary to take leadership. In other words, the institutional representative of highest ranking at the local level should lead the process. In critical moments... make clumsy) the process in a negative way regarding... an obstacle in the process and is a step backwards. But attitude that one has to have... should always be open; to converse, to negotiate, until the point at which...you push the extremes of the regulations and scope of action permissible. One always has to have a positive attitude and radiate this in the community so that people see you as a positive agent, and not as someone who is an obstacle in the process."*
> **– Former superintendent of Cahuita National Park (pers. comm., 1998)**

And since the initial negotiation, the director and lawyer for the Conservation Area have actively supported the transition of the Services Committee to the Management Committee, and worked hard for the Committee to receive the legal backing it now has through the Executive Decree. Regardless of the shift in Costa Rica's conservation policies towards public participation, it is important to recognize the courage and importance of these actors in being open to negotiating and implementing a precedent-setting arrangement in the context of a protected areas system – and staff – that is still largely operating under the conventional fences and fines approach to management.

### 3.3.2 Dynamics Among the Committee Members

The role of individuals is further highlighted in observing the Management Committee in operation. Although one would expect community members to have more say with regards to the outcomes of decision-making in that there are more community representatives than state representatives on the Committee (three community, two state), it became clear that of more importance were the personalities, attitudes, abilities and interests of the individuals involved. A given individual's ability to influence decision-making was related directly to his or her standing and influence in the community (and with the government officials), but also to the individual's ability

to speak his or her mind openly and to participate in discussions. Overall, government officials on the Committee were far more comfortable operating in a Committee environment and voicing their concerns, and were therefore more able to influence decision-making; community members became more comfortable and empowered over time – the more they participated, the better they became at participating and voicing concerns (in some cases, there was quite a long learning curve). In addition, however, the disposition of the various individuals on the Committee – their (closed or open) attitude and respect (or disrespect) for one another, and each other's knowledge and potential contributions – had a large impact on the dynamics and outcomes.

With regards to the Arnstein ladder, then, the degree of participation taking place and power to influence outcomes of decision-making depended not only on framing factors such as the type of legal recognition accorded the Committee, the proportion of government to community seats – or even the level of community empowerment – but on factors relating to the individuals on the Committee. Even with a very progressively structured co-management body and strong legal backing, in the end the type of power balancing that takes place can swing from one end of the participation spectrum to the other depending on the particular individuals involved.

## 4.    Representation and Funding: Power Keys

In addition to the power issues considered in the discussion of the three common assumptions, two critical elements that shape the process and outcome of co-management are who has access to the decision-making forum and who controls the funding. Again, the point is to look beyond what might appear to be progressive from the outside, to understand the various forces underpinning and shaping the co-management experience.

### 4.1 Representation: Perpetuating Prevailing Power Relations?

Recent critical literature has highlighted the heterogeneity among the individuals who ostensibly represent the community (and by extension, those who represent the state),

*"The creation of the park ruined us completely, because we can no longer use it... Being from here, how is it possible that the park prohibit us from taking an iguana while foreigners can take and export them while we go hungry?"*

*"They don't let us catch turtles, they don't let us do what we did before...we don't have the rights we had before."*

– **Resource users from the community of Punta Riel (pers. comm., 1998)**

noting that prevailing power relations at the local level might be perpetuated in who is or who is not represented on a co-management institution, and therefore who has the power to influence rules and enforcement practice (e.g., Agrawal 1999; Leach et al.1997; Kabeer and Subrahamanian 1996). The Cahuita case bears this point out. In effect, a 'Tragedy of the Commoners' (McCay 1987) situation is occurring. Despite the Committee's expanded mandate over the entire park, resource users (fishers, hunters, turtle-egg gatherers) from neighbouring communities other than Cahuita who depend almost entirely on their subsistence use and activities in the park have been excluded from the Committee.[4]

Two related power issues are whether community representatives on the Committee do in fact represent the various community interests, and whether there is two-way communication between the community members on the Committee and their constituents (i.e., whether the people in the community have the ability and power to influence decision-making through their representatives). In Cahuita, these linkages are still tenuous. In our random household survey (n=39) in Cahuita, we asked people to list the community organizations they were aware of, and to comment on how they thought these were working. While most people listed Cahuita's Chamber of Tourism and the Development Association of Cahuita, the pervasive description of how these groups were working was 'not well'. In addition, of 39 people interviewed, 10 said they had heard of the Management Committee, but only 6 were able to comment correctly on some aspect of its function and role. Although the Committee meets every week for three hours, and community members can bring their concerns directly to the Committee, the Committee has not developed any communication vehicles to inform people about its existence, membership, when it meets, the issues it is considering or its decisions. Lack of accountability and communication brings into question the legitimacy and credibility of a given co-management board in the eyes of the people it purports to represent, and raises questions about whose interests the members are representing. This is corrosive to any co-management institution's long-term viability and stability.

---

[4] In a recent planning session (January 1999) with the Management Committee, the need to include representation from resource users in neighbouring communities was highlighted. However, Committee members – specifically Cahuita's community representatives – felt it was too soon for this, underscoring the need for the Committee to 'get its house in order' first. There is room for optimism, however, as important inroads were made for future inclusion: the Committee defined itself as *"an instance of joint administration and natural and cultural resources management of Cahuita National Park between the State the community of Cahuita and its neighbouring communities"* and identified as one of its objectives to *"contribute with the strengthening and participation of organized groups in communities neighbouring Cahuita National Park for the integrated management of the protected area and its area of influence"* (Weitzner 2000a).

## 4.2 Funding: Controlling the Purse Strings, Controlling the Process?

In many instances of co-management, boards are dependent on the government for funding. According to some co-managers, if a government agency has control over the purse strings, it in effect controls the outcomes of decision-making and overall effectiveness of the board (cf. Weitzner 2000b). In Cahuita, the Management Committee does not receive any funds from the government. Instead, it generates its own funds through the donations given by visitors at the Playa Blanca entrance of the park. These funds are used to pay the Committee-hired park wardens who patrol the Playa Blanca section of the park, and extra funds are reinvested back into community projects (Committee members are not paid per diems). To date, the treasurers of the Committee funds have all been community members. An interesting situation that has arisen is that the park administration has approached the Committee on numerous occasions to borrow money for fuel and other necessities related to fulfilling park functions. In essence, through lack of funding (and personnel), the government has lost its ability to assert its sovereignty and control over the protected area. The Committee – and in particular, the community members who handle the donations and funds generated – has increased its potential to influence decision-making in the park through its control over the allocation of funds for the implementation of activities.

While the Committee has achieved a certain amount of financial autonomy compared to other co-management institutions, it is important to point out that it is vulnerable to fluctuations in tourism and park visitation, and it will need to raise more funds in order to design and implement priority projects, and to engage in capacity-building. The question for the future is whether it will be able to maintain its autonomy in light of this, or whether the monies it raises will come with strings attached.

## 5.    Conclusion and Lessons Learned: Co-Management with a Human Face

While acknowledging that the issue of power in co-management is recently receiving more attention – particularly in relation to political ecology – this paper began by outlining some of the major assumptions about power that pervade the literature. It then probed these assumptions through the lens of the case of Cahuita National Park, Costa Rica. This inquiry led to a series of considerations, including that community and state representatives have different

types of responsibilities and constituencies to whom they are accountable that are often founded on very different world views. Because of this – and the observation that the local level has agency – questions are raised about the language of devolution and power-sharing. Further, the paper underscored the important role of individuals in affecting the process and outcomes of co-management, noting that adaptations of Arnstein's ladder may not adequately reflect this role.

Regardless of all the discussion on structuring agents, conceptual, theoretical and legal constraints, in the end many of the challenges and power issues are, as one Canadian co-manager has stated, *"in people's heads"* (Weitzner 2000b). This is also where the strength of co-management lies: within people. With regards to 'people as enablers', the Cahuita case offers the lessons that co-management will be strengthened if:

1. There are 'visionaries' within the state agencies;
2. There are leaders of all types in the community, cultural identity and community spirit;
3. There is a willingness and commitment on behalf of the co-managers to work together, and they have the following powers: knowledge and education (regarding the resource, legislation, participatory processes, etc); representation (i.e., power vested in individuals, legitimacy); personality and ability/openness to understand (i.e., open attitude, respect); and ability to speak in public and negotiate (i.e., to participate and affect outcomes, manage conflict).

To help fulfill the board's mandate, three additional factors surface: the importance of financial resources and independence; legal authority and responsibility for the co-management arrangement; and the ability to forge alliances with external agents. If this is all couched in a nation-state where there is democracy and rule of law, then a co-management board is well positioned to become a vehicle for empowerment rather than co-option.

## Acknowledgments

# References

Agrawal, A. 1997. *Community in Conservation: Beyond Enchantment and Disenchantment.* Gainseville, FL: Conservation and Development Forum.

_____. 1999. State Formation in Community Spaces: Control over forests in the Kumaon Himalaya, India. Paper prepared for presentation at the University of California, Berkeley Workshop on Environmental Politics, April 30.

Arnstein, S.R. 1969. A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *AIP Journal.* July: 216-224.

Berkes, F., George, P. and R.J. Preston. 1991. Co-management: The Evolution in Theory and Practice of the Joint Administration of Living Resources. *Alternatives* 18(2): 12-18.

Borrini-Feyerabend, G. 1996. *Collaborative Management of Protected Areas: Tailoring the Approach to the Context.* Gland: IUCN.

Covey, S. 1992. *Principle-centered leadership.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Cruz, J.C.B. 1996. El nuevo Monocultivo: ¿Qué pasará si el turismo se va de Cahuita? *La Ecologia,* 19 de junio: 6.

Dahl, R. A. 1957. The Concept of Power. *Behavioural Science* (2):201-215.

Equipos Básicos de Atención Integral en Salud (EBAIS). 1998. Población del Área de Salud Atracción. Cahuita. Unpublished Survey.

Fonseca, M. and V. Weitzner. 1999. Comanejo y participación civil en la gestión de áreas protegidas: La experiencia del Parque Nacional Cahuita. In *Gestión Ambiental Descentralizada: Gobiernos Locales y Sociedad Civil en la experiencia del Area de Conservación La Amistad Caribe,* FUDEU, ed. San José: Litografía IPECA. 197-253.

Hanna, S. 1995. Efficiencies of User Participation in Natural Resource Management. In *Property Rights and the Environment: Social and Economic Issues,* Susan Hanna and Mohan Munasinghe eds. The Beijer International Institute of Ecological Economics and the World Bank. 59-67.

Jentoft, S. 2000. Legitimacy and disappointment in fisheries management. *Marine Policy* 24: 141-148.

Joseph, E. 1995. Letter to José Luis Velasquez, Diputado, Provincia de Limón, August 30.

Kabeer, N. and R. Subrahamanian. 1996. Institutions, relations and outcomes: Works and tools for gender-aware planning. *Discussion Paper* No. 357: Brighton: IDS.

Kutay, K.N. 1984. *Cahuita National Park, Costa Rica: A Case Study in Living Cultures and National Park Management.* MSc (Natural Resources) Thesis, University of Michigan.

Leach, M., R. Mearns and I. Scoones. 1997. Challenges to Community-Based Sustainable Development: Dynamics, Entitlements, Institutions. *IDS Bulletin* 28 (1): 4-14.

McCay, B.J. 1987. The Culture of the Commoners: Historical Observations on Old and New World Fisheries. In *The Question of the commons: the culture and ecology of communal resources,* Bonnie J. McCay and James M. Acheson, eds. Arizona: University of Arizona Press. 195-216.

_____. 1995. Common and private concerns. *Advances in Human Ecology* 4: 89-116.

McCay, B.J. and J.M. Acheson. 1987. Human Ecology of the Commons. In *The Question of the Commons,* Bonnie McCay and James M. Acheson, eds. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press. 1-34.

Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía (MINAE). 1997. Parque Nacional Cahuita Tenencia de Tierra. Agosto. Subregion Siquirres-Matina.

Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda. 1997. Censo de Población de Costa Rica. Dirección de Estadística y Censos. San José, Costa Rica. July.

Murphree, M. 1994. The Role of Institutions in Community-Based Conservation. In *Natural Connections: Perspectives in Community-Based Conservation,* David Western and R. Michael Wright, eds. Washington D.C.: Island Press. 403-447.

Palmer, P. 1977. *What Happen': A Folk: History of Costa Rica's Talamanca Coast.* San José: Publications in English.

Pimbert, M. and J.N. Pretty. 1997. Parks, People and Professionals: Putting 'Participation' into Protected-Area Management. In *Social Change and Conservation,* Krishna B. Ghimire and Michel P. Pimbert eds. London: UNRISD. 297-330.

Pinkerton, E. 1994. Summary and Conclusions. In *Folk Management in the World's Fisheries*, C.L. Dyer and J.R. McGoodwin, eds. Niwot: Univesrity Press of Colorado. 317-337.

————. 1998. Integrated management of a temperate montane forest ecosystem through wholistic forestry: A British Columbia example. In *Linking Social and Ecological Systems: Management Practices and Social Mechanisms for Building Resilience*, Fikret Berkes and Carl Folke, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 363-389.

Pomeroy, R.S. 1995. Community-based and co-management institutions for sustainable coastal fisheries management. *Southeast Asia. Ocean and Coastal Management* 27: 143-162.

Pomeroy, R.S. and F. Berkes. 1997. Two to tango: the role of government in fisheries co-management. *Marine Policy* 21 (5): 465-480.

Ramírez, C. 1977. Estudio Ocupación Parque Nacional Cahuita. San José, Costa Rica.

Reid, C. 1998. Personal Communication, Cahuita, Limón, Costa Rica.

Ribot, J. and A. Agrawal. 1998. The State of Communities: Participation, Decentralization, and Natural Resources Management. Abstract for a panel discussion at the International Association for the Study of Common Property, Vancouver, June 1998. Http://www.sfu.ca/~iascp98/papers/panls/strms/panpaps/17-18.pan.htm

Rocha, E.M. 1997. A Ladder of Empowerment. *Journal of Education and Research* 17: 31-44.

Sanderson, S.E. 1995. Ten Theses on the Promise and Problems of Creative Ecosystem Management in Developing Countries. In *Barriers and Bridges to the Renewal of Ecosystems and Institutions*, Lance H. Gunderson, C.S. Holling and Stephen S. Light, eds. New York: Columbia University Press. 375-390.

Sen, S. and J. R. Nielsen. 1996. Fisheries co-management: A comparative Analysis. *Marine Policy* 20: 405-418.

Seymoar. 1997. The Community Self Empowerment Cycle. In *Creating Common Unity: Models of Self Empowerment 50 Award Winning Communities*, Nola-Kate Seymoar and Juana Poncé de Léon, eds. Canada: Friends of the United Nations. 131-139.

Solórzano, R. 1997. La administración de las Areas Silvestres Protegidas mejora con la participación privada no comercial. *Ambien-Tico* 55(Octubre): 1-7.

Vargas, C. 1993. Mapa del Parque Nacional Cahuita. Programa Ordenamiento Territorial Atlantico.

Weitzner, V. 2000a. *From Conflict to Collaboration: The Case of Cahuita National Park*. Masters in Natural Resources Management Thesis. Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba.

Weitzner, V. 2000b. Taking the Pulse of Collaborative Management in Canada's National Parks and National Park Reserves: Voices from the Field. Final report for an independent research project conducted for course credit towards a Master's in Natural Resources Management. Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba.

Weitzner, V. and M. Fonseca Borrás. 1999. Cahuita, Limón, Costa Rica: From conflict to collaboration. In *Cultivating Peace: Conflict and Collaboration in Natural Resource Management*, Daniel Buckles, ed. Ottawa, ON: International Development Research Center. 129-150.

Wells, M. and K. Brandon. 1992. *People and Parks: Linking Protected Area Management with Local Communities*. Washington DC: The World Bank, The World Wildlife Fund, U.S. Agency for International Development.